

Talks heat up as NBA trading deadline nears

The Associated Press

NEW YORK — Dikembe Mutombo is available, Jason Kidd isn't and Gary Payton might be. As for Shareef Abdur-Rahim, it looks as if he won't be going anywhere until the Grizzlies move from Vancouver.

Trade talks heated up in certain NBA cities and cooled down in others Wednesday as Thursday's 6 p.m. EST trading deadline moved closer.

The team most likely to make a major move was the Atlanta Hawks, who were sorting through offers for Mutombo from the 76ers, Knicks, Mavericks, Trail Blazers and Suns.

"Nothing may happen, but things have heated up dramatically the last 24 to 48 hours," Hawks general manager Pete Babcock said.

The Sixers and Knicks were believed to be the leading contenders, with Philadelphia offering a package including shot-blocking specialist Theo Ratliff and forward Matt Geiger and Atlanta asking for Toni Kukoc instead of Geiger. The Knicks were reportedly offering Marcus Camby and Glen Rice, with the Hawks ask-

ing for Allan Houston instead of Rice.

"You can never put it out of your mind, because you're asked about it every day, especially in New York," Camby said. "I'm content with everything, and I'm just happy to be in the league."

The Hawks were expected to wait until the last minute to see whether any team would sweeten its offer. If not, they will be content to keep Mutombo for the rest of the season and then decide whether to re-sign him or work out a sign-and-trade deal over the summer when the 7-foot-2 center becomes a free agent.

"If it works out that Dikembe stays, that's great for us. We'd love to have him finish his career here," Babcock said. "But if we can make a trade by [Thursday] to better our team in the future, we'd do that."

Kidd's name was prominent in the rumor mill for about 24 hours, but Phoenix general manager Bryan Colangelo said Kidd "will not be traded."

"A lot of teams are anticipating

that we're in a panic mode, and we're not," Colangelo said. "The way Jason has handled the circumstances [his arrest on domestic-violence charges] and confronted this head on, the fans have responded well."

As for Payton, he was uncertain whether his 11-year career in Seattle was about to end. Aaron Goodwin, Payton's agent, said he had heard the Sonics were discussing a trade with the Bucks, although an NBA source who spoke on condition of anonymity insisted Milwaukee was not in the mix on any Payton deal.

"I've been led to believe they're trying to do something without Gary's input, but we've grown to expect as much from Seattle," Goodwin said. "If he got traded to Milwaukee, from my conversations with Gary, that is not a place where he'd want to play."

Goodwin, who also represents Abdur-Rahim, said he had been assured his client would not be dealt.

"I'm 100 percent certain, and Shareef is resigned to that fact," Goodwin said.

Portland had been rumored to be shopping reserve center Dale Davis, but general manager Bob Whitsitt rarely makes midseason deals and said he wasn't making any calls.

"We've felt good all year about our team, and we still feel good about it," Whitsitt said.

Injured forward Scottie Pippen, however, wasn't convinced the Blazers would stand pat.

"I wouldn't be surprised," he said. "I don't think every player is feeling like he's untradeable right now. I know a lot of us are feeling that way, anyway. So you never know."

Pippen practices full-court for first time

Pippen took part in full-court drills for the first time in a month Wednesday, but said he's not going to rush back from elbow surgery.

"You're trying to jump the gun on me," Pippen said when a reporter asked whether he might play in the Blazers' upcoming three-game road trip. "When I start feeling good, I'm looking forward to coming back, and

you guys will be the first to know."

Pippen, 35, has missed 18 games with the injury to his right, or shooting, elbow. It first started swelling up after a victory at Boston on Jan. 8, and three weeks later, he underwent surgery to have a bone fragment removed.

Pippen shot jumpers and participated in five-on-five workouts, without a wrap on the elbow. He said it was feeling better, but he still can't fully extend his right arm.

"It looks good from the outside, but the inside is still sore and healing," he said.

Pippen, in his 14th season and second with the Blazers, is averaging 10.5 points, 5.1 rebounds and 4.5 assists per game, his lowest numbers since his rookie year with Chicago.

Portland, which plays Utah on Thursday night in a matchup of the two division leaders in the Western Conference, is 13-5 without Pippen.

"I wasn't looking forward to the rest, but I guess it has been a bit of a blessing for me," he said.

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Horoscope by Linda C. Black

TODAY'S BIRTHDAY (Feb. 22). Heal an old trauma, and you may find that you've outgrown your present surroundings. Prayer and private conversations will lead to completion in February. By March you should feel much stronger. You'll start noticing improvements to be made. Request more money in April. Learn something you used to think was too hard in May. Tell a roommate how you really feel and improve living conditions in June. Tell a loved one how you really feel and improve romantic relationships in July. Study all year so you're ready to go public in December. Tally up your losses and celebrate your wins next January and February.

To get the advantage, check the day's rating: 10 is the easiest day, 0 the most challenging.

ARIES (March 21-April 19) — Today is a 6 — You may feel like somebody's looking over your shoulder. You're being pushed to try something new. What you've been doing hasn't worked as well as you'd like. That complainer could be your own inner voice, so listen.

TAURUS (April 20-May 20) — Today is a 5 — You'll get stronger as the day goes on. That will be quite helpful since you're running into trouble. This is not all your fault, so don't take it on the back. Stand up for your rights, nicely.

GEMINI (May 21-June 21) — Today is a 6 — Are too many demands being put on your time? You need a partner. Somebody who's willing to take a risk. Somebody who'll draw attention away from you while you figure out what to do next.

CANCER (June 22-July 22) — Today is a 6 — You're anxious to get out of town. A serious bout of spring fever hits hard. Soon you'll be unable to ignore it. Get as much finished as possible now so you can try something new tomorrow. It's bound to come up.

LEO (July 23-Aug. 22) — Today is a 5 — Begin popular is wonderful, but you might start to feel hassled. Be careful with your resources, such as time, money and energy. Don't make promises you can't keep. Some of your admirers will just have to wait until later.

VIRGO (Aug. 23-Sept. 22) — Today is a 5 — You've been working your fingers to the bone for the past few days. Are you getting burned out? If you get somebody to help, take care. Watch that person like a hawk to make sure you don't have to do the job over.

LIBRA (Sept. 23-Oct. 22) — Today is a 6 — You're in a good mood initially, but then you'll start running into obstacles. You used to think you were pretty smart, but today you might wonder. Making mistakes is normal. Just be careful, so you don't hurt yourself.

SCORPIO (Oct. 23-Nov. 21) — Today is a 6 — You'd like to stay home and fix up your place, but first you have to do the homework. Don't get bogged down in papers, but do look at the options. It's all part of the planning, so you can get the right thing.

SAGITTARIUS (Nov. 22-Dec. 21) — Today is a 6 — You're contemplating great philosophical truths. You may even be in an argument with another person. Why not take the night off and let your subconscious work on the problem? You may find the answer in your dreams.

CAPRICORN (Dec. 22-Jan. 19) — Today is a 7 — Money's been on your mind, with good reason. You have money coming in, but it's not steady. If you add a couple of new skills to your repertoire, you might make your life easier. It's OK to do that, by the way.

AQUARIUS (Jan. 20-Feb. 18) — Today is a 6 — You're going from analytical to emotional. That could explain your strange mood swings. You're not losing any powers; you're actually gaining some. You're learning about nonverbal communication. Keep listening.

PISCES (Feb. 19-March 20) — Today is a 6 — You're gaining in strength, and not a moment too soon. You may have to stand your ground against a direct assault. Don't let others control you. Let them know you can only be pushed so far. That may surprise them, so be patient.