

Robert's Rant: Raptors trade deadline wasn't bad at all

By Robert Belardi

OPINION

Annually, the NBA Trade Deadline has a proclivity for flustering our very passionate basketball souls or leaving us clinging on to the edge of our seats.

In a time where we are constantly talking about uncertainty, this surely fits the bill. There were surprising trades last Thursday, especially when we all saw star-centre Nikola Vucevic traded to the Chicago Bulls from the Orlando Magic. We saw the Magic trade Evan Fournier to the Boston Celtics and Aaron Gordon to the Denver Nuggets. Not a bad time to blow things up.

We saw the Miami Heat acquire Victor Oladipo for practically nothing and we also saw the Philadelphia 76ers complete an abysmal deal for Oklahoma City Thunder guard George Hill.

Amongst the other deals that turned our heads, I wanted to focus on our hometown Toronto Raptors and grade their NBA Trade Deadline Day.

Let's begin with Norman 'Playoff' Powell. The 27-year-old, San Diego, California native has been having the best season of his career this year. He has been averaging 19.6 points per game with 3.0 rebounds and 1.8 assists, as per Basketball Reference.

I can go on and rhapsodize on Powell's improvements throughout the past three seasons. We saw him play very well in the Raptors championship run. Even last season when things were normal and into the NBA bubble.

But what I will do is try to understand this deal more thoroughly. I believe the Raptors made this deal sending Powell the other way because they wouldn't be able to afford to give him a wealthy contract extension - let-alone the risk of Powell falling off again.

Masai Ujiri probably thought this was the best course of action. Trade him now, get as much as you can and move on. Some might say this deal was a loss. I beg to differ.

I think it was an even-keel deal. The Raptors dealt Powell and, in return, the Portland Trailblazers sent over Gary Trent Jr. and Rodney Hood.

In 1998, Gary Trent Sr. was traded from the Trailblazers to the Raptors. It's funny how history repeats itself. It isn't a cliché when things like this happen time and time again.

The Raptors get a young player in the younger Trent. The 22-year-old slotted in very well throughout C.J. McCollum's injury and has been having a great season averaging 15 points a game and showing flashes of what he can be. Not a bad risk by any means. Rodney Hood on the other hand doesn't provide too much value. We'll see what he can bring to the table.

The Raptors also dealt guard Matt Thomas to the Utah Jazz for a second-round pick and also sent guard Terence Davis to the Sacramento Kings for a future second-round choice as well. These two have been quite disappointing to say the least this season and getting something for them was better than nothing.

Powell took on the Raptors at Amalie Arena Sunday night for the first time since the trade. He lined up on the opposite side of mid-court, seemingly forgetting he's a Blazer. He posted 13 points in the Blazers 122-117 victory.

But the hallmark moment of the day for the Raptors and us fans came at 3:00 p.m. Kyle Lowry wasn't going anywhere. The greatest

Raptor of all time will still don the red and black.

Now this is quite an exasperating conversation to have for some. There is a constructive argument to debate why the Raptors should have traded the 35-year-old on his birthday and in the final year of his contract. Lowry will become a UFA at the end of this year.

I believe the Raptors didn't get what they were looking for. The Miami Heat and the Philadelphia 76ers were the two frontrunners to land Lowry and both could not complete a deal. The Raptors wanted Heat guard Tyler Herro. Heck, that's who I would have wanted as well.

But keeping Lowry isn't exactly a loss. Ujiri didn't want to undersell. And how could he sell the greatest Raptor of all time just like that and without a proper goodbye from the Toronto faithful?

Maybe Lowry resigns at the end of the year for a cheaper contract. Maybe he helps nurture Malachi Flynn and even Trent. The sad part is Kyle Lowry is the threshold between the Raptors of old and the current vision of the Raptors of the future. He still holds those memories dear to all of us as fans.

With the Raptors currently fighting for a playoff-spot, their recent woes would suggest the boys might miss the cut. Who knows. They might.

Overall it was a sentimental trade deadline for the Raptors. I didn't want to see Powell go personally. I understand it was necessary. And Lowry; although the hope was to find him a competitive team to win the chip, it didn't work out. I grade the Raptors trade deadline moves a B. The organization acquired two players and two picks. They let three players go. Not too shabby.