

## Salary Caps, Pt. 4: Cap Concerns

Written by Glen Hoos

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*Editor's Note: This is the fourth and final instalment in a series on running a salary cap fantasy league. See the [pros and cons](#) of cap leagues, an examination of different [types of caps](#) and also on determining your [cap limit](#)*

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When the NHL owners finally achieved their long sought-after “cost certainty,” they thought the system was bulletproof. Predictably, however, it wasn’t long before savvy agents and innovative GMs started exposing loopholes and finding ways to circumvent the spirit of the system. Monster contracts that extend well into normal retirement years are just one example, allowing teams to achieve a lower cap hit in the present, knowing that players like Ilya Kovalchuk, Roberto Luongo, Marian Hossa and others will likely be long gone from the NHL scene before their deals expire. (Expect the new CBA to close up that loophole nice and tight.)

As we’ve seen in this series, salary caps are complex beast. Adding a salary cap to your fantasy league brings with it a myriad of issues that aren’t in play in a non-cap league, both for managers and commissioners.

As commish, your job is to think through the implications of your rules, and nip any problems in the bud – preferably before they happen. Don’t be caught by surprise! Here are a few things to consider as you set up your cap league.

### Cap Relief

While we’d all prefer to coast through life without regrets, mistakes happen. In the NHL, it’s not easy for a team to get out from under a bad contract, but it can be done – whether it’s the Wade

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Redden method of burying a player in the minors, or the Alexei Yashin strategy of choking down a nasty buyout.

Likewise, you'll want some "out clauses" in your league rules. This is especially crucial when you're using NHL salaries, as fantasy teams can easily have their salary structure thrown out of whack when desperate NHL GMs get caught up in the annual free agent frenzy and sign a third liner for first line money (\*cough\* Leino \*cough\*).

I'm an advocate for a summer escape clause that allows fantasy teams to drop a player without penalty before any season in which that player starts playing under a new contract. This gives your GMs the opportunity to evaluate new contracts and determine if the value makes sense for their squad, rather than forcing them to shuffle their roster to accommodate a contract that they don't want. They may not always exercise this option, as no one likes giving up an asset for nothing, but in some cases it will be preferable to swallowing an unpalatable contract.

You will likely also want some form of a traditional buyout, in which teams can release players but remain liable for part of their cap hit for a certain period of time. The amount of the ongoing cap hit may depend on whether that player gets picked up by another team in the league.

## Tracking the Cap

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Cap tracking is a major issue – and potentially a major headache. A site like Fantrax makes things easy if you're using NHL salaries, as it has built-in salary cap capability and won't allow teams to dress a line-up that violates the cap. However, if you're using a site that doesn't track salaries, or if you're not using real NHL numbers, you're on your own as far as tracking salaries goes.

If you're tracking the numbers manually, you'll want to build a spreadsheet with a worksheet for each team's roster. But setting it up is the easiest part. The real task is keeping it up-to-date over time. During the summer, every transaction is going to have to be reflected in your spreadsheet. If a player goes on IR and his contract ceases to count against the cap for a time, this will have to be factored in. If a player is bought out by one team and picked up by another, his salary will have to be split up according to your rules. A watchdog will have to keep an eye on everyone's roster to look out for cap violations. And each summer you'll have to do a full update based on all the new contract data.

As you can see, it's no small undertaking. The commissioner may not always be the best person for this task, especially if you're not a numbers guy. Instead, you may look to give these duties to another member of your league (or for a large league, to a committee of 2-3 GMs).

## Violations

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Hopefully it will never occur, but you need to be prepared to deal with any cap violations before they occur. Nothing tears apart a league like determining discipline issues on the fly.

Again, if you use a site like Fantrax, this may not be a concern. Teams aren't able to ice rosters that violate the cap, so the punishment for doing so is automatic – their team simply won't accumulate any points for as long as they are in violation.

It's less straightforward when you are tracking the cap manually. If a team is found to be in violation, there are a number of possible sanctions, such as deducting points in the standings, docking draft picks, etc. Whichever way you choose to enforce the cap, make sure that everyone knows the rules ahead of time, so there's no room for controversy when it comes time to lay down the hammer.

*What other complications have you seen arise in cap leagues? Do you have any advice for a commish setting up a cap league for the first time?*