

Mats Zuccarello-Aasen v. New York Rangers

Team 4

Representing: the Player

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This brief concerns the matter of a salary arbitration involving Mr. Mats Zuccarello-Aasen (“the Player” or “Mr. Zuccarello”) and the New York Rangers (“the Rangers” or “the Club”) pursuant to article 12 of the Collective Bargaining Agreement between the NHL and the NHLPA. As will be clear from the evidence of his past performance, contributions and player comparables presented in this brief, Mr. Zuccarello’s suggested salary of \$1.15 million is not an accurate reflection of his performance or of his potential, rather something in the range of \$1.20-\$1.50 million would be more representative of his contributions.

## **I. Team and Injury History**

Mr. Zuccarello is a 26 year-old, 5'7", 176lb left winger who has played in 67 regular season games and 18 postseason games with the Rangers throughout his three year career. Mr. Zuccarello began his NHL career in the summer of 2010 when he was signed by the New York Rangers as a free agent. Over 42 game during the 2010-11 season he scored 23 points with six of them goals. In the 2011-12 season found Zuccarello spent only 10 games in the NHL that year, with three points scored missing 8 regular season games and 20 playoff games due to a broken left wrist which occurred while blocking a shot versus the Buffalo Sabres in March 2012.<sup>1</sup> This has been the only significant injury of his career. Mr. Zuccarello has not missed any other games due to injury, nor has he demonstrated any sort of injury history. At the end of the 2011-12 season, Zuccarello signed a 2-year deal to play with the KHL's Metallurg Magnitogorsk. Mr. Zuccarello completed only one year in the KHL before returning to the Rangers to complete the shortened 2013 season. During his platform season, Mr. Zuccarello tallied 8 points in 15 regular season games with and added 7 points in 12 playoffs games.<sup>2</sup>

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1 <http://www.tsn.ca/nhl/teams/players/bio/?id=7214>

2 <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8475692>

## II. Statistical Review and Career Performance

### Career Statistics<sup>3</sup>

SEASON	TEAM	GP	G	A	P	+/-	PIM	PP	SH	GW	S	S%
2010-2011	RANGERS	42	6	17	23	3	4	0	0	2	74	8.1
2011-2012	RANGERS	10	2	1	3	0	6	1	0	1	10	20
2012-2013	RANGERS	15	3	5	8	10	8	0	0	0	27	11.1
	<b>NHL TOTALS</b>	<b>67</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>111</b>	<b>9.9</b>
	<b>CAREER AVERAGE</b>		<b>0.16</b>	<b>0.34</b>	<b>0.51</b>						<b>1.66</b>	

Zuccarello is known as a quick skater with great offensive abilities. During his first season with Rangers, his lack of size, experience on smaller rinks, and the faster play of the NHL caused him to struggle in his adjustment to the North American game. Since returning to the Rangers in 2013 Zuccarello has done a better job of handling the speed and skill of the world's premier hockey league. With 34 points in 67 games as a Ranger, Zuccarello has flashed NHL ability, particularly through his vision and passing ability. However he has never truly had an opportunity in a full scoring rôle; playing with a wide variety of different linemates. During his time in New York, Zuccarello has routinely been one of the Rangers' most creative powerplay contributors and his statistics clearly demonstrate that he is better with the puck than without.

Over his career, Mr. Zuccarello has an average ice time of 14:05 minutes per game. In his platform year, he averaged a career high of 16:25 minutes per game, including 2:24 minutes of power play time per game, good enough for 7<sup>th</sup> amongst Rangers forwards. Points per game is a telling indicator of offensive production. In that regard, Mr. Zuccarello, in a small sample of 67 games has produced 34 points, good for 0.51 points per game. Additionally, in his platform season Zuccarello totaled 8 points in 15 games, an average of 0.53 points per game, placing him 8<sup>th</sup> amongst Rangers players. Mr. Zuccarello's shooting percentage was 11.1% this past season, good for 6<sup>th</sup> on the team and

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<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

9.9% for his career. While Mr. Zuccarello's contributions are largely offensively oriented, his defensive game does not suffer, evidence by his +/- rating of +10, ranked 5<sup>th</sup> on his team, in a very limited number of games. Mr. Zuccarello does not take many penalties but clearly does not shy away from contact given the fact that he also ranked 8<sup>th</sup> on the team in blocked shots per game, good for 2<sup>nd</sup> amongst Rangers forwards.

Mr. Zuccarello has also demonstrated that he can elevate his game during the post season totaling 7 points in 12 postseason games in his platform year. This is an average of 0.58 points/game, an increase over his regular season average of 0.53 points/game. While his average ice time dropped a few seconds to 16:21 minutes per game, his powerplay time actually saw a marked increase, averaging 3:01 minutes on the powerplay per game, ranking him 6<sup>th</sup> amongst all forwards. This demonstrates a respect for Mr. Zuccarello's offensive instincts. It is also a mark of faith to be given a substantial amount of powerplay time during must-win games.

Another unique skillset Mr. Zuccarello has is his penchant for scoring shootout goals. His career rate of 50%, with 6 goals on 12 attempts is an invaluable asset. Of his 6 tallies, 4 of them were game-winning shootout goals. After a season in which the Rangers finished tied for the 6<sup>th</sup> playoff spot in the Eastern Conference, one point ahead of the final spot, Mr. Zuccarello's penchant for game winning goals in shootouts is a rare skill that cannot be understated when the margins between making and missing the playoffs are that small. An entire point is lost or won based on the results of these shootouts and Mr. Zuccarello's conversion rate of 50% was the best on his team last season and is well above the league average of 33.88% in 2011-2012 and 37.3% last season.<sup>4</sup>

Admittedly this is a small sample size. Nevertheless, Mr. Zuccarello has consistently been one of the best two-way players on his team. Having played fewer games we must rely on individual game performances and consistency over the season. The use of advanced metrics (sabermetrics), allows us

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<sup>4</sup><http://www.nhl.com/ice/playerstats.htm?season=20122013&gameType=2&team=NYR&position=S&country=&status=&viewName=shootouts>

a more advanced study of Mr. Zuccarello's performance as well as his team's. In his platform season, Mr. Zuccarello rated highly in several advanced metrics, namely Corsi ratings.

The Corsi Rating is the difference between shots directed on goal by a team in 5 on 5 situations and those allowed by a team. Included are shots on goal, blocked shots and missed shots. It is a strong gage of puck possession. If one team has the puck a lot more than another, they will have a good Corsi rating, often a strong team. Corsi ratings can be used to evaluate individual players as well. The problem is finding the right context for numbers. Players on good teams will tend to have better Corsi ratings than those on bad teams and this is not evidence that a player on a good team is necessarily better. Similarly players who play with strong linemates, or against weaker opponents or who start shifts in their offensive zone will do better than those who don't. This must all be taken into account when rating players by Corsi ratings. It remains a valid proxy for possession, as well as how well one's team creates or limits chances while a given player is on the ice. Mr. Zuccarello did not have the advantage of strong linemates, spending the majority of his time on the team's third line. However, advanced metrics indicate that Mr. Zuccarello was one of the best forwards on his team.<sup>5</sup>

In terms of 'On-Ice Corsi', which is the shot and scoring chance differential when Mr. Zuccarello is on the ice, he ranks first amongst Rangers forwards with a +20.39, ranking in the top 15 amongst NHL forwards. Mr. Zuccarello's teammate, Rick Nash, ranked second on the team with a rating of +12.56. In regards to his 'Relative Corsi', which measures the difference in Corsi between a player's on-ice performance and his team's performance when he's on the bench, he again ranks first on his team with a rating of +21.7. Once more, Mr. Nash was second with a rating of +13.2. Mr. Zuccarello's rating was also 7<sup>th</sup> amongst all NHL forwards, ahead of superstars like Evgeni Malkin, Sidney Crosby and Tyler Seguin.<sup>6</sup> That is not to say that Mr. Zuccarello deserves compensation in the range of these players; it merely serves to highlight that Mr. Zuccarello possesses a unique set of

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5 [http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl\\_statistics.php](http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl_statistics.php) 'Mats Zuccarello'.

6 *Ibid.*

skills, some of these skills bordering on 'elite'. This can also be highlighted by the fact that that players like Henrik and Daniel Sedin, Tyler Seguin, Dustin Brown, Patrice Bergeron and Brad Marchand are just a few of the players who have similar 'On-Ice and Relative Corsi' ratings. These players are amongst the elite two-way players in the league. The fact that Mr. Zuccarello was able to compare favorably to these players, albeit in a small sample size is an accomplishment in and of itself.

In studying these advanced metrics, it is evident that Mr. Zuccarello's team shoots more and takes less shots when he is on the ice. Shots are what create scoring chances and scoring chances translate into goals, this cannot be disputed. Due to the bevy of varying teammates Mr. Zuccarello played with throughout the season and the fact that most of his minutes came on the third line, these accomplishments cannot be ignored. Furthermore, the gap between his rating and the second highest rated player on the team, superstar, Rick Nash also indicates that these numbers are not skewed to favor players who get less attention from opposing defenses. In fact, Mr. Zuccarello also ranked first amongst Rangers forwards in 'Corsi Rel QoC', which is the average relative Corsi of opposing players, weighted by head-to-head ice time. A high rating indicates a more difficult player to play against, it also indicates drawing the toughest competition on the opposing team. His rating of +1.073 was well ahead of Carl Hagelin (+0.678), Derek Stepan (+0.418) and Ryan Callahan (+0.382).<sup>7</sup> Hagelin is lauded as a defensive forward, while Stepan and Callahan are two of the best two-way players on their team.

### III. Valid Comparable Players

#### i. Matt Beleskey

##### Career Statistics<sup>8</sup>

SEAS ON	TEAM	GP	G	A	P	+/-	PIM	PP	SH	GW	S	S%
2008- 2009	DUCKS	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
2009- 2010	DUCKS	60	11	7	18	-10	35	0	0	3	123	8.9

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473492>

2010-2011	DUCKS	35	3	7	10	-10	36	0	0	0	58	5.2
2011-2012	DUCKS	70	4	11	15	-2	72	0	0	0	75	5.3
2012-2013	DUCKS	42	8	5	13	2	56	2	0	1	61	13.1
	<b>NHL TOTALS</b>	<b>209</b>	<b>26</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>56</b>	<b>-20</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>317</b>	<b>8.20</b>

Left-winger, Matt Beleskey, was drafted in the 4th round (112th overall) by the Anaheim Ducks in the 2006 NHL Entry Draft. In 2013, he signed a 2 year \$2.7 million contract (\$1.35M cap hit) with the Ducks.<sup>9</sup>

Earning \$200 000 more than Mr. Zuccarello, Matt Beleskey (age 25) can be regarded as a fair comparable to the Player. However, given his points per game average this past season and over his entire career (0.31 & 0.27 respectively), his performance does not match that of Mr. Zuccarello. More importantly, his -20 (+/-) is far inferior to that of the Player. In addition, his shooting percentage is 1.7% lower and he fails to record a point in more than 74.88% of games played in his career, demonstrating a lack of offensive impact in most of his games. His 'On-Ice Corsi' was a paltry -16.5, while his 'Relative Corsi' was -12.0, while his 'Corsi Rel QoC' was -0.455, all tremendously lower than Mr. Zuccarello, who rated +20.39, +20.17 & +1.073.<sup>10</sup>

## ii. Trevor Lewis

### Career Statistics<sup>11</sup>

SEASON	TEAM	GP	G	A	P	+/-	PIM	PP	SH	GW	S	S%
2008-2009	KINGS	6	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	0	10	10
2009-2010	KINGS	5	0	0	0	-3	0	0	0	0	4	0
2010-2011	KINGS	72	3	10	13	-11	6	0	0	2	105	2.9
2011-2012	KINGS	72	3	4	7	-3	26	0	0	1	103	2.9
2012-2013	KINGS	48	5	9	14	5	19	0	1	2	92	5.4
	<b>NHL TOTALS</b>	<b>203</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>37</b>	<b>-12</b>	<b>51</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>5</b>	<b>314</b>	<b>3.8</b>

<sup>9</sup> <http://www.capgeek.com/player/335>

<sup>10</sup> [http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl\\_statistics.php](http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl_statistics.php) 'Matt Beleskey'.

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473453#&navid=nhl-search>



Trevor Lewis, a centerman for the Los Angeles Kings, was drafted in the 1st round (17th overall) in the 2006 NHL Entry Draft. In 2013, he signed a 1 year \$1.325 million contract with the Kings.<sup>12</sup>

Trevor Lewis averaged 0.29 PPG over this past season and 0.25 for his career. His +/- is also far inferior to Mr. Zuccarello's (-12), playing for a team who was the 5th seed in the Western Conference, . His shot % of 3.8 is also 6.1 points lower than Mr. Zuccarello. The percentage of games where Mr. Lewis did not record a point is alarming as well: in 86.46% of games he did not record a point compared to 58.21% for Mr. Zuccarello. His 'On-Ice Corsi', 'Relative Corsi' & 'Corsi Rel QoC' rated out to +8.01, -6.5 & +0.248.<sup>13</sup>

### iii. Erik Condra

#### Career Statistics<sup>14</sup>

SEASON	TEAM	GP	G	A	P	+/-	PIM	PP	SH	GW	S	S%
2010-2011	SENATORS	26	6	5	11	-1	12	1	0	2	48	12.5
2011-2012	SENATORS	81	8	17	25	11	30	0	2	1	140	5.7
2012-2013	SENATORS	48	4	8	12	3	34	0	0	0	73	5.5
	NHL TOTALS	155	18	30	48	13	76	1	2	3	261	6.9

Right-winger Erik Condra, was drafted in the 7th round (211th overall) in the 2006 N.H.L. Entry Draft. In 2013, he signed a 2 year \$2.5 million contract (\$1.25M cap hit) with the Ottawa Senators.<sup>15</sup>

Erik Condra earns \$100,000 more than Mr. Zuccarello, yet also records fewer points per game throughout his career (0.25 this season, 0.31 for his career). Mr. Condra's shooting per centage

12 <http://www.capegeek.com/player/1024>

13 [http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl\\_statistics.php](http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl_statistics.php) 'Trevor Lewis'

14 <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8473588#&navid=nhl-search>

15 <http://www.capegeek.com/player/1280>

continues to decrease over time. Furthermore, his 'On-Ice Corsi', 'Relative Corsi' & 'Corsi Rel QoC' rated out to +12.93, +5.7 & -0.310.<sup>16</sup>

#### iv. Craig Smith

##### Career Statistics<sup>17</sup>

SEASON	TEAM	GP	G	A	P	+/-	PIM	PP	SH	GW	S	S%
2011-2012	PREDATORS	72	14	22	36	-9	30	6	0	1	172	8.1
2012-2013	PREDATORS	44	4	8	12	-11	20	2	0	0	83	4.8
	NHL TOTALS	116	18	30	48	-20	50	8	0	1	255	7.1

Centerman Craig Smith, was drafted in the 4th round (98th overall) in the 2009 NHL Entry Draft. In 2013, he signed a 2 year \$4 million contract extension (\$2M cap hit) with the Nashville Predators.<sup>18</sup>

Craig Smith has played 116 games, earning a salary of \$2 million. In his most recent season he recorded 0.27 points per game and a far inferior -11 (+/-). His 'On-Ice Corsi', 'Relative Corsi' & 'Corsi Rel QoC' rated out to -9.87, -4.3 & -0.995. All of these statistics are inferior to Mr. Zuccarello's over their respective careers.<sup>19</sup>

### III. Conclusion

Over his short career Mr. Zuccarello has consistently contributed on offense while being a reliable two way player. Over that time Mr. Zuccarello has consistently outperformed higher earning comparable players who are each inferior in points per game, +/-, shooting % and have graded out far worse when relying upon advanced metrics. As such, our client is being underpaid and undervalued at \$1.15 million AAV and we respectfully suggest something closer to the \$1.20-1.50 million range.

<sup>16</sup> [http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl\\_statistics.php](http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl_statistics.php) 'Erik Condra'.

<sup>17</sup> <http://www.nhl.com/ice/player.htm?id=8475225#&navid=nhl-search>

<sup>18</sup> <http://www.capgeek.com/player/2101>

<sup>19</sup> [http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl\\_statistics.php](http://www.behindthenet.ca/nhl_statistics.php) 'Craig Smith'.