

High/Low Five: Free Agency

Written by Jeff Angus

Wednesday, 04 July 2007 13:05 -



To those of you ready to hand Lord Stanley over to the Rangers, think back to when a certain team landed Kariya and Selanne a few summers back. Cups are not won or lost in July, although the chance to hoist the Cup can change drastically.

First off, I'm not a big fan of any contract over five years. Dobber made a few good points on this a few weeks back, and I'll add one. Go back a few years ago and read your fantasy pool guide or the latest hockey magazine. Hell, even from 2003 you'll see names like Daze, Bure, Allison and Palffy dominating. You'll also see top prospects like Jani Rita, Brandon Reid, and so on.

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My point is that hockey can change over time, and likes to. Change is one constant in the NHL, especially in the cap world. These GM's like Paul Holmgren and so on are not worried about their cap situation in eight years. They just want to ice the best possible team for the immediate future so they can retain their jobs. When you get impatient ownership, these situations arise.

Enough rambling... here is my high and low five so far.

High:

1) Brad Stuart (LA, one year, 3.5 million) - smart contract for both sides. The Kings get a stopgap while Jack Johnson can develop, and one with considerable upside still. Stuart gets to prove himself for a big contract, and has a great young core in LA to continue to mature with. Very smart contract for both sides as it gives flexibility to each party.

2) Scott Hannan (Colorado, four years, 4.5 million) - finally have their Adam Foote replacement. Hannan is young, will fit well in the rugged Northwest division, and wears his heart on his sleeve. The Avalanche went after a glaring need and filled it perfectly.

3) Petr Sykora (Pittsburgh, two years, 2.5 million) - great contract term, solid top six talent. He is a terrific complementary player (great with Arnott and Elias in New Jersey). Steal of a price as well, especially considering guys like Fedotenko got more.

4) Michael Handzus (LA, four years, 4 million) - while he is coming off a knee injury, he has never had injury problems in the past. Handzus is the type of player you can't measure in points, he will provide some great stability and two-way presence for the maturing Kings. The exact type of player an up and coming team needs to play pressure minutes and play smart hockey.

5) Tom Poti (Washington, four years, 3.5 million) - Poti is not the same defensive liability he was a few years ago. Sure, he still has his gaffs, but put up very good numbers on the Islanders. He was top 15 in the league for defensive ice-time, and still put up good point totals. He will fit in perfectly on a team needing a puck moving defenseman on the PP and five on five. Washington looks to be the perfect fit for him.

Low:

1) Daniel Briere (Philadelphia, eight years, 6.5 million) - It is hard to give a 90+ point player the highest spot on my low five... but this deal does it. Eight years is ludicrous, especially with a no movement clause. Think back to the NHL in 1999. Look at it now. That is how long Briere is going to be a Flyer. Sure these rich teams have exploited the cap somewhat with frontloading

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salaries, but this one stinks. I really like Briere and feel is a legitimate top talent in the league, but this contract is worse than warm beer.

2) Jason Blake (Toronto, five years, 4 million) - Blake has a bad reputation that has followed him throughout his career. Stuff like: bad attitude, selfish, not a team player. He is a great skater, and has a great shot, but put up big numbers in a CONTRACT YEAR. I'd like Jason Blake at 4 million for one or two years, but five? Ferguson doesn't give a crap about the Leafs in five years; he just wants to keep his job. Ugly contract all around, even if Blake does put up 35 goals next year.

3) Todd Bertuzzi (Anaheim, two years, 4 million) - Bertuzzi is forever going to carry the name factor that will earn him money. His steady decline since the beginning of the 03-04 season (yes, before he clobbered Moore) came right after he signed the big contract with the Canucks. He put up 17 goals that year, and the next season put up the worst 70+ point season I have seen in quite some time. There is a chance he rekindles some old fire playing in a rough system with his buddy Burke, but this is such a risk. It is hard to criticize Burke right now, as all his decisions seem to turn to gold. This one could be fools gold for the Ducks.

4) Robert Lang (Chicago, two years, 4 million) - One of the laziest players in the NHL on a team like Detroit. Imagine how bad he'll be on the Hawks. Should put up decent numbers if he can play with Havlat, though. I'm surprised how far the Red Wings made it last year with Lang's poor play dragging them down. Chicago has the cap space and wants a bit of insurance in case Toews can't handle top minutes yet, so I can see their side of it, but I would have gone after basically anyone before Lang.

5) Bryan Smolinski/Roman Hamrlik (Montreal, one year 2 million, and four years 5.5 million) - Smolinski put up decent numbers last year, only because he played top line minutes on Chicago and banked a few passes in off Marty Havlat. He is a decent role player but doesn't really contribute much to a team besides 15 goals and 40 points. The Habs would have been better off keeping Bonk for the extra million instead of settling for Smolinski, who is a clear downgrade. As for Hamrlik... he definitely was a panic move. Souray rejected the same contract from the Habs so they went out to get a replacement. Hamrlik's play has been declining and this is on a strong team like Calgary. \$5.5 million is a joke, especially for four years. If Montreal was so desperate for a top four guy, do what the Ducks did with Schneider. Overpay, but keep the terms short (two years in this case).