

Cavs' Roster Slowly Taking Shape

Written by {ga=jerryroche}

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Going into tonight's pre-season clash with the Indiana Pacers, Cavalier Head Coach Mike Brown wants to gain additional insight on some of the players on the roster "bubble." Cutting four players on the current roster to get it down to even 15 (only 12 of whom can be active for any one game) could prove to be quite a conundrum. And if Andrew Bynum starts the season on the injured list, which appears entirely possible, another player will have to be released later to make room for him.

At this early point in the season, let's take a closer look at how the final roster might shape up.

Apparent Lock-Ins:

Andy Varejao (6-11 F-C, 31 years old) averaged 14 ppg and 14 rpg last year when not injured. If he's healthy all year and isn't traded, he could give Kyrie Irving a run in the local sportswriters' voting for Cavs MVP--but those are big "ifs."

Kyrie Irving (6-3 G, 21) averaged 22 points and 6 assists last year after being named 2012 NBA Rookie of the Year, getting 117 of a possible 120 first-place votes.

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Rookie **Anthony Bennett** (6-8 F, 20), the first overall pick in last spring's draft, played one season at UNLV, averaging 16 points and 8 rebounds in 27 mpg. Even though he's a bit undersized for a power forward, he appears to be the real deal.

Tristan Thompson (6-9 F-C, 22) showed amazing improvement last season over his rookie season, averaging almost 12 points and 10 rebounds per game playing left-handed; this year, he's trying (successfully so far) to make the switch to playing right-handed.

C.J. Miles (6-6 G-F, 26) averaged 11 points last year. He's perhaps the team's most accomplished "old dependable."

Dion Waiters (6-4 G, 22) averaged 15 points and 3 assists last year.

Tyler Zeller (7-0 F-C, 23) averaged 8 points and 6 rebounds last year playing largely out of position. He's put on some bulk in the off-season, which should make him a more formidable presence on the front line.

Good Bets:

Jarrett Jack (6-3 G, 30) averaged 13 points and 5 assists in 30 minutes last year for Golden State. This year, he's averaging just 3.5 ppg, but he's a proven pro who could be kept as a stabilizing, veteran presence.

Earl Clark (6-10 F, 25) averaged 7 points and 5.5 rebounds in 23 minutes last year with Lakers. Despite his slow start, he wasn't picked up in the off-season just to be cut.

Rookie **Sergey Karasev** (6-7 G-F, 20), the 19th overall pick in last spring's draft; averaged 18 points and 5 rebounds per game in 33 minutes in Russia's top league.

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Possibles:

Alonzo Gee (6-6 G-F, 26) averaged 10 points and 4 rebounds last year.

Rookie **Matthew Dellavedova** (6-4 G, 23) is a hustler extraordinaire. Because he's so aggressive both offensively and defensively, the coaches love him--not to mention his 15 assists, second on the team to Irving.

Henry Sims (6-10 C, 23) seems to be a good fit offensively and defensively so far.

Rookie **Carrick Felix** (6-6 G-F, 23) was drafted specifically for his defense, so--given Coach Brown's obsession with defense--he's got a great shot at staying.

Jermaine Taylor (6-5 G, 27) averaged 7 points and 2 rebounds last year with Timberwolves; this pre-season, he's averaging 6.7 ppg in only 13 mpg.

Rookie **Kenny Kadji** (6-10 F, 25), a pleasant surprise, is averaging 5.8 ppg despite averaging only 10 mpg.

Long Shots:

Elliot Williams (6-5 G, 24) averaged 4 points last year for Trail Blazers.

DeSagana Diop (7-0 C, 31) averaged just 1 point and 3 rebounds last year for Bobcats.

Rookie **Michael Lee** (6-9 F, 27) has not yet distinguished himself in pre-season.

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Roster Highlights So Far:

>> Varejao (not surprisingly), Thompson, Bennett and Sims are the team's top four rebounders. And Sims--a heretofore unknown quantity--is shooting at a team-leading 73 percent clip from the field.

>> Waiters showed noticeable improvement from his freshman to his sophomore campaign; this year, he's slimmed down and looks like he's being more selective and creative with his field-goal attempts (which can only be a good thing).

>> Karasev, drafted as a shooter, is doing just that: 50 percent from the field, including 44 percent from beyond the three-point arc.

>> Taylor appears to be one of those guys who isn't afraid to try some offensive razzle-dazzle, and it's working.

Roster 'Lowlights' So Far:

>> Meanwhile, Gee, a starter last year, is averaging just 12 mpg with a scoring average of 0.5 ppg. Realistically, he's really got to pick it up if he wants to even remain on the roster, much less start.

>> So far, Clark has been a bit of a disappointment, shooting just 33 percent from the field for 5.8 ppg and not really doing much else of note.

>> Lee, Williams and Diop are averaging just 6.0, 3.7 and 3.5 mpg, respectively, so far in the pre-season. Felix, Gee, Williams, Diop and Lee have yet to hit a field goal in limited minutes.

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What It Will Come Down To...

If past history is any indication, the composition of the final roster will come down to Brown and his assistants deciding which players have the talent and mindset to buy into his defense-first philosophy. We've already seen Irving at least trying to contribute on the defensive end (though he's still got a long way to go). And the bigs so far have done a pretty decent job of "showing" on picks, then hustling back to reacquire their man--something that was drastically missing under Byron Scott.

Virtually anybody who knows anything about the NBA agrees that (eventually) getting Bynum back and keeping him healthy will be a tremendous boon to the team's overall success (or lack thereof). The 26-year-old 7-foot-0 center averaged 19 points, 12 rebounds two years ago with Lakers.

However the final roster is composed, it appears (at least so far) that this version of the Cavaliers will be among the deepest in the team's history--and that's saying a lot. It's also pretty exciting from a fan's point of view...And when was the last time we could say that about the Cavaliers?