

2010 Trade Deadline Preview - Everything's Not Peachy in Atlanta

Written by Jeff Angus

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Ilya Kovalchuk has been the face of the Atlanta Thrashers since he came into the league close to a decade ago. The Thrashers have seen their share of star players come and go (most notably Dany Heatley and Marian Hossa), but Kovalchuk has been there through thick and (mostly) thin. However, it appears that his time in Atlanta is running out, especially with Bob McKenzie stating last week that he is completely confident that Kovalchuk will get moved at the deadline. When rumour mongers mention Kovalchuk's name in passing, it doesn't hold much weight, but Bob McKenzie's word is about as good as it gets in the hockey world.

What teams could realistically acquire Kovalchuk? What will it take to land the former Rocket Richard winner? How will a potential deal impact the fantasy values of both players on Kovalchuk's new team?

Chicago

Why? Chicago has one of the strongest rosters in the NHL and Kovalchuk may push them over the top this season. Atlanta GM Don Waddell has gone on record stating that he wants proven

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NHL players in return for Kovalchuk - not just futures. Chicago has a plethora of young NHL talent signed to reasonable contracts. Players like Cam Barker, Patrick Sharp, Kris Versteeg, Andrew Ladd, and Dustin Byfuglien would all interest the Thrashers. Kovalchuk plays the left side, and would immediately give Chicago two dominant top lines up front. In addition, imagine a top power play unit featuring Keith, Kovalchuk, Hossa, Toews, and Kane? Yowzas! Chicago will have to dump some salary in the off-season anyways, so they might as well put it to good use while they can, right?

Why not? Cap space. Chicago picking up Kovalchuk would surely just be a rental for the stretch drive, as they would have no chance at re-signing him long term (unless he decides to take a league minimum salary). The Hawks would be able to afford Ilya for the rest of this season by moving out comparable salary.

The offer. Cam Barker, Kris Versteeg, Kyle Beach, and their 2010 1st round draft pick.

The impact. Kovalchuk would make one of the most lethal offences in the entire league even more dangerous. With Hossa and Kane on the right side, Kovalchuk would provide a superstar on the left. Dave Bolland would stand to benefit the most, as the quality of wingers on the second line would improve dramatically, regardless of how the top two lines would shake out.

Calgary

Why? Calgary's offence has been stuck in first gear all season, and Kovalchuk would quickly change that. In addition, they have the cap space to re-sign him long term, as they have some money (most notably Olli Jokinen's \$5 million salary) coming off the books. There are rumours circulating that the Flames are shopping Dion Phaneuf, and a Phaneuf-Kovalchuk swap makes lot of sense for a number of reasons. Calgary has depth on defence, and Dion, in addition to being a solid defenseman, has the big name association that Atlanta could market to their fans. His defensive zone play has lots of room for improvement, but he would probably thrive playing in the Southeast Division as opposed to the Northwest.

Why not? Calgary wouldn't give up Phaneuf for a rental, and there are no guarantees that Kovalchuk would want to come to Calgary and stay for a while.

The offer. Dion Phaneuf and David Moss.

The impact. Whoever gets to play center for Kovalchuk and Iginla would see an obvious increase in production. One thing about Kovalchuk is that his setup man on the power play gets lots of primary assists. In Atlanta, that player is Tobias Enstrom. In Calgary, it would most likely be Mark Giordano.

Los Angeles

Why? Los Angeles has cap space and is a team ready to make some noise in the post-season. GM Dean Lombardi wants to put his stamp on this team, and acquiring Kovalchuk would definitely do that. Los Angeles wants to ship out Alex Frolov, and Atlanta may be interested in his services. Playing in Los Angeles may be an attractive proposition for Kovalchuk as well. The Kings, like Chicago, have lots of young talent already in the NHL and signed to reasonable contracts.

Why not? Los Angeles would be very top heavy up front if they make a move for Kovalchuk (however, many teams have successfully gone this route already). Does Lombardi want to take a huge risk and potentially damage the rebuild he has overseen so patiently? There is some speculation that Atlanta would want Wayne Simmonds as a part of the package, and that may be a tough pill for the Kings to swallow.

The offer. Jack Johnson, Alexander Frolov (with extension), and Jarrett Stoll.

The impact. Kovalchuk would probably bump Ryan Smyth down to the second line, or the Kings may decide to spread out the offence on their top two units. His biggest impact would be on the top power play unit.

Boston

Why? Like Calgary, the Bruins are desperate for offence. And like Chicago and Los Angeles, they have some solid young NHL players signed to reasonable contracts. Atlanta is deep on defence, but relatively thin up front, and names like David Krejci, Zach Hamill, Blake Wheeler, and Vladimir Sobotka would probably get them to listen to Boston.

Why not? The Fourth Period has recently reported that Boston has taken itself out of the Kovalchuk sweepstakes. Speculation is that Atlanta wants Milan Lucic in the returning package, something that is simply a non-starter from Boston's perspective. Also, the Bruins will be leery at giving up integral roster pieces for a player not guaranteed to return in 2010-11. They are quickly sliding out of playoff contention, and getting Kovalchuk may amount to a band-aid on a bullet wound more than anything.

The offer. David Krejci, Dennis Wideman, Zach Hamill, 2010 1st round pick (Boston's own, not Toronto's.)

The impact. Huge. Kovalchuk equals instant offence, and the Bruins simply don't have anyone with that capability on their roster. He would be reunited with Marc Savard, and the third

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Wheeler... I mean wheel on that line would benefit greatly.

New York

Why? It's the Rangers.

Why not? The salary cap!

The offer. Artem Anisimov, Evgeni Grachev, and Bobby Sanguenetti. Realistically one of Ryan Callahan or Brandon Dubinsky would have to be included, but I can't see the Rangers parting with either of them for a rental.

The impact. Another game breaker to complement Marian Gaborik. Brandon Dubinsky's name would quickly change to "Cha-ching!"