

IN THE MATTER OF SALARY ARBITRATION BETWEEN:

DERICK BRASSARD

-AND-

THE NEW YORK RANGERS

BRIEF OF THE REPRESENTATIVES OF THE PLAYER AT HAND

Team #7

Case #3

I.	INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW.....	1
	A. Versatility.....	1
	B. Contribution to Team Success.....	2
II.	VALID COMPARABLE PLAYERS.....	4
	A. Tyler Ennis – Buffalo Sabres.....	4
	B. Sam Gagne – Edmonton Oilers.....	6
III.	CONCLUSION.....	8

I. INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

Pursuant to section 12.9 of the NHL Collective Bargaining Agreement¹, this brief will form an analysis of the performances of Derick Brassard of the New York Rangers. It will be demonstrated that Mr. Brassard's versatility and contributions to team success are characteristics of a solid and well-rounded forward. Further, after drawing a comparison to players in the same price range, it will become apparent that Mr. Brassard deserves an Award above the suggested \$5 million midpoint figure. As Representatives of the Player at Hand, it is being submitted that a salary reflecting an Average Annual Value of \$5.1 million is both a suitable and fair Award.

A. Versatility

Derick Brassard possesses a unique combination of skill and grit that make him a valuable asset. In five full NHL seasons, Brassard has managed to surpass the 40-point mark on three occasions, the most recent being his Platform Year. At the same time, the 6'1", 202-pound center has racked up over 230 PIM throughout his career². With his vision, playmaking ability, and peskiness, Brassard is an imposing presence in the offensive zone.

This past season, Brassard emerged as a stabilizing force and the focal point of the Rangers' most consistently productive offensive line with Mats Zuccarello and Benoit Pouliot. He set a career high for both goals (18) and game-winning goals (four), and registered his second highest season point total with 45.³ In his Platform Year, Brassard also continued his physical style of play and demonstrated an unprecedented willingness to sacrifice his body. While his 124 hits were good enough for fifth amongst all Rangers that season, Brassard also recorded a career high

¹ NHL Collective Bargaining Agreement, 2005, s.12.

² <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544>

³ *Ibid.*

in blocked shots.⁴ These numbers are indicative of a well-rounded player that can easily alternate between roles.

With the shortest coaching tenures in NHL history and more movement of players through trades, players who can adapt to changing team dynamics are more valuable than ever. After being acquired by the Rangers at the 2013 trade deadline, he made an immediate impact in his new surroundings by tallying 4 points in his first game.⁵ In fact, since joining the Rangers that season, Brassard was a plus-4 with seven goals, 16 assists in the first 25 games with his new club. The importance of Brassard's stellar play was magnified by the shortened season in 2012/2013. His hot streak began with 13 games left in the regular season and carried into the post season, where Brassard averaged a point a game in the subsequent 12 playoff games.⁶

A player's versatility can also be measured by his involvement in special teams. Derick Brassard has been a key component on the power play with each team he has played with. He has registered 28 career power play goals and 77 career power play points to date.⁷ His effectiveness on the power play was particularly evident in his Platform Year in which he averaged 2:31 power play minutes per game, and managed an excellent power play point percentage of 40%.⁸ He was the leading contributor on the team, having finished the first on the Rangers with a team-high seven power play goals and 18 power play points.⁹

B. Contributions to Team Success

A player's individual achievements must be judged based on their overall contribution to team success. Derick Brassard has demonstrated on countless occasions that he plays his best

⁴ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&view=splits&season=20132014&gameType=2>

⁵ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&view=log&season=20122013>

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Supra* note 2.

⁸ *Supra* note 4.

⁹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20142NYRSASALL&sort=powerPlayGoals&viewName=summary>

hockey when his team needs him most. First, he has amassed 12 game winning goals in his career and an additional three during the playoffs.¹⁰ His four game winning goals during the regular season and the additional two during the playoffs placed him third amongst Rangers last year.¹¹ Second, throughout his career Brassard has managed to be most effective when games have been close. Over 60% of his career goals have come when games have been at most one goal apart.¹² Third, Brassard leads by example against the strongest competition in the league. In his Platform Year, 30% of Brassard's points came against the eight best teams in the NHL. This statistic stands out considerably if it is compared to other Rangers forwards such as Derek Stepan¹³ or Rick Nash¹⁴ who's points against the weakest opposition in the league was almost three times as much as their points generated against the best eight teams.

It is Brassard's playoff experience, however, that has been invaluable to his team's success, and cannot be overlooked when assessing his worth. Over the past two seasons with the Rangers he has skated in 35 NHL playoff games, registering eight goals and 16 assists, and a plus-5 rating.¹⁵ Despite being a new addition to the team, Brassard was by far the Rangers' best player in the 2012/2013 playoffs. His 12 points were almost twice as much as the next top performer, and his tally included a crucial game-winning goal in a closely contested opening series that the Rangers ultimately won in 7 games.¹⁶

Brassard again demonstrated his ability to contribute when it matters most in the playoffs of his Platform Year, where he helped the Rangers reach the Stanley Cup Final for the first time

¹⁰*Supra* note 2.

¹¹<http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?season=20132014&gameType=2&team=NYR&position=S&country=&status=&viewName=summary>

¹²*Supra* note 2.

¹³<http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474613&view=splits>

¹⁴<http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8470041&view=splits&season=20132014&gameType=2>

¹⁵*Supra* note 2.

¹⁶<http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?season=20122013&gameType=3&team=NYR&position=S&country=&status=&viewName=summary>

since 1994. Here, Brassard established playoff career-highs in games played, goals, plus/minus rating, game-winning goals, and power play assists. He also tied playoff career-highs in points and power play points¹⁷. In comparison to his teammates, he tied for second on the Rangers – and sixth in the NHL – in game-winning goals, and ranked third on the team in goals.¹⁸ Players who step up in important games are extremely valuable in the NHL. In the Stanley Cup Finals themselves, Brassard's became a player that the Rangers increasingly relied on. His ice time went up drastically. He ended the series tied for the team lead in plus/minus rating, and tied for second on the team in assists and points (three).¹⁹

It is evident that Brassard was an important piece to the Rangers' success last season. Overall, he was one of the more dangerous Ranger forwards in the playoffs. Brassard has demonstrated in two separate playoff campaigns that he knows what it takes to be successful. That intangible adds significant value to his worth as a player.

II. VALID COMPARABLE PLAYERS

A. Tyler Ennis

In July 2014, Tyler Ennis signed a multi-year deal with the Buffalo Sabres worth an average of \$4.6 million²⁰. Although his salary is within the range of a Brassard's midpoint figure, it will be demonstrated that Brassard is simply a better player. As such, Brassard's Award should be a reflection of this superiority. Last season, which was the Platform Year for both players, Ennis tallied less points despite spending over three minutes more on the ice per game. This increased ice time also included over 45 seconds more on the power play. Although power play minutes most readily translate into offensive opportunities, Ennis also managed less power play

¹⁷*Supra* note 2.

¹⁸<http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?fetchKey=20143NYRSASALL&sort=gameWinningGoals&viewName=summary>

¹⁹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&view=log&season=20132014>

²⁰ <http://www.capgeek.com/player/1572>

goals and points than Brassard.²¹ These numbers reveal a noticeable gap in efficiency between the two players. Further, Brassard's offensive contributions more readily translated to the success of the Rangers last season. His career high in game winning goals eclipsed that of Ennis who failed to score a single game winning goal for his club.²²

Part of Brassard's versatility lends to is his ability to combine his offensive skill with physical play. In comparison, at 5'9" and 169 pounds Ennis, poses no significant threat to the opposition with his meager size. For example, Ennis hit considerably less than Brassard last season²³. What is more, this may contribute to injury trouble because Ennis' hits have plummeted since he suffered a serious ankle injury during the 2011/2012 season²⁴. Brassard, on the other hand, recorded his second highest hit count last season²⁵.

As his career has progressed, Brassard has also been entrusted with taking more faceoffs. His total faceoffs taken for the 2013/2014 season surpassed his previous career high by almost 100, and he still managed to tie his career best in faceoff percentage.²⁶ Although Brassard's faceoff count in his Platform Year surpassed Ennis' numbers by almost 200, Ennis' faceoff percentage was still 10% worse.²⁷ These statistics highlight yet another dimension to Brassard's game that Ennis does not possess.

A major factor distinguishing Brassard's value from that of Ennis is his playoff success. Brassard has three times as many playoff points in comparison to Ennis and has played in almost three times as many games. Despite playing more playoffs games and having gone further in the playoffs and faced tougher opposition as a result, Brassard boasts career play off

²¹<http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474589&view=splits&season=20132014&gameType=2>

²²*Ibid.*

²³*Supra* note 21.

²⁴ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474589&view=splits>

²⁵*Supra* note 4.

²⁶ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473544&view=splits>

²⁷*Supra* note 24.

points per game is 0.68²⁸ whereas Ennis' eight points in 13 games leaves him at 0.61. What is more, Ennis has not helped the Sabres make the playoffs since the 2010/2011 season.²⁹ Conversely, Brassard has a history of helping a historically weaker team make the playoffs. During his rookie year, Brassard managed an impressive 25 points in the 30 games in which he played, and he helped the Columbus Blue Jackets make the playoffs for the first time in franchise history.³⁰

Derick Brassard is a versatile and physical player who excels in important game situations, particularly in the playoffs. Comparatively, Tyler Ennis is an under sized forward with worse offensive production who has had no success in the playoffs. Brassard is thus significantly more valuable to his team and a stronger player comparatively. As such a fair award for Derick Brassard in arbitration is \$5.1 million.

Sam Gagner

The second comparable player which counsel for Derick Brassard has selected is Sam Gagner of the Arizona Coyotes. Mr. Gagner was a class two UFA who signed a three year contract with an Average Annual Value of \$4.8 million in the summer of 2012.³¹ A comparison of Mr. Gagner and Mr. Brassard will show that the players have comparable offensive production. However, Mr. Brassard has considerably more success, particularly in the playoffs. A comparison will also show that Mr. Brassard is a much more versatile player, who is able to contribute to team success through physical play. As such Mr. Brassard is a significantly more valuable than Mr. Gagne and deserves an award in arbitration of at least \$200,000 more than Gagner.

²⁸*Supra* note 2.

²⁹ <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474589&view=stats>

³⁰*Supra* note 2.

³¹<http://capgeek.com/player/23>

Mr. Gagne and Mr. Brassard are comparable offensive players. They both play the centre position (Brassard outperforms Gagne in faceoff percentage). In the four seasons leading up to arbitration Gagne averaged 42 points per season, where Brassard averaged 40.5 points.³² Mr. Gagne's highest total offensive production in a season is 49 points, as compared to 47 points.

The real difference in the comparative value of Brassard and Gagne lies in the players' contributions to team success. Mr. Brassard has demonstrated throughout his career that he thrives in important situations. He has scored 12 game winning goals over the course of his career.³³ This is nearly double the seven game winning goals scored by Gagne in his career.³⁴ Focusing specifically on the Platform Year Brassard scores four times the game winning goals as Gagne scored in his Platform Season. Brassard also scored an additional two game winning goals in the playoffs of his Platform Season.

Mr. Brassard has led the Rangers to the playoffs in the last two seasons, including an appearance in the Stanley Cup Finals. Mr. Gagne has not made the playoffs in his NHL career despite being considered a leader on the Edmonton Oilers for six seasons. Playoff success adds value in two ways. First, playoff experience demonstrates that Mr. Brassard has a proven ability to thrive in big games. Second, playoff success has given Mr. Brassard a foundation of veteran experience to thrive in further playoff situations.

Additionally, where Mr. Gagne is one-dimensional, Mr. Brassard possesses the versatility to contribute to team success outside of scoring. One area is through physical play. In the three seasons leading up to arbitration Mr. Brassard has registered 344 hits, compared to just

³²Supra Note 2

³³Supra Note 2

³⁴<http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8474040&docid=TeamPlayerBio:47038#&navid=nhl-search>

80 registered by Mr. Gagner in the three years leading up to his arbitration.³⁵The physical dimension to Brassard's game allows him to make contributions to team success outside of offensive production.

Mr. Gagne and Mr. Brassard have remarkably similar offensive potential with respect to quantity. However, hockey is a team game and the most valuable players are those whose contributions translate to team success. The comparative quality of Mr. Brassard production in directly contributing to team success, including in the playoffs, far exceeds that of Mr. Gagner. Further, the most valuable players are those who can contribute to team success in a variety of ways. Mr. Brassard has continually utilized his versatility to contribute to team success, with both scoring and physical play. Based on this an appropriate award for Mr. Brassard would be more than \$200,000 higher than that which Mr. Gagne negotiated in 2013.

III. CONCLUSION

Mr. Brassard is a valuable hockey player who possesses a unique combination of skill and physicality he effectively utilizes in different areas of the game. Most importantly, Mr. Brassard has utilized his versatility to consistently make contributions to team success, particularly in the playoffs. Playoff success demonstrates a player who thrives in important games and has given Mr. Brassard a solid foundation of experience for future playoff success. Compared to Tyler Ennis of the Buffalo Sabres and Sam Gagne of the Arizona Coyotes, two one-dimensional players with non-existent playoff success, Mr. Brassard's value becomes clear. Based on these comparisons an appropriate award in arbitration for Mr. Brassard is \$5.1 million.

³⁵Supra Note 2 and Note 34.