

UNDER-THE-RADAR SIGNING OF CHRISTIAN EHRHOFF TO PAY IMMEDIATE DIVIDENDS FOR LA KINGS

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Christian Ehrhoff #10 of the Pittsburgh Penguins warms up prior to playing the Colorado Avalanche at Consol Energy Center on December 18, 2014 in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. (Photo : Photo by Daniel Kubus/Getty Images)

When the summer of 2010 began, the **Los Angeles Kings** were making a serious push to sign **Ilya Kovalchuk**. After weeks of wondering will he or won't he, the Russian sniper decided to re-sign with the **New Jersey Devils**. It appeared as if the Kings were down on their luck, but on August 25, with the NHL's free-agent frenzy long subdued, the club signed defenseman **Willie Mitchell** who, despite a history of concussions, turned out to be so invaluable to the team that fans still miss him a year after leaving town. So, when the summer of 2015 began, this writer was reminded of five years earlier when it

kicked off a season of drama.

The termination of **Mike Richards'** contract followed by a grievance from the **NHLPA** weeks later on his behalf, **Slava Voynov's** jail sentence and even **Andrej Sekera**, whom the Kings had paid a high price to get, leaving town to sign with **Edmonton** all played significant roles in said drama. Amidst the craziness, though, this writer began the summer thinking to himself – mostly wishful thinking in all fairness – that GM **Dean Lombardi** will make a key signing that flies under everyone's radar during the dog days of summer. After all, he did just that in 2010.

On Sunday, that wishful thinking became a reality as Lombardi and the Kings inked veteran blueliner **Christian Ehrhoff** to a one-year deal worth a paltry \$1.5 million. The news was first reported by **TSN's Bob McKenzie**.

When he became an unrestricted free agent in 2011, this writer was hoping that the Kings would sign the German D-man. After all, he had come off the 2010-11 season scoring 14 goals and 36 assists to go in hand with a +19 rating for the **Canucks**. He was also instrumental in helping **Vancouver** reach the **Stanley Cup Final**. However, it was the **Buffalo Sabres** who signed Ehrhoff that summer and with a 10-year, \$40 million deal, this writer was relieved that the Kings had not signed him.

As for Ehrhoff's tenure in the Queen City, it last just three seasons before the Sabres bought him out. Then, last season, Ehrhoff played with the Penguins where he played in just 49 games, scoring three goals and adding 11 assists to go along with a rating of +8. While he is known as an offensive defenseman,

Ehrhoff is able to flex quite a bit of defensive muscle as he recorded 49 blocked shots last season – averaging one per game.

While he may not have lived up to his billing in Buffalo. Christian Ehrhoff remains a bona fide defenseman, making this a solid signing by Dean Lombardi and the Kings – one that gives the silver-and-black, if nothing else, added depth on their blueline.

Two of Ehrhoff's biggest assets – and reasons why every Kings fan should be excited – is his ability to quarterback a power play and his knack for logging big minutes. Eating up minutes should help Drew Doughty immensely, who logged an exorbitant average of approximately 30 minutes last season. During his brief time with the Kings last season, Andrej Sekera looked to be that defenseman but while he logged an average of 19:13, Ehrhoff averaged 2:33 more per outing in the Steel City.

Also, while their 19.0 per cent power play efficiency was good enough for 11th-overall last season, the Kings could stand to see some improvement on the man-advantage this coming season and Ehrhoff's presence could very likely make that happen.

Some flaws in the German's game, however, include a knack for making bad decisions under pressure, taking bad penalties and having a shot that isn't the most accurate. However, Ehrhoff is a left-handed shot which may make him a good fit with **Drew Doughty** or **Matt Greene**, two right-handed shooters. Of course, defensive pairings will be determined at a later date.

(Photo credit: USATSI)

While he does have some areas that needs work, Christian Ehrhoff is a great overall pickup for the Kings. After all, unlike the \$4 million he made in each of his last four seasons, the 6' 2, 196-pounder comes at a discount at \$1.5 million – a small blip on Los Angeles's salary-cap radar.

When the weekend began, the defensive corps of the Los Angeles Kings looked good. As the weekend draws to a close, said defensive corps looks great, giving the loyal fans of the silver-and-black just one more reason to be excited for the upcoming season. After all, having started his career with the **San Jose Sharks**, there is no better way to return to California than to open the season against the team that drafted him. Of course, the man who drafted Ehrhoff will not be opposing him on Oct. 7 but joining him – a man by the name of Dean Lombardi.