

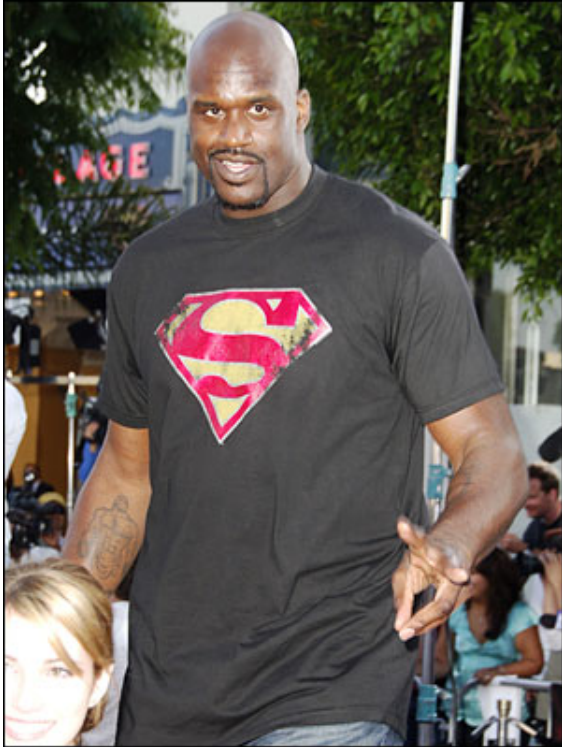
## It's Official ... Shaq Is A Cav

Written by {ga=samamico}

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Chances are, folks in Cleveland won't be talking about the NBA draft today. Chances are, they'll be talking about their renewed faith in the team with the league's best regular-season record. Chances are, the topic will be LeBron James' new teammate, a 37-year old mammoth of a man with four championship rings. Shaquille O'Neal is a Cav ... and Sam talks about the trade, which just developed late tonight. And says that the Cavs are not done tinkering.



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But the Cavs' summer likely only begins with last night's trade that sent Ben Wallace and Sasha Pavlovic to Phoenix for none other than Shaquille O'Neal.

Let's start with the obvious.

As the Cavs and their fans must be sick of hearing by now, Orlando exposed a few weaknesses in the Eastern Conference finals. One was their inability to defend Magic center Dwight Howard (the Cavs, of course, aren't alone in this plight).

Does Shaq solve that issue? Maybe, maybe not. But you have to figure he can defend Howard a whole heck of a lot better than Wallace, Pavlovic or whoever the Cavs would have selected with the No. 46 pick (also traded to Phoenix) ever could.

When it comes to interior defense, Shaq is already the best the Cavs have had in the LeBron era.

Then there's the small matter of defending the perimeter against the Magic's ball-swinging, inside-out attack. You remember Hedo Turkoglu and Rashard Lewis, don't you? You sure do if you're a Cavs fan -- as you probably still have nightmares about all those blown leads by your favorite team and big 3-pointers by the other guys.

Obviously, O'Neal isn't going to play lockdown defense on the wing. But he can make it so the Cavs will no longer have to double-team Howard in the low post, enabling the Cavs' other defenders to stay glued to Orlando's perimeter shooters.

Now, let's keep in mind that the Cavs aren't basing their entire summer on beating only the Magic. They understand 2008 champion Boston still lurks. They know Atlanta and especially Washington just got better with nice trades of their own.

Mostly, they realize that finishing with the home-court advantage throughout the playoffs is simply not enough.

So landing O'Neal is quite possibly just the beginning of things.

The Cavs are likely seeking to add at least one more swingman-type, someone who is long and athletic with good range on the jump shot. That's especially the case now that Pavlovic has been traded and unrestricted free agent Wally Szczerbiak is all but gone. And with Szczerbiak's \$13 million contract coming off the books, the Cavs have the power to make something else happen.

Phoenix's Matt Barnes is an unrestricted free agent and might fit well. San Antonio's Ime Udoka is also available. Toronto's Shawn Marion (the man whom the Suns originally traded to land Shaq) would be another nice addition -- although Marion would be pricey and it's already been reported that the Cavs aren't interested.

Of course, the Cavs still have a first-round pick (as of this morning). Forget for a moment that the pick is the very last one of the first round. Every once in a while, you can find a player at No. 30. After all, Carlos Boozer wasn't selected until No. 34.

Then again, it's obvious the Cavs don't want to be waiting around on prospects. The trade for O'Neal proves they are all about the here and now, and mostly, the very next season.

And the lineup possibilities are endless.

Cavs coach Mike Brown can go with O'Neal at center and 7-foot-3 center Zydrunas Ilgauskas at power forward, bringing Anderson Varejao off the bench (and yes, you can expect free agent Varejao to re-sign with the team). He can start Varejao and bring Ilgauskas off the bench at either frontcourt position. He can play O'Neal 24-28 minutes a game during the regular season -- saving him for the playoffs and giving young big men J.J. Hickson and Darnell Jackson more

opportunities as they continue to develop.

And here's a question no one else seems to be asking: Will anyone possibly out-rebound the Cavs next season? Seriously, between Shaq, LeBron, Big Z and the Wild Thing, the Cavs should put a sign on the backboard warning opponents to box out at their own risk.

Bottom line? The Cavs were good enough to have won the title this past season, but they didn't. And it's clear GM Danny Ferry isn't going to sit around, twiddle his thumbs, wait for the summer to end and, you know, hope for the best.

Ferry and the Cavs have bigger plans and they showed it by going out and getting the league's biggest man.

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