

IN THE MATTER OF SALARY ARBITRATION BETWEEN:

DERICK BRASSARD

- and -

THE NEW YORK RANGERS

BRIEF OF THE NEW YORK RANGERS

TEAM 19



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I. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Pursuant to section 12.9 of the NHL collective bargain agreement, this brief will analyze the performance of New York Rangers (“Rangers”) forward Derick Brassard (“Brassard”).¹ This brief outlines the Rangers’ belief that Brassard, as a valued member of the Rangers organization, is entitled to an appropriate salary of 4.5 million per year. The justification for this amount is based on his consistent performance as a third line center, health concerns throughout his career, and contrast to comparable previous restricted free agents Bryan Little and Sam Gagner.

II. RELIABLE PERFORMANCE

As a valuable member of the Rangers organization, Brassard had an impressive regular season during his platform year in which he was able to achieve personal bests in several statistical categories. Specifically, he realized career bests in goals (18), PPGs (7), and GWGs (4)². He also achieved near career highs in points, assists, and plus/minus. Throughout his career he has been a reliable player producing 35-45 points per season.³ Since moving from the Columbus Blue Jackets to the Rangers, Brassard has managed to maintain his point production totals and consistently provide third line offence to his team. While his reliable performance is indicative of what can be expected in the future, it also highlights the fact that he will most likely not emerge as an elite offensive force in the NHL. After seven season in the NHL, he has failed to attain the milestones

¹ NHL Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2005, s.12, online: <http://www.nhlpa.com/insidenhlpa/collective-bargaining-agreement>.

² Derick Brassard Profile – NHL.com, online: <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&view=stats>

³ *ibid*

of 20 goals or 50 points. His career average of 0.56 points per game should be fairly indicative of his production in future years.

Brassard's has had limited playoff experience during his NHL career. He has participated in the Stanley Cup Playoffs twice. During his first appearance in 2012-2013 he managed an extremely impressive point-per-game campaign amassing twelve points in twelve games played. However, in his platform year, Brassard's was unable to raise his play as his playoff numbers dropped significantly to more closely mirror his regular season statistics as he notched 12 points(6G, 6A) in 23 games (0.52 points per game).

Brassard is entrusted with less ice time than comparable centres. He averaged only 15:47 minutes per game and has yet to receive top six minutes during his seven years in the NHL. As a perennial third liner, many of Brassard's minutes have come against weaker opposing defence pairings. Further, Brassard's points per game are significantly bolstered by his increase in power play minutes (where it is easier to get points per minute) where he is surrounded by a plethora of talented players including Nash, Richards, Stepan, and Zuccarello among others. A move to the second line (where he would see more ice time) would not necessarily equate to higher point performance. Maintaining the same level of performance over a longer period is questionable given that Brassard has failed to add strength to his imposing 6'1" 202lbs frame thus limiting his endurance under increased workload⁴. The Rangers have yet to afford Brassard the opportunity to play first or second line minutes and he is certainly unproven as a top six forward in the NHL.

⁴ <http://www.tsn.ca/nhl/player-bio/derick-brassard/bio>

III. INJURY CONCERNS

Brassard has been prone to injury during his career and many critics have noted that he has to “overcome his propensity to get injured”.⁵ Presumably increasing his strength and taking advantage of his size, as previously mentioned, would go a long way towards reducing his risk of injury, however Brassard has yet to add bulk to maximize his frame. While he has only had one long term injury (54 games in 2009), he has had repeated injury trouble almost every season. In 2006, prior to entering the NHL, he suffered a dislocated shoulder and was sidelined indefinitely. In 2008, his shoulder was again injured, this time requiring surgery keeping him out for 54 games, including 4 playoff games. In 2010 and 2011 he again missed time due to a hand injury. During the 2012-2013 season, he suffered a lower-body injury which forced him to miss several games. Finally, in his platform year, he suffered several injuries. First, a lower body injury during the regular season and then an upper body injury which left him out of the final two playoff games of the year. While he has been able to maintain his offensive output when healthy, his propensity for getting injured is of concern to the team and the accumulation of small injuries may lead to more serious complications as Brassard enters his late 20s/early 30s.

IV. TEAM CONTRIBUTION

There is little doubt that Brassard is a valuable member of the Rangers. Brassard finished 4th in scoring on the team, and third among centers. However, his +2 rating placed him 8th out of the top ten scores indicating that he may be a defensive liability compared to his Ranger counterparts. The only player who was significantly more of a defensive liability was Brad

⁵ <http://www.tsn.ca/nhl/player-bio/derick-brassard/bio>

Richards and the Rangers elected to buy him out during the off season. This buyout leaves the door open for Brassard to step into the number 2 center position on the team giving him increased ice time and responsibility. However, as previously mentioned, the increase in ice time will not necessarily translate to increased output given the increase in quality of defensive opponents and increased physical and mental strain. Also of concern is Brassard's below average performance in the face-off circle. In his platform year, he ranked 252nd in the NHL with a win percentage of only 48%.⁶ One of the key roles of an NHL Centerman is the ability to gain control of the puck from the face off. A win percentage of below 50% limits Brassard's efficacy and usability in key situations.

Presumably, Brassard will again be turned to for power play production where he was tied for the team lead with 7 PPGs last year. However, the Rangers possess a diverse group of talented forwards all capable of producing on the power play. Zuccarello, Kreider, Stepan, Nash, and Pouliot all tallied between 4 and 7 PPGs and newcomer St. Louis had 9 of his own for his previous team (Tampa Bay) where he spent the vast majority of the season.

While Brassard remains a key ingredient of the Rangers organization, he is also surrounded by a deep roster of talent NHL players who were all responsible for carrying the team to the cup finals in 2013-2014. The team is a blend elite proven veterans such as Nash, St. Louis, and Lundqvist and young talent such as Zuccarello, Stepan, McDonagh, Kreider, and Brassard. Further, the Rangers do not look to Brassard for leadership responsibility. The Rangers are one of only five teams in the NHL to name five captains (1 captain, 4 alternates) and have spread the duties around between forwards, defence, veterans and youngsters. Brassard has not yet shown

⁶ http://espn.go.com/nhl/statistics/player/_/stat/faceoffs/sort/faceoffPercent/year/2014/count/241

himself to possess the leadership skills necessary to warrant an “A” or “C” on his jersey. Instead, the team has given the honours to younger center Derek Stepan, veteran winger Martin St. Louis, and defensemen McDonagh, Giraldi, and Staal.

V. VALID COMPARABLE PLAYERS

A) BRYAN LITTLE

Bryal Little (“Little”) is a 26 year old centre for the Winnipeg Jets. Last year, the Jets and Little agreed to a contract prior to arbitration in the amount of 4.7 million. While Little clocks in 15 pounds and 2 inches under Brassard, he is a tireless worker who plays a bigger game than his size would indicate. Though his diminutive stature may initially be of concern, he has actually proven to be a more reliable player than Brassard. He has missed less time due to injury, never suffered a major injury (Brassard’s had a 54 game injury), and never had a repeated injury (unlike Brassard’s shoulder).

In terms of point production, he is on par with Brassard posting a 0.56ppg over his career. While Brassard and Little are comparable in terms of point production, there are other statistical categories where Little excels. His career plus minus is significantly higher than Brassard’s (-5 vs. -41) despite playing on teams that have significantly lower plus minus records. While playing with the Rangers, Brassard has been on a team that has posted a +/- rating of +18 and +25 over the past two years whereas Little’s team’s +/- rating for the two years prior to his contract were -16 and -21. This shows that Brassard has underperformed compared to his teams plus minus performance while Little has managed to outperform, making him a more valuable asset to his team. Critics have echoed this opinion in their scouting reports noting Little as a tireless worker

with sound defensive instincts.⁷ In addition to his superior defensive play, Little was also better in the faceoff circle posting a 51.2% success rate during his platform year. In addition to his superior statistics, Little is also a more versatile player with the ability to play the wing as well as his natural center position.

What doesn't show up on the stat sheet is the fact that Little has managed to keep pace or outperform Brassard while playing against the elite players in the NHL as an integral member of the Jets' first line with arguably less support than Brassard receives on the Rangers. Unlike Brassard, Little is a proven top six forward in the NHL and his 2013 contract reflects this. For these reasons, the Rangers believe that the contract of 4.7 million per year awarded to Little is, at best, a ceiling for Brassard's contract.

B) SAM GAGNER

Sam Gagner ("Gagner") is a center for the Arizona Coyotes (although he was an Edmonton Oilers up to and including his RFA year). In 2013, the Oilers and Gagner agreed to a 3 year contract with an AAV of 4.8 million per year. The similarities between Gagner and Brassard are many and can be seen as early as their draft position. Both went 6th overall, Gagner in 2006 and Brassard in 2007. Gagner manages to fill his frame to the fullest weighing in at 202lbs, the same as Brassard, despite being 2 inches shorter. Gagner's diminutive size has resulted in several injuries, similar to Brassard. He has also had repeated injuries to his ankle, similar to the issues that Brassard has experienced with his shoulder. While Gagner has missed less time overall than Brassard, he has been injured more frequently. Thus, it would be fair to assume that the future injury potential for both players is approximately equal.

⁷ <http://www.tsn.ca/nhl/player-bio/bryan-little/bio>

In terms of production, both players have posted reliable production numbers with Gagner edging out Brassard in terms of points per game (0.61 vs. 0.56). Gagner's performance has been reliable and has fluctuated within a narrow range between 41 and 49 points during full seasons, and an impressive 38 points in 48 games (0.79ppg) during the lockout shortened season of 2012-2013. This 0.79ppg performance in his platform year placed Gagner tied for 34th in the league in scoring and was by far is his best offensive outing. In addition to his performance, Gagner also garnered fame as somewhat of a fan favorite after his unforgettable 8 point night against Chicago on February 2, 2012. The last player to match that feat - Mario Lemieux in 1988!⁸ In terms of plus minus ratings, both players had nearly identical career stats entering arbitration, -48 for Gagner and -40 for Brassard. However, given that Gagner had spent his entire career up to that point with the perennial basement dwelling Oilers, it could be argued that his +/- is actually more impressive than Brassards given their respective surroundings.

In addition to his statistical superiority, Gagner is also a much more flexible player than Brassard. He has the ability to play the wing as well center and is considered a shoot-out specialist with quick hands and uncanny vision.⁹ Based on Gagner's ability to out produce Brassard in key statistical categories as well as being an overall more versatile player equates to a higher value for Gagner than Brassard. For these reasons, the Rangers believe that the contract awarded to Gagner of 4.8 million to be greater than the contract that should be awarded for Brassard.

⁸ The Star, online:

http://www.thestar.com/sports/hockey/2012/02/03/sam_gagners_whopping_8_point_performance_in_edmonton_oilers_84_win_over_chicago_aves_nhl_players.html

⁹ TSN Player Bio, online: <http://www.tsn.ca/nhl/player-bio/sam-gagner/bio>

VI. CONCLUSION

The two closest comparables from which to work when evaluating Brassard's future remuneration are Bryan Little and Sam Gagner. It has been submitted that both Little and Gagner were superior to Brassard with respect to their statistical production, their relative roles on their team (first and second line vs. third line), and other unique abilities (ie. player diversity). In addition, both Little and Gagner have had time to prove themselves as top six forwards in the NHL. Their salaries, as such, are in line with what would be expected of a top six player. In contrast, Brassard has yet to prove himself at the top six level and a contract above Little or Gagner would amount to compensation as a proven top six forward which he is not. Brassard should be fairly compensated on his accomplishments to date as a third line center for the past seven years, and not what he might do in the future in a different role. As such, the Rangers believe that a salary below the 4.7 million and 4.8 million awarded to Little and Gagner is both fair and appropriate. The Rangers believe that a contract with an AAV of 4.5 million per year is consistent with other recent signings.