

## If he stays or goes, Harden's fantasy value won't change

Written By ROBERT BELARDI

With the upcoming NBA season set to start on December 22, one of the League's formidable talents has been quite the hot topic with the trade market and off-field criticisms.

Houston Rockets guard James Harden has reportedly told the team this past week he is open to a trade to the Philadelphia 76ers, according to ESPN. It has also been reported, the Brooklyn Nets, the Milwaukee Bucks and the Miami Heat are destinations Harden would prefer.

This is all bearing in mind Harden signed the League's most lucrative contract in history two seasons ago and the Rockets acquired John Wall from the Washington Wizards along with free agent DeMarcus Cousins.

In spite of the team's efforts to appease Harden, it looks like it still wasn't enough.

As the start of the year edges closer, fantasy basketball managers gear up for another highly anticipated NBA season.

Harden, who has been lauded for his trademark step-back-threes and notorious for winning trips to the free throw line has arguably been the best fantasy player in recent years. He's one that you simply can't pass up when you're in the top five picks of the draft.

The Bellflower, CA native, led the NBA averaging 34.3 points, a league high 4.4 three-pointers made per game and a staggering 35.5 per cent success rate from beyond the arc.

He also averaged 7.7 assists and 6.6 rebounds to add to his value.

Depending on the categories chosen in your fantasy basketball formats, Harden teetered around the No. 1 overall ranking as a fantasy player. And despite the drama and trade talks currently overshadowing his talents, Harden is a top five fantasy choice and one that would be a mistake to pass up on as a fantasy owner. Even if he is traded.

Hypothetically, if Harden is moved to one of the teams aforementioned, the only team that would shatter his fantasy value would be the Brooklyn Nets. But a trade to Biggie Smalls' hometown doesn't look likely. The Rockets made it quite clear, Kevin Durant or Kyrie Irving must be a part of the trade.

And let's say he ends up staying in Houston. It's a perfect fantasy situation. John Wall and DeMarcus Cousins were sidelined all of last season with injuries and in the event these players re-aggravate their previous ailments, Harden's value would skyrocket.

Players like Wall and Cousins are examples of athletes fantasy managers should actually be weary of. The NBA's new confounding policy on load management will prohibit players from taking a night off when games are being nationally televised.

Kawhi Leonard, was notorious for this in his last year with the San Antonio Spurs and his championship run with the Toronto Raptors.

So, for players like Leonard and even LeBron James, it isn't quite clear how this will affect players throughout the course of the season but most certainly in some cases could affect their minutes moving forward.

But not for Harden.

Harden averaged 36.5 minutes played last season, tying with C.J McCollum for second-most minutes averaged by a player in the

League.

At 31 years of age, his window of opportunity is closing and he is the prime of his career. All the power to you to take him.