

Ilya Kovalchuk to the Devils for Oduya, Bergfors, Cormier, and more

Written by Jeff Angus

Thursday, 04 February 2010 21:29 - Last Updated Friday, 05 February 2010 12:22



The Atlanta Thrashers have dealt superstar sniper Ilya Kovalchuk to the New Jersey Devils in return for defenseman Johnny Oduya, winger Nicklas Bergfors, prospect (and the recently suspended) Patrice Cormier, and New Jersey's 2010 1st round draft pick. The two teams will also exchange 2nd round draft picks in 2010. Along with Kovalchuk, the Devils also received depth defenseman Anssi Salmela.

New Jersey gets: one of the best pure goal scorers in the game. Kovalchuk immediately makes their power play more dangerous, as his one timer from the point is one of the most potent attacks in all of hockey. He plays the left side so it will be interesting to see how they balance things out with Zach Parise there as well. Parise is a smart player and I wouldn't be surprised if he slots over to the right side. Salmela is a decent depth defenseman who can skate and move the puck. Him and Kovalchuk share the same agent and that may have played in to this. Will New Jersey re-sign Kovalchuk? It depends if he can buy in to the Kool-Aid that Lou Lamoriello will inevitably give him. New Jersey isn't as glamorous as LA or New York, but it is hard to argue with three cups in the past 15 years. Depends how much Kovalchuk wants to win I guess, doesn't it?

Atlanta gets: A steady top-four defenseman (and Olympian for Team Sweden) in Oduya. He missed some time this season due to injury, but he is capable of logging 20 minutes a night and

Ilya Kovalchuk to the Devils for Oduya, Bergfors, Cormier, and more

Written by Jeff Angus

Thursday, 04 February 2010 21:29 - Last Updated Friday, 05 February 2010 12:22

should be a 25-40 point defenseman on the Thrashers, depending on power play time. His production this season (four points in 40 games) is disappointing, but that is due in large part to losing his spot on the top line. He formed the shut down pairing with Paul Martin for much of the past two seasons in New Jersey. He isn't a big name, but he is an upgrade that will help that team out.

Nicklas Bergfors is a gifted young forward who has blinding speed and great hands. He had a hot start to the season but has had trouble producing on a consistent basis as the season has continued. He has the upside to develop into a 30 goal, 70-80 point winger. This trade may help him out, as the Devils are very patient with young forwards. Atlanta will have some incentive to help Bergfors accelerate his development in order to sell the trade to the fan base. That is just me thinking out loud but it is a theory that makes some sense.

Patrice Cormier has been in the news a lot lately due to his vicious elbow delivered to Mikael Tam in the QMJHL a few weeks back. He is a solid prospect – not flashy, but should be a dependable checking line player in the NHL. The 1st round pick won't be high, I'd guess somewhere between 25-30.

Fantasy Players Impacted: I'll break this down for New Jersey and then Atlanta.

Ilya Kovalchuk to the Devils for Oduya, Bergfors, Cormier, and more

Written by Jeff Angus

Thursday, 04 February 2010 21:29 - Last Updated Friday, 05 February 2010 12:22

On the Devils, this benefits everyone, save for Brian Rolston. Rolston used to play the point at times on the power play as the big shot, but that is Kovalchuk's domain now. However, Rolston may find himself lining up with Kovalchuk at even strength, so who really knows. It will definitely benefit the top power play members the most – Zajac, Parise, Elias (when he returns), and Andy Greene. Greene is a key player to watch here, as he probably will be the set up man on the other point. In Atlanta, it was a role filled by Tobias Enstrom. Enstrom is on pace for close to 60 points. It would be unfair to say that is due completely to Kovalchuk, but it definitely is a huge part of it. Expect Greene's assists to skyrocket.

Losing your best player is obviously not going to be something viewed as positive. In the case of Atlanta, Kovalchuk has been the backbone of that team for close to the past decade. However, so many of the Thrasher forwards have been slumping offensively over the past month or two. I doubt it does much to impact their values in fantasy hockey leagues. In fact, it may be a good time to go out and acquire a player like Nik Antropov, who is still a solid offensive contributor. Maxim Afinogenov is going to be streaky with or without Kovalchuk. Antropov may drop off a bit, but he is still the top line center and will still see heavy offensive minutes. I am going to go against the grain here and say that this trade could potentially be a benefit to many Atlanta forwards, as the Kovalchuk rumors have most definitely been a distraction over the past few weeks/months.

The player who stands to benefit the most is Zach Bogosian. He has a huge bomb from the point and is the logical choice to replace Kovalchuk on the top unit. Bogosian has 20-goal upside as a defenseman. With Kovalchuk around, he was relegated to second unit duty, and Atlanta plays their top unit significantly more. Another player to watch is Bryan Little, who like Kovalchuk is a shoot-first winger. He has had a disappointing season but has the upside to score 40 goals in the NHL. He hit 31 last year, but is way off that pace this season. Now is the time to make a move on him.

Ilya Kovalchuk to the Devils for Oduya, Bergfors, Cormier, and more

Written by Jeff Angus

Thursday, 04 February 2010 21:29 - Last Updated Friday, 05 February 2010 12:22

Another to watch for is Evander Kane. He plays LW, like Kovalchuk, so this immediately clears up more ice time for him. Kane has huge upside, but is still very raw and won't hit it for another two or three seasons. Keep an eye on how much he plays over the next five or 10 games, as ice time usually tells the story with young players.