

DiPietro's contract has nothing on these deals



GATEWAY
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Sports
Commentary

When a former backup goalie signs the guy who forced him into the backup role to a long-term contract, that's a little odd. When that contract is for 15 years and \$67.5 million, it officially enters bizarre territory. So, in honour of Ricky "You Can Count On Me" DiPietro's good fortune and Garth Snow's stupidity, here are the Gateway's picks for the worst contracts in sports.

Ross Prusakowski

While the Rick DiPietro signing may be the worst contract the New York Islanders have signed recently, it's not the worst contract ever—or even the most terrible contract that the Islanders have ever signed. No, that distinction belongs to the lead-weight deal that "Mad" Mike Milbury signed Alexei Yashin to in 2001, after acquiring him from the Ottawa Senators.

At nearly \$90 million, not only did the Isles overpay one of the worst floaters in NHL history, but, by spreading it out over ten years, they also removed any incentive for Yashin—one of the greatest contract-year players ever—to play like he has a heart-beat. Since he signed that deal, New York has gotten all of twelve playoff points out of Alexei and enough excuses for poor performance to fill an encyclopedia on how to excuse poor performance.

For true hockey fans on Long Island, there's also one off-ice aspect of this deal that easily makes this the worst contract ever: Yashin's friendship with owner Charles Wang makes him one of the most influential people in the organization. Anything that leads to Alexei Yashin providing advice about how to put a team together qualifies as my worst deal of all time.

Nick Frost

As if it wasn't bad enough that the Grizzlies' time in Vancouver had to be marred by straight-up suckiness, it also had to endure Stu Jackson's monumental lapse in judgment, via the massive, yet poorly thought-out contract to Bryant "Big Country" Reeves. The deal in question was a six-year extension worth \$65 million. This coming from a team that was rapidly losing home attendance—probably because they sucked so much—and money.

It would seem, on the surface, as though Stu Jackson came up with this doozy after losing a Jägermeister shot-for-shot contest. After all, the most common reaction to the words "Bryant 'Big Country' Reeves" is a hearty, demeaning laugh, followed by a period of silence while one attempts to remember what the hell he actually did in the NBA. Why offer him so much money? Well, in his early years, he actually looked like he might, eventually, become one of the league's few strong centres. Once the money kicked in, however, so did the beer belly, the chronic back problems and the steadily decreasing field-goal percentage.

And now the team plays in Memphis, just like Stu Jackson planned. He always hated Canada.

Suman Varghese

The years leading up to the new NHL Collective Bargaining Agreement allowed us to bear witness to the most over-inflated contracts in NHL history. The New York Rangers epitomized overspending for years, and the signing of checking centre Bobby Holik in the summer of 2002 for a five-year \$45 million deal was no exception.

Holik was a solid two-way player who was highly sought after around the league; however that doesn't change the fact that he had never even reached the 30-goal mark in a single season, and was offered a 174 per cent increase in salary. His \$9 million salary made him one of the ten highest paid players in the game, ahead of MVP-calibre players like Peter Forsberg, Steve Yzerman and Patrick Roy.

Secure with his rich, long-term contract, Holik reported to camp that fall 20 pounds overweight scored only 16 goals, finishing the year minus-1. As for the Rangers, they missed the playoffs for the fifth consecutive year.

Scott Drebit

My pick for worst contract ever goes to the worst number one selection of all-time in the NHL: Alexander "The Bagel" Daigle. In one of the richest rookie contracts ever, Daigle signed for \$12.25 million over five years with the Ottawa Senators. Touted as the next Mario Lemieux, Daigle couldn't handle the pressure and never scored over 51 points with the Sens—or anywhere else for that matter. Over his five seasons in our country's capital he was an abysmal minus-176.

Ottawa wasn't even the only team to drop the ball in thinking the guy would pan out. He played for five other teams in his career, half of which I couldn't remember if it weren't for the fact that I have his NHL.com bio open in front of me. But I guess it makes sense for a guy who was more interested in a jet-set lifestyle and relationship with Pamela Anderson than his hockey career. Anyone who states, "Nobody remembers who was picked number two," after being drafted deserves to have a nickname referencing the number zero. Hate to mention it Alexander, but it was Chris Pronger who went second overall, and that's a guy people will remember long after you're a footnote in history for scoring 137 points in the QMJHL.

Trevor Phillips

The United States Football League (USFL) was a poorly-conceived football alternative for the NFL's off months that lasted a mere three years in the mid-'80s. It folded after an anti-trust lawsuit fell through against the NFL in 1986—the USFL actually won the case, but was only awarded \$1 in compensation. However, the real reason the USFL was a joke might be the signing made by Los Angeles Express GM Don Klosterman in 1984. That year, the Express drafted highly-touted quarterback Steve Young first overall and signed him to a 10-year \$44 million deal. More ridiculous was that, because of a loophole in the Collective Bargaining Agreement, Young had to be paid over a 43-year period.

Now, call me crazy, but signing anybody for longer than five years can

be a gamble never mind 43, especially if you throw in the fact that the league is falling apart, your games are drawing just over 15 000 people and that, oh yeah, the average career of a professional quarterback is 13–14 years, this deal had to appear just a little bit excessive to any clear thinking sports GM. I mean, Steve Young would go on to be a Hall of Fame quarterback in the NFL, but in 1984, in the USFL, \$44 million is a pretty outrageous sum to pay anyone.

Andrew Renfree

This might seem blasphemous to Winnipeg fans, but the worst contract in professional sports was when the Jets signed Bobby Hull for \$1 million in 1972. This was an attempt to garner recognition for the newly formed World Hockey Association, a rival of the NHL. The WHA figured that by signing Hull, one of the greatest to ever play the game, people would feel the the league was on par with the NHL. The absurd sum at the time paid off, as Hull went on to score more than 300 goals in his seven seasons in the 'Peg. Still, this is the worst contract in sports because that was the first time hockey became more about the money than the game.

Players were paid a pittance in the early years of the NHL, but Hull's contract has led to the opposite extreme: mediocre fourth-line players making \$2 million per year. Consider the recent example of the Canucks signing Ryan Kesler for \$1.9 million. Last season the rookie only got 23 points, each of which is apparently worth \$100 000. If Bobby Hull had of been paid that much per point, he'd have walked away from the Jets with more than \$60 million in his pocket. Damn you, Bobby Hull and the WHA! Look at the monster you've created.

Paul Owen

While all of these contracts have been worthy of inclusion into this select group, the most glaringly bad of all contracts comes every time an NFL player signs a long-term, multi-million dollar deal.

It's one thing to hear about some big shot quarterback's latest seven-year, \$100 million deal, but it's another to learn that a third of that is in signing bonus, another \$20 million could be incentives and the money is back-loaded so that he makes \$20 million in the final two years and \$5 million the first five.

Didn't understand any of that? Neither do I. Nor do I understand how every year there comes a period where any NFL team can cut any player for no cap penalty and with no contract buyout. It's this mystical period that falls somewhere between the Super Bowl and the NFL Draft—though no one knows when—where people give something up for nothing in return and everyone winds up disappointed, like my Uncle Blair's birthday, or Lent.

Realistically, that contract will be renegotiated before the big money kicks in for the last couple years, or else that player will be cut to save space under the salary cap and he will never see that \$40 million at the end of the rainbow. Any contract that you know won't be fulfilled before the ink is dry on the signatures is definitely the worst in sports history.

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