



Gallagher: It's buyout season, so who's gonna get richer?

By Tony Gallagher, The Province

There may be fewer compliance buyouts in the NHL than previously expected, but as the window officially opens and teams set out to off-load some of their less savoury contracts, for many of the players being bought out it's often a marvelous opportunity to get a new start and perhaps even a raise as well if they're lucky.

Health is the big reason why the numbers are apt to be down, so many players still recovering from injuries to the point where the general managers aren't sure who will or won't be available when they do become unrestricted free agents.

But for those being bought out, it's the ultimate socialist payoff for these guys who have been a complete disaster with the team that paid them a tremendous amount of money to begin with. Despite their failures, they now get to choose where they will play, and in the bargain perhaps parlay their own inept play into even greater reward.

Consider the case of Keith Ballard for instance. Not that he was completely inept here, because that would be unfair and you would have to admit that the logjam of good defencemen when he first arrived, combined with the coaching style of Alain Vigneault, were factors in him doing worse than GM Mike Gillis or anyone else expected when he arrived with this contract from Florida.

The soon to be bought out Vancouver defenceman is slated to make \$4.2 million US over the next two seasons, so he will receive \$5.2 million from the Canucks over the next four years or \$2.6 million per hockey season paid over that longer period.

So in order not to lose any money, Ballard merely has to sign a \$1.6 million deal with his new team to match the income he was slated to make. If he signs for more than that, and perhaps even gets into one of the regions like Texas, Tennessee or Florida, where there is no state tax, he'd be that much more rewarded

Now maybe he won't get that much in this environment. Ilya Bryzgalov and others will be lucky to even get another deal anywhere. But if he does, it's a huge bonus. And it's why, with the talent shortage the way it is in the NHL these days, this process holds no fear for many of these players.

And consider how the agents of these players feel. It's their ultimate high, causing high-fives in offices all over North America. It's about as much satisfaction as they can derive from their jobs other than the money they make. Not only have they already performed miracles in that they have conned some team into paying their player far more than he has proven to be worth, they can now stick their chest out and proclaim to their underachieving client that they've actually been able to get him a raise.

They'll just love this stuff. They'll sit in bars years afterward in drunken stupors proclaiming they got this guy or that guy X million dollars and pat themselves on the back to anyone who will listen, and the boast will be as real then as it will be on July 5 when free agency gets underway.

Consider the players who may soon find themselves in this situation, with Daniel Briere who will be bought out by the Flyers among the leaders in the category.

If for some reason Roberto Luongo ever gets bought out, he would be a massive winner here, but a trade or straight up waivers would come before any kind of buyout consideration. David Booth, had he been healthy enough to be bought out, would also have been a big-raise candidate but the Canucks still like this guy for good reason.

"It's just impossible right now to tell who is going to be available," says Gillis, "It's going to be a very fluid market with health playing a big part, but we may find some opportunities. If we do, we'll manage our cap issues, don't worry about that."

A third line centre with experience would be nice and a winger with good size and speed wouldn't hurt either. How about Vinny Lecavalier should the Lightning pull the trigger and buy out the remaining motherlode of \$45 million left on his deal.

Like Luongo, that's highly unlikely, but Lecavalier playing again for John Tortorella if the Canucks could afford him may be of interest should such a move ever take place.

Buffalo says they're not buying out Ville Leino, which leaves Vancouver looking at perhaps Scottie Upshall, R.J. Umberger or Brooks Laich to become available. Health and/or club choice may prevent some or all of these from being bought out, but if they are, all are possible candidates to get a raise for being disappointments. If and when good players become available, even with the cap coming down, the bidding is bound to get goofy.

Those quirky netminders are tough to figure out

Ben Kuzma The Province

Canucks happy with goalies, not sure if they will pick another one

Far from an exact science, the NHL draft is akin to combining combustible skill and will and hoping the mixture doesn't blow up in your face.

And when it comes to the last line of defence, the first thought is you need to select a goaltender nearly every year because there are no guarantees in a position that continues to evolve through conditioning, positioning and equipment.

The quirky nature of crease crusaders, who are wired differently and can have alarming swings in physical and mental exertion, makes NHL Combine interviewing as important as season-long scouting.

Seven stoppers could go in the first three rounds of the 2013 draft on Sunday in Newark, N.J.

Zachary Fucale of the Memorial Cup champion Halifax Mooseheads is a consensus top-20 pick. He's followed by projected second-rounders Eric Comrie of Tri-City (WHL), who had season-ending hip surgery, Delta native Tristan Jarry of Edmonton (WHL) and Philippe Desrosiers of Rimouski (QMJHL). On paper, they all look good. In reality, who knows?

"That's the hardest position to figure out and we're not very good at figuring out most of the positions," admitted an NHL director of amateur scouting. "You try to bring in goalie consultants and coaches and try and get some knowledge in what they're seeing in techniques and the biggest thing is mentally — meeting them and getting to know them. You try to find out about their work ethic and their drive more than anything.

"They have to have that competitive drive and that focus."

The significance of selecting a stopper has reached the level to where Hockey Canada runs a pre-draft goalie camp so NHL coaches and scouts can get one last look at who they may select. And drafting a goalie has become more of a necessity than an option for most NHL clubs in any draft.

"Absolutely," said the scout. "We're looking to draft a goalie — no doubt."

First-overall picks Marc-Andre Fleury (2003), Rick DiPietro (2000) and Michel Plasse (1968) have ridden roller-coasters of execution and emotion. Fleury won a Stanley Cup with the Pittsburgh Penguins in 2009 but lost his playoff starting job to Tomas Vokoun this spring.

Aside from an eye-popping 15-year contract, a string of injuries led to the moniker of Rickety DiPietro. He played just three games this season and was placed on waivers before being sent to the minors. Plasse won a Stanley Cup with the Montreal Canadiens in 1973 and played for six teams.

So what does this all mean for the Vancouver Canucks?

While signing Swedish free agent Joacim Eriksson, 23, to a two-year, two-way entry level contract on June 17 could be the prelude to battling the 25-year-old Eddie Lack for the backup job to Cory Schneider — once Roberto Luongo is finally dealt — it's no certainty.

Is Eriksson ready to face NHL rubber and will Lack be fully recovered from January hip surgery and has he had enough AHL seasoning? One will pair with Joe Cannata, 23, to backstop the Utica Comets. David Honzik could have also been in the development mix, but fell so far off the 2011 post-draft radar that he wasn't signed by the June 1 deadline.

Which tells you a lot about the picking process.

When the Canucks selected WHL goaltender Morgan Clark in the seventh round of the 2008 draft, they passed on Eriksson, who went 25 picks later.

Eleven selections after that, the Nashville Predators took Anders Lindback and traded the Swede to Tampa Bay, where he's now the Lightning backup. As for this draft, Canucks general manager Mike Gillis isn't sure whether he'll draft by position or by the best player available with six picks (Nos. 24, 85, 115, 145, 175 and 205) on Sunday. He's of the mind that his goal tending is good, if not deep.

"We're really secure with our goal tending," said Gillis. "Adding Eriksson is a huge piece for us and with Lack, we feel we have three mature goaltenders who can play and Cannata coming along. I'm not sure whether we'll draft a goalie or not. Perhaps, but we'll see what's available.

"Historically, we have looked at positions along with the best player available. I don't feel a need to move up (from No. 24) and it's very difficult to do, but if there's an opportunity, we'll look at it."

The Canucks were high on goalie John Gibson in the 2011 draft and interviewed the Pittsburgh native several times, but he went 39th overall to the Anaheim Ducks. The Canucks then sent the 60th pick to the Wild so Minnesota native winger Mario Lucia could be selected in exchange for 71st and 101st picks. The Canucks then took Honzik based largely on the goalie's 6-foot3 size and potential. However, injury plagued and bothered by a trouble some shoulder, the Czech native was 4-23-1 this season with a bloated 4.40 goalsagainst average and .873 saves percentage for Cape Breton of the QMJHL.

Meanwhile, the 19-year-old Gibson outshone Ben Bishop as the U.S won bronze at the world championship last month and was also the 2013 world junior MVP for the gold medal winning Americans — recording a 1.38 GAA and 95.5 saves percentage.

With Jonas Hiller, 31, entering the final year of his deal and Victor Fasth, 30, getting an extension, there's no reason to rush Gibson unless the Ducks move one of their goalies to get younger.

Canucks GM Gillis remains eternally optimistic

[DAVID EBNER](#)

VANCOUVER — The Globe and Mail

Twelve months later and the Vancouver Canucks have the same problems: waylaid by a brutally fast ejection from the first round of the Stanley Cup playoffs, and trying to trade the talented but richly remunerated Roberto Luongo.

Now, however, there are new problems, even if ever-hopeful team president/general manager Mike Gillis wants to say they're not really terribly pressing and the Canucks will ably skate through the next few weeks and emerge, again, as a Cup contender.

The immediate issue, which is pressing, if not extreme, is Vancouver's kissing-distance from the salary cap. According to capgeek.com, the Canucks as of Wednesday had the tiniest margin of error in the league against the \$64.3-million (all currency U.S.) cap, just \$47,222 – which, coincidentally, is almost exactly the average person's wage in Canada.

Further, the Canucks cash only tallies up for 17 players, which, of course, includes Luongo. The cap wiggle room is \$2-million less than any other team in hockey.

Granted, subtracting Luongo – and his \$5.33-million hit – is a big, and seemingly difficult, first step. If achieved, it does free up enough room for about six entry-level contracts – if the Canucks don't have to retain salary. So, half-pinned against a wall, Gillis, the Canucks, and their new coach, John Tortorella, preach the importance of building from within, developing their young players on the ice in the NHL. There's not much else they can preach, since they do not have the room to manoeuvre in the free-agent market.

Luongo, quiet on Twitter of late, is the fulcrum around which the Canucks will move, into the draft weekend, through the compliance buyout period, and into free agency. A trade is the goal and is complicated. A buyout is possible but seems extreme, given cost.

“We'll figure out the cap space,” said Gillis on Tuesday afternoon after the party at Rogers Arena to introduce Tortorella. “It's not as difficult as you guys think. Everyone insinuates that it's this massive issue. Every team is facing it.”

The fifth-year GM, whose five-year contract extension, awarded a year ago, begins for 2013-14, generally outlined some of his strategic thinking, as he tries to bolster a veteran squad, having added a fiery new coach, for another Cup challenge, after falling badly short, twice.

Gillis, no surprise, sees some market for Luongo, calling him one of only 12 No. 1 goalies in the entire world. The netminder's certainly paid like it. A buyout is radical, given it would cost a record \$27-million over 18 years. Waivers seems a better option, if it all comes to that. If it ends up being a trade, Gillis on Tuesday did say he does "not necessarily" need to get a goaltender back, noting the new backup could be a first-year player, presumably the 25-year-old Swede, Eddie Lack, or newly signed 23-year-old Swede, Joacim Eriksson.

Such a backup would rank among the "five or six [entry-level players] that we would really like to push for this hockey team and get on this hockey team." Names Gillis cited were Brendan Gaunce, a 19-year-old centre, the 26th overall pick a year ago who played major junior last winter; Kellan Lain, an undrafted 23-year-old winger who is 6 foot 6; 20-year-old winger Nicklas Jensen, the No. 29 pick in 2011; Frank Corrado, for whom the Canucks burned a year of his entry-level deal this past spring as the 20-year-old played seven games.

On the subject of buyouts, Gillis was coy. How the draft, and Luongo, plays out will be the decisive factor. Defenceman Keith Ballard seems a maybe, and would cost \$5.6-million over four years. David Booth cannot be bought out, as he is still injured from the ankle he broke badly back in March. "Recovering well," said Booth's agent, Mike Liut, by e-mail. The winger can try to skate in month or so but "he hasn't got to uneven terrain running (no Grouse Grind, yet)."

There was no word from Gillis regarding the Sedins. The twins turn 33 in September and enter the final season of their bargain five-year, \$30.5-million contract.

Restricted free agent Chris Tanev, the steady 23-year-old defenceman, just hired a big-time agent and looks to get at least \$2-million a year or more, given he could be snatched up with an offer sheet for as much as \$3.36-million (or as little as \$1.68-million) and the acquirer would only have to provide a second-round pick, though, of course, the Canucks could (and likely would) match.

On his unrestricted free agents, Gillis wouldn't comment – but it's hard to see Mason Raymond coming back. Max Lapierre seems unlikely, too, given cap constraints.

The action commences this weekend. The Canucks have time to think, with no second-round pick, traded away in a package for the hapless Derek Roy. "Everyone's going to wait," said Gillis, "till the last minute to see what shakes out here."
