The chess match between the Cavaliers and enigmatic free agent power forward Drew Gooden finally ended today, as the team inked Drew to a three year contract extension worth twenty three million dollars. All the details and my initial reaction are enclosed.

Finally.

The Cavaliers agreed to terms with Drew Gooden today on a three year contract worth about twenty three million dollars. The package is FAR LESS than the "Nene money" (six years, sixty million) that Drew and his agent were on the record as seeking early in the free agent signing period. The signing also brings long awaited closure to a process that got dragged out much longer than most Cavs fans expected.

The deal is a good one for the Cavaliers and General Manager Danny Ferry. While Gooden has his flaws, he is far more talented than any of the remaining big men available in free agency. Even to those who are driven crazy by Gooden's sometimes airheaded play (I am one) ... it was crucial for the team to either bring Drew back into the fold, or to get equal or better value in exhange for him in a sign and trade. At just 24 years of age, and at only a little over seven mllion per season on a short term deal, Gooden is not a long term balance sheet liability, and remains a very movable asset in the future if the team chooses to go in that direction.

Along those lines, don't expect Gooden to be traded anytime soon, or even anytime during next season. By signing him to this deal, NBA rules regarding all players signing deals that constitute a 20% raise or higher prohibit a deal of Gooden until we get a month into the season, and make it difficult until after June 30, 2007. For any of you dead set on seeing Gooden signed and traded, you will likely have to wait another full year at least.

The best part about this signing to me is that it may be a catalyst to other moves in what has been a very quiet off-season for the Cavs and Ferry thus far. No other moves of significance could be made until the team resolved the power forward issue. While all of the big names have been picked through in free agency, there remain some viable options out there that could be a part of the Cavalier rotation next season. The team still has the full mid level exemption, which appears likely to be split up between two players at this point. Most likely a tough guy big

man, and a point guard ... which are the teams two biggest needs as it stands presently. I would not rule out the team still signing Reggie Evans, who would likely command somewhere between half and close to all of the mid level exemption.

I would not discount the team making a minor trade of some sort either, with the two most likely candidates to be moved being Damon Jones and Sasha Pavlovic. Neither would net us much of anything in return, but I know the Cavs would love to add a true point guard that can dribble penetrate and run the fast break. Eric Snow is advancing in age, and Daniel Gibson won't be of much help to us this season. For the purposes of contending this year, the team still needs to address the point guard spot, and will not be afraid to unload Jones or Pavlovic to help them do that.

All things considered, this is a good day for the Cavaliers. Gooden has drawn my ire in columns for years for his lack of basketball IQ and defensive lapses, but this is a much better team with Gooden than without. The team also managed to ink him to a very reasonable deal that will help roster and asset flexibility as we move into an era where we will be expected to compete for championships.

Gooden's agent Calvin Andrews had nothing but good things to say about Ferry despite getting well less than their initial asking price, saying "It was a long negotiation, but ultimately Danny Ferry was very fair and professional throughout the process. At the end of the day, Drew is very excited to re-sign with what he feels is a team on the cusp of a championship. He feels he has found a home with the Cavaliers."

I can't wait for the start of the season.