



Dion Waiters is the widget of the Cavs roster. If he were a mechanical device, he'd have a lot of lights and buttons that indicate he can do many different things. But he didn't come with any type of instruction sheet, so you're left to randomly press buttons, hoping to find the sequence that powers him up.

What can he do? Does he fit your needs? If so, where? All legitimate questions that don't really have any solid answers through the first 80 or so games of Waiters' professional career.

He came off the bench in his two years at Syracuse. The Cavs drafted him fourth overall in 2012 because, despite the fact that he was relegated to a sixth-man role, his scoring talent was apparent. Perhaps envisioning a better version of the Mo Williams and Delonte West backcourt that helped power the Cavs to 66 and 61 win seasons in LeBron's final two years here, the Cavs wanted to pair Waiters with Kyrie Irving in the starting backcourt.

Much like Williams and West, Irving and Waiters were both a tad undersized, but both could create their own shots, and both are adept passers. A backcourt comprised of a pair of point guard/shooting guard hybrids could be very versatile and very dangerous.

But there is only one ball. Only one player can create the shot per possession. Kyrie, being the anointed franchise player, would essentially get the right of first refusal, forcing Waiters to play

off the ball.

It didn't really work. Waiters never seemed comfortable taking kickout passes, curling off screens, and all of the other catch-and-shoot rhythm play that is expected of a shooting guard. Last year, he finished second among rookies in scoring behind Rookie of the Year Damian Lillard, but his 14.7 PPG came on 13.4 often poorly-selected shots per game. He converted 41 percent of his shots as a rookie, but most of his converted shots were around the basket. He shot 31 percent from three-point range, exhibiting no ability to stretch the floor – a must-have skill for any starting shooting guard in the NBA.

This season didn't begin much better. As the Cavs careened to a 4-12 start, Waiters continued to struggle in his starting role. Then the rumors started. He reportedly wanted out of Cleveland. He allegedly accused Kyrie and Tristan Thompson of playing "buddy ball" with each other, leaving him comparatively starved for touches and shots.

But as Mike Brown spent November searching frantically for anything that would stop the bleeding, one of the moves he made was perhaps one that was a year in the making: He shuffled the starting lineup. C.J. Miles became the starting shooting guard, and Waiters moved to the same sixth-man bench role that made him a top-five draft pick at Syracuse.

So determined was Brown to keep Waiters in that role that when Miles went down with a calf injury, Matthew Dellavedova – who will never be confused with an actual starting shooting guard – started in his place.

Waiters reportedly wasn't happy with the move – who wants to lose their starting gig? – but since moving to the bench, the progress has been palpable. Since Nov. 27, Waiters has notched five 20-point games and a 30-point game. There have still been a few clunkers in the mix (1/10 FG and 3 PTS versus the Clippers), but the good games have outpaced the bad games.

Waiters is playing with more confidence, even swagger at times. But even as Waiters starts to show signs of developing into a productive player, there are still a circus' worth of elephants in the room.

Did the Cavs really burn a No. 4 pick on a guy who was destined for a bench role? If Waiters needs the ball and Kyrie needs the ball, can they ever play together in the same backcourt and be successful? Even with the renewal of hope spawned by his recent uptick in performance, will we simply come to the conclusion that Waiters is a mismatched part in Cleveland, and bound for the trading block?

It is an odd development to have a high level of redundant scoring in the backcourt – Jarrett Jack can also chuck it – while small forward languishes, occupied by the underwhelming trio of Alonzo Gee, Earl Clark and Anthony Bennett. But scoring is scoring, no matter where it comes from. And with a roster that appears to finally be stabilizing itself after a November of horrendous turmoil and blowout losses, now might not be the time to answer the questions regarding Waiters' future in Cleveland.

If the players on this team can continue settling into their roles, absorb Brown's complicated defense well enough to execute it at a reasonably high level and score enough points to win more than they lose, the best course of action might be to let the Jell-O set for the remainder of this season.

It's a far cry from several weeks ago, when it looked like a transformational trade was the only thing that might save the season.

Chris Grant will almost certainly address the small forward position this coming summer, one way or another. And if the Cavs can sign or trade for a quality scoring forward, Waiters' presence as a bench scorer could add first-string scoring punch to the second unit – a luxury that a lot of teams don't have.

A fan base like Cleveland's, starved for a championship – and recently, just starved for winning seasons and playoff appearances – doesn't want to hear about works in progress. Fans don't want to hear front-office buzzwords like "process" and "upside." But that's exactly what the Cavs are. They're a work in progress, and all the holes and roles won't be completely filled or defined this season. Even if the Cavs roar back to claim a top-four seed in the weak Eastern Conference, all the questions won't be answered.

That includes how to best utilize the undefined widget that is Waiters. Starting shooting guard? Backup combo guard? Trade bait? Those questions will have to be answered at some point. But not right now.