In the Matter of Salary Arbitration Between:

DERICK BRASSARD

-AND-

THE NEW YORK RANGERS

BRIEF FOR THE NEW YORK RANGERS

TEAM #22



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**I. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

Pursuant to section 12.9 of the National Hockey League Collective Bargaining Agreement (CBA), this brief will analyze the performance and contribution of the New York Rangers' Derick Brassard. From the evidence contained herein, it will be clear that Mr. Brassard is an inconsistent scorer who has failed to live up to the expectations of a former #6 overall pick, a liability in the faceoff circle, and lacking an overall complete game that makes up for his limitations on offense. For these reasons, the Rangers submit that Mr. Brassard is entitled to an award below the $5 million mid-point value, and that a salary of $4.25 million is an appropriate and fair award.

**A.** **Inconsistent Offensive Output**

Mr. Brassard has displayed an inconsistent offensive output in his career with both Columbus and New York. Despite his physical presence and eagerness to use his body to that end, Mr. Brassard has been unable to translate that desire to offensive success at a consistent rate. Mr. Brassard's scoring totals of 18 goals, 27 assists, and 45 points, represent his highest scoring rates since 2010-11.[[1]](#footnote-1) Despite these higher point totals, Mr. Brassard can hardly be called a reliable contributor on offense. During his platform year, Mr. Brassard had one eight-game scoreless streak, and four goalless streaks of 8+ games.[[2]](#footnote-2)

Furthermore, the increase in goals is due to two factors that would have seen most players improve on their previous season's totals. First, Mr. Brassard's offensive zone starts increased from 47.5% to 60.1% in his first full season in New York. Second, Mr. Brassard's teammates' shooting percentage increased, improving his ability to generate assists. This was especially true during the 2013-14 playoffs, when it jumped to a level nearly 3% above average.[[3]](#footnote-3) Further, his shooting percentage during the season of 11.3% was an increase over his career average. Expectations in the future should include a return to the mean in that category.

**B.** **Faceoff Circle Deficiencies**

Despite taking the third most faceoffs on the team, Mr. Brassard remains a liability in the faceoff circle. Mr. Brassard has only the 4th best faceoff win rate on the team at 48%, which is doubly relevant because it is the highest success rate he has achieved since his sophomore campaign in 2009.[[4]](#footnote-4) This is doubly troubling, because Mr. Brassard is only infrequently lining up against opposing teams' best centers playing on the Ranger's third line. While his power play win rate of 55.9% is much improved, it is also an outlier, as Mr. Brassard has not previously achieved a success rate of 51%.[[5]](#footnote-5) This failure rate within the faceoff circle leads him to squander many opportunities in the offensive zone. Despite the fact that he starts more than 60% of his shifts in the offensive zone, Mr. Brassard loses 53.3% of those faceoffs, immediately negating the offensive pressure applied by the prior group.[[6]](#footnote-6) The faceoff issue is compounded by Mr. Brassard's poor success rate (49.2%) in the defensive zone, an area where a high win rate is even more critical, as losses quickly turn into scoring opportunities for the opposing team.[[7]](#footnote-7) Mr. Brassard's weakness in this area prevents the Rangers from deploying him in more situations, such as penalty killing scenarios, and many defensive zone faceoffs, where tired first-line players could use a reprieve.

**C.** **Lacks the Complete Game Required by the Rangers for His Position**

The Rangers need a third line center with a complete defensive game. That is not Derick Brassard. The problem is, his offensive numbers don't grant him the freedom to be as great a defensive liability as he is. While his +2 rating indicates that he is on the ice for more goals than not, this is belied by the fact that he plays in front of one of the best goaltenders in the league, on the team with the 4th lowest goals against average in the league, and that his plus/minus rating places him only 7th on the team.[[8]](#footnote-8) Over the course of his career, Mr. Brassard is -37.[[9]](#footnote-9)

A critical aspect of a third line center is to turn possession against better lines into offensive zone time, or, at the very least, neutralize opposing teams' 1st and 2nd lines. Mr. Brassard has not demonstrated an ability to do this. In every season, with the exception of the lockout-shortened 2012-13 campaign, Mr. Brassard's offensive zone start/offensive zone finish rate has been less than one, meaning that his shifts are more often losses for his team than wins.[[10]](#footnote-10) Due in part to his poor performance in the faceoff circle, Mr. Brassard is deployed in extremely limited capacity on the penalty kill, and has seen his time on the power play decrease in each of the last two seasons.

**II. VALID COMPARABLE PLAYERS**

**A. Cody Hodgson – Buffalo Sabres**

Cody Hodgson agreed to a six-year deal in September 2013 with the Buffalo Sabres that pays him an average salary of $4.25 million per year.[[11]](#footnote-11) Mr. Hodgson and Mr. Brassard are similar in that they are both average sized centers capable of playing top-six minutes, who are relied on to create scoring opportunities for others, and drive offensive play.

In Mr. Hodgson's platform year, he scored at a rate of .31 goals, .40 assists, and .71 points per game.[[12]](#footnote-12) Each of these figures compares favorably to Mr. Brassard's rates of .22 goals, .33 assists, and .55 points per game.[[13]](#footnote-13) It is worth noting that Mr. Hodgson was able to accomplish this higher scoring rate despite only starting 48.4% of his shifts in the offensive zone,[[14]](#footnote-14) meaning Hodgson is responsible for creating more offensive chances through his play than Mr. Brassard, who starts 60.8% of his shifts in the offensive zone.[[15]](#footnote-15)

Both Mr. Brassard and Mr. Hodgson have both been able to distinguish themselves on their teams respective special teams unit. Mr. Brassard averaged .22 points per game on the power play, compared to just .10 by Mr. Hodgson. However, Mr. Brassard benefited from playing on a more prolific power play unit that succeeded at a rate of 18.2%. The Sabres' unit averaged only 14.1%, 29th in the NHL. Any gap between the two players' power play abilities is bridged by Hodgson's presence on Buffalo's second penalty killing unit. Where Mr. Brassard spends no time on New York's penalty killing units, Mr. Hodgson averages 1:17 per game, and finishes more than 27% of his penalty killing shifts in the offensive zone, compared to a 9% start rate in the offensive zone.

Mr. Hodgson also provides additional value on the defensive side of the game. Mr. Hodgson blocks shots at a rate of 0.5 blocks per game, which is more than double that of Mr. Brassard 0.23 blocks per game. Mr. Hodgson also plays a smarter game, drawing fewer minor penalties than Mr. Brassard.[[16]](#footnote-16) While Mr. Hodgson's plus/minus (-4)[[17]](#footnote-17), is slightly lower than Mr. Brassard's (+2)[[18]](#footnote-18), but this is due in large part to the fact that Mr. Brassard had the benefit of playing in front of Henrik Lundqvist, an all-star caliber goaltender, while the goaltenders Mr. Hodgson played in front of managed just an .895 save percentage.[[19]](#footnote-19) As mentioned before, Mr. Brassard benefited from more offensive zone starts than Mr. Hodgson. The corollary to this is that Mr. Brassard finished in the offensive zone on only 50.8% of shifts, a decrease of 9.3%. By contrast, Mr. Hodgson, who starts only 48.4% of his shifts in the offensive zone, finishes 50.0% of them there. This suggests that Mr. Hodgson is better at transitioning his team from a poor situation to a more opportunistic one through his defensive abilities. Further, Mr. Hodgson provides more value in the faceoff circle, where he is better than Mr. Brassard on both the penalty kill and at even strength.[[20]](#footnote-20)

It is the club's contention that Mr. Hodgson is an accurate comparable for Mr. Brassard for the above-mentioned reasons. As such, the club submits that an award of $4.25 million, which would be the most appropriate given the circumstances.

**B. Bryan Little – Winnepeg Jets**

On July 22, 2013, Bryan Little agreed to a five-year deal with the Winnipeg Jets that paid an average of $4.7 million per year.[[21]](#footnote-21) The evidence will show that Mr. Little is a superior player to Mr. Brassard in the most prominent aspects of the game, and that a salary of $4.7 million, while still below the mid-point amount, would be too great an award for Mr. Brassard.

In scoring, Mr. Little outperformed Mr. Brassard's points per game in their respective platform years, and if not for an abnormally low shot percentage of 8.3%, Mr. Little would have been on par with Mr. Brassard's goal scoring rate, despite the above mentioned discrepancies in zone starts.[[22]](#footnote-22) Mr. Brassard also benefited from playing on one of the better power play units in the league, further increasing his scoring opportunities, whereas Mr. Little played on the 30th ranked unit in his platform year. Mr. Little has also consistently outperformed Mr. Brassard in scoring, and has done so while playing more games over the same time frame. Mr. Little has averaged 0.25 goals and 0.61 points per game while participating in 487 games. In the same time frame, Mr. Brassard has played only 403 games, and averaged 0.20 goals and 0.56 points per game.

Mr. Little also plays a stronger defensive game than Mr. Brassard, making him a better all-around forward. In his platform year, Mr. Little had a higher plus/minus than Mr. Brassard, despite playing in fewer games, and suiting up for a team that gave up the 24th most goals per game (2.94). By contrast, the Rangers were 4th in the NHL in goals allowed per game during Mr. Brassard's platform year.

Ability to maintain or gain possession is critical for centers, and this is an area where Mr. Little has excelled, while Mr. Brassard has been only average. Mr. Little finished his platform year with takeaway-to-giveaway ratio of 2.63, whereas Mr. Brassard finished with a ratio of 1. More telling on the issue of possession, as described above, is the fact that Mr. Brassard's shifts tend toward turnovers given the change in start and end zone positions. By contrast, Bryan Little starts only 44.7% of his shifts in the offensive zone, but finishes 53.5% of them there. He accomplishes this despite playing four more minutes per game, 1:32 of which is on the penalty kill. In this same vein, Mr. Little is vastly more valuable to his team in the faceoff circle, where he takes the most faceoffs at even strength, power play, and penalty kill for his team. Mr. Little took 30.7% of his team's faceoffs, compared with just 20.2% for Brassard. Further, with the exception, as noted above, of Brassard's aberrant platform season, Mr. Little's faceoff winning percentage was greater across all situations, with a win rate above 50% in every category.

**C. Chris Stewart – St. Louis Blues**

In July 2013, Chris Stewart signed a two-year deal with the Blues worth an average salary of $4.15 million per year.[[23]](#footnote-23) Though he is not a center, Stewart plays ostensibly the same role as Brassard, that of a higher scoring power forward. The two forwards also had similar time-on-ice statistics. Brassard played 15:47 per game, 2:31 of which came on the power play.[[24]](#footnote-24) Stewart played 15:49 per game, and a slightly lower 2:19 on the power play.[[25]](#footnote-25) Defensively, Mr. Brassard and Mr. Stewart offer similar statistics in plus/minus (+2, Even),[[26]](#footnote-26) blocked shots per game (.23, .27), and takeaway-to-giveaway ratio (1, 1.18).[[27]](#footnote-27)

Despite the similarities in style of play and time-on-ice, Mr. Stewart vastly outperformed Mr. Brassard across all offensive categories when comparing their platform years. During the 2013-14 season, Mr. Brassard averaged .22 goals, .33 assists, and .55 points per game.[[28]](#footnote-28) By contrast, Mr. Stewart averaged .38 goals, .38 assists, and .75 points per game.[[29]](#footnote-29) Even when Mr. Stewart's career high in shooting percentage of 18.6% is taken into consideration, and we project his goals per game based on his career shooting percentage of 13.44%, Mr. Stewart's goals per game becomes .27, which is still greater than Mr. Brassard's per game amounts.[[30]](#footnote-30) Given that the two played nearly identical amounts of time per game, Mr. Stewart scored at a much higher rate than Mr. Brassard, meaning that Mr. Stewart added more value to the Blues offensive success than Mr. Brassard did for the Rangers.

Mr. Stewart was also more prolific in two other offensive areas critical to his club's success, game-winning goals, and power play production. Mr. Stewart scored one fewer game-winning goal than Mr. Brassard, despite playing in a lockout-shortened season. Mr. Stewart made an even greater difference to his team's overall success on the power play, where he led the team in goals (6, or .125 per game), and points (12, or .25 per game).[[31]](#footnote-31) These per game totals are better than Mr. Brassard's averages of .09 goals and .22 points per game on the power play,[[32]](#footnote-32) despite the fact that Mr. Stewart spent less time per game on the power play at 2:19 per game, compared to Mr. Brassard's 2:31.[[33]](#footnote-33) This again highlights that Mr. Stewart is a more productive power forward than Mr. Brassard.

Though center is arguably a more valuable position, Stewart's numbers are better in those categories that are critical to both Mr. Brassard and Mr. Stewart's style of play. While Mr. Brassard's hit totals are higher, Mr. Stewart has more impressive offensive numbers across the board. If the two played the same position, Mr. Brassard would be entitled to an amount less than the $4.15 million per year paid to Mr. Stewart. Because of the added value of his position, however, the New York Rangers submit that Mr. Brassard should be entitled to a fair and just award of $4.25 million, an amount well below the $5 million mid-point figure.

**III. CONCLUSION**

Mr. Brassard is an inconsistent third-line center who has yet to demonstrate the ability to play a complete two-way game. He is an inconsistent offensive option, is deficient in the faceoff circle, and lacks top-6 defensive talent. When comparing Mr. Brassard to other players in the price range, it is evident that he is entitled to an award below the $5 million midpoint, and $4.25 million is a fair and appropriate award.

1. http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl\_statistics.php [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl\_statistics.php [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl\_statistics.php [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. http://www.capgeek.com/ [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl\_statistics.php [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl\_statistics.php [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. http://www.capgeek.com/ [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. *Ibid.*  [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. http://www.capgeek.com/ [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. http://www.nhl.com/ice/teamstats [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. *Ibid.* [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. http://www.nhl.com/ice/teamstats [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats [↑](#footnote-ref-33)