

Cavaliers fans have been anxiously anticipating the moves of Danny Ferry this summer like small children who can't fall asleep on Christmas Eve. The Cavs are flying heavy with about \$30 million in expiring contracts. LeBron James strongly hinted at the end of the Cavs-Celtics playoff series that he'd like to see some kind of improvements made to the team. Yet nothing has been done. But can you blame Danny Ferry? Erik Cassano gives us his thoughts on the matter.



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That's all the spurring our San Antonio-groomed general manager should need, right? It's all a matter of going out and waving some tantalizing expiring contracts under the nose of a team with a superstar or two in need of a rebuild, and LeBron will officially have his Pippen, and we can start planning that NBA championship parade to Public Square for next June.

Well, it's mid-July, the draft is past tense, the NBA's free agency period has been underway for a couple of weeks now, and all the big names available have pretty much changed addresses already, to places other than Cleveland.

Richard Jefferson is in Milwaukee, which can be taken as a strong indicator that Michael Redd isn't going anywhere anytime soon. Baron Davis is a Clipper, Corey Maggette is a Warrior, Elton Brand is a Sixer and Cavs front-office favorite

Mickael Pietrus jumped to Orlando.

Ferry made a play for James Posey, the battle-tested swingman who played such an important role in allowing the Celtics to hold off the Cavs this spring, but ultimately finished second to the Hornets.

So far, the only basketball news of the summer in Cleveland is that first round pick J.J. Hickson dropped 26 points and nine boards in his summer league debut, and on Wednesday, Daniel Gibson completed the formality of agreeing to a five-year, \$20 million contract. Like he was going anywhere. He's affordable and the Cavs' best shooter. His re-signing was as close to a foregone conclusion as you are going to find in the world of restricted free agency.

As much as you might still be crossing your fingers and hoping against all hope that Ferry does something, anything, to improve the Cavs' chances at unseating the Celtics as the league's champs next spring, you will likely be forced to admit that you see the giant letters known commonly as the "handwriting on the wall";

When Danny Ferry says he likes the makeup of this roster, he means he likes the makeup of this roster. You might disagree, but Ferry's opinion is what matters. In other words, once the Delonte West contract situation is resolved one way or the other, that's probably going to bring the curtain down on the offseason as far as major moves are concerned.

West's restricted free agency and contract negotiations -- which might turn out to be noticeably more suspenseful than Gibson's -- is the only real drama left to play out for the Cavs before training camp opens. If the Cavs do make a headline-grabbing move, the guess is it will be to acquire a point guard because negotiations with West have stalled out, or West is about to sign an offer sheet that Ferry has no interest in matching. But if I were a betting man, I'd still place my chips on the side that says the Cavs and West will hammer out a deal before camp starts.

Other than that, there might be a few minor tweaks. The Cavs will probably use a portion of their midlevel exception to sign one or two Devin Brown types, and there is a chance that Damon Jones, who spent most of the playoffs rotting on the bench, will be dealt, but the early edition of the 2008-09 Cavs will probably look suspiciously similar to the Cavs squad that was knocked out by the Celtics.

Is it playing with fire to stand pat when LeBron's potential free agency looms a mere 24 months from now? Well, no matter what Ferry does or does not do, it's a roll of the dice. Stand pat, and other teams -- like the Celtics -- might seize the opportunity and blast right by you. Make aggressive moves, and you could end up in salary cap hell, riveted to a bunch of lousy deals doled out to aging players.

If a team is willing to deal one of their stars for expiring contracts, it's normally because that star player is signed to a gargantuan deal and the trading team wants to get out from under the contract. Those kinds of deals look attractive in the short term, but can absolutely kill the long term flexibility of the team receiving the star player. It's generally a bad idea to make short term deals for long term contracts, particularly if the player you acquire has or will soon reach the big 3-0.

With all that in mind, if Ferry stands pat and makes no major moves for the remainder of the offseason, here is what he's banking on:

### **1. Familiarity will make last February's blockbuster look better.**

The deal that brought West, Ben Wallace, Wally Szczerbiak and Joe Smith to town didn't have the shot-in-the-arm effect that everyone was hoping for. The revamped Cavs accomplished what the Larry Hughes-Donyell Marshall group likely would have: 45 wins and a second-round exit.

Now this group will come to camp with a playoff run under their belts and the knowledge that they'll have an entire season together to learn each other's games and learn Mike Brown's schemes. This is probably better than a 45-win team, but injuries and upheaval took their toll. Ferry probably wants to give the current roster time to jell before he starts changing more pieces in and out.

### **2. Boston will come back to Earth, at least a little bit.**

After watching the Cavs, without homecourt advantage, give the Celtics everything they could handle short of an upset, Ferry is probably pretty confident that this Cavs team can take out anyone in the East in a seven game series. The Celtics stayed remarkably healthy last year for a team built around a core of 30-somethings, they played with a determination to win not seen in the league since the heyday of Michael Jordan, and they had a cast of reliable role players fronted by Posey.

The injury bug might bite Boston a bit harder this year, and even if it doesn't, it's hard to imagine the Celtics spending themselves to win 60-plus regular season games again next season without suffering dire consequences in the playoffs. To top it off, Posey is gone, eliminating a huge thorn in the Cavs' side from this spring's playoffs.

The East is always subject to change. The Magic continue to get stronger, but won't ever pose a threat to win the conference until Dwight Howard can perform at the level of LeBron and Kevin Garnett in the playoffs. The Sixers added a major piece in Brand, but he's coming back from an Achilles' tendon injury and, even if he's healthy, Philadelphia's roster still has some large holes.

Detroit could come out of nowhere and deal for Tracy McGrady. But if that kind of fairy tale wheeling and dealing doesn't happen, Ferry likely believes that his team, as presently constructed, can get back to the NBA Finals and maybe win it.

### **3. Some teams that think they have a shot at winning could be singing a different tune in February (I'm looking at you, Milwaukee).**

Right now is a time for optimism. Right now, Bucks fans are ecstatic that Jefferson and Redd will team up on a playoff run. Right now, the Hawks are one of the rising young teams in the East, as are the Sixers. Right now, the Nets are apparently content to build around Vince Carter. Right now, the Bobcats, with Larry Brown calling the shots, are poised to possibly make a run at their first playoff berth.

Chances are, one or more of those dreams will be shattered by the time the trading deadline is in sight, and Ferry might have a better chances of gleaning one of the above mentioned players at that point.

As we sit and watch the summer progress, some fans are sharpening their Ferry-shredding instruments, waiting to pounce if the leaves start turning and the Cavs don't have a second perennial all-star in camp. Start shredding now if that's the case, because despite what the one-in-a-million story of the 2008 Boston Celtics might tell you, the other 99 percent of the time, good things come to those who wait.