



Buffalo Sabres

Team report | Schedule | Salaries | Roster | Depth chart | Player notes | Injuries | Transactions | Statistics

[Buy Sabres Tickets](#)

Sabres keep Vanek by matching Oilers' \$50M offer

Updated 7/6/2007 5:16 PM | Comment | Recommend

E-mail | Print |

THE VANEK OFFER IN CONTEXT

There were four major offer sheets to restricted free agents in the last collective-bargaining agreement and one in the current one before Friday's offer by the Edmonton Oilers to the Buffalo Sabres' Thomas Vanek. A look:

1995 - Keith Tkachuk: The Chicago Blackhawks gave Winnipeg Jets left wing Keith Tkachuk a five-year, \$17.2 million offer that paid \$6 million in the first year. Even though the Jets were looking to leave town, they matched and Tkachuk went with them to Phoenix the following summer.

1997 - Joe Sakic: The New York Rangers' three-year, \$21 million offer to the Colorado Avalanche center was widely blamed for creating salary escalation because it established \$7 million a year as the going price for a superstar. The Rangers were desperate to replace Mark Messier, who had left for the Vancouver Canucks, and front-loaded the offer sheet with a \$15 million signing bonus that the Avalanche would have just seven days to raise. But on the day before the deadline, the Avalanche announced a new arena deal and matched.

1997 - Chris Gratton: This one got messy. The Philadelphia Flyers offered Tampa Bay Lightning center Chris Gratton a five-year, \$16.5 million deal with a \$9 million signing bonus. The Blackhawks said they had made a deal to acquire Gratton by trade and the Lightning, who were up for sale, argued that the Flyers' faxed offer sheet was invalid because it was smudged. The case went to arbitration and the Flyers prevailed. But the teams essentially worked out a trade. The Lightning didn't match the offer and the Flyers sent Mikael Renberg and Karl Dykhuis to reacquire the four first-round picks they gave up. Gratton didn't work out in Philadelphia and was traded back to Tampa Bay for Renberg in December 1998.

1998 - Sergei Fedorov: Fedorov made news at the Nagano Olympics, and not because of his play for Team Russia. When his contract dispute with the Detroit Red Wings dragged into February, the Carolina Hurricanes gave him a six-year, \$38 million offer sheet. It included a \$14 million signing bonus and a \$12 million bonus if his team reached the 1998 conference final, which the Hurricanes were less likely to do than the defending champion Red Wings. The NHL voided the offer, but an arbitrator ruled the clause was valid. Detroit matched and ended up paying out the \$12 million bonus as they won the Stanley Cup a second consecutive year. Fedorov, who had made \$2 million annual salaries in the rest of the contract, ended up donating a year's worth to charity.

2006 - Ryan Kesler: The Flyers, seeking insurance because of Keith Primeau's concussion, offered the Kesler \$1.9 million, twice what the Vancouver Canucks were willing to give the center. The Canucks grumbled but matched. Kesler suffered a season-ending hip injury in January. The Canucks re-signed him to a three-year, \$5.25 million deal in May.

In the pre-1995 CBA:

* The Washington Capitals let defenseman Scott Stevens go to the St. Louis Blues in 1990 for five first-round picks. Two ended up being Sergei Gonchar and Brendan Witt.

* The Blues made an offer to New Jersey Devils winger Brendan Shanahan in 1991 and an arbitrator awarded Stevens to the Devils as compensation.

- By Mike Brehm

By Kevin Allen, USA TODAY

Mixx it

Other ways to share:

- Digg
- del.icio.us
- Newsvine
- Reddit
- Facebook
- What's this?

The Buffalo Sabres had seven days to match the Edmonton Oilers' stunning seven-year, \$50 million offer to 23-year-old restricted free agent Thomas Vanek, but the Sabres didn't even need seven minutes to match the offer.

"The message is that we aren't going to become a farm team for the other NHL teams," said Buffalo general manager Darcy Regier.

Regier said he had "gotten wind" on Thursday that the Oilers were preparing an offer sheet for Vanek, a 43-goal scorer, and he called Edmonton general manager Kevin Lowe to inform him that it would be a fruitless effort because he intended to match. The Sabres had drafted Vanek fifth overall in 2003, developed him and watched him blossom into a star, and they weren't going to allow him to leave for the compensation of four first-round draft picks.

"I guess they thought we were bluffing," Regier said.

MORE SABRES: [Buffalo team report](#)
MORE OILERS: [Edmonton team report](#)

The Sabres, the NHL's No. 1 regular-season team in 2006-07, had already lost Chris Drury, Daniel Briere and Dainius Zubrus to free agency and couldn't afford to lose another potential superstar. As it is, most of the top free agents are already claimed, and even with Vanek still on the roster, the Sabres still need to bring in at least one more center.

"What's going to happen is up in the air," Regier said. "The pool is depleted, but there are other avenues. There's trades — for players, prospects or draft picks. That's the avenue we will have to look at."

Last summer, the Philadelphia Flyers offered Vancouver restricted free agent Ryan Kesler a one-year deal worth \$1.9 million and the Canucks matched. But this is the first time, under the two-year-old salary cap, that a major player has received a multiyear deal with heavy salary-cap numbers.

The Oilers, frustrated by their inability to attract unrestricted free agents this summer, offered Vanek \$5 million in the first two seasons and \$6.4 million over the last five, plus \$8 million in signing bonus money over the first two seasons. That's a salary-cap hit of \$7.14 million. The deal was negotiated by Steve and Brian Bartlett, a father-and-son agent team that had predicted at the draft that some restricted free agent would get an offer sheet this summer.

"I think that Thomas was shocked," Steve Bartlett said. "I kept telling him I was going to get him a deal, and I don't think he believed me. I don't know if I believed it myself."

Even though Oilers general manager Kevin Lowe had told the *Edmonton Sun* he was contemplating an attempt to land a restricted agent, Regier said he was still surprised it was the Oilers who came after Vanek.

"They aren't the only ones getting players to come to their city," Regier said.

Before the new CBA, teams didn't usually target restricted free agents because teams were almost sure to match and, generally, it caused anger from rival general managers over the inflationary impact on salaries.

Before the Kesler and Vanek offers under the salary-cap system, the last significant offer sheet was presented in 1998 when the Carolina Hurricanes went after Detroit star Sergei Fedorov and the Red Wings matched.

Bartlett said there "were discussions with more than one team" about Vanek, meaning that teams now seem to be viewing the signing of restricted free agents as a plausible strategy.

"There was a whole range of discussions that went on here," Steve Bartlett said. "They wanted to know what it would take, and whether I thought Buffalo would match."

Featured video



Royal family
Can wedding boost monarchy's popularity?



Charlie Sheen
Actor seeks custody of twins.

[More Video](#)

What's this?

Buy tickets to premium and sold out events!

Category:

Please select...

Powered by **TICKETSNow** Call us at: **800-927-2770**

Bartlett believes that now that the Oilers have made a lucrative offer to a restricted free agent, others will follow. In theory, it would be an effective strategy when a team is pressed against the salary-cap limit.

"This is a deal that will send ripples through the marketplace," Steve Bartlett said. "I just feel this is the logical byproduct of a cap system. There is no reason why these players shouldn't receive offers."

The Sabres' actions could discourage other teams from trying, but Regier said he wasn't thinking leaguewide when the decision was made to match.

"We are probably paying the tab for the league, but we weren't thinking about that," he said. "We were thinking about the Buffalo Sabres."

Share this story:



Digg | del.icio.us | Newsvine | Reddit | Facebook | What's

this?

Posted 7/6/2007 4:50 PM

Updated 7/6/2007 5:16 PM

E-mail | Print |

To report corrections and clarifications, contact Reader Editor Brent Jones. For publication consideration in the newspaper, send comments to letters@usatoday.com. Include name, phone number, city and state for verification.

Conversation guidelines: USA TODAY welcomes your thoughts, stories and information related to this article. Please stay on topic and be respectful of others. Keep the conversation appropriate for interested readers across the map.

Newspaper Home Delivery - Subscribe Today

Home • News • Travel • Money • Sports • Life • Tech • Weather

About USATODAY.com: Site Map | FAQ | Contact Us | Jobs with Us | Terms of Service | Privacy Policy | Your California Privacy Right | Advertise | Press Room | Developer | Media Lounge | Reprints and Permissions

News Your Way: Mobile News | Email News | Add USATODAY.com RSS feeds | Twitter | Podcasts | Widgets

Partners: USA WEEKEND | Sports Weekly | Education | Space.com | Travel Tips

Copyright 2011 USA TODAY, a division of Gannett Co. Inc.