

BLACKWOOD TRADED TO AVALANCHE: Trade Grades and Impact on Askarov's Timeline

Ryan Greenberg — December 9, 2024

The Colorado Avalanche have acquired goaltender Mackenzie Blackwood, as well as forward Givani Smith and a 2027 fifth round draft pick, from the San Jose Sharks, in return for goaltender Alexandar Georgiev, forward Nikolai Kovalenko, and two draft picks.

Though the Sharks do inherit another goaltender in Georgiev, this likely accelerates Yaroslav Askarov's timeline to becoming the Sharks' number one goaltender. The Sharks began their season with Blackwood and Vitek Vanecek as their goaltenders, but were expected to deal one of the two before the trade deadline to clear a path for Askarov to secure a roster spot full-time.

Blackwood, a free agent at season's end, heads to an Avalanche team with Stanley Cup expectations who have been hampered by poor goaltending play this season. Blackwood's performance for the Sharks this season has been a pleasant surprise. He heads to Colorado with an impressive .910 save percentage, which is all the more impressive when considering he's posted that number in front of the Sharks' subpar defensive corps.

Blackwood's play this season has allowed the Sharks to begin Askarov's season in the minors, allowing him more playing time and development. Blackwood also built his trade value up in the first 30 games of the season, and the Sharks decided to cash in on that now rather than at the deadline, earlier than some might have expected.

So who wins this trade? And how does it impact Askarov's timeline to becoming the Sharks' number one goalie?

TRADE GRADES

Colorado Avalanche: A-
San Jose Sharks: B

Let's get the Avalanche out of the way first. They are two-and-a-half years removed from a Stanley Cup, and are a good goalie away from winning another one. Blackwood's play this season suggests he certainly can be that goalie. Adin Hill won a Stanley Cup as the Vegas Golden Knights' starter one year after a so-so season with the Sharks. The Avalanche are hoping Blackwood can bring about a similar effect. While Blackwood doesn't propel the Avalanche into runaway Cup favorites, they are now among the highest tier of Cup contenders with their goaltending vastly improved.

Now to the Sharks. They receive Georgiev, who is statistically one of the worst goalies in the league this season, one year after leading the NHL in wins. Of the 80 goalies to play in the NHL this season, he ranks 79th in goals saved above expected, with -9.4.

The Sharks also receive 25-year-old rookie Kovalenko. Drafted in 2018, he made his NHL debut this season after two nearly point-per-game seasons in Russia's KHL. He has four goals and four assists this season in 28 games played.

The Sharks also receive a conditional 2025 fifth round draft pick and 2026 second round draft pick.

Kovalenko will likely slot into the Sharks' bottom six forward group for now. The Sharks can afford to take a swing on Kovalenko, who has some upside, albeit waning. The Sharks will also look to make good on that second round draft pick in 2026.

Trading Blackwood was 100% the right decision from general manager Mike Grier. Blackwood is a pending free agent, and with Askarov in the ranks, there were no plans to re-sign him. And with Blackwood's performance to start the season, and increased trade value, trading him was a must, as opposed to losing him for free at the end of the season. Trading Blackwood over Vanecek was also the right decision.

But what stops the Sharks from being awarded an 'A' for this trade is their return. What Blackwood has the potential to do for the Avalanche is worth more than what they gave to the Sharks. The Sharks perhaps could have negotiated for a better prospect and/or draft pick.

The Sharks might also have benefitted from waiting until closer to the deadline to deal Blackwood. A goalie tandem of Blackwood and Askarov would have been interesting to explore, and Blackwood was the Sharks' best insurance policy on Askarov.

Now, the Sharks will have to suffer with Vanecek and Georgiev if Askarov isn't NHL-ready yet. Vanecek had a strong start to the season, but his performance has declined in the last several weeks. Georgiev has some of the worst statistics in the league, numbers that figure to only get worse once he plays behind the Sharks' defense.

Nonetheless, it's not like the Sharks are trying to make the playoffs this season, so they don't need Blackwood's goaltending. The Sharks get a respectable return for a pending free agent, and clear a path for Askarov to obtain a full-time roster spot whenever he is ready...

How does this trade impact Askarov's timeline?

Blackwood played well enough to earn playing time in the Sharks' net. With him gone, neither Vanecek nor Georgiev are good enough to keep Askarov off the roster once he's ready full-time. What happens with Vanecek and Georgiev is completely dependent on Askarov.

Respectfully, the Sharks don't owe Georgiev anything. He hasn't played well enough to earn an NHL roster spot this season and he offers no upside, so the Sharks are not obligated to give him any benefit of the doubt. He is simply a placeholder for Askarov until he is ready. Once that day comes, it's likely Georgiev's time as a Shark will end, unless he outplays Vanecek in the time before Askarov gets called up.

With Blackwood out of the picture, the only thing stopping Askarov from taking the Sharks' net is himself, and it will be easier to justify giving him the net sooner. With how he's played this season, it likely won't be long until that day comes.