

Team 1

Lars Eller vs. Montreal Canadiens

Submissions on behalf of Montreal Canadiens (Team Side)

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1 Player Analysis

1.1 Introduction

This brief will analyze the past performance and contributions of Montreal Canadiens (the “Canadiens”) forward Lars Eller. Though the Canadiens appreciate Mr. Eller’s contributions to the team, it will be seen that he deserves compensation at a level well below the \$3,500,000 midpoint salary range. Mr. Eller’s highly-inconsistent offensive production, poor plus-minus ratings, and inability to compete consistently on a game-by-game bases in the NHL highlight why it is the clubs’ belief that \$3.5 million annual salary is far too high.

1.2 Disappointing Offensive Output

Mr. Eller has been with the Canadiens for four years, since being traded in the 2010-11 season. Despite being a player who possesses offensive talent, he has yet to record more than 30 points in any of his four NHL seasons, despite playing in 77 or more games in three of those seasons.¹ Additionally, Mr. Eller’s point totals have not progressively gotten higher, but have instead proven to be erratic, raising questions about his career progression and his ability to compete effectively. There have also been concerns that Mr. Eller’s play has suffered as a result of confidence issues since the end of the 2012-13 season, where he took a devastating hit from Eric Gryba, suffering a concussion, severe facial bleeding, as well as facial and dental fractures.² Mr. Eller had a very low point-per-game ratio last year, posting 0.34 points per game.³ He was 280th in the league in scoring,⁴ suffering a serious regression in a season where the club was hoping for significantly more production from him. Eller was only 7th in points for all forwards

¹ <http://canadiens.nhl.com/club/player.htm?id=8474189>

² <http://nesn.com/2013/05/lars-eller-has-concussion-facial-fractures-after-hit-from-ottawas-eric-gryba-in-senators-game-1-win/>

³ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?season=20132014&gameType=2&team=MTL&position=S&country=&status=&viewName=summary>

⁴ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20142ALLSASAll&viewName=summary&sort=points&pg=10>

on the Canadiens at even strength.⁵ Furthermore, he registered only 3 powerplay points during the entire regular 2013-14 season⁶. Mr. Eller's inconsistent play led to less ice time, and his effectiveness subsequently diminished.⁷ Mr. Eller suffered a lack of confidence resulting in poor puck possession, with the 2nd most giveaways of all Canadiens forwards last season.⁸

The club commends Mr. Eller on a strong playoff performance last season, where he enjoyed some offensive success. However, the playoffs represent a small sample of most NHL player's statistics, and further investigation would seem to indicate that Mr. Eller's 2013-14 post-season successes might have been an outlier. Combining his 2013-14 regular and playoff statistics, Mr. Eller had 0.4 points per game,⁹ which is very close to his 0.36 career point per game average.¹⁰ This helps to understand how his 2013-14 playoff 0.76 point per game average was an outlier performance, based on a small sample size. To further illustrate the problem of only considering a sample of 17 playoff games, consider Mr. Eller's performance from January 4 to March 12 of the 2013-14 season. Through this 24 game period, he tallied 0 goals and 1 assist, 0.04 points per game, while playing an average of over 14 minutes per game.¹¹ This 24 game period (longer than the 17 game playoff period) is probably not indicative of his offensive value, but it illustrates how a small sample size can be easily misinterpreted, which can bias inferences.

Mr. Eller has been described as an offensive player with potential,¹² however he has been unable to achieve consistent success in the NHL. Although the club recognizes that he is young

⁵ <http://canadiens.nhl.com/club/player.htm?id=8474189>

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474189&view=log&season=20132014>

⁸

<http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20142MTLSASALL&sort=giveaways&viewName=rtssPlayerStats>

⁹ <http://www.hockeydb.com/ihdb/stats/pdisplay.php?pid=105385>

¹⁰ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474189>

¹¹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474189&view=log&season=20132014>

¹² <http://forecaster.thehockeynews.com/hockeynews/hockey/player.php?6418>

and may be able to become a more effective player, Mr. Eller has yet to prove himself as a reliable NHL forward.¹³

1.3 Defensive Liability: Poor Plus-minus Rating

Last season, in 2013-14, Mr. Eller had a very weak plus-minus rating at minus-15,¹⁴ the lowest of all 33 skaters on the Canadiens.¹⁵ During the 2013-14 season, the Canadiens team had a plus-11 goal differential¹⁶, and Mr. Eller's team-worst plus-minus rating is an indication of his deficiencies in his positional and defensive zone play. Mr. Eller appears to have recognized this area of improvement, saying that he wants to be a "player that can be depended on at both ends of the ice."¹⁷ Mr. Eller's defensive game has not been a strong area throughout his career. He has had a negative plus-minus rating in three of his four seasons on the Canadiens,¹⁸ and has sometimes been a defensive liability thus far in his professional career.

1.4 Difficulty Capitalizing on Scoring Chances

Breaking down his offensive statistics further, it becomes apparent that Mr. Eller suffers from difficulties capitalizing on scoring chances, which perhaps provides an explanation for his lack of consistent offensive production. Mr. Eller has had poor comparative success in his shooting percentage (ratio of goals to shots taken), demonstrated by his position as the 12th ranked shooting percentage of Canadiens forwards in the 2013-14 season.¹⁹ This may be attributable to difficulty creating quality scoring opportunities, poor aim, weak scoring instincts, or a combination of these issues. He has consistently had a low shooting percentage, as the 9th

¹³ <http://canadiens.nhl.com/club/player.htm?id=8474189>

¹⁴ <http://canadiens.nhl.com/club/player.htm?id=8474189>

¹⁵ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20142MTLSASALL&viewName=summary&sort=plusMinus&pg=2>

¹⁶ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/standings.htm?season=20132014&type=CON>

¹⁷ <http://forecaster.thehockeynews.com/hockeynews/hockey/player.php?6418>

¹⁸ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474189>

¹⁹ <http://stats.hockeyanalysis.com/ratings.php?disp=1&db=201314&sit=5v5&pos=forwards&minutes=100&teamid=16&type=individual&sort=ishpct&sortdir=DESC>

ranked Canadian forward in 2012-13²⁰ and 11th in 2010-11.²¹ This difficulty scoring was epitomized last season by his 24 game goal drought²² and his overall poor offensive output.²³

2 Comparable Players

2.1 Comparable #1 - Nick Spaling

On July 31, 2014, the Pittsburgh Penguins and center Nick Spaling agreed to terms on a two year \$4.4 million contract.²⁴ Mr. Spaling came to Pittsburgh through a trade with the Nashville Predators, after playing for the Predators during the 2013-14 season. Mr. Spaling and Mr. Eller are both 25 years old and were also part of the 2007 NHL draft class.²⁵ Both players are described as two-way centers with offensive upside.²⁶ However, Mr. Spaling has been more effective and consistent than Mr. Eller in the defensive zone, while registering similar offensive numbers, and notably superior offensive numbers in his platform year.

Mr. Spaling had a strong 2013-14 campaign, registering 32 points in 71 games, a ratio of 0.45 points per game.²⁷ During that season, Mr. Eller failed to effectively contribute offensively, finishing with only 0.34 points per game.²⁸ Both players were given similar opportunities to produce, with both players receiving an average of approximately 16 minutes of ice time per game.²⁹ Mr. Spaling also had more points in special teams situations than Mr. Eller last season.³⁰

²⁰<http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20132MTLFAFALL&sort=shootingPctg&viewName=summary>

²¹ *Ibid*

²² <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474189&view=log&season=20132014>

²³ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?season=20132014&gameType=2&team=MTL&position=S&country=&status=&viewName=summary>

²⁴ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=727578>

²⁵ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474096>

²⁶ <http://forecaster.thehockeynews.com/hockeynews/hockey/player.php?6222>

²⁷ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474096>

²⁸ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474189>

²⁹ *Ibid*

³⁰ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474096>

Furthermore, Mr. Spaling was far more consistent than Mr. Eller, as his longest pointless streak of the season was 6 games. Mr. Eller, alternatively, was held scoreless for periods lasting 8 games (twice), 9 games, and 14 games.³¹ Mr. Eller also had a much lower shooting percentage over the last two years (8.8% and 9.5%)³² compared to Mr. Spaling (15.3% and 15.8%).³³ These statistics indicate that Mr. Spaling contributed more effectively offensively in his platform year, and Mr. Spaling can be relied on to provide a more consistent effort on a game-to-game basis.

Last season, Mr. Eller was minus-15 on a team that had a plus 11 goal differential,³⁴ while Mr. Spaling was plus-2 on a team that had negative 26 goal differential.³⁵ Thus, despite playing on a team with a significantly worse plus-minus, Mr. Spaling was able to comparatively achieve a much better plus-minus. A contributing factor to these plus-minus ratings is Mr. Eller's propensity to giveaway the puck relative to Mr. Spaling, at 25 giveaways and 7 giveaways last season, respectively.³⁶

Both players have contributed meaningfully to their teams over the course of their young careers. They are both at a similar age and level of career development. Mr. Spaling's annual average \$2.2 million dollar salary is \$1.3 million dollars less than Mr. Eller's \$3.5 million midpoint salary, despite their similar production. Recognizing Mr. Spaling's consistent scoring and effectiveness in the defensive zone, while also placing value on Mr. Eller's 2013-14 playoff contribution, we believe Mr. Eller should be compensated similarly to Mr. Spaling.

³¹ *Ibid*

³² *Ibid*

³³ *Ibid*

³⁴ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/standings.htm?season=20132014&type=DIV>

³⁵ *Ibid*

³⁶ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?season=20132014&gameType=2&team=&position=S&country=&status=&viewName=rtssPlayerStats#>

2.2 Comparable #2 - Nathan Gerbe

The Carolina Hurricanes signed forward Nathan Gerbe to a two-year contract worth an average of \$1.75 million per season.³⁷ Mr. Gerbe signed at 26 years old, after a season where he scored 31 points in 81 games,³⁸ adding to career statistics that have been stronger and more consistent than Mr. Eller. Both players have the same number of career points (103),³⁹ while Mr. Eller has played in 283 career NHL games, compared with Mr. Gerbe's 269.⁴⁰

Like Mr. Eller, Mr. Gerbe is a talented forward who has had early success in the NHL. Mr. Gerbe had an impressive 2013-14 season where he matched career highs in goals (16) and assists (15).⁴¹ In his other season in which he tallied the same goals and assists numbers he only played 64 games (0.48 points per game),⁴² displaying the ability to produce almost a point every other game he played in. Although Mr. Gerbe is a year older than Mr. Eller, both forwards offensive production on a per-game basis has been very similar.

As previously discussed, Mr. Eller had a strong playoff campaign in 2013-14, though Mr. Gerbe's playoff statistics are worthy of comparison. In nine total playoff appearances, Mr. Gerbe has registered 4 points, almost a point every other game.⁴³ In 25 playoff games, Mr. Eller has posted 15 points, buoyed by the 13 points in last seasons 17 playoff games.⁴⁴ While Mr. Eller's playoff statistics have been slightly better than Mr. Gerbe's, Mr. Gerbe has played on considerably weaker teams, the Buffalo Sabres and Carolina Hurricanes, and was still able to replicate his regular season performance in the post-season.

³⁷ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=723684>

³⁸ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471804>

³⁹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playersearch.htm?navid=nav-ply-plyrs#>

⁴⁰ *Ibid*

⁴¹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471804>

⁴² *Ibid*

⁴³ *Ibid*

⁴⁴ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474189>

As discussed, the players have very similar statistics, age and future potential. Mr. Gerbe has slightly stronger statistics in his overall career and last season, while Mr. Eller has slightly better playoff statistics. Yet, Mr. Eller claims that he is entitled to more than an additional \$1.75 million per year, or more than double what Mr. Gerbe is paid. This is obviously very disproportionate, considering the similar statistical performance of these two players.

2.3 Comparable #3 - Jiri Tlustý

On July 2, 2014 the Carolina Hurricanes and forward Jiri Tlustý agreed to a one-year \$2.95 million contract.⁴⁵ Jiri Tlustý is a skilled 26-year-old forward, who has played in the NHL for nearly seven years.⁴⁶ Mr. Tlustý has enjoyed significant success since joining the Carolina Hurricanes, when considering his offensive output. In each of their last three NHL campaigns, Mr. Tlustý has significantly outperformed Mr. Eller in almost every statistical category.

Mr. Tlustý has compiled a tremendous amount of points in his last three seasons relative to Mr. Eller, at a rate of 0.53 points per game,⁴⁷ while in the same time span, Mr. Eller has amassed 0.42 points per game.⁴⁸ Mr. Tlustý has not been provided with more opportunities than Mr. Eller, with both players playing similar ice time in the same time span, as Mr. Tlustý averaged 15:40 and Mr. Eller averaged 15:27 minutes per game.⁴⁹ Despite being on a stronger Canadiens team, Mr. Eller was minus-12, while Mr. Tlustý achieved an impressive plus-18. It is clear that Mr. Tlustý has proven himself to be more consistent and capable scoring threat than Mr. Eller, while also exceeding Mr. Eller in plus-minus rating, an important statistic in evaluating defensive zone responsibility.

⁴⁵ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=724920>

⁴⁶ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473482>

⁴⁷ *Ibid*

⁴⁸ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474189>

⁴⁹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473482>

As discussed, Mr. Eller's poor shooting percentage of 8.8% last season, either indicates that he is a player who lacks the ability to finish a play or a player that shoots from areas on the ice with a low likelihood of scoring. Mr. Tlusty, in comparison, led the Hurricanes in shooting percentage, at 12.2%.⁵⁰ In the 2012-13 season, Mr. Tlusty's shooting percentage was 7th among all NHL players at 19.7%.⁵¹ In that season Eller's percentage was 9.3%, ranking him 11th on the Canadiens⁵² and 180th in the NHL.⁵³ This suggest that putting Jiri Tlusty in a scoring position will generate more goals than Mr. Eller in the same position, and given the goals and points differential between the two players, it is clear that in application, this was also the case.

It is our opinion that Lars Eller does not deserve more than the \$2.95 million awarded to Jiri Tlusty, recognizing that Mr. Tlusty settled for a less secure one-year contract that should pay more annually than a multi-year deal. Mr. Tlusty has been a greater offensive contributor, has a significantly better plus-minus, and has been a more consistent contributor to his his team.

3 Conclusion

The Canadiens recognize that Lars Eller is a young talented player, who has struggled to become an elite NHL forward. The club is still optimistic about his career potential, and is also willing to pay him what he rightfully deserves. It is the club's belief, looking to the comparable contracts reviewed - Nick Spaling at \$2.2 million, Nathan Gerbe at \$1.75 million, and Jiri Tlusty at \$2.95 million (all annual) - that Mr. Eller deserves well below the midpoint of \$3.5 million. Given his potential, as evidenced in small streaks of production, we believe Mr. Eller should be awarded no more than \$2.5 million annually.

⁵⁰<http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?season=20132014&gameType=2&team=CAR&position=S&country=&status=&viewName=shooting#>

⁵¹<http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?season=20122013&gameType=2&team=&position=S&country=&status=&viewName=shooting#>

⁵²<http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20132MTLFAFALL&sort=shootingPctg&viewName=summar>

⁵³<http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20132ALLSASALL&viewName=shooting&sort=shootingPctg&pg=6>