

Blackhawks GM Says He Didn't Mismanage Cap

Written by Matthew Collier
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[David Haugh of the Chicago Tribune](#) wrote this week that the Chicago Blackhawks planned all along to sell off players after the 2009-10 season and transfer the cap hit of bonuses awarded to Jonathan Toews and Patrick Kane on to next season. "Perceptions are, 'Geez, [the Blackhawks](#) mismanaged the salary cap, but I'd say we did the opposite — we managed the hell out of it," Bowman told the Tribune. "We exploited it in a way."

To channel my inner Joe Pesci: exploited how? The Blackhawks knew all along they would have been at least \$10 million over the 2010-11 cap, so Bowman chose gamble, knowing he'd have to trade players such as Dustin Byfuglien and Kris Versteeg immediately after the cap was raised. Fortunately for Bowman, Byfuglien and Versteeg were the ones doing the raising.

But Bowman's plan goes deeper than a post-season fire sale. The GM battled with the agents of stars Toews, Kane and Duncan Keith over nickels and dimes in negotiating long-term deals for all three. Eventually the deals were all worked out and announced on Dec. 3, 2009.

As Bowman carefully carved up the cap, the Blackhawks' coach Joel Quenneville was left in the dark. "I didn't want to take away any focus from Joel's job, which he did masterfully," Bowman said. "Then when it was time to bring him into it, he was understanding."

We're not sure how understanding Quenneville was when the 'Hawks walked away from an arbitration ruling to re-sign cup-winning goalie Antti Niemi. But options were limited, partially due to the San Jose Sharks. Sharks' GM Doug Wilson offered restricted free-agent defenseman Niklas Hjalmarsson a four-year, \$14 million offer sheet which forced Bowman to commit \$3.5 million to Hjalmarsson one year before he planned. Wilson claimed he was trying to replace Rob Blake, but Bowman suspected the Sharks of forcing Chicago into a decision between the young defenseman and Niemi.

Bowman isn't out of the woods yet. He's filled most of the open spots, but will still have to deal with ridiculous Christobal Huet and Brian Campbell contracts.

"People ask are you enjoying the Cup?" Bowman said. "In time I will. But because of all we've

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had to do, I haven't really enjoyed it, per se. Ever since we went back to work that following Monday, it has been a mad dash."

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