

As the NBA trade deadline looms, Papa Cass takes a second to look back at what some writers have called the greatest NBA deadline deal ever. The trade that was the Cavs send Kevin Johnson, Tyrone Corbin, Mark West, and draft picks to the Phoenix Suns for Larry Nance and Mike Sanders. The deal benefitted both teams greatly, morphing both into top tier contenders for half a decade. Stay tuned to The Cleveland Fan for all the latest on any moves the Cavs make before this week's trade deadline.



One popular urban myth in Cleveland needs to be debunked right now:

The belief that Wayne Embry was a bad trader.

Embry is a less-afflicted version of Bill Buckner and Fred Merkle, his career in Cleveland mostly remembered for the one thing he did wrong instead of the many other things he did right.

Yes, he dealt Ron Harper to the Clippers for the rights to Danny Ferry. Yes, that kicked a major support beam out from under the Cavs teams of the late '80s and began a downward spiral that was complete by the time the team moved back downtown in 1994.

And yes, that move was ordered by Gordon Gund, who allegedly didn't like the company Harper was keeping.

But while we in Cleveland wail and gnash our teeth over what might have been (probably still a ton of playoff losses to the Bulls, though the teams might have developed more of a rivalry with Harper guarding Michael Jordan), we forget what is not-so-arguably Embry's best trade.

At the trade deadline in 1988, Embry sent Kevin Johnson, Tyrone Corbin, Mark West and three draft picks to the Suns for Larry Nance, Mike Sanders and a draft pick.

It might have been the best deadline deal ever executed in the NBA.

That's not just my opinion. It's also the opinion of [CNNSI . com](#)'s [Chris Ekstrand](#) .

Both teams were improved dramatically and would become playoff regulars for the next half-decade. Johnson would eventually help lead the Suns to the 1993 NBA Finals. Nance

became the most prolific shot-blocker and one of the best rebounders in Cavs history. He, Mark Price and Brad Daugherty formed the triumvirate that oversaw what is still the most successful run the franchise has seen.

It's the way trades are supposed to work. Embry found a team that was weak where his team was strong, then found a player from that team that would help strengthen one of his team's weaknesses.

He dealt Johnson, stuck behind Price on the team's depth chart at point guard, to add size and athleticism to the frontcourt.

The frontcourt trio of Sanders, Nance and Daugherty were right behind the Pistons and Celtics in terms of defensive prowess. In an era in which the Cavs had no true superstar player and had to contend with Jordan, Larry Bird and Bill Laimbeer in a beastly Eastern Conference, adding size and hops to the frontcourt was a heads-up move by Embry, and it probably kept the Cavs afloat in the East playoff picture longer, even as Harper was traded and Price fell victim to repeated injuries.

But because the East was so tough and because the Cavs, as they so often have, got lost in the shuffle of better teams and better players, the trade that Embry and Suns GM Jerry Colangelo pulled off in the winter of 1988 is a footnote.

It wasn't a sexy trade with headline-grabbing names, but it was one of the best-executed trades in NBA history from both sides. Colangelo got his recognition when he nabbed Charles Barkley and the Suns got to the Finals. Embry's reputation went in the other direction, thanks to the Harper-for-Ferry bombshell less than two years later.

It's unfortunate, because the Johnson-Nance trade illustrates that there is a significant difference between a blockbuster deal and a deal that works. One doesn't entail the other. Many times, they are mutually exclusive characteristics of big trades because it's hard for GMs to keep their itchy trigger fingers at bay.

But before NBA GMs go rolling the dice on all the Jason Kidds, Pau Gasols and Vince Carters that will supposedly be available this week, all 30 of them would be wise to study the deal Embry

and
Colangelo
struck 19 years ago. It could save a lot of teams money on headache medicine down the road.