

HOCKEY ARBITRATION COMPETITION OF CANADA

DERRICK BRASSARD

– AND –

THE NEW YORK RANGERS HOCKEY CLUB

Submission on Behalf of the New York Rangers

Team 13

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I. SUMMARY

This is a matter of arbitration involving Derrick Brassard and the New York Rangers Hockey Club (the “New York Rangers”) pursuant to Article 12.9 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement.¹ An analysis of Mr. Brassard’s offensive production; his value to the New York Rangers, as well as a statistical and compensatory analysis of comparables Bryan Little and Patrik Berglund will serve to demonstrate that Mr. Brassard should receive an award below the \$5 million midpoint. A one-year contract worth \$4.5 million is not only fair compensation for Brassard’s past and future contributions, but is also conducive to maintaining a positive relationship between both sides going forward in pursuit of the franchise’s fifth Stanley Cup.

II. PLAYER OVERVIEW

Derrick Brassard entered the league as a highly rated prospect having been drafted sixth overall by the Columbus Blue Jackets in 2006. Mr. Brassard spent most of his rookie season in the AHL with the Syracuse Crunch before being called up for seventeen games with the Blue Jackets in which he had minimal offensive impact. In his second professional season, Mr. Brassard justified his high draft position by posting 0.81 points per game in 31 games with Columbus before suffering a season-ending shoulder injury.² Although Mr. Brassard showed no lingering effects of his shoulder injury and posted consistent offensive statistics in the seasons that followed, his performance never again reached pre-injury levels. Once pegged as a potential top-line playmaker, Brassard never once ranked top three among Columbus forwards in time on ice per game and only once placed in the top three in points per game while playing more than 40 games.³

¹ NHL Collective Bargaining Agreement, Article 12.

² <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

³ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

Mr. Brassard was acquired by the New York Rangers via trade in 2013. It was hoped that a change of scenery could help him to reach his full potential and provide the Rangers with significant offensive production from the centre ice position. Initially, Brassard performed as hoped, notching eleven points in thirteen games and exploding in the playoffs, scoring at a point-per-game pace and leading his team in this category.⁴ However, during his platform season and the playoffs that followed, Brassard reverted to his role as a secondary scorer, evinced by his seventh place ranking among Rangers forwards in both points per game and time on ice per game.⁵ These statistics can be seen in detail in Exhibits 1 and 2, below.

Mr. Brassard has yet to win any notable awards or trophies during his NHL career nor has he ever made an NHL all-star team. Mr. Brassard has also failed to represent Canada at any notable international competitions since winning a silver medal at the 2005 Under-18 World Championships. Mr. Brassard does not hold any leadership positions within the New York Rangers hockey club nor did he hold a similar role with the Columbus Blue Jackets. There are few, if any, qualitative or off-ice reasons which merit Mr. Brassard being awarded a one-year salary above what is offensive statistics suggest.

When Mr. Brassard was drafted in 2006, he had top-line offensive potential. He was undoubtedly rewarded for this potential in his entry-level contract with the Blue Jackets as well as in his subsequent four-year contract extension. However, after seven years of playing professional hockey, “potential” should no longer play a factor in his salary determination. Mr. Brassard’s flattened production in the last five years is a perfect indicator that it is time for him to be compensated as the top-six, secondary playmaker that he is and not as the potential top-line,

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ *Ibid.*

dynamic forward that he was once expected to become. While offensive depth is vitally important in the National Hockey League, Mr. Brassard should be compensated at a level below the midpoint salary of \$5 million. An analysis of two comparable players, including their offensive production, their respective values to their teams and their annual compensation values will further emphasize this point.

III. COMPARABLE PLAYER ANALYSIS

In order to determine an appropriate salary award, the above analysis of Mr. Brassard's performance must be put into context. The easiest way to paint this contextual picture is to place Brassard along a continuum of salaries, comparing him to other players with superior and inferior statistics. In this case, an appropriate upper "ceiling" along this continuum is Brassard's closest comparable, Mr. Bryan Little of the Winnipeg Jets. On the other end of the spectrum, Patrik Berglund of the St. Louis Blues will represent the lower "floor" of the range. Each of these players will be considered in turn and a statistical comparison of these players can be found in the Appendix in Exhibits 3 and 4.

A. Bryan Little

Bryan Little is comparable to Derrick Brassard in many ways. Like Mr. Brassard, Mr. Little plays the centre ice position for the Winnipeg Jets, who drafted him in the first round (12th overall) in the 2006 NHL entry draft. Mr. Little is the same age as Mr. Brassard and was eligible for arbitration last year before agreeing to a five-year extension worth \$4.7 million per year.⁶ At the time of contract negotiations, Mr. Little was one year away from unrestricted free agent eligibility, just

⁶ <http://www.capgeek.com/player/342>

like Derrick Brassard is today. Despite these situational similarities, Derrick Brassard should receive a salary award below that of Bryan Little for multiple reasons.

Not only does Mr. Little have a higher career point-per-game average than Brassard, but he outperformed Mr. Brassard in each of the three seasons prior to becoming a restricted free agent, including the players' respective platform years.⁷ In addition to the difference in offensive production, Mr. Little also plays a bigger role for his team, ranking top three among forwards in both time on ice per game and points per game in his two platform years.⁸ Given the higher amount of ice time and, thus, responsibility that Mr. Little has with his respective team, his relative value to the Winnipeg Jets is much higher than Brassard's value to the Rangers.

Lastly, it has been established by past awards that a premium is paid by teams in order to retain the services of a player who would otherwise become an unrestricted free agent. For example, in *Jason Smith and the Edmonton Oilers* (2002), Arbitrator Picher stated that the bartering away of three years of unrestricted free agency must be accounted for in reviewing the salary of comparable players.⁹ In this case, Mr. Little's long-term deal eliminates four years of potential unrestricted free agency eligibility. It is highly likely that Little's annual salary of \$4.7 million is inflated in order to compensate him for his long-term commitment to the Jets. This means that a one-year contract award would have likely carried an even lower compensation value. Since the arbitration award for Mr. Brassard is for a one year Standard Player Contract prior to unrestricted free agency eligibility, the inflated nature of the comparable contract should be considered by the panel.

⁷ *Supra* note 2.

⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹ *Jason Smith and the Edmonton Oilers* (2002)

B. Patrik Berglund

Patrik Berglund is another former first round pick from the 2006 NHL entry draft. The 26-year-old Berglund is a top-six centre for the St. Louis Blues and represents the low end of the proposed salary range for Mr. Brassard. Brassard and Berglund have followed similar career trajectories with regards to offensive production and average ice time per game. They have also played similar roles of importance for their respective teams. However, while the statistical trajectories are similar, it should be noted that Mr. Brassard has offensively outperformed Mr. Berglund in almost every professional season since 2008 despite being provided similar ice time per game. The comparison is best illustrated in Exhibits 3, 4, 5 and 6, below.

Although Mr. Brassard has achieved greater statistical success in the NHL than Mr. Berglund, these differences are partially offset by Berglund's international experience, representing Sweden at multiple World Championships. Berglund's value is also increased due to his status as a power forward with size and strength – intangibles which Brassard does not boast, but which are particularly valuable to teams playing in the physically demanding western conference. As a result, the panel should view the two players as comparable, but seek to award Mr. Brassard with a contract value that is slightly higher than the \$3.7 million annual salary that Berglund currently earns over his three-year deal with the Blues.¹⁰

IV. CONCLUSION

Derrick Brassard is an appreciated member of the New York Rangers who provides secondary offensive production from the centre ice position. Mr. Brassard once had the potential of becoming the dynamic, first-line centre that all NHL teams covet so highly and was compensated for this

¹⁰ <http://www.capgeek.com/player/964>.

potential over the course of two Standard Player Contracts. However, after seven years in the NHL and flattening offensive production, it is clear that Mr. Brassard's true value is that of a complimentary, top-six forward who can be counted on for just under 50 points per season. While consistency is important, it must be compensated appropriately, given his overall value to the team.

A comparable player analysis has put this production into context. For example, Bryan Little, who not only has higher offensive production, but also more on-ice responsibility for the Winnipeg Jets, earns only \$4.7 million per year. Furthermore, Patrik Berglund, who has had somewhat weaker offensive production than Mr. Brassard earns only \$3.7 million per year, despite having a number of qualitative factors in his favour.

Given the current compensation of the aforementioned comparable players as well Mr. Brassard's role within the New York Rangers organization, an award of \$4.5 million for a one-year contract would be fair compensation. This amount would place Mr. Brassard in the upper portion of the provided salary range and would help to maintain a positive relationship between the both sides going forward.

V. APPENDIX

Exhibit 1: Derrick Brassard Regular Season and Playoff Statistics

REGULAR SEASON	TEAM	GP	G	G/G	A	A/G	P	P/G	+/-
2007-2008	BLUE JACKETS	17	1	0.06	1	0.06	2	0.12	-4
2008-2009	BLUE JACKETS	31	10	0.32	15	0.48	25	0.81	12
2009-2010	BLUE JACKETS	79	9	0.11	27	0.34	36	0.46	-17
2010-2011	BLUE JACKETS	74	17	0.23	30	0.41	47	0.64	-11
2011-2012	BLUE JACKETS	74	14	0.19	27	0.36	41	0.55	-20
2012-2013	CBJ/NYR	47	12	0.26	17	0.36	29	0.62	1
2013-2014	RANGERS	81	18	0.22	27	0.33	45	0.56	2
NHL TOTALS		403	81	0.20	144	0.36	225	0.56	-37

PLAYOFFS	TEAM	GP	G	G/G	A	A/G	P	P/G	+/-
2012-2013	RANGERS	12	2	0.17	10	0.83	12	1.00	1
2013-2014	RANGERS	23	6	0.26	6	0.26	12	0.52	4
NHL TOTALS		35	8	0.23	16	0.46	24	0.69	5

Exhibit 2: Derrick Brassard Time on Ice Statistics

	TOI/G	Shifts/G	Rank of Forwards
2007-2008	9.03	12.6	17
2008-2009	14.25	19.8	9
2009-2010	14.56	20	7
2010-2011	17.01	21.1	4
2011-2012	16.20	20.7	6
2012-2013	16.38	20.2	8
2013-2014	15.47	21.5	7

Exhibit 3: Points per Game Comparison

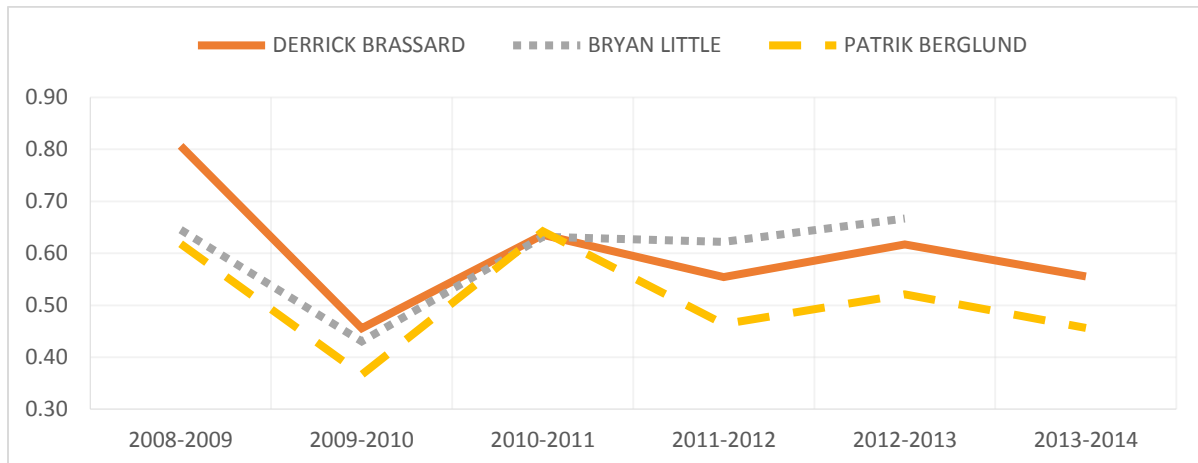


Exhibit 4: Time on Ice per Game Comparison

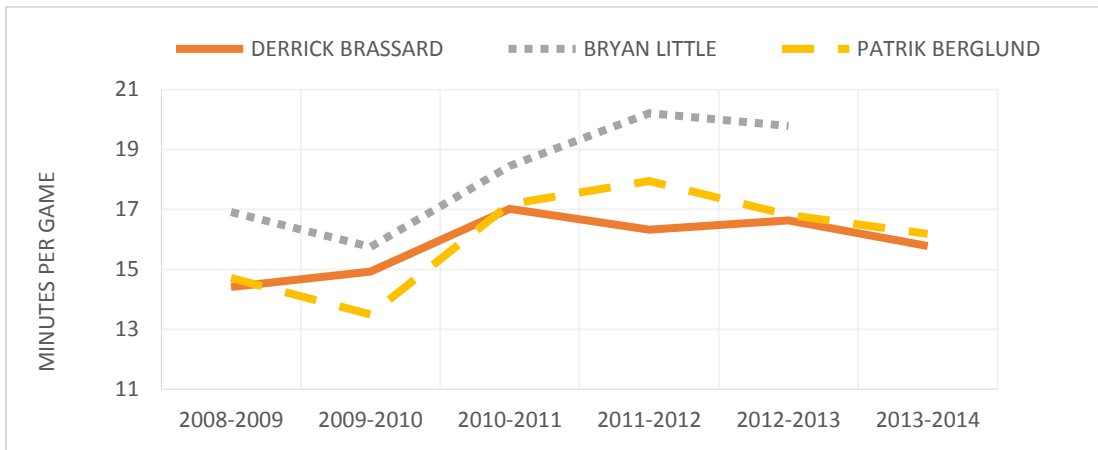


Exhibit 5: Assists per Game Comparison

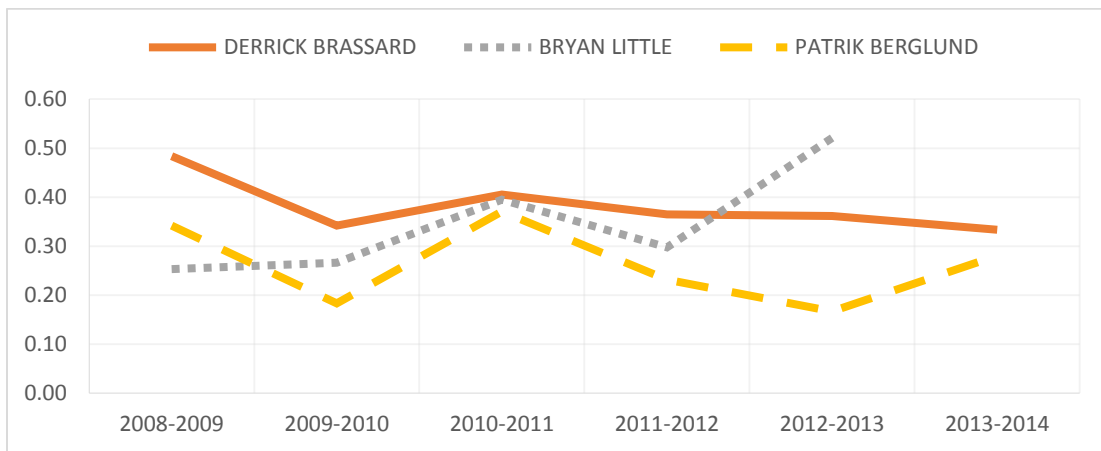


Exhibit 6: Goals per Game Comparison

