



Playoffs or bust?

PORTLAND TRAIL BLAZERS NEED TRADE OPTIONS



Coming into the 2019-20 season, there were high hopes for the Portland Trail Blazers. After coming off a trip to the Western Conference Finals, fans expected to see the Blazers make a return to the playoffs for another run. This, however, has not been the case. Through major roster turnover and injuries, the team has found themselves fighting for the eighth seed.

STORY BY NICK SCHWADA
STAFF WRITER

1. Be aggressive in the trade market

Currently, the Blazers are currently sitting in the tenth seed, three games back from the eighth spot. The Western Conference is extremely deep this year and the Blazers will have to contend with at least five other teams in order to sneak into the playoffs: Phoenix, San Antonio, Memphis, New Orleans and the Sacramento Kings.

With the Blazers current roster, this is a tall task. Coming into the trade deadline, the Blazers may want to pursue names like Robert Covington or Danilo Gallinari in order to boost their wing scoring and defense. Someone like a Kevin Love would add size to their depleted frontcourt and provide another scoring option that this team desperately needs.

The downfall of this option is that they'd have to give up some young talent in order to make any of these trades work. Zach Collins and/or Anfernee Simons, along with a first-rounder, would have to be packaged with Hassan Whiteside in order to bring in those big names. Is it worth giving up young talent so you can find yourself facing the No. 1 seed in the first round? That's something this team will have to consider.

2. Do nothing (except move Whiteside)

It's hard to do nothing during the trade deadline. Every team feels like they could add just one piece to put themselves over the top. For the Blazers, the best option may be to just stay out of it.

Jusuf Nurkic is eyeing to return sometime this month. With Nurkic and Collins preparing to be back around playoff time, the team will certainly be a tough out for any first-round opponent. With this option, the Blazers will be able to keep their assets and young talent, which could mean

that Portland will miss the playoffs for the first time in seven years; in the end, that would give them the opportunity to gear up, get healthy and make a return next year.

As for Whiteside — it only makes sense to get rid of him. His contract is up after this season and the Blazers won't have the salary space to keep him next year; Whiteside has been great for the Blazers, but has essentially been a rental for this team until Nurkic comes back. With the Bosnian Beast looking to return soon, it only makes sense to trade Whiteside.

3. Time to Break it up

This is where the pessimist in me comes out. I hate to say it and I know a lot of you will hate to hear it, but Portland should consider a rebuild. Rebuilding would lead to breaking up the backcourt duo of Dame and CJ, which I think is something that is long overdue. At times, CJ McCollum has been special for the Blazers; however, he's only special on one end of the floor. It's hard to imagine the Blazers actually contend for the playoffs when they have two players that are both no-shows on the defensive end.

Ideally, you can make a trade with CJ that can free up some cap space and get wing defenders to surround our all-star point guard. You hate to waste a few years of Lillard's prime on a rebuild, but time and time again do the Blazers find themselves in the worst position a team can be — in the middle.

Portland has consistently been a team that is good enough to make the playoffs, but isn't good enough to really contend with other top teams; ultimately, this leaves them without a lottery pick and an early exit in the playoffs. In order to get out of basketball purgatory, Portland may want to consider a rebuild.

With the NBA trade deadline just around the corner, the Blazers have many decisions to make that could change the course of this franchise forever. Here are a few options the Blazers will have to weigh before the deadline ends Feb. 6 at noon.

STORY BY RILEY BUERK
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1. Trade for depth and try and make a run in the playoffs

This is what the Blazers will more than likely try to do. Neil Olshey, the Blazers general manager, does not like to lose. I think the Blazers will try and trade for a backup big man. Cleveland Cavaliers big man Larry Nance Jr. would be the ideal fit. A big man who shoots league average from three and allows under 50% shooting on defense, he would help the Blazers on both ends. He is averaging 9.0 points and 7.2 rebounds, so he would not cost the Blazers too much.

This move would help the Blazers right now, but once they are fully healthy, there will not be a lot of minutes to go around. If the Blazers offer a prospect like Gary Trent Jr. and a veteran like Mario Hezonja, then the Cavaliers will have something to think about.

They have already traded for one veteran in Trevor Ariza, who has already been helpful in his brief time with the team.

2. Trade veterans for prospects

The Blazers signed multiple veterans in the off-season when they believed they would have a chance to compete for a top spot in the Western Conference. However, once Collins got hurt, everyone was forced to play more than expected or a different position than expected and it was not working.

The Blazers don't have a lot of prospects on their roster right now, as they are in "win now" mode, but if they decide to trade for prospects, Romeo Langford on the Boston Celtics would be a great target.

Langford was the No. 5 recruit in his class, and was drafted by Boston with the 14th pick in the 2019 draft. The start to his career has been af-

fectured by injuries and the Celtics wing depth, but he is shooting 45.8% from the field and 87.5% from the free throw line, which is a good sign for his three point shooting. I think Langford will be a very solid player with more playing time, and the Blazers will be able to give him that.

3. Trade CJ for more pieces

Blazer fans will hate me for even suggesting this, but it might be time to break up Dame and CJ. Obviously, the Blazers would need to be blown away by an offer to trade a star like CJ. They will be asking for a star in return, or a combination of players and picks. A combination of players and picks is probably the best idea so that they have more assets and depth. However, if the Blazers can trade CJ and a pick or player for Bradley Beal, they should think hard about it.

Ideally, a trade package for CJ would be a proven player like JJ Redick, a player with star potential like Nickeil Alexander-Walker, and a first round pick. This is the least likely possibility to happen this year, but rumors have been around for a couple years, and if the Blazers keep underachieving, it might be time to break it up.