

2012 Hockey Arbitration Competition of Canada

Ondrej Pavelec v. Winnipeg Jets

Submission on Behalf of the Winnipeg Jets

Midpoint: \$3.9 million

Submission by: Team 7

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I. INTRODUCTION

This brief is addressing the contributions Ondrej Pavelec, a goaltender in the National Hockey league (NHL), for an arbitration hearing governed by the collective bargaining agreement between the NHL and the National Hockey League Players' Association. This brief is meant to analyze Pavelec's productivity through the following criteria: his overall performance, comparable goaltenders' salaries, his previous injuries, his future role with the Winnipeg Jets, and his past compensation.

Looking at these criteria this arbitration must find that Ondrej Pavelec's salary should be below the midpoint of \$3.9 million and award a salary of \$2.75 million.

II. THE OVERALL PERFORMANCE OF ONDREJ PAVELEC¹

A. 2011-2012 Season

Pavelec played the 2011-2012 season for the Winnipeg Jets. Pavelec finished the platform season with a record of 29 wins, 28 losses, and 9 overtime losses, placing him 19th in the league in wins.

When looking at goaltender performance it can be argued that the category of wins is not very determinative of a goalie's ability, as it is highly influenced by the team they play for. When considering save percentage and goals against average, Pavelec finished in 35th and 39th respectively in the league. Finally, he finished 45th place, which was last in the league, in goals against with a grand total of 191 over 68 games played.

More importantly, Pavelec was unable to perform down the stretch. During March and April Pavelec started 15 games, won only 6, and underperformed with save percentages of .900

¹ Unless otherwise stated all statistics are found at NHL.com.

and .873 respectively. The Jets were in a position to make the playoffs, but when it mattered, Pavelec did not play his best hockey, limiting the value he is worth to the organization. In the final 10 games of the season, hunting for playoff spot, Pavelec let in 2-3 goals in 4 of the games, and surrendering 4-5 goals in the other 6. During that 10 game period Pavelec only earned a save percentage of .900 or above 3 times. In order for Pavelec to be awarded a salary of \$3.9 million per year, he must be able to help the team make a run for the playoffs.

B. Previous Seasons

The Jets came into existence after the Atlanta Thrashers relocated during the summer of 2011. Pavelec was drafted by Atlanta in 2005, and has played his entire career for the organization. Pavelec first became a starting goaltender in the 2009-2010 season when he played 42 games for the Atlanta Thrashers. During the 2009-2010 Pavelec amassed 14 wins 18 losses and 7 overtime losses, with a .906 save percentage and a goals against of 3.29. In the following season Pavelec started a total of 58 games, and earning 21 wins 23 losses and 9 overtime losses with a career high .914 save percentage.

Pavelec's history of struggling down the stretch has been consistent throughout his time in the NHL. In 2010-2011, Pavelec was unable to post a save percentage above .900 in February, March, or April resulting in the team winning a total of 4 out of 19 games played. In 2009-2010, Pavelec was only able to win 2 out of 10 starts from February to April. Therefore, since becoming a starting goalie in the NHL, Pavelec has a career record of 18 wins and 55 losses during the February through April time period. It is true that wins and losses are a team effort and cannot be solely blamed on Pavelec, but the fact is that Pavelec's save percentage has dropped consistently during the final months of the past 3 seasons. As a team looking to make

the playoffs, it is essential that they have a goalie who can help them down the stretch, thus far Pavelec's personal play has faltered right when his team needed him the most. Therefore, Pavelec should be awarded a salary below the midpoint of \$3.9 Million, until he is able to help the Jets organization reach its goals.

C. Playoff Experience

The Jets were knocking on the door of making the playoffs last year and are in a good position to make it this year. Playoff experience in a goaltender would be beneficial to the Jets organization. Unfortunately, Pavelec has never played a playoff game in the NHL and as such is an unknown entity, lowering his value to the Jets organization.

III. COMPARATIVE GOALTENDER SALARIES

As the starting goaltender for the Jets, Pavelec has been consistently underwhelming. This is even more evident when compared to his peers Devan Dubnyk, Corey Crawford, and Antti Niemi. Upon looking at how these players were compensated for their performance it should be evident what Pavelec is worth.

A. Devan Dubnyk

The best place to begin assessing the value of a goaltender like Pavelec is to look at Devan Dubnyk. Dubnik is the starting goaltender for the Edmonton Oilers and was arbitration eligible at the end of the 2011-2012 season. He avoided arbitration and signed a two year contract worth \$3.5 million per season.² Dubnyk was 26 years old when he signed his contract.

² Devan Dubnyk, player page, CapGeek.com, <http://capgeek.com/players/display.php?id=49>.

Platform Season Statistics

	GP	GS	W	L	OT	GA	SA	Sv	Sv%	GAA	SO	Min
Ondrej Pavelec	68	67	29	28	9	191	2,036	1,845	.906	2.91	4	3932
Devan Dubnyk	47	42	20	20	3	118	1,380	1,262	.914	2.67	2	2653

In comparing these two players it is important to keep in mind the teams that they play for. Pavelec plays for the Jets, a team that finished 21st in the league with an average of 2.70 goals for per game. Dubnyk on the other hand plays for the Edmonton Oilers, the 28th place team with an average of 2.52 goals for per game. This sheds some light on the winning percentages that these two goaltenders have achieved. They both have almost identical winning percentages winning 42.6% of games played. Pavelec had the advantage of a much stronger team in front of him. Pavelec was able to let in more goals than Dubnyk and still win simply because his team was able to pick up the slack offensively.

It is evident that Dubnyk had stronger in game statistics than Pavelec. Pavelec's save percentage of .906 and goals against average of 2.91 were not at Dubnyk's level. Dubnyk's in game stats only put him at 24th and 31st in the league respectively but it is still a great increase over Pavelec's 35th and 39th rankings.

The statistics where Pavelec is stronger than Dubnyk tend to come down to games played. He has more wins, saves, shutouts, and minutes simply because these are all directly tied to the amount of games played. This organization has put a lot of faith in Pavelec in the past and asked him to play in a lot of games. Dubnyk has slowly acquired his starting role from veteran Nikolai Khabibulin. Edmonton is expecting Dubnyk to play a more central role and gave him a salary to match that.

Pavelec has proven that he is able to play in a large number of games. His production has not been at the same level as Dubnyk's. The salary awarded to Pavelec should be lower than the

salary Dubnyk signed for. For these reasons this arbitration panel should find that Pavelec's value is lower than the midpoint of \$3.9 million.

B. Corey Crawford

Another player who is a strong comparative to Pavelec is Corey Crawford. Crawford is the current starting goaltender for the Chicago Blackhawks and was eligible for arbitration at the end of the 2010-2011 season. As a 26 year old, Crawford signed a 3 year contract for an average annual salary of \$2.667 million³. A breakdown of each of these players' statistics will show why Pavelec should awarded a salary below the midpoint.

Platform Season Statistics

	GP	GS	W	L	OT	GA	SA	Sv	Sv%	GAA	SO	Min
Ondrej Pavelec	68	67	29	28	9	191	2,036	1,845	.906	2.91	4	3,932
Corey Crawford	57	55	33	18	6	128	1,545	1,417	.917	2.30	4	3,337

Platform Season Playoff Statistics

Corey Crawford	GP	GS	W	L	GA	SA	Sv	Sv%	GAA	SO	Min
2010-2011 PLAYOFF	7	7	3	4	16	218	202	.927	2.21	1	435

Crawford is an easy player to compare to Pavelec because his games played in his platform season are closer to Pavelec than most other comparable players. Pavelec's platform season was simply not at the same level as Corey Crawford. In 11 less games played, Crawford was able to accumulate 4 more wins and the same amount of shutouts as Pavelec. He was able to win 57.9% of the games he played compared to the 42.6% that Pavelec won.

The in game statistics also favour awarding Pavelec a salary closer to Crawford. Crawford posted a save percentage at .917 and a goals against average of 2.30, placing him 8th and 17th respectively in his platform season. Pavelec's .906 save percentage and 2.91 goals against average, much below Crawford's mark and well into the bottom half of the league at 24th

3 Corey Crawford, player page, Capgeek.com, <http://capgeek.com/players/display.php?id=273>.

and 31st.

Though Pavelec has more experience in the regular season, Crawford's playoff experience is important to a team looking to break into the playoffs in the coming seasons. Crawford was the starting goaltender for Chicago's first round loss to the Vancouver Canucks in the 2011 playoffs. Although the series was lost, he is a proven playoff contender shutting out the presidents trophy winning Canucks and gained experience valuable to the Chicago Blackhawks's future. A goaltender who is proven under pressure is of greater value than a goaltender who is unknown.

As the Jets' starting goaltender, Pavelec has had many opportunities to prove himself to be a strong number one goalie. He has not put up the same statistics as other starting goaltenders like Crawford. Crawford has had much stronger numbers in important game changing categories and still has earned a contract over \$1 million less than the midpoint. The statistics that Pavelec has produced are indicative that his value is below the midpoint.

C. Antti Niemi

The last goalie to actually go to arbitration is an important place to look when assessing what a goalie like Pavelec is worth. Antti Niemi took the Chicago Blackhawks to arbitration at the end of the 2010-2011 season. An arbitrator awarded Niemi a contract worth \$2.75 million annually⁴. The Chicago Blackhawks walked away. Niemi was 27 at the time and became an unrestricted free agent. When looking at Niemi and Pavelec's platform seasons it is clear that Niemi was a stronger net minder.

Platform Season Statistics

	GP	GS	W	L	OT	GA	SA	Sv	Sv%	GAA	SO	Min
Ondrej Pavelec	68	67	29	28	9	191	2,036	1,845	.906	2.91	4	3,932
Antti Niemi	39	35	26	7	4	82	936	854	.912	2.25	7	2,190

4 Canadian Press, The "Niemi gets first shutout of season against former team, Sharks beat Blackhawks" NHL.com available at <http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=603027#&navid=nhl-search>.

Platform Season Playoff Statistics

Antti Niemi	GP	GS	W	L	GA	SA	Sv	Sv%	GAA	SO	Min
2009-2010 PLAYOFF	22	22	16	6	58	645	587	.910	2.63	2	1,322

In every category conceivable Niemi was a stronger player in the 2009-2010 season than Pavelec was this past season. Although Niemi's win totals were lower, it is because he started much fewer games. In the games that he did play during the regular season he managed to win 66.7% of the time. Pavelec on the other hand has only managed to win 42.6% of the games he played last season. Pavelec is also much more likely to lose games. He lost 41.2% of the games he played more than twice the rate of Antti Niemi at 20%. Pavelec had an excellent 4 shutouts this past season, but Niemi managed to tally 7 in almost 30 less games in his platform season.

The in game statistics are even more telling. Andrej Pavelec has struggled with his save percentage and goals against average. This past season he only managed a save percentage of .906 and a goals against average of 2.91 placing him 35th and 39th respectively in a league of 30 teams. Niemi in his platform season maintained a Goals Against average of 2.25 and a save percentage of .912 ranking him 4th and 20th in those categories that year.

Strong consideration should also be given to Niemi's playoff experience and Pavelec's lack of playoff experience. Niemi was the starting goaltender for the Chicago Blackhawks in the 2010 playoffs and helped carry his team to it's first Stanley Cup since 1961. Pavelec has not made a playoff appearance in his career, partially because his record has never been strong enough to take his team to the playoffs.

These comparisons are not to diminish what Pavelec has accomplished in being the starting goaltender for this franchise for the previous 3 seasons, but to show the value that arbiters have placed on starting goaltenders. In a much stronger season, Antti Niemi was awarded

a salary below our midpoint by over \$1 Million. In keeping with the way past arbiters have ruled Pavelec should be awarded a salary below the midpoint.

IV. PREVIOUS INJURIES

On October 8, 2010, during the Atlanta Thrashers home opener, Pavelec collapsed to the ice when no one around him, smacking his head off the ice, resulting in a concussion.⁵ The collapse was later discovered to be a result of a fainting spell, and the concussion kept Pavelec on the injured reserve for 14 days, and missing 8 games.⁶ Afterward Pavelec does not remember any of the game, and was unconscious when he left the ice in a stretcher.⁷ Despite two days of testing on his heart and brain, there was no determination made as to what caused the fainting spell.⁸ After recovering from the concussion, Pavelec has not had a relapse of his fainting spell, but it is a question mark going forward concerning this young goaltenders career. Given this unexplainable incident, the salary Pavelec is awarded must reflect the risk that signing him to a contract entails, and should be lower than the midpoint of \$3.9 Million.

V. ONDREJ PAVELEC'S ROLE IN THE FUTURE OF THE WINNIPEG JETS

Goaltending is a difficult position to plan for the future. It requires a player with not only talent but consistency as well. When a forward is having a rough night a coach can give them

5 John Manasso, Pavelec out of hospital, fainting spell caused collapse. NHL.com available at <http://www.nhl.com/ice/news.htm?id=540225>.

6 Ondrej Pavelec page, TSN.com, available at <http://www.tsn.ca/nhl/teams/players/bio/?id=5337>.

7 Goalie Pavelec doesn't remember game, CBC.ca, available at <http://www.cbc.ca/sports/hockey/story/2010/10/09/sp-pavelecupdate.html>.

8 Report: Fainting Spell led to Pavelec's concussion, sportingnews.com, available at <http://aol.sportingnews.com/nhl/feed/2010-10/pavelec-collapses/story/report-fainting-spell-led-to-pavelecs-concussion>.

less ice time, and usually it will not cost the team the game. A goaltender, however, can cost the entire team. If a goaltender is having a tough night, they can be pulled, but it's usually too late to salvage a win. This is why consistency is so important in this position. A coach needs to be able to trust that his goaltender will play at the same level they did the game before.

Pavelec has shown some consistency in this league, unfortunately it is not at the level of a starting NHL Goaltender. As a starting goaltender, he has never been in the top 30 goaltenders in goals against average. He has also never been able to win more than 50% of the games he played in a season. This is important for a Jets team trying to make the playoffs. Over recent years the Jets have drafted well and brought in strong players to help improve the team's offensive output. At 12th in the league in goals for per game the Jets should be a playoff contender. Instead they missed the playoffs by 8 points.

Currently Pavelec is still considered the starting goaltender for the Jets moving forward, but that could change. Pavelec needs to prove that he can produce at the level this team needs to make the playoffs. If this is not within Pavelec's abilities the Jets need to consider playing him play in a more supporting capacity. It would not be wise for the Jets to commit a lot of money to a goaltender who still has not proven to be a strong starting goaltender in the league. This is another reason why this panel should find that Pavelec's value is below the \$3.9 million midpoint.

VI. PAST COMPENSATION

Pavelec just recently finished his first non entry-level contract. In 2010, Pavelec signed a contract for 2 years to be making \$1 million the first year and \$1.3 million the second year. Entering into this contract it was understood that Pavelec would be taking a larger role with the

organization. He already played more than half of the regular season games for the organization that season. Over the course of this contract he has been playing more games for the Jets, however this alone is not enough to support such a large raise as the midpoint. A \$2.6 million raise is a lot for a goaltender who has not acquired any playoff experience, not won 30 games in a season, not achieved a goals against average lower than 2.50, and not posted a save percentage above .914.

VII. CONCLUSION

Ondrej Pavelec has been an underwhelming starting goaltender for the Winnipeg Jets. He has yet to prove that he can come through in the playoff race. His platform year gave him an opportunity to show how strong of a goaltender he can be with 68 games played but he only managed to win 29 games with less than spectacular save percentage and goals against average statistics. His platform year was not at the level of Devan Dubnyk's in spite of Dubnyk playing for a much weaker team. His platform year was not as strong as Corey Crawford's before he signed his contract, as Crawford amassed more wins in less games. His level was also not as strong as the last goalie to go to arbitration, Stanley Cup winning goaltender Antti Niemi. Ondrej Pavelec is a risk moving forward. He could have another fainting spell or experience more concussion symptoms. He could also lose his starting job if he does not improve to the level that this team needs. He has not proven that a 236% raise above his previous salary is warranted. For these reasons we ask this arbitration panel to find for the Winnipeg Jets and award Pavelec a salary of \$2.75 million.