

A Man Of Inaction

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

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With point guards Mike Bibby and Jason Kidd headed to new homes, the debate has flared once again in our Cavs message forum. Is Danny Ferry a poor GM that is afraid to act and too willing to stay the course with a team most feel is not good enough to win a title? Or is Danny active behind the scenes and simply saddled with a roster that is devoid of tradeable parts? Gary Benz gives his take on The Great Ferry Debate in his latest ...



Rome may not be exactly burning, but that doesn't mean that Danny Ferry isn't fiddling. Again.

The news that Mike Bibby and Jason Kidd, two point guards who might look quite good in a Cavaliers uniform, are headed somewhere other than Cleveland probably disappointed many but isn't much of a shock. The NBA's trading deadline is looming a few days from now and the Cavaliers again don't appear to be very active there, either. The Cavs, under Ferry's leadership as general manager, have been in status quo mode for so long now the franchise is essentially on auto pilot.

For the third straight year, the Cavs entered the NBA season with essentially the same lineup, opting again to "stay the course." Sure, they added a few fringe players here and subtracted a few others there, but the core of the team today is the same as it has been for three straight years. It wasn't a group good enough to win a NBA title last year and it isn't a group good enough to win it this year, next year or any year for that matter. That doesn't mean the Cavs aren't a good team. They just aren't a good enough team.

Right about now, there are a number of you reading this that are ready to attack, telling me how the Cavs didn't have the right pieces to consummate either the Bibby or the Kidd trade and that may be technically correct. But that's not really the point. You can deconstruct any trade, compare it to the Cavs current lineup and come up with any number of reasons why the Cavs could not have or should not have made a similar trade. It's what Ferry seems to do with most of his time.

The picture that is emerging of Ferry is that he is risk adverse. It's a far easier path to find reasons not to do something than to do it and right now, it's the space Ferry seems most comfortable occupying. It's a way of operating when your fear of failure is greater than your desire for success. If you looked at Ferry's financial portfolio, you'd no doubt find it was heavily weighted with low-yielding bonds and few, if any stocks. He follows a strategy designed much more to reduce the number of dips than to increase the height of the peaks.

One of the more puzzling aspects about all of this is the silence of Cavs owner Dan Gilbert. He's a risk taker by nature, which is how he built his fortune. Maybe he thinks that Ferry provides the yang to his yin but at some point, if he's not there already, Gilbert is going to wonder how Los Angeles and Dallas and Phoenix and even lowly Atlanta can manage to pull off trades of consequence while his team and his general manager are again sitting in the corner sucking their thumb.

This isn't to suggest that Ferry has been completely ineffective as a general manager. His tough stances with both Sasha Pavlovic and Anderson Varejao in the off-season were exactly the right move. Signing either to above-market contracts may have felt good in the short run to some fans, but by using the little leverage that general managers rarely get, he helped preserve financial flexibility down the road.

But given Ferry's aversion to the bold stroke, one should rightfully wonder if he'll ever be able to parlay that flexibility he so rightly courted into a roster than can win a title. The seeds of doubt on that one are starting to germinate.

In many ways, the NBA is a far greater sink or swim league than any other. It's odd mixture of a relatively hard cap and numerous, bizarre exceptions can work to make bad teams good and good teams great far more quickly than any other sport. But in the end, the spoils of victory go to those teams that can best manage the cap. Those who cannot, like the New York Knicks, can find themselves in purgatory year after year after year.

There is no question that Ferry is sincerely trying to manage the cap in an attempt to build that juggernaut franchise with a legitimate chance to with the NBA crown every year. Exactly when is the question. He has as big a head start as any team in the league with LeBron James in the fold. But as last year's NBA Finals proved titles cannot be won on the backs of just one player. At some point, a more cohesive and complete team is needed or else you end up like the Minnesota Timberwolves with Kevin Garnett. Garnett will probably win a NBA title, but we now know it won't ever be with the T-Wolves. Right now, it's a road the Cavs under Ferry seem destined to follow.

Ferry's sincerity notwithstanding, there is no doubt that he's treading precipitously close to the danger zone when it comes to James. The popular theory is that James will bolt Cleveland the first chance he gets for the supposed more lucrative riches of a bigger market. It's a theory that might make sense for a lesser figure, but not in the case of James. Those who know James respect his deep commitment to his roots and his desire to be part of a NBA championship here. James is already one of the most recognizable persons on the planet. Given that status, playing in New York, for example, will do little to further enhance his brand.

James already has far more money than he and several generations after him could ever spend. He's in line, too, for much, much more that will come no matter where he plays. In other words, money isn't the issue. James, like Tiger Woods, is motivated much more by accomplishments. He wants to win and win it all. If he leaves, it will be for the opportunity that affords him the best opportunity, not the one that only affords him the most money.

That's why the situation with Ferry and James is on a collision course, even if no one in Cavs management wants to admit it. If the Cavs want to retain James, they are going to have to demonstrate in dramatic terms that they are committed to putting a team on the floor capable of winning it all. A new practice facility and a tricked-out locker room are always nice amenities. But if they don't bring in the kind of players seriously capable of winning a championship, then they are all for naught.

Ferry can't simply wait until James has one foot out the door to step forward with a move that might make a difference. With James captive for the next two seasons, the time is now. In fact, the Cavs and Ferry are operating on borrowed time as it is.

It might make a difference, though not much, if Ferry was more vocal with his intentions. True, he can't run afoul of league tampering rules by discussing potential acquisitions, but it would be helpful if he articulated a plan with some clarity. Instead, he remains mostly silent letting few if any know what his plans might really be. Thus, we're left mostly to discern the actions, or in Ferry's case, the inactions.

The only question now is how long Gilbert can tolerate watching Ferry fritter away the opportunities that James presents. It can't be much longer.

It may not be clear which team will win the NBA title this year as there are a number of legitimate candidates, such as Boston, San Antonio, Phoenix and Dallas. The Los Angeles Lakers trade for Pau Gasol further altered the landscape in the NBA's Western Conference, though whether they really have enough horsepower to compete in that conference or whether they are that conference's version of the Cavaliers remains to be seen. What doesn't however is that the Cavs have no shot at the title, not as presently configured.

For now and forevermore, at least under Ferry, the Cavs will continue to achieve

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goodness. Greatness is a few players and a better general manager off in the distance.