

2010 Trade Deadline Preview: Four More to Watch

Written by Jeff Angus

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There are a few certainties as we head towards deadline day on March 3rd. Atlanta is going to move Ilya Kovalchuk. The Edmonton Oilers and Carolina Hurricanes are going to be sellers, and as much as Brian Burke says otherwise, the Leafs will be joining them. However, like every over deadline, there will be some surprises and deals that come out of leftfield. In addition to the usual veterans and impending free agents on the move, there are a few younger players who may find new homes on March 3rd.

1) Cory Schneider (2010 RFA)

Schneider is widely regarded as one of the best goaltenders not currently in the NHL, along with

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Jonathan Bernier and Jacob Markstrom. He is set to become a free agent this summer, and if the Canucks do not move him by that point he will be ripe for the picking in terms of an offer sheet. There are realistically three teams in the league that could have interest in Schneider at the deadline this year: Dallas, Philadelphia, and St. Louis.

Dallas has made it pretty clear that Marty Turco is not a part of their long term plans. Backup Alex Auld is seeing lots of starts lately, and there have been a few rumours swirling that the Stars may try and dump Turco at the deadline. They have some solid young players at both forward and defence who they could move in a potential deal for Schneider. The Stars best goaltending prospect, Richard Bachman, is currently toiling in the ECHL because the Stars don't have room for him on their AHL affiliate up the road in Austin. He isn't as NHL ready as Schneider nor does he possess the same upside. and doesn't possess much upside either. A move that may work for both teams would be Schneider for Ivan Vishnevskiy, straight across. It also depends on how the Canucks value Vishnevskiy. Steve Ott is about to become a free agent and the Canucks would love to have him, but Dallas is hard at work trying to extend Ott long term.

The Flyers have a giant question mark in between the pipes after this season as well. Ray Emery is a free agent, and Michael Leighton is nothing more than a short term solution. The Flyers have some decent depth at the position with Nicola Riopel and Joacim Ericsson, but again neither have the pedigree of Schneider. There have been Schneider to Philadelphia rumours circulating for over a year now and as the saying goes, where there is smoke there often is fire. Because the goalie market is so weak (and has been for a while), Schneider's value is going to be defined by how each individual team views his upside. Some may see him as a future all-star, while other teams may view him as possessing more limited upside. The Flyers wouldn't move either James van Riemsdyk or Claude Giroux in a deal for Schneider, but have some other prospects that may interest the Canucks, including defenseman Kevin Marshall and winger Patrick Maroon.

The Blues recently paid a visit to Winnipeg to watch Schneider play for the Manitoba Moose, and the Canucks had several scouts and management staff at the St. Louis game in Montreal last week, fuelling Schneider to St. Louis speculation. The Canucks would love to land Alex Pietrangelo in a deal, but the Blues are most likely unwilling to part with their best prospect.

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David Backes, who the Canucks absolutely love, is off limits as well. The Canucks would like to add a checking center and defensive depth for the playoffs, so Schneider could be used to acquire the likes of Jay McClement and/or Barret Jackman. However, as the Blues inch closer to playoff contention, it becomes less and less likely that they will be sellers at the deadline. Lars Eller could be in play as well.

2) Andrew Cogliano (2010 RFA)

With only five goals through 51 games this season (and two in his last 34), Cogliano has been a major flop for the struggling Oilers. He is a fantastic skater who has scored 18 goals in both 2007-08 and 2008-09. The Oilers may use Cogliano to acquire another player looking for a fresh start. His fantasy upside isn't huge, but he has the potential to be a valuable asset in most league formats. Cogliano has the upside to become a 20-25 goal, 50-60 point center/winger who will also be good for some short-handed production. Cogliano's hometown Leafs may be interested, and could offer someone like Mikael Grabovski or Viktor Stalberg in return.

3) Peter Mueller (2010 RFA)

Mueller, who many (myself included) thought would be a 70-80 point producer already, has been awful for the last season and a half in Phoenix. After suffering a concussion in January of 2009, he hasn't rediscovered his offensive touch from 2007-08, where he scored 22 goals and fired over 200 shots on goal as a rookie. The Coyotes may not want to sell low on Mueller, but they may be forced to deal him in an effort to acquire depth for the stretch drive and into the playoffs, where the Coyotes appear to be headed for the first time in a while. Mueller has only three goals in 44 games - he isn't seeing much ice time (averaging around 13 minutes a night), but that level of production is absolutely dreadful. 13 Coyotes, including Lauri Korpikoski and Verne Fiddler, have more goals than Mueller this season.

The concussion issue is the main reason for Mueller's struggles, as he seems to be shying away from any sort of physical confrontation, and his game is devoid of any level of confidence whatsoever. I got the chance to watch him live in the WHL when he played for Everett, and he was absolutely dominant. Big, fast, skilled, and consistent. He brought it every night and was a game breaking presence at that level. Not all junior stars turn out to be NHL stars, but Mueller had all the key attributes and looked to be well on his way to stardom. Hopefully a change of scenery can get him back on track.

4) Cam Barker (2 years left @ \$3 million per season)

I make mention of the importance of ice time a lot, and power play time especially with regards to fantasy hockey. Cam Barker had 40 points last year. However, only 11 of those points came at even strength. Barker played 3:24 per game on the power play last season, and was obviously quite productive in that role. This season however, his ice time with the man advantage has dropped to 2:10 per game, and Barker has only six power play points. With Duncan Keith taking on additional power play minutes and Brian Campbell possessing an absolutely untradeable contract, look for Barker to be the odd man out as the Blackhawks look to cut salary for next season. Barker and his \$3 million cap hit may be moved out at the deadline to allow Chicago to bring in a big ticket rental (from Atlanta perhaps). His fantasy relevance is completely dependant on power play minutes, as he is a below average even strength defenseman. If he gets dealt, he could go from a 25 point defenseman to a 45 point defenseman overnight.