Jackman, Blues Agree to 3-Year Contract Extension

Written by Jeff Ponder Tuesday, 19 June 2012 00:58

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Being tenured with one team for ten years is a rarity in professional sports nowadays.

10-year veteran Barret Jackman, who has spent his entire NHL career as a St. Louis Blue, agreed to a three-year contract extension Monday morning. Jackman is not only the longest-tenured defenseman in the NHL, but the longest-tenured athlete in St. Louis.

The contract will pay Jackman \$9.50 million over the next three seasons (\$3 million in 2012-13; \$3.25 million in 2013-14 and \$3.25 million in 2014-15). According to the current CBA, his cap-hit will be \$3.17 million per season. Jackman will be 34 years old when his new contract expires.

The highlight of Jackman's season came on February 18, when he broke a league-high 150 game goalless drought in a 4-0 win over the Minnesota Wild at Scottrade Center.

Jackman was a staple in the Blues' rebuild. He was the only player left on the Blues' roster from their last-place finish in 2005-06 after Eric Brewer was traded exactly one year before Jackman broke his goalless drought in February.

With Jackman signed, the writing is likely on the wall for upcoming unrestricted free-agent defensemen Kent Huskins and Carlo Colaiacovo. Up-and-comers Ian Cole and Cade Fairchild stand a pretty good chance of making the Blues' roster out of training camp, so there will be minimal vacancies on the blue line in St. Louis.

But was this the right decision?

Jackman has long been known as a solid locker room guy that the young Blues players like and

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trust. His veteran presence off the ice is important to the growth of players such as Kevin Shattenkirk and Alex Pietrangelo.

It is unclear how important veteran leadership is to a sports franchise. This is an aspect of the game that you cannot put a statistical number on or that you can count on a scoresheet.

Jackman had a much better season in 2011-12 than he has had in a very long time. His plus-20 was 2nd on the roster and 1st amongst defensemen. He also led the team with 153 blocked shots.

Jackman is still widely known for lacking abilities with the puck. He does not see a lot of power-play or overtime minutes because of it. Those are reserved for Pietrangelo, Shattenkirk and Kris Russell.

The 31 year old defenseman has seen his top-defenseman minutes dwindle down to #3 minutes (Pietrangelo and Shattenkirk took over the 1 and 2 spots last season). He fits better in a role where he is not expected to be a shutdown defenseman.

Still, the length and salary are troublesome. Jackman is coming off his best season since the lockout, but remember one thing: this was a contract year. NHL players have been known to pick their game up when their job is on the line. Only time will tell if Jackman will fit into this category.

It was rumored that Jackman was seeking around \$4 million per season heading into free-agency. Rumors furthered that Jackman may receive offers from the Detroit Red Wings after July 1, since they announced that defenseman Brad Stuart would not return next season and veteran Nicklas Lidstrom was retiring after 20 NHL seasons. The Nashville Predators were in the mix too, as they will likely be losing #2 defenseman Ryan Suter this off-season. Jackman's name has been mentioned in the Music City as well.

If any of these rumors are true, it is likely that the Blues wanted to retain Jackman in order to keep him away from a rival. \$4 million would be a very high price for a defensive defenseman;

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\$3.25 may still be too steep for what Jackman has to offer.

There is no doubt that Jackman's veteran presence is what landed him a larger contract than what most would pay a defenseman with minimal puck-moving abilities (let's forget about Jeff Finger).

It is hard to argue with results, though. The Blues finished the 2011-12 season with 109 points (2nd highest in team history). They advanced to the second round of the playoffs for the first time since 2002. Head Coach Ken Hitchcock and GM Doug Armstrong went into the off-season hoping to bring back a very similar roster.

The Blues have six shoe-ins for the defensive lineup next season. Jackman will rejoin Pietrangelo, Shattenkirk, Russell, Roman Polak and Ian Cole for next season. With Colaiacovo and Huskins still not under contract for next season, the Blues will be looking to add one more defenseman to the NHL roster. A slim free-agent market leaves that opportunity open for Fairchild, but it is expected that Armstrong will be searching for another veteran to go along with the fairly young defense.

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