

A Man of Action

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Thursday, February 21 2008 7:00 PM -

Pictured to the right going head to head in the paint, Ben Wallace and Wally Szczerbiak are now teammates. With the Cleveland Cavaliers! What?!? The Cavs pulled off a blockbuster today acquiring Big Ben, Wally World, Delonte West, Joe Smith, and a draft pick from the Bulls and the Sonics in a three team trade. Leaving town are Larry Hughes (good riddance), Drew Gooden, Ira Newble, Donyell Marshall, Shannon Brown, and Cedric Simmons. Gary tells us all about it.



The fiddling is over. Let the deconstruction of the move begin.

For those among us practically screaming for Cavaliers general manager Danny Ferry to do something to improve the team, his boldness in overhauling half of the Cavs current active roster was a refreshing slap in the face. With the NBA's trade deadline on the verge of once again setting on Ferry and the Cavs, Ferry's moves today signal that indeed he well understood that a roster shake-up was needed.

For most, it was enough just to hear that Larry Hughes was traded. You can imagine many, not just me, upon hearing the news that Hughes was traded think (and to paraphrase Lenny Dykstra upon hearing that Von Hayes had been traded), "great trade, who'd we get?"

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For the record, the trade is as follows: The Cavs get Wally Szcerbiak and point guard Delonte West from Seattle and Ben Wallace, forward Joe Smith and a second-round draft pick next year from the Chicago Bulls. In turn, the Bulls get Drew Gooden, Larry Hughes and Cedric Simmons from the Cavs, while the Sonics get Ira Newble, Donyell Marshall and Shannon Brown. The Sonics also got Adrian Griffin from the Bulls.

No matter what your definition of dramatic may be, this trade certainly qualifies.

I'll resist the urge to take credit [for goading Ferry into making a move](#) , mainly because that would be ridiculous. And wrong. What isn't ridiculous or wrong is that Ferry was unquestionably feeling some heat, both internally and externally, to make a move to improve this team. Failing to execute this year probably wouldn't have resulted in his losing his job, but it would have put him on very thin ice.

As it stood a few days ago, Ferry seemed poised to once again disappoint those within and outside the organization by his inability to pull the trigger on a move. The arguments, as expected, poured in that there just weren't enough tradable assets to make a difference. Frankly, it's an argument I never bought and for which I feel somewhat vindicated given today's trade. After all the Cavs made the NBA Finals last year. It seems incongruous to suggest that there could not be a way to swing a trade in that context.

Indeed it was incongruous. Trades in the NBA are difficult because of the salary cap and its often bizarre exceptions and permutations. Contracts, both in length and value, have to be considered far more in the NBA than any other sport. But other teams always seemed to find a way to make it happen and now Ferry and his counterparts in Seattle and Chicago found a way to make it work. And by making this move right now, Ferry established himself as a credible general manager throughout the league in the process.

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This isn't meant to suggest that to this point he's been a joke. It is to suggest, however, that he's been mostly a non-entity, making a lot of phone calls, talking to a lot of folks, not doing much of anything. Despite the relative inaction, he's mostly been given a pass because when you have a player like LeBron James, it covers up a lot of other sins.

There likely will be plenty of instant analysis to go around as to the merits of this trade in terms of how it improves the team this year and how it impacts its ability to maneuver down the road. At first blush, though, there is no question that this trade gives the Cavs a veteran presence and a toughness that for so long has seemed to elude them. Beyond those broad strokes, trades of this magnitude usually resist quick analysis. Whether or not this was the right deal is something that will play out over the rest of this season and resonate at least into the next one. It certainly is dramatic and has great potential. But for now, the Cavs have at least on the surface given its fans a reason other than whether James will win the MVP to stay engaged for the rest of the season.

This trade also demonstrates a strong commitment by Cavs owner Dan Gilbert. The Cavs have taken on a tremendous amount of salary by consummating this trade and also have limited much of the flexibility they thought they had going into next season. So what? It was going to happen at some point and there certainly was no guarantee that the supposed salary flexibility they had would have yielded any better results in the off season. By signing off on the trade, Gilbert let it be known that the "wait until next year" mentality that so often permeates Cleveland sports is not part of his operating philosophy.

But as with any change, particularly one of this magnitude, questions and more questions arise. Just a few for immediate consideration:

- Can head coach Mike Brown successfully integrate the new pieces with the old parts quickly and efficiently? It's a good problem to have, but a problem

nonetheless. Clearly this will be Brown's biggest challenge in his young head coaching career and will go a long way to determining Brown's real mettle as a head coach in the NBA.

- To whom will the fans now direct their enmity? Stated differently, with both Larry Hughes and Donyell Marshall toiling elsewhere, who's left to underachieve on such a grand scale? That's actually hard to say. Hughes has been mostly a disappointment irrespective of his contract. Factoring that in, he's been just this short of awful, always seeming to pull out a game or two that makes you think that he's on the verge of breaking out, a sort of Kordell Stewart of the hardwood. Marshall never did provide much to get anyone excited about. In the pantheon that is the Cavs history, he'll go down as one of the least memorable players of all time. Quick, what was his jersey number?

- What's the impact on James? This will be hard to judge because almost nothing seems to impact James' ability to perform on the court, no matter who he is surrounded by. Still, there is no question that James is more than just another player on this team. Virtually everything this franchise has done in the last few years has been with one eye on keeping James enthused about the team's short, mid and long-term prospects. The strong guess is that while James had no official say in whether this trade got made, it was done with his tacit approval.

- How many air balls will Ben Wallace offer up from the free throw line in the post season? It was almost comical watching Wallace the last few years during the playoffs struggle with free throws. But he is an enforcer and does bring an attitude that the Cavs have had trouble projecting in the past. Put it this way, teams will now think twice about abusing James knowing that Wallace has his back.

There is no way to know whether this trade will make Cavs fans happy come June. Too many variables are at play, not the least of which is an incredibly strong Western Conference where there is every likelihood that a 50-win team won't make the playoffs. But the Cavs are legitimately part of the conversation again, even if they weren't very far outside of it in the first place.