

## Kovalchuk Contract Defies Logic, Not CBA

Written by Matthew Coller  
Tuesday, 20 July 2010 05:24

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*Donald, meet Gary. Gary meet Donald. Now, you two meet Ilya and Lou. Donald, meet Gary, Lou and Ilya. Now guys, work this nonsense out.*

Let's start in July, 2009. [ESPN.com's](http://ESPN.com) Scott Burnside reports the NHL is "concerned" with front-loaded long-term contracts. Marian Hossa signed a 12-year deal with the Blackhawks paying him \$7.9 million for the first seven years and \$1 million for the final four.

Makes sense, right? He won't be very good 11 years from now, so why should he make top dollar? Hossa will be 42-years old by then and won't be able to score on a high schooler, and nor will he have the chance to. Hossa won't see 42 in the NHL, in fact, near one percent make it past 38, but what will happen is his cap hit will be reduced to \$5.275 million and he'll still make \$7.9 million assuming he retires by age 37.

An NHL executive told Burnside the contract makes sense because 40-year olds never make much more than \$1 million, so all is fair. Yeah, and I'll sell you my magic hat and golden-egg-laying goose.

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Hossa was not alone in July, 2009. Chris Pronger's monster contract beings at \$7.6 million and ends just above the league minimum. Huh, Great minds?

Well, if they think alike, then so does another great mind: Lou "ca Brasi" Lamoriello. The Devils GM Lou Lamoriello wasn't concerned with bad blood over signing superstar Ilya Kovalchuk to another Lou-dacris contract. Kovalchuk signed with the Devils for \$100 million over 17-years. Kovy, 27, will peak at \$11.5 million, yet earn just over \$3 million in the final six years of his contract. Years he's more likely to be Yachting than skating.

If Kovy plays until 2021, he'll be 38-years old and have earned 96.5 million of the \$100 agreed upon. Yet, his team will take significantly less in a cap hit. Textbook loophole: The CBA says the cap hit will be the average of the total contract. And nobody saw front-loaded long-term contracts coming?

Don't worry, NHL commissioner Gary Bettman warned everyone to play nice. The Minnesota Wild did with Mikko Koivu's contract. He's got a \$6.75 cap hit for seven years, Kovalchuk has only \$6 million for 17 years.

The worst part is this can't be corrected until the next collective bargaining agreement, which will likely feature ace-in-the-hole Donald Fehr, who may argue with the same "who, us?" tactics as owners and GMs. The NHLPA wants its players paid, the GMs don't want the cap hit, but the commish is calling shenanigans.

But, just in case, big-name unrestricted free agents of next year will be waiting with bated breath for their day to come. These front-loaders are likely to be grandfathered in after the next CBA, which was extended for another year. Stars like Brad Richards, Zdeno Chara and Joe Thornton will all have their shot at a 29-year, \$300 million contract with \$297 million in the first 6 years. Currently Richards' cap hit is \$7.8 million, but odds are his salary goes up, but cap hit goes down. What a mess.

Keep investigating, Gary. But, at this point, there's nothing the league can do but watch.

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Here's the complete breakdown of Kovalchuk's contract via the [Star Tribune](#) :

2010-2011: \$6 million

2011-2012: \$6 million

2012-2013: \$11.5 million

2013-2014: \$11.5 million

2014-2015: \$11.5 million

2015-2016: \$11.5 million

2016-2017: \$11.5 million

2017-2018: \$10.5 million

2018-2019: \$8.5 million

2019-2020: \$6.5 million

2020-2021: \$3.5 million

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2021-2022: \$750,000

2022-2023: \$550,000

2023-2024: \$550,000

2024-2025: \$550,000

2025-2026: \$550,000

2026-2027: \$550,000

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