

Thank You Knicks

Written by {ga=diminishingskills}
Sunday, November 23 2008 7:00 PM -

The Cavs visit Madison Square Garden tomorrow night to take on a Knicks team that just made a couple of major trades, unloading Jamal Crawford on the Warriors and Zach Randolph to the Clippers. The predictable consensus from the national media was that LeBron James can start shopping for a new home in Manhattan any day now. The reality? The Knicks just did the Cavs a huge favor. John Hnat explains in his latest.



The New York Knicks have just done the Cavs a huge favor.

Didn't expect to read that, did you?

The consensus on the Knicks' moves this past Friday - first [trading Jamal Crawford](#) to the Warriors for Al Harrington, and then [dealing Zach Randolph and Mardy Collins](#) to the Clippers for Cuttino Mobley and Tim Thomas - was that LeBron James can start shopping for a new home in Manhattan any day now.

Although both of these trades make some sense from a pure talent perspective, the real story is that the Knicks traded away two longer-term contracts (Crawford and Randolph) and received several players whose contracts will expire in 2010.

Not coincidentally, many marquee stars - none bigger than King James - are set to become free agents that summer.

James's proposed departure to The Big Apple has been regarded as a done deal for some time now, at least by many media members who have a vested interest in such a move. (If you're a New York-based writer, it's much easier to write stories about the game's best player when he is a Knick than when he is a Cavalier.)

The exact landing pad has been in some question - the Knicks were always the sentimental favorite, but LeBron's friendship with Nets minority owner Jay-Z made many think that LeBron would want to play for them instead.

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Now that the Nets' move from New Jersey to Brooklyn has been delayed indefinitely, the Knicks have become The Preferred Destination.

And then they went and spoiled it all by doing something stupid like nuking their team.

Okay, "nuking" is a relative term. Randolph is a different kind of King - the King of Empty Statistics. He will average 20 and 10 a

night, and his teams will lose.
's what he did in Portland.

It

It's what he did in New York.

And it is what he will do in Los Angeles.

Crawford is a useful shooting guard, and a player who can put a lot of points on the board in a hurry, but he's not quite an elite guard, nor is he perceived as a player who improves the game of those around him.

Maybe instead of "nuking", the word we should use here is "exposing". The Knicks' trades expose them for what they are - a team that has next to nothing talent-wise.

In 2010, here is what the Knicks will have on their roster:

- The \$11 million-per-season carcass of Eddy Curry (although the Knicks will assuredly do everything they can to dispose of him by then; or failing that, holding the Mother of All Bake Sales to raise the money to buy out the rest of his contract);
- The player option year of Jared Jeffries (see above comment re: trades and bake sales, as they apply to Jeffries as well; note that your career probably isn't going so well when a fan sponsors your [Basketball Reference page](#) to advocate sending you out of town);
- Nate Robinson (assuming he is re-signed; he is a restricted free agent this offseason);
- David Lee (also a restricted free agent next summer);
- Danilo Gallinari (who already, at the age of 20, has a contacts list full of orthopedists and back specialists);
- Wilson Chandler (a promising young player who ...oops... plays small forward, the exact same position as LeBron).

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They'll also have whatever player they select next year in the NBA draft (they do not have a first-round pick in 2010). That's it.

So that gives the Knicks maybe four other useful players to put around LeBron (and that number is dubious). What about the rest of the team? The Conventional Wisdom says that the Knicks will be able to sign not only LeBron, but maybe one or two other superstars as well.

Imagine Bron and Chris Bosh, or Bron and Amare Stoudemire, or Bron and Dwyane Wade, wearing the same laundry.

The Conventional Wisdom isn't always very wise.

To win in the NBA, you need to have a rotation of at least eight quality players, and (at least during the regular season) more like ten. If your key reserves are guys who should have retired two years ago, or kids who should still be in college or the NBDL, then you're in trouble, no matter how much star power you have up front. Denver learned this lesson the hard way the past two seasons - they traded for Allen Iverson to pair with Carmelo Anthony, but did not have a strong enough supporting cast to win, even with those two stars.

The Cavs (particularly GM Danny Ferry) recognize this. That is why they have built a team that is top-to-bottom strong. Look at the team that the Cavs will field in 2010:

- Mo Williams, a legitimate point guard who can also create his own shot and knock down open jumpers;
- Delonte West, who has elevated his game this season, and (with Williams) gives the Cavs one of the strongest backcourts in the game;
- Daniel Gibson, who is one of the top three-point shooters in the league, a recent slump notwithstanding;
- Anderson Varejao (assuming he re-signs, which is a much more likely possibility than it seemed a year ago);
- J.J. Hickson, a promising (though raw) young player;
- Darnell Jackson, who is really an unknown at this point, but was a valuable contributor to some strong Kansas teams.

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Never mind that the Cavs should have a good chance at getting "veteran discount" type deals with Zydrunas Ilgauskas and Ben Wallace. Neither of them is quite what they were a few years ago, but both are still very effective contributors when limited to 20-25 minutes per night.

Based on current team members alone, the Cavs will be able to field a much more competitive team in 2010 than will the Knicks. And we haven't even gotten to the Cavs' ace in the hole yet.

Much of the NBA (including the Knicks) is trying to jettison players with longer contracts in order to make a run at LeBron (or Wade, or Bosh, or whoever) in 2010.

That strategy plays right into the hands of a team like the Cavs, a team that is poised to win now, and that can perhaps pick up a veteran star for fifty cents on the dollar in this season or next.

What if the Cavs can bring a Vince Carter (not advocating it; just trying to put a name on this idea) into the fold, as a desperate Nets team tries to rebuild itself?

What if the Clippers, headed for their 250 millionth losing season dating back to the Paleozoic Era, decides that a thirtysomething Marcus Camby is not in their long-term plans?

If there has been one consistent theme in LeBron's comments about where he wants to play in 2010, it is that he wants to play for a true championship contender. He wants rings. (Plural.) To get where he wants to go career-wise, he needs to win multiple titles.

The question LeBron will need to ask himself is whether a team of Williams/West/Varejao/Gibson/Hickson/potentially an additional star represents a better supporting cast than Robinson/Lee/Gallinari/Chandler.

The related question is whether the defense-first philosophy of Cavs coach Mike Brown is more likely to yield titles than the "seven seconds or less", defense-optional approach of Knicks coach Mike D'Antoni.

(Hint:

It is, by several magnitudes.)

If the Knicks want to put themselves in a position where their weaknesses are ever more apparent, we as Cavs fans should be grateful. LeBron already played wet nurse for a low-talent

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cast in his first couple of seasons (say, what are Darius Miles and Milt Palacio doing these days?). As he enters the prime of his career, the last thing he is going to want to do is relive those days.

Maybe you believe that selling a few more jerseys will make up for that.

I tend to think not.

And everything James has said suggests that he tends to think not either.