

Bulls need scorer - but not Eddy Curry

by Mike Nadel

CHICAGO - To revisionist historians and illogical-leap theorists, Eddy Curry is a godsend.

If only the Bulls had a low-post scorer such as Curry, the theorists muse, the NBA Finals would be on Chicago's June calendar. If only the Bulls had kept the kid, the historians say, they wouldn't have needed to throw silly money at old man Ben Wallace - and they might be on the cusp of a new dynasty.

And if only I still had hair, Scarlett Johansson wouldn't be able to keep her hands off me.

So what's the point?

Yes, Curry is averaging 19.4 points on 57.7 percent shooting as the main offensive threat for the New York Knicks. And yes, as I and other semi-educated observers have noted, the Bulls could use a low-post threat come playoff time.

But let's be real.

After then-GM Jerry Krause drafted him out of Thornwood High School in 2001, Curry alternately teased and tormented three different head coaches during his four-year stay with the Bulls.

The third coach, Scott Skiles, publicly and repeatedly wondered if the 6-foot-11, 285-pound Curry ever would grow up. Given that Skiles was hired by John Paxson (who had replaced Krause as GM), things didn't

bode well for Curry's long-term future in Chicago.

Throw in the heart condition that sidelined Curry in March 2005 - and the Bulls' insistence that he take a DNA test before they'd give him the huge contract he desired - and it simply wasn't going to happen for Eddy here. So Paxson traded him to New York seven months later.

What about the Bulls lacking a low-post scorer?

Such a guy wouldn't help much unless he shared Wallace's intensity, rebounding ability and defensive presence. And it'd be nice if that guy could step out and consistently hit a 15-foot jumper. Curry fails on all counts.

The Bulls need a lean, long athlete who can run, defend, rebound and score (KG, KG, wherefore art thou, KG?) to team with Wallace, not a one-dimensional wide-body who would frustrate his coaches and teammates. Tyrus Thomas, the rapidly improving rookie who arrived in Chicago last draft day thanks to Paxson's Curry deal, will be every bit as valuable in the playoffs as Eddy would have been.

"I don't want to minimize what he's doing; Eddy's having a very good year," Skiles said. "But it seems like he's being put on a pedestal awful quickly. He's clearly improving ... but he's averaging roughly three more points a game than he did here (16.1 in 2004-05) in a lot more minutes."

See what I mean about Skiles and Curry being a marriage made in hell?

Curry has had some sensational games this season. Tuesday night's 98-69 loss at the United Center wasn't one of them.

He committed two early offensive fouls while unsuccessfully attempting to overpower Wallace, had a shot rejected by Thomas and finished with four points in 22 minutes.

The victory for doubly good for the Bulls. First, they moved a half-game ahead of Cleveland in the race for the Eastern Conference's second seed. Second, they moved closer to securing more NBA Draft Lottery ping-pong balls in the race for Kevin Durant, Greg Oden or another top-five stud.

The final piece of the Curry deal lets the Bulls swap first-round picks with New York. The Knicks now have the league's ninth-worst record; given their injuries and their remaining schedule, they might not win another game and could move down to fifth-worst. The lower they go, the better for the Bulls.

Nevertheless, Knicks coach/president Isiah Thomas sounded like a guy who would make the deal again.

"Curry's a pretty rare guy," he said. "Every night, he's the biggest guy out there. If you see that type of athleticism, that type of build, that type of touch, they don't come along that often. He's 24 years old and he's gonna get better. I think both teams are happy."

Indeed, everybody is happy.

Thomas is thrilled he has a young franchise center.

Paxson is excited about his talented club, which could make some noise in the playoffs and then get even better on draft day.

And the revisionist historians and illogical-leap theorists are delighted because they have a subject to debate. It's a debate they can't win, but that never stopped them before.

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