

With Drew Gooden demanding 6 years and 60 million dollars in free agency, the Cavaliers find themselves in a bit of a predicament with the talented, enigmatic, and often airheaded young power forward. In Cassano's latest, he lays out what all of Danny Ferry's options are with Drew, who is a restricted free agent.



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Now that LeBron James has pledged allegiance to the Cavaliers through at least 2010, attention can now shift to the back-page saga that Drew Gooden's contract negotiations are becoming.

The sides are reportedly miles apart with no immediate hope of building a bridge.

Gooden wants the type of money Nuggets forward Nene just received in his ridiculous six-year, \$60 million contract extension. From Gooden's standpoint, it makes sense. Time will probably prove that Gooden is a better player than Nene, and if Nene is getting big bucks, Gooden wants his share too.

The problem is, he isn't worth it. Not yet. And the Cavs would be foolish to tie themselves to Gooden for the next four or five years with an eight-figure annual salary.

The Cavs know it, which is a credit to them. Too often, one desperate team sets the going rate for players at a give position way too high, and too often, teams cave and overpay out of fear of losing their players.

The sides are closing in on an impasse quickly. If direct negotiations with Gooden's agent yield nothing in the very near future, I expect Cavs GM Danny Ferry to pack his briefcase, leave the negotiating table, and try to figure out another way to resolve the situation.

If negotiations reach the point of no return, here are the main options Ferry has:

1. Ferry can do nothing and let Gooden test the free agent waters.

The Cavs have the right to match any offer for Gooden this summer. Ferry can bank on the educated guess that Gooden won't find much more than midlevel salary cap exemption money out there, a little over \$5 million per year. If Gooden signs an offer sheet with another team for that kind of money, Ferry can match it.

But if that's all that is out there for Gooden, he'll probably come slinking back to the Cavs for another round of negotiations.

That strategy can backfire, however. If there is a team out there willing to pay big money for Gooden, or sign him to a front-loaded contract, the Cavs might be forced to let Gooden go and get nothing in return.

2. Ferry can sign Gooden to a one-year qualifying offer.

This might be what happens if Gooden finds the free agent market to be fruitless. It's the route I'd like to see the Cavs take if Gooden ends up back on their doorstep.

A one-year deal might light the biggest fire under Gooden's behind. If he plays for the one-year qualifying offer (about \$5 million), he knows he's playing for an unrestricted free agent contract next summer. Either he's going to cement himself as an elite player at his position, or he's going to be cast as a journeyman.

Next summer, the Cavs would have no financial obligation to Gooden, which should offer the team a bit more flexibility. That's important since Anderson Varejao is eligible for restricted free agency next year.

3. Ferry can package Gooden in a sign-and-trade deal.

You have to be cautious with this option. If Ferry is going to take a long-term contract on in return for Gooden, he has to make sure that player is someone he can build with. If he takes on a bunch of expiring contracts and draft picks, he runs the risk of being saddled with a ton of dead weight this coming season.

As I have said before, every season LeBron is under contract is an important season. The days of foisting Shawn Kemp off on the Blazers for spare parts like Clarence Weatherspoon and Chris Gatling are over.

Some intriguing teams are interested in Gooden, such as Phoenix. If Ferry could figure out a way to pry Leandro Barbosa loose from the Suns, he could hit a sign-and-trade home run. Barbosa is widely regarded as one of the best backup point guards in the league, and might soon be worthy of running his own show. That won't happen in Phoenix, who has a guy named Steve Nash running the point. I hear he's pretty good.

In any case in which they lose Gooden, Ferry has to make sure he has a new plan in place. Varejao hasn't yet shown he's capable of playing big minutes without racking up fouls at an alarming rate, so if the Cavs part ways with Gooden, Ferry has to make sure he can line up another big man either in free agency or through a trade.