

By LARRY BROOKS

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The right-eye injury sustained by Marc Staal on Tuesday night at 5:45 of the third period at the Garden when he was struck by a deflected puck is not believed vision-threatening or career-threatening, according to the Rangers.

“Marc Staal was examined [Wednesday] by **Dr. Mark Fromer**, ophthalmologist, and Dr. Mendel Markowitz, maxillofacial surgeon,” the club announced in a statement released at 6 p.m. “The injury has improved significantly and both doctors are optimistic that Marc will make a full recovery.”

Earlier in the day, Marc’s older brother, Eric of the Hurricanes, told reporters the defenseman, [was] “staying positive about it, which is the kind of person he is.”



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**D-PLEATED:** The Rangers are hoping Marc Staal, injured after getting hit in the eye with the puck on Tuesday, can return soon to help the defense.

The Blueshirts moved quickly to fill the hole created by the absence of Staal, who will be sidelined indefinitely, by claiming 38-year-old Roman Hamrlik off waivers from the Capitals.

Of course, filling the Staal hole with Hamrlik is tantamount to putting a single shovelful of dirt into the Florida sinkhole that swallowed up that house, but it is reflective of the desperation confronting the Rangers, who have no NHL-ready defensemen in the AHL and obviously aren’t comfortable entrusting Matt Gilroy with the sixth spot.

Most of the responsibility for assuming Staal's minutes (24:27 per game) presumably will fall on Michael Del Zotto and Anton Stralman, who likely will move up in the rotation behind a reunited Ryan McDonagh-Dan Girardi first pair while Hamrlik combines on the third pair with Steve Eminger.

Hamrlik, who turns 39 next month, was a healthy scratch in 16 of the first 20 games for the Capitals before being placed on waivers on Tuesday. Indeed, after playing in the season's first three matches, he was scratched in 16 of the following 17. Hamrlik, who is signed to an over-35 contract with a full-season cap hit of \$3.5 million, has not played since Feb. 7.

There is no telling whether he will be deemed in good enough condition to join the lineup for Thursday night's match at the Coliseum against the Islanders as the Rangers seek a season-best fourth straight victory.

Staal was struck by a Jakub Voracek deflection of a Kimmo Timonen drive. He pitched onto the ice, blood specking the rink, and writhed in pain before skating to the locker room on his own power while holding a towel to his face.

NHL deputy commissioner Bill Daly told The Post Wednesday in an e-mail the NHL continues to be in favor of a rule making the wearing of visors mandatory but the NHLPA has historically opposed such a requirement.

"To be clear, the League is in favor of a mandatory rule requiring the use of visors," Daly wrote. It was discussed briefly [in CBA negotiations] and there was no traction for change in the current approach.

"The players [and PA] have always favored a 'Player's Choice' (cq) approach, with increased usage generated by education and sensitization to the dangers of non-use," continued Daly, noting that visors are worn by more than 70-percent of players as opposed to approximately 56-percent in 2009.

Staal — who missed the first 36 games of last season in the aftermath of a concussion he suffered on a hit from brother Eric — recently had regained his pre-injury form and had recaptured his spot on the Blueshirts' shutdown defense pair with Girardi. Now, though, the 26-year-old's immediate future is cloudy.