

**HOCKEY ARBITRATION COMPETITION OF CANADA**

**LARS ELLER**

**– AND –**

**THE MONTREAL CANADIENS HOCKEY CLUB**

*Submission on Behalf of Lars Eller*

*Team 13*

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## I. SUMMARY

This is a matter of arbitration involving Lars Eller and the Montreal Canadiens Hockey Club (the “Montreal Canadiens”) pursuant to Article 12.9 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement.<sup>1</sup> An analysis of Mr. Eller’s offensive production, his value to the Montreal Canadiens, as well as a statistical and compensatory analysis of comparable players Patrik Berglund and David Desharnais will serve to demonstrate that Mr. Eller should receive an award above the \$3.5 million midpoint. A one-year contract worth \$3.7 million is not only fair compensation for Eller’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 25<sup>th</sup> Stanley Cup.

## II. PLAYER OVERVIEW

Like many players entering the league as high-level prospects, the story of Lars Eller is one of struggle, growth and maturity. It is the story of a player that has fought through adversity and has finally cemented himself as being an effective power forward in the National Hockey League. Mr. Eller was drafted 13<sup>th</sup> overall by the St. Louis Blues in the 2007 NHL Entry Draft. After playing only seven games for the Blues, Mr. Eller was traded to the Montreal Canadiens in the summer of 2010 in exchange for standout playoff performer, Jaroslav Halak.

As previously mentioned, the story of Lars Eller is one of growth. In his first NHL season, Mr. Eller posted a miniscule 17 points in 77 games for a pace of only 0.22 points per game.<sup>23</sup> Rather than blaming his performance on a number of possible factors, including lack of familiarity to North American hockey or negligible ice time, Mr. Eller persevered. In his next season, Mr. Eller

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<sup>1</sup> NHL Collective Bargaining Agreement 2012, Article 12.

<sup>2</sup> Full statistical analysis can be seen in Exhibit 1, below.

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

showed improvement, elevating his offensive production to 0.35 points per game.<sup>4</sup> Unsatisfied with his progress, Mr. Eller almost doubled his offensive production in the lockout shortened 2012-2013 season, scoring at a torrent 0.65 point-per-game pace.<sup>5</sup> Eller's 30 points that season were good enough for third place among all Canadiens forwards, despite ranking 16<sup>th</sup> in time on ice per game during the season.<sup>6</sup> This was undoubtedly Mr. Eller's breakout season in the NHL and one that brought with it great expectations for the playoffs that followed. Unfortunately, Mr. Eller's playoffs were cut short following a vicious open-ice hit from the Ottawa Senators' defenseman Eric Gryba, which left Eller unconscious and lying in a puddle of blood before being stretchered off the ice.<sup>7</sup> The Canadiens went on to lose the series in five games.

It should come as no surprise that the subsequent season was extremely challenging for Mr. Eller. Returning from a traumatizing experience like the one he endured is no easy feat, especially for a power forward, who must face this risk on a regular basis. The transition back to full speed and full strength proved difficult for Eller in his platform year, where he notched only 26 points – his second worst production in the NHL over a full season.<sup>8</sup> However, the themes of growth and maturity that were so apparent in Eller's career were never more evident than during his platform season. Mr. Eller dramatically improved as the season progressed and this improvement reached a climax in the playoffs. It was in the playoffs where Mr. Eller finished with the second highest point total on his team, falling one point shy of elite defenseman P.K. Subban and leading all Canadiens forwards in this category.<sup>9</sup> This breakout in scoring showed that Mr. Eller was back to being the explosive power forward he had proven himself to be the year before. It also showed that Mr. Eller

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<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.tsn.ca>.

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

can provide elite level offence in big-game situations and that he has cemented his role as a key piece to the Canadiens' offence. Eller's playoff performance not only symbolized recovery from a potentially career-threatening injury, but it also re-ignited his desire to become the elite power forward that he was expected to become when the St. Louis Blues drafted him in 2007.

### **III. COMPARABLE PLAYER ANALYSIS**

In order to determine an appropriate salary award, the above analysis of Mr. Eller's performance should be put into context. The easiest way to paint this contextual picture is to compare Mr. Eller to other players with similar statistics in order to determine an appropriate salary range. The most fitting comparable players for this analysis are Mr. Eller's teammate, David Desharnais and Patrik Berglund of the St. Louis Blues. Each of these players will be considered in turn.

#### **A. David Desharnais**

In March, 2013, David Desharnais re-signed with the Montreal Canadiens to a 4-year contract worth \$3.5 million per year.<sup>10</sup> Mr. Desharnais plays the same position as Mr. Eller on the same team, indicating that the two are potentially close comparables. Despite the similarities, Mr. Desharnais' salary should represent an appropriate salary "floor" for Mr. Eller, given Mr. Eller's relative experience on the date of signing, and Mr. Eller's higher offensive upside.

Immediately prior to Mr. Desharnais' signing, he had played a total of 157 regular-season games and five playoff games over four seasons in the NHL.<sup>11</sup> By contrast, Mr. Eller has played in 286 regular-season games and 25 playoff games throughout his career.<sup>12</sup> Mr. Eller's additional

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<sup>10</sup> <http://www.capegeek.com/player/98>.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

experience is amplified by the quality of the experience that each player has. During the 2013-2014 season, Mr. Eller and the Montreal Canadiens made it to the conference final where they were eliminated by the New York Rangers.<sup>13</sup> Mr. Eller played all 17 of these games.<sup>14</sup> By contrast, in the 2010-2011 season, Mr. Desharnais and the Montreal Canadiens were eliminated in the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs.<sup>15</sup> While the team played seven games, Mr. Desharnais was only on the ice for only five of those games.<sup>16</sup> Mr. Eller's NHL experience is far greater than Mr. Desharnais' experience at the time of his contract signing. This factor should be considered when evaluating Mr. Eller's salary relative to Mr. Desharnais'.

There are many factors that lead to the notion that Mr. Eller has greater room to grow with the Montreal Canadiens organization than Mr. Desharnais did at the time of his contract signing. During his platform year, Mr. Eller played a major role in the Montreal Canadiens' playoff success. As noted above, the Montreal Canadiens completed two upsets in the 2014 Stanley Cup Playoffs, making it all the way to the Conference Finals where they were eliminated by the New York Rangers.<sup>17</sup> Lars Eller finished the playoffs with the second-highest playoff point total on his team, falling one point shy of elite defenseman P.K. Subban.<sup>18</sup> By contrast, at the time of his signing, Mr. Desharnais had played 5 career playoff games, recording zero goals and one assist.<sup>19</sup> This ability to play in big game situations will likely cause the Canadiens to rely on the services of Mr. Eller over those of Mr. Desharnais in the future.

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<sup>13</sup> <http://www.nhl.com>.

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.nhl.com>.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.nhl.com>.

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

Furthermore, Mr. Eller possesses the size and strength of an elite power forward. Mr. Eller is 6' 2", 215 lbs, compared to Mr. Desharnais' 5' 7", 170 lbs stature.<sup>20</sup> During his platform year, Mr. Eller led his team's forwards in hits and blocked shots.<sup>21</sup> While these statistics tend to deviate from rink to rink, they serve as a good means to compare players on the same team. What they show is that Mr. Eller provides a physical presence that Desharnais cannot match and which is invaluable to an NHL organization. While it is not impossible for a smaller player to have success in the NHL, a player of Mr. Eller's size is more likely to maintain success at the highest level.

## **B. Patrik Berglund**

In June, 2014, Patrik Berglund re-signed with the St. Louis Blues to a 3-year deal worth \$3.7 million per year.<sup>22</sup> Patrik Berglund and Lars Eller share many similarities that make them close salary comparables. Both players are big, young centers who have shown offensive promise. It should be recognized that Mr. Berglund has had a more successful NHL career from an offensive production point of view; however, this is offset by Mr. Eller's strong playoff experience and higher offensive ceiling. These factors, in combination with the similar roles of each player with their respective hockey clubs indicate that Mr. Eller should receive a similar award to Mr. Berglund's \$3.7 million salary.

Throughout their respective NHL careers, Patrik Berglund has generally outperformed Mr. Eller from an offensive production standpoint. However, in recent years, Mr. Berglund's offensive production appears to have plateaued, evidenced by his failure to come within 14 points of his career-high 52 point total during the 2010-2011 NHL season.<sup>23</sup> In his platform year, Mr. Berglund

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<sup>20</sup> <http://www.tsn.ca>.

<sup>21</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

<sup>22</sup> <http://www.capgeek.com/player/964>.

<sup>23</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm>.

only recorded 32 points for a 0.41 points per game total during the regular season.<sup>24</sup> During the 2014 Stanley Cup playoffs, Mr. Berglund only played in four of his team's six games and recorded zero points and had a +/- rating of -7.<sup>25</sup>

By contrast, Mr. Eller has shown steady recovery in offensive production after suffering from a significant injury at the end of a breakout season. While his offensive production during the 2013-2014 regular season suffered as a result of his injury, Mr. Eller was able to bounce back and score at an outstanding 0.76 points per game pace in the playoffs.<sup>26</sup> During these playoffs, Mr. Eller recorded 13 points in 17 games played.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Mr. Berglund has had stronger career offensive production than Mr. Eller; however, this is offset by the offensive upside that Mr. Eller has displayed in recent seasons and his sloping trend-line. These factors indicate that Mr. Eller should receive an arbitration award similar to Mr. Berglund's \$3.7 million salary.

The comparability of Mr. Eller and Mr. Berglund is further evidenced by the similar role that each player has within his respective hockey club. Both players play top-six forward minutes, recording nearly identical 16:10 and 15:57 TOI/G figures, respectively.<sup>28</sup> Mr. Eller and Mr. Berglund both play significant special teams minutes. During the 2013-2014 season, Mr. Eller and Mr. Berglund played 1:06 and 1:32 on the powerplay per game, respectively.<sup>29</sup> Additionally, Mr. Eller and Mr. Berglund played 1:24 and 1:31 of shorthanded time per game, respectively.<sup>30</sup> The nearly identical minutes that Mr. Eller and Mr. Berglund receive signifies their value to their respective organizations.

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<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*



It is clear that Mr. Eller and Mr. Berglund differ in some respects. Mr. Berglund has played more NHL games and has generally recorded more points than Mr. Eller. However, this is offset by Mr. Eller's strong playoff experience and greater offensive upside. Furthermore, Mr. Eller and Mr. Berglund share many similarities that make them excellent salary comparators. Both players play a physical game that affords them top-six minutes for their respective hockey clubs. For these reasons, the representatives for Lars Eller submit that he receive a salary award of \$3.7 million.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Mr. Eller is a valued member of the Montreal Canadiens who provides top-six minutes as well as a physical presence on the ice. Thus far, Mr. Eller's career is a story of struggle, growth and maturity which has now begun a new chapter as an established NHL power forward. Furthermore, Mr. Eller has cemented himself as a core piece of the Canadiens' offensive threat and is entitled to a commensurate increase in salary.

When evaluated against comparable players such as David Desharnais and Patrik Berglund, it becomes clear that Mr. Eller should receive an award greater than \$3.5 million. While both comparable players have achieved superior offensive production in their careers, Eller's exponential improvement as well as his intangibles make him an invaluable asset to the Montreal Canadiens. It is for the above reasons that Mr. Eller should receive an arbitration award of \$3.7 million for the 2014-2015 NHL season.

## V. APPENDIX

### Exhibit 1: Lars Eller's Statistics

Reg. Season	TEAM	GP	G	G/G	A	A/G	P	P/G	+/-	PIM
2009-2010	BLUES	7	2	0.29	0	0.00	2	0.29	2	4
2010-2011	CANADIENS	77	7	0.09	10	0.13	17	0.22	-4	48
2011-2012	CANADIENS	79	16	0.20	12	0.15	28	0.35	-5	66
2012-2013	CANADIENS	46	8	0.17	22	0.48	30	0.65	8	45
2013-2014	CANADIENS	77	12	0.16	14	0.18	26	0.34	-15	68
<b>NHL TOTALS</b>	<b>NHL TOTALS</b>	<b>286</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>0.16</b>	<b>58</b>	<b>0.20</b>	<b>103</b>	<b>0.36</b>	<b>-14</b>	<b>231</b>

PLAYOFFS	TEAM	GP	G	G/G	A	A/G	P	P/G	+/-	PIM
2010-2011	CANADIENS	7	0	0.00	2	0.29	2	0.29	1	4
2012-2013	CANADIENS	1	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0.00	0	0
2013-2014	CANADIENS	17	5	0.29	8	0.47	13	0.76	6	18
<b>NHL TOTALS</b>	<b>NHL TOTALS</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>0.2</b>	<b>10</b>	<b>0.4</b>	<b>15</b>	<b>0.6</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>22</b>