



Rampant speculation continues as to where Rick Nash's destination will be on or before February 27. The prize of this year's trade deadline, Nash has submitted a list to the Blue Jackets of what teams he would accept a trade to. The contract extension he signed after the 2008-09 season included a "no movement clause", which means that Nash would have to give his seal of approval to any possible trade.

According to multiple sources, Nash's list includes the Los Angeles Kings, New York Rangers, Boston Bruins, San Jose Sharks, and Toronto Maple Leafs. Not all of these teams match up well with the Blue Jackets needs, but there is always the outside chance of a third team being involved in any transaction. The Blue Jackets have also been having extended discussions with the Philadelphia Flyers. Nash would have to approve a trade with any team, including the ones on the list he submitted, so there may be other teams that he is willing to go to and just did not include them.

Operating under the pretense that the Blue Jackets would try to acquiesce Nash's request before looking at other opportunities, let's examine why the five teams on Nash's list would be interested and what the Blue Jackets could reasonably expect in return for their franchise forward.

Los Angeles Kings

The Kings seem the most logical fit for Rick Nash. Currently, the Kings are the league's lowest scoring team with just 2.1 goals scored per game. Despite that, the Kings are tied for the eighth and final playoff spot in the Western Conference. Obviously, Nash would help the team's lack of offense. Furthermore, most people believe that Nash is a good defensive forward as well, so he should fit right in with the the Kings' style.

What would Columbus want?: The chief objective in any trade with the Los Angeles Kings would be to get backup goaltender Jonathan Bernier. Bernier would be under team control for the foreseeable future because he is signed for \$1.25M for the '12-13 season and is a restricted free agent after that. Bernier, a first round pick in 2006, is just 23 years old and has been blocked by Jon Quick for the last three years.

The Blue Jackets would also strive to get one of Los Angeles's solid defenseman prospects. Three names to keep in mind are Derek Forbort, Slava Voinov, and Nicolas Deslauriers. Forbort, a first round draft pick in 2010, is a 6'5" left handed defenseman with a lot of hockey sense and a big frame to build upon. Voinov, a second round pick in 2008, is a much smaller player at just 5'11", but is very gifted offensively. Deslauriers, a third round pick in 2009, is a phenomenal skater with good offensive instincts. One of these three would certainly be on General Manager Scott Howson's wish list.

Odds are, the Blue Jackets would also want a roster forward from the Kings.

How would a trade work?: Any trade with a player like Rick Nash comes with salary cap concerns. In this case, Columbus would likely have to take a contract like Rob Scuderi's, a veteran defenseman who got a big payday after the Pittsburgh Penguins Stanley Cup run in 2009. Scuderi's cap hit is \$3.4M through next season. Another player may have to be added to make a deal work. The Blue Jackets would also likely part with Curtis Sanford to be the Kings' new backup.

New York Rangers

The New York Rangers have been one of the more popular teams discussed so far. Part of it could be the New York media machine, but another part of it is that they are the most convenient fit for both teams. That is different from the Kings in the sense that the Kings need a player like Rick Nash. The Rangers are undoubtedly a Stanley Cup contender without Nash.

The Rangers could use some additional scoring punch on their top two lines and Nash fits the mold of the current Rangers system.

What would Columbus want?: There are some major pros and one major con to dealing with the Rangers. First of all, the pros are that the Rangers have experienced NHL talent that they could part with for Rick Nash. As a subsidiary effect of having pro roster players to trade for Nash, the salaries are going to line up a lot easier. Speculation has been that Chris Kreider and Michael del Zotto would be involved. Kreider, the Rangers' consensus best prospect, is currently playing at Boston College. He was a first round draft pick of the Rangers in 2009. Kreider has good size at 6'2" 201 and has been impressive in international tournaments. Del Zotto, unlike Kreider, has been with the Rangers for three seasons now. At just 21 years old, he is one of the best young defenders in the game.

The con is that the Rangers would not be able to give the Blue Jackets a goaltender prospect or NHL-ready goaltender.

How would a trade work?: The Rangers would have a logjam at forward and would probably look to include Brandon Dubinsky in the trade. Trading two roster players in Del Zotto and Dubinsky would, added to the roughly \$40,000 in cap space that the Rangers currently have, create adequate cap space to fit Nash for the remainder of this season. With Dubinsky's \$4.2 cap hit off the books and Del Zotto in line for a large raise this offseason, the Rangers would only have minimal maneuvering to fit Nash for next season.

Boston Bruins

The Bruins are not a very good fit for Rick Nash, but there is no downside to trying to see what kind of offer they can piece together. The Bruins do not have very many movable contracts and would be hard-pressed to find a reason to shake up their current roster. Even with the caliber of player that Nash is, the Bruins would lose some of their depth trying to make a trade because they lack top-notch prospects.

What would Columbus want?: Boston is nearly an impossible trading partner. Two players who might have value to the Blue Jackets, Marc Savard and Nathan Horton, both have concussion concerns and Savard may never play again. If the Blue Jackets could somehow convince Bruins GM Peter Chiarelli to discuss Tyler Seguin, there might be a chance of a deal getting done. The likelihood of Seguin being on the table is very slim. Dougie Hamilton, a first round pick from the 2011 draft, is an intriguing defenseman and would have to be in any proposal.

How would a trade work?: It would take a third team entering the fold for a trade to work, and even then, the Bruins do not have many players available. Their team is full of veteran guys with little trade value and then core players like David Krejci and Patrice Bergeron. It's hard to envision any kind of deal that works for both sides.

San Jose Sharks

The Sharks could definitely use a player like Rick Nash to play alongside Joe Thornton. Thornton and Nash have played together in Olympic tournaments and seem to be a natural fit as big left handed shooters with plenty of experience. Nash would love to play alongside a passer like Thornton. The Sharks are also desperate to remove their "choker" label come playoff time. They always have good regular seasons and then fall short in the playoffs. The pressure is on for them.

What would Columbus want?: Like the Bruins and Rangers, the Sharks do not have a young goaltender that Columbus would want. Thomas Greiss is already 26 years old and does not have “franchise goalie” upside. They have a prospect in the system by the name of Harri Sateri, but he simply doesn’t have enough potential.

The Sharks have one of the worst prospect groups in the entire NHL, so the Blue Jackets would have to demand roster players. This always creates a dilemma because teams are so unwilling to sacrifice depth. The Sharks also have two injured defensemen, Doug Murray and Marc-Edouard Vlasic, who took pucks to the facial area and will miss some time. Also, San Jose is playing a number of call-ups and young guys at depth positions. With no reasonable chance at getting a player like Joe Pavelski or Logan Couture, the Blue Jackets will not find what they’re looking for.

How would a trade work?: The Sharks would have to be willing to part with top talent for top talent with a lack of prospect depth and first round picks that are almost always in the bottom third of the round. Barring a miracle, Nash will not be a San Jose Shark.

Toronto Maple Leafs

Before Rick Nash signed his eight-year extension with the Blue Jackets in 2009, everybody and their brother assumed that Nash would sign with Toronto as a free agent, to play for his hometown team. Nash shocked everyone by signing with Columbus. Now the time has come for Toronto fans to create trade proposals that would put Nash in their beloved blue and white.

Toronto, unlike the other teams on Nash’s list, is not a Stanley Cup contender. Their GM, Brian Burke, drew a lot of ire for trading two first round picks (Tyler Seguin and Dougie Hamilton) to Boston for Phil Kessel. He would likely be gun-shy to pull off another trade of that magnitude, but Burke is not one to care about the media.

What would Columbus want?: Any Rick Nash trade would have to include Nazem Kadri. Kadri, a top ten first rounder in the 2009 Draft, is exactly the sort of top flight talent the Blue Jackets need. Unfortunately, there isn't a whole lot to come along with Kadri. Joe Colborne is another decent prospect, but "decent" prospects won't do it. The Leafs would have to include a couple first round picks, a roster player, and it's hard to find a match.

As has become a running theme, the Maple Leafs do not have a goaltender prospect to send Columbus's way.

How would a trade work?: Amazingly, according to Hockeybuzz.com's Cap Central page, the Leafs are in the worst salary cap shape of any of the teams on Nash's list. So, a trade would have to include Luke Schenn and probably another roster player, along with Kadri. While Nash is certainly a game-changer, the Leafs are not a Cup contender and so a trade seems implausible. If one were to be done, however, it would likely be a quantity over quality deal and a sign that Scott Howson did not get what he wanted and felt too much urgency to trade Nash.

Keep in mind that these are not the only teams in play for Rick Nash, they are just the only teams that Nash has stated he would, no questions asked, accept a trade to. If a contending team not on this list comes up with a good offer, Nash would likely accept a trade to that team. The losers in the Rick Nash sweepstakes could be in play for Jeff Carter, and that's something Scott Howson could consider as well.

With just five days to go before the non-waiver trade deadline, Rick Nash will dominate the headlines, whether he is traded or not.

In a late breaking edit to this week's column, the Blue Jackets have traded center Antoine Vermette to the Phoenix Coyotes in exchange for goaltender Curtis McElhinney, Ottawa's second round pick in the 2012 NHL Entry Draft and a fifth round pick in the 2013 NHL Entry

Draft. The 2013 pick becomes a fourth round selection if Phoenix wins a playoff round this season.

Vermette, who drastically underachieved with the Blue Jackets after being traded to Columbus in a 2009 deal that sent oft-injured goaltender Pascal Leclaire to Ottawa, is strong on faceoffs and defensively responsible. He simply never filled the role that the Blue Jackets needed him to fill. The Blue Jackets also unload Vermette's sizable \$3.75M contract that he was locked in to for the next three seasons.

Keep checking back to the NHL forum on the message boards www.theclevelandfan.com for up-to-the-minute Jackets trade deadline coverage. Any big trades will be broken using the Hitting the Fan news section in the left column on the main TCF homepage.