It

It's easy, isn't it? Making a trade in the NBA, that is. We live in an age with the NBA Trade Machine (which will someday replace sliced bread in sentences that include the words "the best thing since …"), which makes it simple for armchair GMs to propose deals.

That mode of thinking has led to the common belief among Cavs fans that a mid-season trade is inevitable. Not only will a mid-season trade happen; it will involve a superstar coming to Cleveland. We don't know *how* it will happen, but we know that it *will*. Right?

Not so fast.

The funny thing about trades is that they have to work for all sides involved (unless one of those sides happens to be the Memphis Grizzlies). So the question becomes: what do the Cavaliers have to offer in trade? Most NBA trades, especially deals that occur before the trade deadline in February, are not straight talent-for-talent swaps. Usually, one team is looking to get better *right this minute*, while the other team is willing to sacrifice some wins now in hopes that they will be better in the future.

That means that a team looking to get better *right this minute* (which would include the Cavaliers at mid-season) has three commodities to offer in exchange:

1. Young players;
2. Draft picks;

3. Players with expiring contracts.

Notice that this list explains why the Cavs could not be players in the trade market in 2006 and 2007 – they had *absolutely none* of these three commodities. Okay, they do have the best young player on the planet, but that makes him about as untouchable as it gets. Fortunately, the Cavs have restocked the cupboard, and now have trade chips in all three categories:

1. *Young players*: Players like Delonte West, Daniel Gibson, Anderson Varejao, Sasha Pavlovic, and J.J. Hickson could be available if the right deal presented itself. (No, I am NOT saying that the Cavs WILL trade any of these players; I am saying that the potential is there.)

2. *Draft picks*: For the first time since the Paleozoic Era, the Cavs have all of their draft picks in upcoming drafts. They are not Stepien Ruled from including any future first-round picks in a trade.

3. *Expiring contracts*: The big expiring contract is Wally Szczerbiak's $13 million deal. Eric Snow (who will earn $7.3 million) is also technically an expiring contract; however, the luxury tax relief offered by having him retire as a Cavalier means that he probably is not going anywhere. Technically, two other Cavs could be free agents if they decline player options: Zydrunas Ilgauskas ($11.5 million option for 2009-10) and Anderson Varejao ($6.2 million option). The general consensus seems to be that Ilgauskas will exercise his option, but that Varejao will decline his.

So the Cavs should be able to go shopping when trade season arrives. That leads us to the second question: who might be available in a trade? That's where we run into some problems. That's where we enter the world of South Park's underpants gnomes. Phase I is expiring contracts. Phase III is a superstar. But what is Phase

II?

Unfortunately for the Cavs (and us as fans), I don't see how we get there from here. Sure, they have a huge trade chip with Wally's expiring contract. That chip makes sense only in exchange for a player with a multi-year contract. For example, Miami's Shawn Marion and Denver's Allen Iverson both have large contracts that expire at the end of this season. Why would either one of those teams trade those players to Cleveland for Wally (and whatever other contract filler is needed to make the numbers work)? The contracts are coming off the books at the end of this season anyway.

In a similar vein, some teams are under the salary cap. Take Charlotte. They have some players (Jason Richardson, Raymond Felton, Gerald Wallace) who would be interesting. But they have no real need to trade them for an expiring contract, as they are not over the cap. (Although there is the possibility that they could go "full Memphis" and try to cut costs as low as possible.) So the one thing that Wally's contract offers – salary cap relief starting in the summer of 2009 – is not something that every team needs.

With those thoughts in mind, let's set the criteria for a potential acquisition as a good player who is signed through at least the 2010 season. From that, we can exclude young star players

(why would Minnesota trade Al Jefferson, or Charlotte trade Emeka Okafor, or Orlando trade Dwight Howard?) as well as players on likely playoff teams (it's doubtful that Boston, Detroit, New Orleans, the Lakers, etc. are going to be sellers come February). Actually, "we" don't have to do this; I've already done it for us. Here's the resulting list (alphabetical order):

* Leandro Barbosa (signed through 2010-11; player option for 2011-12)
* Marcus Camby (signed through 2009-10)
* Vince Carter (signed through the 2010-11 season with a team option for 2011-12)
* Eddy Curry (signed through 2008-09, with player options in each of the next two seasons)
* Erick Dampier (signed through 2010-11)
* Mike Dunleavy (signed through 2010-11)
* Al Harrington (signed through 2009-10)
* Udonis Haslem (signed through 2009-10)
* Kirk Hinrich (signed through 2011-12)
* Joe Johnson (signed through 2009-10)
* Kenyon Martin (signed through 2009-10; player option for 2010-11)
* Darko Milicic (signed through 2009-10)
* Brad Miller (signed through 2009-10)
* Mike Miller (signed through 2009-10)
* Troy Murphy (signed through 2010-11)
* Nene (signed through 2010-11; player option for 2011-12)
* Dirk Nowitzki (signed through 2009-10; player option for

2010-11)
* Jermaine O'Neal (signed through 2009-10; and if Toronto tanks to the point where they are looking to unload Jermaine, then the Cavs probably would not want him)
* Shaquille O'Neal (signed through 2009-10)
* Zach Randolph (signed through 2010-11)
* Michael Redd (signed through 2009-10; player option for 2010-11)
* Jason Terry (signed through 2011-12)

Again, this list gives you an idea of the *possible*, not necessarily what will actually be *available*. For example, I listed several Dallas players as possibilities, based on a feeling that Dallas is going to land with a huge thud this season; but maybe they do have one more season in them.

Scan that list. Do any names jump out at you? The ones that jump out the most at me – Joe Johnson and Dirk Nowitzki – are at the far end of the "will they possibly be available?" scale. Vince Carter would probably be very available, but do you want to be on the hook for four more seasons to a guard on the wrong side of 30? Otherwise, there are a lot of decent players available – the Brad Millers and Mike Dunleavys of the world – but nobody who is going to be the Robin to LeBron's Batman.

Time out here. I've used the Batman/Robin analogy for the last time. It's been an incredibly overused reference point for describing how LeBron needs a quality star at his side. I am hereby declaring that I will never use that analogy again. (Until I slip and mention it, that is.)

Besides, I'm not sure we are looking in the right place for an additional player. Consider this Indian woman, who killed a would-be attacker and then paraded through public while carrying his head. THAT is the type of inside presence the Cavs need. Put her at power forward, and we'll see if Tony Parker or CP3 ever tries to drive to the hole again! They'll be taking three-pointers from nowhere closer than Euclid. (Note to those guys: say hi to Damon Jones while you're out there.)

Okay, back to business. The other item to consider: do the Cavs want to take on a contract that extends past 2010? As they stand right now, they will have enough cap room in 2010 to both re-sign LeBron and to offer a max contract to another superstar, while still retaining Mo Williams, Daniel Gibson, Delonte West, and J.J. Hickson (I am assuming the Indian woman will be paid the veteran minimum). Do the Cavs want to foreclose the possibility of adding, say, Chris Bosh in 2010? If

they acquire a player signed for significant dollars beyond 2010, that's exactly what they will be doing.

Put all of the pieces of this puzzle together, and I do not see the Rob … er, second star player arriving in a midseason trade. So please, don't be too disappointed if Danny Ferry cannot turn Wally's expiring deal into the power forward of our dreams. The chances of another earthquake type trade are slim. What we see on the roster today is probably very close to what we'll see when the playoffs start next April … and that's not a bad thing.