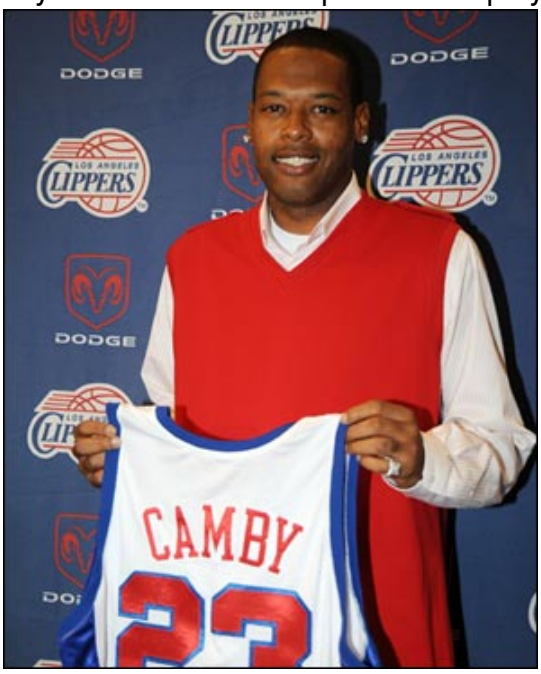
After months and months of hypothesizing, scrutinizing and rumormongering, the NBA's trading deadline is now less than three weeks away -- 3 p.m. Eastern Time on Feb. 19. And Wally Szczerbiak's $13.775 million expiring contract might be the most important bargaining chip in the league. In Erik Cassano's latest, he takes a look at seven players linked with the Cavs and a potential Wally trade. He handicaps them as players and the odds of them coming to Cleveland.



As far as NBA players go, Wally Szczerbiak is kind of plain.

Sure, he has a funky last name with multiple Z's, and you don't find too many modern-era NBA players who go by "Wally." But beyond that, he's a serviceable role player on the Cavaliers bench, a guy who can knock down a few jumpers, guard a couple of different positions and high-five everyone in sight.

Szczerbiak doesn't even sport visible tattoos. This in a league where arm, neck, chest and back ink is as much of a birthright as penthouse suites and limousine service.

But as the calendar marches into February, Wally Szczerbiak is the man on every Cavs fan's mind. If you don't know the reason why, feel free to rejoin the living world anytime now.

After months and months of hypothesizing, scrutinizing and rumormongering, the NBA's trading deadline is now less than three weeks away -- 3 p.m. Eastern Time on Feb. 19. And Szczerbiak's $13.775 million expiring contract might be the most important bargaining chip in the league.

Of the league's top four teams -- the Cavs, Lakers, Celtics and Magic -- Cleveland

has the most ready-made solution for adding a major piece before the deadline.

NBA rules state that a team over the salary cap can use an exception in a two-team trade to acquire contracts equalling up to 125 percent plus $100,000 of the outgoing contract or contracts. That means Szczerbiak's contract could allow the Cavs to acquire a player or players totalling up to about $17.3 million this NBA fiscal year, should owner Dan Gilbert be willing to take on that much extra salary.

Of course, it's not quite that simple. In order to perform a significant roster upgrade, Danny Ferry has to find a team willing to take on Szczerbiak's contract in exchange for what would likely be one of their core players. That means finding a front office that is eyeing a rebuild, or a team that is thoroughly disenchanted with a high-priced player in need of a change of scenery. Example A would be the Larry Hughes for Ben Wallace swap the Cavs and Bulls conducted a year ago.

Other players Ferry might potentially consider -- such as Washington's Antawn Jamison and the Clippers' Marcus Camby -- make less than Szczerbiak, which would require further maneuvering by Ferry, possibly to the point of getting a third team involved.

That's all assuming Ferry will even deal Szczerbiak. With the recent rash of injuries to Cleveland's backcourt, and the recent uptick in Szczerbiak's performance, Ferry might come to the conclusion that the best course of action is to sit tight and wait for Delonte West and Tarence Kinsey to return from injury.

But this is a column about trades, so below are some of the Cavs' possible trade targets, their upsides and downsides, and a percentage chance of acquiring the player. Statistics are as of Tuesday evening.

Antawn Jamison, Washington Wizards

2008-09: 21.3 PPG, 9.2 RPG

Upside: Jamison is a points and rebounds machine who would fit very well as a member of the Cavs bench corps. A career small forward who has transitioned to the power forward spot in Washington, Jamison is a durable 32-year-old who now has veteran savvy to go along with his wide array of skills.

Downside: He is signed for three more years, and this year is slated to make $9.9 million. He grabs rebounds, but won't provide a lot in the way of low-post scoring. His bread and butter is his mid-range shooting touch -- which is valuable, but if you're looking for a rugged bumper-grinder to wear down the likes of Kevin Garnett and Dwight Howard, Jamison is not your guy.

Another potential problem is his $9.9 million salary. As mentioned above, that could make fitting Jamison into a trade for Szczerbiak somewhat difficult. A third team might have to get involved. That's assuming the Wizards would even trade their best player to the Cavs, their long-time tormentors.

Jamison to the Cavs: 10 percent

Marcus Camby, Los Angeles Clippers

2008-09: 11.7 PPG, 13.1 RPG, 2.5 BPG

Upside: Camby will turn 35 in March, but he's still one of the premier defensive big men in the game. He can score to the tune of double figures per game, but it's his defense, rebounding and shot blocking that set his game apart.

If the Cavs had Camby patrolling the paint, it would allow Ben Wallace, Anderson Varejao and even Zydrunas Ilgauskas to roam away from the basket and pressure players on the wings. That could come in handy if the Cavs draw the Magic in the playoffs. The Cavs will need tall defenders who can bother Hedo Turkoglu and Rashard Lewis, Orlando's 6'-10" perimeter bombers.

Downside: Camby has been an injury case for much of his career. Though he has remained healthy in recent years, a 35 year old with an injury history always gives reason to pause. Camby recently returned to the Clippers' lineup after missing several games with an ankle injury.

Camby, with a $10 million salary this year, is another player who would pose numbers problems in a trade involving Szczerbiak.

Having said all of that, Camby could be a prime target for Ferry.

Camby to the Cavs: 20 percent

Vince Carter, New Jersey Nets

2008-09: 21.1 PPG, 5.1 RPG, 4.6 APG

Upside: Carter is a scoring machine. He's 32, but can still drive and shoot at an elite level. In the Cavs lineup, it would be virtually impossible for opposing teams to stop Carter, LeBron and Williams simultaneously.

Carter isn't a terribly physical player, but he has the size to grab rebounds, as his career 5.5 rebounds per game average would indicate. He has the black mark on his resume of having admittedly sandbagged as a member of the Raptors, but he has historically been a solid team player. This year, he willingly took a supporting cast role as the Nets began to construct their team around Devin Harris.

Downside: Acquiring Carter could easily turn into a case of too many chefs in the kitchen for the Cavs. Averaging nearly 17 shots per game this year, and just over 19 per game for his career, Carter would fight for touches on a Cavs team that already has two dominant scorers and a sharpshooting big man. For Carter to get his shots, every other Cav besides LeBron would have to sacrifice, which generally isn't a recipe for maintaining good team chemistry.

Szczerbiak for Carter straight up works financially, and the two teams reportedly discussed that very trade last summer. But be careful what you wish for.

Carter to the Cavs: 15 percent

Brad Miller, Sacramento Kings

2008-09: 11.9 PPG, 8 RPG

Upside: Nearly two full months without an effective Zydrunas Ilgauskas showed us exactly how much the Cavs miss him when he's not out there. No other player on the roster matches Z's skill set or size. Miller, a seven-footer who excells at passing and shooting, would replicate Z's skill set closely enough to act as an insurance policy against injuries, and with a roster at full strength, would allow Mike Brown to have a shooting big man on the floor at all times.

Downside: Miller doesn't bring a ton in the way of defense, and he has virtually no low-post game. At age 32, he's starting to become increasingly injury-prone, which could lead to a nosedive in his production. In the end, there are probably better places to spend Szczerbiak's contract.

Miller to the Cavs: 5 percent

Amare Stoudemire, Phoenix Suns

2008-09: 21.2 PPG, 8.1 RPG

Upside: Stoudemire is a flat-out lethal scorer with an array of moves to free himself for shots. As a big man, he doesn't really have a traditional low-post game, but when you can fill the bucket the way Stoudemire does, who cares? If an opposing defense has to decide whether to guard LeBron or Stoudemire, someone is getting dunked on, early and often.

Downside: If Ferry and Brown are the staunch disciples of Gregg Popovich defensive basketball that we think they are, Stoudemire could be a poor match for the Cavs. He has never developed himself as a defender, and when he tries to dig in his heels, he usually ends up committing fouls. Some of that might be due to spending a good portion of his young career playing for offensive guru Mike D'Antoni. Brown could reform Stoudemire into a good defender, but it might take some time.

A more pressing issue is the fact that Stoudemire wants to be the focus of the offense in Phoenix. That sentiment probably won't disappear if he gets traded, even to LeBron's team. As with Vince Carter, Stoudemire's touches are going to have to come at the expense of other players, which could create tension. Stoudemire is a top-1o player in the NBA, but he really can't influence a game without the ball in his hands.

But this might all be a moot point. There have been media rumblings that the Suns might be on the verge of blowing up their roster and rebuilding, but it seems far-fetched to think they'd part with Stoudemire on such short notice, unless GM Steve Kerr was bowled over by a trade proposal.

Stoudemire to the Cavs: 2 percent

Elton Brand, Philadelphia 76ers

2008-09: 14.3 PPG, 9 RPG

Upside: You want low-post scoring? Brand can give you low-post scoring. Possessing solid footwork and a deft shooting touch that includes a mid-range jumper, Brand is a member of a dying breed: a basketball player who makes his living by boxing out and scoring off the block. Basketball, particularly NBA basketball, has become a wing player's game, so a big man with Brand's skill set can pose all kinds of matchup problems for defenses.

Brand hasn't really fit in with the Sixers, largely because they have a team full of floor-runners who want to push the ball. Brand excels at half-court basketball, and the Sixers don't play at the slow, methodical place needed to truly take advantage of Brand's skill set. What it means for the Cavs is that Brand could be available for the right price.

Downside: He's coming off a severe ankle injury that ruined his final season with the Clippers, and might affect his lateral mobility for the rest of his career, something to consider when saddling yourself with the bulk of a five year, $80 million contract that Brand signed with the Sixers last summer. That's a lot of money and years to pay for a guy who looks to be on the back nine of his career at age 29.

Of course, if all he needs is a change of scenery, whoever is able to pry him loose from the Sixer might look like a genius.

Brand to the Cavs: 5 percent

Joe Smith, Oklahoma City Thunder

2008-09: 6.7 PPG, 4.4 RPG

Upside: Smith is already familiar with the Cavs system, having played three months here last season. If the Cavs are looking for some bench depth, as opposed to a making a major splash, Smith would fit well. He can't absorb major minutes, but he makes the most of the minutes he gets.

Downside: The Cavs can't trade for him, since they dealt him after last July 1. The Thunder would have to buy Smith's contract out and make him a free agent. It seems simple enough, but once Smith is on the market, any team can sign him. You had better believe the Celtics and Magic would make strong plays for Smith. Now that Andrew Bynum is out for up to three months, the Lakers might get in on the action as well.

Having said all of that, this might be the most realistic and appealing option for Ferry, who still has all of his midlevel exception money to play with.

Smith to the Cavs: 25 percent