

Storylines Linger After Kovalchuk Decision

Written by Matthew Coller

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Yesterday, arbitrator Richard Bloch ruled that the NHL's rejection of Ilya Kovalchuk's 17-year, \$102 million front-loaded contract will be upheld. NHL Deputy Commissioner Bill Daly released this [statement](#) :

"We want to thank Arbitrator Bloch for his prompt resolution of a complex issue. His ruling is consistent with the League's view of the manner in which the Collective Bargaining Agreement should deal with contracts that circumvent the Salary Cap."

Storyline 1: **So, now what?** Well, the NHL can fine the New Jersey Devils up to \$5 million and punish them via taking away draft picks, but that is unlikely. They can also fine Kovalchuk, but neither of those options would make much sense.

Storyline 2: **How will this affect future contracts?** Plenty of super-stars are unrestricted free agents after next season including Joe Thornton, Zdeno Chara and Zach Parise. The Kovalchuk decision means these guys will have to play by the rules. What is unclear is what those rules are. General managers will want to sign these big-name players to long term contracts, but now the ambiguity begins. How long-term is too long-term, how front-loaded is too front-loaded? Are we going to end up with 10 contracts going in front of an arbiter next off-season? The can of worms is officially opened.

Storyline 3: **Did the NHLPA blow this on purpose?** This one might have been like missing a 3-foot gimme put so you don't beat your boss. There could be several lines of thinking here: A. If we let the NHL have this one, they'll be easier to deal with come CBA time. B. If we win this, several players are going to take a ton of money away from average players. The NHLPA released a statement today saying they were disappointed and had no further comment. Doesn't sound that riled up to me.

Storyline 4: **Will the Devils still sign Kovalchuk?** [USA Today reported](#) that Devils GM Lou Lamoriello said the team will "do everything possible" to sign Kovy. That could be pretty tough because the Devils only have \$3.7 million in cap space according to [CapGeek.com](#)

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Storyline 5: Will the NHL overrule other long-term front-loaded deals? [ProHockey Talk](#) reported that NHL Senior VP of public relations Gary Meagher confirmed that the league is "looking at" the long-term contracts of Marian Hossa, Chris Pronger, Roberto Loungo and Marc Savard. The Bruins and Canucks said they would cooperate, but the flyers were not so thrilled, saying that Pronger's contract is structured differently and is compliant. If anything is clear, it's that things are about to get hairy.

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