

Team 1

Cody Franson vs. Toronto Maple Leafs

Submission on behalf of Cody Franson (Player Side)

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1 Player Analysis

1.1 Introduction

This brief will analyze the past performance and contributions of Toronto Maple Leafs (the “Leafs”) defenceman Cody Franson. It will become evident that Cody Franson is entitled to receive significantly more than the \$3,300,000 midpoint salary that has been proposed. Mr. Franson’s consistent high-level of offensive production, defensive skill, physicality, and elite powerplay performance emphasize why he deserves to be compensated above the midpoint salary. Mr. Franson is 27 years old, and has been with the Leafs since the 2011-12 season.¹ He has proven himself to be very durable, with very few injury concerns throughout his career. He played a career-high 79 games in his platform 2013-14 season.²

When looking at comparable players and their salaries, it becomes apparent that the Leafs are receiving great value for Mr. Franson, even above the midpoint salary range. Mr. Franson has strong offensive and defensive skill sets, as well as the experience that will help the Leafs return and compete in the NHL Stanley Cup Playoffs.

1.2 Defenseman Contributing Offensively

Cody Franson has consistently produced strong and consistent offensive numbers as a defenceman. In Franson’s 2012-13 campaign, he led all Leafs defencemen in points and assists.³ More significantly, he finished 8th overall in points and 4th in assists for all NHL defencemen.⁴ Mr. Franson followed that up with an outstanding 2013-14 season, where once again he led all

¹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471742>

² <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471742>

³ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20132TORSASALL&sort=points&viewName=goals>

⁴ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?season=20122013&gameType=2&team=&position=D&country=&status=&viewName=summary>

Leafs defensemen in scoring.⁵ These 2013-14 point totals surpass those of highly celebrated defenseman and team captain Dion Phaneuf, as well as offensive defenseman Jake Gardener.⁶

In terms of basic point production for defenceman at even strength, Mr. Franson ranks 27th in the NHL in points in the last two seasons.⁷ On the powerplay he ranks 12th in points for defenceman over the NHL over the last two seasons.⁸ This consistent and elite level production add tremendous value to Mr. Franson as an NHL defenceman, and places him as one of the top NHL scoring defenceman, complemented by his large and physical frame, as well as his youth.

1.3 Impact in Playoffs

The Leafs most recent impressive playoff campaign was in 2012-13, and Mr. Franson played an integral role in the series. He scored three goals and collected three assists in the seven game series against Boston.⁹ Additionally, he was an impact player in the defensive zone, with his large reach, playing an important shutdown role against the explosive Boston Bruins, who went on to the Stanley Cup Finals round.¹⁰ Mr. Franson's playoff experience and success, having been to the playoffs three times, and tallying 13 points in 23 games,¹¹ is very valuable for the young and relatively inexperienced Leafs team.

1.4 Powerplay Proficiency

Mr. Franson accumulated 18 powerplay points in his last season, which was good for 2nd on the Leafs, including forwards.¹² In the previous 2012-13 season he was also very effective on

⁵<http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20142ALLDADALL&viewName=summary&sort=points&pg=2>

⁶ *Ibid*

⁷<http://stats.hockeyanalysis.com/ratings.php?disp=1&db=201214&sit=5v5&pos=defense&minutes=100&teamid=0&type=individual&sort=ipoints&sortdir=DESC>

⁸<http://stats.hockeyanalysis.com/ratings.php?disp=1&db=201214&sit=5v4&pos=defense&minutes=100&teamid=0&type=individual&sort=ipoints&sortdir=DESC>

⁹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471742>

¹⁰ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=673375>

¹¹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471742>

¹²<http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20132TORSASALL&sort=powerPlayGoals&viewName=scoringLeaders>

the powerplay, registering the 3rd most powerplay points of all Leafs players, and the most goals of all Leafs defenceman.¹³ He controls the pace of the powerplay effectively, indicated by his team leading 17 power play assists last season.¹⁴ Mr. Franson's skills as a powerplay "quarterback" would be tremendously valuable on any team, but specifically a Leafs team that has struggled over the last few seasons producing consistently on the power play.¹⁵

1.5 Shooting Accuracy

Mr. Franson excels in registering shots on net. His ability to get pucks on net through traffic on the powerplay and during even strength play is a skill that the Leafs desperately need. Getting quality shots from the blue line has been a consistent issue for the Leafs.¹⁶ Mr. Franson contributes significantly to remedying this issue with his quick release and offensive awareness. Last season he registered 115 shots on goal.¹⁷ Over the last two seasons, he has registered more shots on goal than any Leafs defenceman, and 27th overall in the NHL.¹⁸

1.6 Defensive Skill and Physicality

Standing at 6 feet and 5 inches, Mr. Franson is an imposing defensive presence to attacking forwards in the Leafs' zone. Arguably, Mr. Franson's most impressive statistical performance comes by way of his incredible hits total, a key indicator of physical neutral defensive zone play. Last season, he registered an enormous 282 hits, which was 2nd among all NHL players, forwards and defenseman.¹⁹ To put that in perspective, the Leafs' next biggest

¹³ *Ibid*

¹⁴ *Ibid*

¹⁵ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/teamstats.htm?navid=nav-sts-teams#>

¹⁶ <http://www.pensionplanpuppets.com/2014/7/30/5938429/the-case-for-cody-franson>

¹⁷ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471742>

¹⁸ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471742>

¹⁹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20142TORSASALL&sort=hits&viewName=rtssPlayerStats>

hitter is Carl Gunnarsson, with 166 hits last season.²⁰ The Leafs have benefitted tremendously from Mr. Franson's ability to use his big frame to impose physical dominance around the league.

Mr. Franson has also contributed significantly in other ways to the Leafs' defensive zone play, including registering the most takeaways of any Leafs player last season,²¹ which was also 40th in the league. Additionally, he was 3rd on the Leafs in blocked shots,²² highlighting his solid positional awareness and a willingness to put himself in front of hard shots for his team.

2 Comparable Players

2.1 Comparable #1 - Jason Demers

On July 16, 2014, Jason Demers signed a contract with the San Jose Sharks for two years at an average annual salary of \$3.4 million.²³ Mr. Demers is described as an offensive defenseman who possesses a big frame, similar to that of Mr. Franson²⁴. While Mr. Demers and Mr. Franson are both 26 years old, Mr. Franson has played 42 more games in his career,²⁵ and in recent years has contributed more to the Leafs offensive output than Mr. Demers has to his club.

As both these players are recognized for their offensive abilities from the defenseman position, points and points per game are important criteria for comparison. In his 2012-13 campaign, Mr. Demers scored 3 points in 22 games. In the same season, Mr. Franson far outperformed Mr. Demers, scoring 29 points in 45 games.²⁶ Last season both defenseman had nearly identical success in points - Mr. Demers scoring 34 to Mr. Franson's 33.²⁷ Mr. Franson's

²⁰ *Ibid*

²¹ *Ibid*

²² *Ibid*

²³ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=726513>

²⁴ <http://forecaster.thehockeynews.com/hockeynews/hockey/player.php?5601>

²⁵ <http://www.nhl.com/playerstats>

²⁶ *Ibid*

²⁷ *Ibid*

62 points over these two NHL seasons highlights his superior offensive contribution,²⁸ which is significantly higher than Mr. Demers's 37 point totals over that same period.²⁹

As last season displayed, both players have been relied on by their teams to play significant minutes per game, Mr. Demers and Mr. Franson contributing 19:29 and 20:41 average ice time per game, respectively.³⁰ Although their average time on ice is similar, Mr. Franson has played more minutes than Mr. Demers over the last two seasons, a telling statistic of the value that a club attributes to a defenseman in the NHL.³¹ Playing these significant minutes will generate important plus/minus ratings. However, comparing Mr. Demers' plus/minus statistics to Mr. Franson's would not be an accurate indicator of comparable value. This is because the Sharks were plus-49 as a team, and the Maple Leafs were minus-25 as a team³². Overall, the Maple Leafs had 23 minus rated players,³³ while the Sharks only had 10 players in that category.³⁴ Given these overwhelming facts, and given that Mr. Demers playing similar minutes to Mr. Franson on a much stronger San Jose Sharks club, Mr. Franson should be seen as a greater, and at the very minimum, equally effective weapon to the Maple Leafs defensively.

A detailed look at the situational usage of both players, further illustrates Mr. Franson's value compared with Mr. Demers. Last season, Mr. Franson played 2:54 average powerplay minutes per game, the 2nd most on the Maple Leafs,³⁵ while Mr. Demers contributed 1:55, a statistic that is good for 4th-most on the Sharks.³⁶ While Mr. Franson could be characterized as

²⁸ *Ibid*

²⁹ *Ibid*

³⁰ *Ibid*

³¹ *Ibid*

³² <http://www.nhl.com/ice/teamstats>

³³ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?season=20132014&gameType=2&team=TOR&position=S&country=&status=&viewName=summary>

³⁴ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?season=20132014&gameType=2&team=SJS&position=S&country=&status=&viewName=summary>

³⁵ *Supra* at 32

³⁶ *Supra* at 33

exclusively a power-play specialist, the Leafs also relied on him to play 1:38 minutes of penalty kill per game last season.³⁷ In the same year Mr. Demers played 1:25 minutes on the penalty kill on average.³⁸ Mr. Franson's value seems to be greater to the Leafs than is Mr. Demers' to the Sharks in these critical game situations.

Considering that the Sharks have been a perennial playoff contender, and the Leafs are on the cusp of playoff contention it is important to look to Mr. Demers and Mr. Franson success in the post-season. During the Leafs' 2012-13 playoff campaign, Mr. Franson was nearly a point-per-game player, an incredible achievement for a defenseman.³⁹ Mr. Franson also has other solid playoff experience, competing in three total playoff runs, tallying 13 points in 23 games.⁴⁰ At the same time, Demers has posted 9 points in 39 playoff appearances, and is an overall minus-6 in those contests.⁴¹ Though the sample sizes are different, it is clear that in many opportunities, Mr. Demers has not elevated his level of play during critical post-season play, while Mr. Franson, in limited opportunities, was able to be a significant factor to his team's offensive playoff output.

Analyzing both player's statistical performance in their most recent playing seasons, it is clear that Mr. Franson is a more valuable defenseman to the Toronto Maple Leafs than Mr. Demers is to the San Jose Sharks. Mr. Franson plays in more critical situations, has proven himself to be a more capable scoring threat, and has elevated his game in the playoffs. Mr. Franson clearly deserves an annual salary greater than the \$3.4m awarded to Jason Demers.

1.2 Comparable #2 - Dmitry Kulikov

³⁷ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471742>

³⁸ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474218>

³⁹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471742>

⁴⁰ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474218>

⁴¹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474218>

Dmitry Kulikov, a defenseman on the Florida Panthers, signed a three-year \$13 million deal, paying him an annual salary of \$4.33 million.⁴² Mr. Kulikov plays a similar role to Cody Franson, being described as a defenseman with a powerful shot and a large offensive component to his game.⁴³ Though Mr. Kulikov is 23 years old, he is far less efficient offensively compared to Mr. Franson, both in the last two years, as well as when Mr. Franson was the same age.

In the 2012-13 season, Mr. Kulikov had 0.29 points per game, and last season he scored 0.24 points per game.⁴⁴ Although clearly talented, these numbers are dwarfed by Mr. Franson's offensive output of 0.64 and 0.42 points per game in the same seasons, respectively.⁴⁵ Although age and experience are important factors, when Mr. Franson was 22 and 23 years old (Mr. Kulikov's age), he had a much greater offensive impact than Mr. Kulikov, posting an average of 0.35 points per game in those seasons.⁴⁶ Mr. Franson is clearly a more impactful defenseman today than Mr. Kulikov, and even if Mr. Kulikov is compared to Mr. Franson when they were the same age, he would have objectively less offensive upside, compare to Mr. Franson.

Assessing plus-minus can be a reliable indicator of defensive responsibility. Defensive liability has become a notable characteristic of Mr. Kulikov's style of play. Although, admittedly, Mr. Franson had an outlier 2013-14 campaign in his plus-minus numbers, Mr. Kulikov continued a trend of negative plus-minus, possessing the lowest plus-minus rating on his team at minus-26.⁴⁷ Mr. Kulikov has never had a plus rating in his five seasons in the NHL, while Mr. Franson has only had one season below minus-1.^{48, 49} Given these defensive statistics, it appears that Mr. Franson is equally or more defensively responsible than Mr. Kulikov.

⁴² <http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=726641>

⁴³ <http://forecaster.thehockeynews.com/hockeynews/hockey/player.php?7144>

⁴⁴ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8475179>

⁴⁵ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471742>

⁴⁶ *Ibid*

⁴⁷ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8475179>

⁴⁸ *Ibid*

Mr. Kulikov's defensive woes continued into the post-season. When the Florida Panthers met the New Jersey Devils in the 2011-2012 playoffs, Mr. Kulikov played in all seven games, averaging 21:26 minutes per contest.⁵⁰ In that series, he went minus-4 with one assist, leading to an early elimination.⁵¹ In three seasons of playoff performance, Mr. Franson has never been a minus rated player, and has contributed 13 points in 23 games.⁵² While Mr. Kulikov may eventually be given an opportunity to improve these statistics, they are currently indicative of inferior performance in crucial post-season play.

Recognizing the similarity of Mr. Kulikov and Mr. Franson's styles of play, Mr. Franson's stronger offensive production, better consistency, superior playoff experience and performance, as well as stronger plus-minus, should allow Mr. Franson to be awarded a salary that is at least on par with Mr. Kulikov's.

3. Conclusion

Cody Franson is an elite offensive force at the defenseman position, providing critical minutes and production on the powerplay of the Toronto Maple Leafs. He has stayed healthy and his output has stayed consistently high throughout the course of his career. Mr. Franson has also made significant progress in the physical element of his game, an indicator that he has become a more well rounded defenseman. Considering the recently signed contracts of Jason Demers and Dmitry Kulikov, and Mr. Franson's highly competitive, if not superior, statistics, we are advocating an average annual salary significantly above the \$3.3 million midpoint. We believe an annual salary of \$4.2 million should be appropriately awarded to Mr. Franson.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*

⁵⁰ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8475179>

⁵¹ *Ibid*

⁵² <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8471742>