With the NBA trade deadline closing in, it was starting to feel more and more like Danny Ferry and his Cavs might just stand pat. And why not? The team was experiencing unprecedented success. Why mess with a good thing if a clear upgrade didn't exist? But then the Amar'e Stoudemire rumors started to swirl, and the game changed. In Nick's latest, he says the Cavaliers should aggressively pursue a Stoudemire deal and that the Phoenix big man is the perfect fit for this basketball team.

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General fan sentiment seems to side with making a deal for Stoudemire, so I may largely be preaching to the converted. However, the mere fact that there are Cavs fans out there shooting down a trade for Amar'e is troublesome. Should the Cavs make a play for the athletic big man? Um, is that even a question? The answer is an obvious and unambiguous "*YES*!" In fact, you have my permission to give a Rick James/ Charlie Murphy open-handed slap to anyone who even suggests that the Cavs shouldn't doggedly pursue Stoudemire. You can even give them a closed fist to the face if you like, provided you're wearing your "Unity" ring.

This trade makes so much sense for the Cavs that it almost makes you worry

subconsciously. We've been trained from youth to learn that anything which seems too good to be true, well, usually is. We've had our mailboxes filled with letters from Publisher's Clearing House, we've bought Powerball tickets (seriously, you might as well burn your money), and we've been promised free iPods by popup ads. As skeptics, we've become so well-conditioned we frequently forget that a place exists where you can still get something for nothing. That place is the NBA.

These "found money trades" don't come along often, but when they do, you have to pounce. You usually need two things -- a star with a big contract playing for a lousy club who's looking to slash payroll, and a trade partner with the contracts (preferably expiring) to make the money match up-- to make one of these deals a reality. The Lakers got lucky with Pau Gasol. The Cavs got lucky with Mo Williams. To a lesser degree, Boston got lucky with Kevin Garnett (Minnesota actually got something in return, just not equal value). Heck, the Bulls were even willing to take Larry Hughes off our hands last February. That should be proof enough that the NBA trade market is professional sports' answer to Disney World.

It looks like another one of those found money trades might be upon us with Amar'e Stoudemire. To acquire Stoudemire, the Cavs would likely have to give up Wally Szczerbiak and his expiring contract of almost $14 million, either JJ Hickson or Anderson Varejao, and one or more draft picks. It's also worth mentioning that there are some external factors outside of the Danny Ferry's control which could put the kibosh on a potential deal.

First and foremost, nobody really knows how badly Phoenix GM Steve Kerr wants to slash his club's payroll, save Kerr himself. If we knew that, things would be far less complex. Kerr doesn't have much on his side, but he does have that one element of uncertainty. Second, we can't know for sure what other teams are willing to give up for Stoudemire. The Cavs may not be able or willing to give up as much as another team (likely an Eastern Conference team; Kerr would probably prefer to trade Amar'e out of the West), and if that's the case, this whole discussion is moot. But assuming that the Cavs have a real chance to land Stoudemire, let me run down a few reasons why Danny Ferry shouldn't hesitate to pull the trigger.

Amar'e and LeBron on the floor together? Pinch me!

If we're talking about upgrading the talent on the roster (and that should always be a priority), then it's a no-brainer that the Cavs are better with Amar'e than they would be without him. We're talking about a guy who's made 4 All-Star teams, has averaged 20 points per game every season except his rookie year (excluding '05'-'06, when Stoudemire only played 3 games due to injuries), runs the floor as well as any big man in the league, and is only 26. It's no stretch to call Stoudemire the most athletic big in the league outside of Dwight Howard. Sign me up.

Injuries, attitude, defense...

On the other hand, Stoudemire doesn't come completely risk-free. He had microfracture surgery on his left knee in 2005, which is a legitimate concern when we're talking about a power forward/center. Amar'e has also developed a reputation for being a bit of a selfish, "me-first" player. Concern number three is that Stoudemire's defense is somewhat mediocre (that's putting it lightly).

Of the three red flags, the knee problems are my only legitimate worry. When big guys' knees start to head south, they generally continue deteriorating, and often at a cumulative rate. Still, all signs point to Stoudemire having made a full recovery; he only missed three games in the two seasons following his surgery. But bigs are delicate, and like Zydrunas Ilgauskas' feet, which have more screws in them than a Home Depot, Stoudemire's knee is could go at any time. By the same token, every player in the league is one catastrophe away from retirement. Considering his tremendous upside, Amar'e is worth the injury risk.

As for the bad attitude, the Suns have been in a state of flux since Steve Kerr took over almost two years ago. Once a perennial contender, the Suns have descended to somewhere in between the second and third tier of the Western Conference, and losing tends to make players think more about their own numbers than the win column. Sure, Amar'e doesn't work all that hard on defense, but neither does anyone else in Phoenix. Given Stoudemire's athletic ability, I'm willing to bet than he can at the very least be an average defender when removed from the run 'n gun Phoenix culture.

Plus, didn't we hear the latter pair of criticisms about Mo Williams when he arrived from Milwaukee? Williams has been everything the Cavs have wanted and more. Aside from a handful of true whackos (read: Ron Artest), a team with strong

leadership, a defensive mentality, and a winning culture tends to encourage most players to get with the program, and there's no reason to believe that Amar'e would be any different.

Are we mortgaging the future?

The Cavs may have to part ways with JJ Hickson and one or more draft picks to make this deal work, so it's natural to wonder if they're swapping immediate success for future hardship. This trade would do no such thing. Hickson is an intriguing prospect, and I love his strength and athleticism, but he's still extremely raw. There's no guarantee that Hickson will be a Drew Gooden, let alone an Amar'e Stoudemire.

I think Hickson ends up as a solid power forward, even if he isn't a game-changer like Stoudemire. A 15-and-10 average isn't out of the question for Hickson at some point down the road. But Hickson is almost an entirely unproven commodity, and passing on a rare talent like Stoudemire because there's a chance that Hickson may one day be a poor man's Stoudemire is ludicrous.

Trading draft picks can set your team back, and the Jiri Welsch trade is still painfully fresh in our memories. But we need to keep in mind that however many draft picks the Cavs deal to the Suns, they wouldn't be giving up any lottery picks. As long as LeBron James is wearing wine and gold, the Cavs should consistently pick in the high 20s, and hopefully at number 30 a time or two. Those draft picks are inconsequential when compared to the proven commodity that we'd be receiving in Amar'e. For every Tony Parker picked in the 20s, there are at least half a dozen Shannon Browns. Again, the reward greatly outweighs the risk.

Mortgaging the future? We might just be saving it.

Regardless of what we say, LeBron James' pending free agency haunts the dark corners of our minds. If you put a gun to my head, I'd tell you that I think LeBron will stay in Cleveland, but nobody, perhaps not even King James himself, knows for sure. But one thing is certain: it will be much tougher for LBJ to say *sayonara* i f he has a strong supporting cast in Cleveland.

If the Cavs trade for Amar'e, they will have a strong core in place for the long haul (Stoudemire, Mo Williams, Delonte West, Daniel Gibson), and that will be tough for LeBron to walk out on. Stoudemire will likely opt out of his deal after next

season, but the Cavs can give him a max deal along with LeBron James.

While James might be able to walk away from a max deal in Cleveland because a few million dollars are inconsequential to him, and he can make more from his endorsements in a larger market, it's pretty unlikely that Stoudemire would balk at such an offer. If Amar'e is in Cleveland for the long-term, it's going to make it much more difficult for LeBron James to walk away, and that's reason enough for Danny Ferry to jump through hoops to get this done.

Chemistry? What chemistry?

Repeat after me: Wally Szczerbiak is not crucial to the team's chemistry. Although others might try to convince you to never tinker with a winning team, I'd contest that a little tinkering might turn this winning team into a shoo-in for the championship. Well, "shoo-in" might be an exaggeration, but they'd certainly be the prohibitive favorite.

Look, Wally Szczerbiak is by all accounts a good guy who plays hard. He's clearly worked on improving his defense since arriving on the north shore. The problem is that Wally simply doesn't have the physical tools to play the kind of defense Mike Brown would like him to play. Szczerbiak turns 32 in March, and he's not getting any younger. More importantly, he's not getting any faster, his lateral movement is likely to diminish, and age doesn't make one run less flat-footed. Szczerbiak's a good shooter when he's standing still, but he's a square peg in a round hole.

The bottom line is that Szczerbiak plays 21 minutes a game, averages 7.4 points, and he's a defensive liability whenever he's on the floor. With Delonte West on the mend, Wally's expendable. Sasha Pavlovic can slide into Szczerbiak's role when he's healthy, all while being a solid defender and a better scorer off the dribble. It's too bad for Wally that it has to be this way, but Danny Ferry has to do what's best for the team.

JJ Hickson's 11 minutes and 4 points per game are even less significant. As long as the Cavs aren't forced to give up Anderson Varejao in the trade, Hickson wouldn't be missed.

Acquiring Amar'e erases AV's leverage.

It seems like ancient history, but a year ago we weren't too far removed from the drama of Anderson Varejao's messy holdout. You remember the situation; the Cavs wanted to sign Varejao (a restricted free agent, meaning that the Cavs could match any offer from another team) to a long-term deal worth $5-6 million a year for about 5 years, and Varejao was seeking something in the neighborhood of $9-10 million per season. When the Cavs countered, Varejao held firm, and Danny Ferry dug in his heels.

Varejao didn't end up back in C-Town until early December, after the Cavs matched a 3-year deal worth $17.4 million offered to Varejao by the Charlotte Bobcats. The contract allows Varejao to opt out after two seasons, so he'll likely become an unrestricted free agent this summer. With Varejao hitting the open market and likely looking for the pay day that evaded him two years prior, the Cavs could be facing a minor crisis in the front court. If they don't add a big before the trade deadline, they could end up with just Ilgauskas, Hickson, Ben Wallace, and Darnell Jackson on the roster next season.

Ilgauskas is poised to retire in the next year or two, while Wallace will be 35 in the autumn and will have a very tradable expiring contract. Even with a year under each of their respective belts, Hickson and Jackson will both still be very green. As usual, the free agent market won't be teeming with big men. The Cavs may have to choose between overpaying for Varejao, pursuing one of the most loathed men in Cleveland sports, Carlos Boozer (who's an injury risk to boot), or heading into the 2009-2010 season with a thin front court full of guys who are either too young or too old.

Bringing Amar'e to town will alleviate that problem in one of two ways. Either Varejao is shipped to Phoenix and becomes someone else's problem, or Hickson is sent to The Grand Canyon State, in which case Stoudemire's presence makes the Cavs very comfortable to part with Varejao. Either way, the score would move to *Ferry 2, Dan Fegan (Varejao's agent) 0.*

The trade deadline looms. By 3:00 tomorrow afternoon, we'll know whether Danny Ferry made a move or not, and Ferry's decision will be crucial to both the short and long term success of the franchise. Maybe the relationship between Danny Ferry and Steve Kerr can help grease the wheels of a potential deal, maybe not. Maybe Phoenix's willingness to trade Stoudemire has been overblown, and maybe not.

Regardless, if there's even the slightest chance that the Amar'e Stoudemire will be dealt, Ferry needs to go after him like gangbusters. Sure, there are risks involved -- there always are. But the potential reward of adding a special talent like Stoudemire isn't merely the potential capture of the title that has eluded Cleveland for so many decades, it's possible birth of a dynasty.