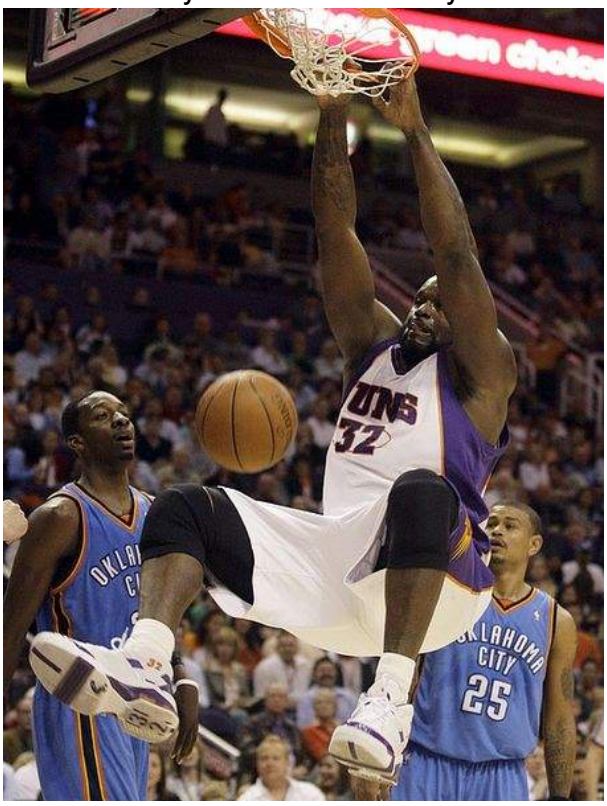
The grandest of grand Cleveland sports experiments will start to play out over the summer and into the fall. Shaq is coming to the Cavs, courtesy of a trade completed in the wee hours of Thursday morning -- a trade that reportedly sent Ben Wallace, Sasha Pavlovic and the Cavs' second round draft pick, No. 46, to Phoenix. Now, we get to see if the potentially-volatile concoction of two legitimate superstars can flourish in Cleveland and end this city's title drought, which will almost certainly stretch to a 46th year. Erik Cassano talks about The Shaq Factor in his latest.



Shaquille O'Neal is big if he's nothing else.

The Big Daddy. The Big Aristotle. The Big Cactus. The Big Shaqtus.

He's 7'-1", 325 pounds and his persona is even larger -- maybe one of the few personalities in the league who can overshadow the Cavs' own magnetic LeBron James.

We're going to find out firsthand how big Shaq is. The grandest of grand Cleveland sports experiments will start to play out over the summer and into the fall. Shaq is coming to the Cavs, courtesy of a trade completed in the wee hours of Thursday morning -- a trade that reportedly sent Ben Wallace, Sasha Pavlovic and the Cavs' second round draft pick, No. 46, to Phoenix. Now, we get to see if the potentially-volatile concoction of two legitimate superstars can flourish in Cleveland and end this city's title drought, which will almost certainly stretch to a 46th year.

In basketball, size does matter. And size is why Danny Ferry pulled the trigger on this trade. Shaq is 37, and will be 38 by the time next season's playoffs start. He's slower than he was in his prime years, but he's still a force in the post because he's so big and possesses the coordination to get the ball into the hoop in multiple ways. His size also makes him a load to handle as a post defender.

Shaq will draw double teams on a regular basis, as will LeBron. The combination of the two will produce a staggering number of open looks for the Cavs' perimeter shooters. Even if Shaq disturbs the neat flow of the Cavs' offense, the Cavs should still not hurt for points next season if guys like Mo Williams, Delonte West and Daniel Gibson are knocking down their looks.

If basketball were the only factor to consider about bringing Shaq aboard, this would be a relatively low-risk trade. Even with Shaq's advancing age, the Cavs just received a massive upgrade at the center position for spare parts.

But Shaq is big. And that means big everything. And it's all the non-basketball factors that make this deal a potential powder keg.

No secret, Shaq has an enormous ego, which can divide as well as unite. No active player has a better concept of what it takes to win titles. But in Shaq's world, harmony isn't always a necessary ingredient. For the Cavs, with their often-celebrated locker room chemistry and a low-key coach, that could become a culture shock.

In Los Angeles, he won three titles while maintaining a contentious relationship with Kobe Bryant. It was a volatile relationship that would have fractured a lesser team, but the 2000-02 Lakers had a deep supporting cast and Phil Jackson for a coach. The Cavs don't have that kind of supporting cast, and Mike Brown does not have the locker room management skills that Jackson has honed over years of winning championships in Chicago and Los Angeles. Even so, by 2004, Jackson couldn't prevent the Lakers from lapsing into a fall-of-Rome state. Shaq was traded to Miami that summer.

Shaq won an NBA title in Miami with Dwyane Wade, with whom he has forged a friendship. But even his stay in Miami was marred by a tense relationship with then-Heat coach Stan Van Gundy. The Heat didn't win their title until Pat Riley came out of the front office to reclaim the head coach's job during the 2005-06 season.

The moral of the story? Shaq isn't the easiest guy to get along with. If he doesn't feel he's getting the ball enough or doesn't feel he's being utilized properly, he has no qualms about taking his internal squabble with the coach to the media. If he isn't getting along with a player, don't expect Shaq to be the party that admits fault and extends the olive branch.

Shaq openly disrespects old foes. It's fine to dub Van Gundy the "master of panic" when you play in the opposite conference and have virtually no chance of facing your old coach in a meaningful game. When you're playing for the team that lost to Van Gundy's Magic in the conference finals, it's a different story. The first scenario is funny. The second is bulletin board material.

But that's the Shaq Package. Along with the frontline beef comes the brazen comments and self-serving displays of ego. Make no mistake about it, Hollywood basketball has come to the nice-guy, team-first Cleveland Cavaliers.

Shaq's presence as a daily fact of life should make the Cavs all the more entertaining. When he's not being snarky, Shaq can be quite funny and charming. He's always quotable. And with LeBron's history as a positive, outgoing team leader, there is reason to believe that he and Shaq will develop a positive relationship.

But the degree to which Shaq and LeBron will coexist harmoniously depends on how the plot develops on the hardwood. Shaq will need his touches in the post. LeBron will need his touches on the wings and perimeter. Mo will want his shots. Altogether, it wouldn't be a shock to see those three account for 70 to 75 percent of the Cavs' total shots in a given game. That leaves Delonte, Zydrunas Ilgauskas and the rest of the team to fight over the scraps.

Like I said, it's going to be a delicate balance. The ramifications of Shaq's presence extend well beyond his relationships with LeBron and Brown.

The 2009-10 season will be a juggling act for Brown as he attempts to get a roster led by two massive egos to the playoffs, then through the early rounds and back to the point where the Cavs were eliminated in May.

That's the real reason Danny Ferry has sought the services of Shaq. Not to beat the Grizzlies in December. Not to beat the Bobcats in February. It's to beat the Magic, Celtics and Lakers in late May and June. The Cavs don't need Shaq's help

to win 60 games during the regular season. They don't need Shaq's help to beat the Pistons or Hawks in the playoffs. They need Shaq's help to beat the best of the best when it counts the most.

If Shaq can help make a world championship a reality for the Cavs, size will matter. Ring size. And if that's the case, dealing with Shaq's size in all its forms will have been well worth it.

But as of right now, that's still The Big "If."