



## Does Going “All In” Work?

By: Austin Rader

After getting swept by LeBron and the Cavaliers in the second round of the 2018 NBA playoffs, the Toronto Raptors felt a change was needed. They had been one of the better teams in the Eastern conference for the past few years. They had a great starting line-up with budding future stars. They were having great regular season success.

But if now was their moment, why couldn't they get past the second round of the playoffs? Shouldn't a team with all this talent be able to make it further in the postseason?

General managers think about this all of the time. When is the right time to go “all in”, and find the one missing piece to get to the promised land? When do you pool all of your future draft picks and trade for a key starter to escape the second round?

For many teams, this means giving away a lot of their future. In smaller markets, doing this can set a franchise back for a decade or longer if they fail. Sometimes, they never recover. For larger cities like LA or New York, they do this all of the time and can afford a mistake along the way.

But what about Toronto? After their 2018 setback, they had to ask themselves: is it really the right time to go “all in”? Are we really willing to let go of one of our greatest talents in an effort to get the big missing piece?

Toronto made the tough call. Now was their moment. Doing so takes guts, conviction, and smarts. Everything has to line up perfectly. But they were confident and decided to pull the trigger. I applaud them for making the gamble.

Here’s what they did. They traded all star shooting guard Demar Derozan, Jacob Poeltl and a first round pick for Kwahi Leonard and Danny Green. They were now a different team on the court, and were ready to compete against the top teams in the playoffs. “All in” was their strategy. If not this year, when?

This formula worked as the Raptors recently won the NBA Finals with Kwahi winning his second Finals MVP award. Even though Kwahi was on a one year deal and is now a free agent, it was still worth it for the Toronto Raptors organization.

When teams are desperate for a championship, should they pull the trigger? A lot of professional teams get impatient if they haven’t won a ring in a long time. Well for starters, it upgrades your roster and barring injury or the Moneyball effect, your team’s results will improve.



**In 2013, the Brooklyn Nets went “all in”.** They had a new owner and were eager to win it all quickly. So they struck a deal with the Boston Celtics sending three players and three future first round picks for Paul Pierce, Kevin Garnett and Jason Terry. It didn’t work.

The 2003-04 Los Angeles Lakers were coming off a second round defeat at the hands of the San Antonio Spurs. In the 2003 offseason, the Lakers decided to go “all in” and went out and got future hall of famers Gary Payton and Karl Malone. They built a “super team” for one year and tried to win their fourth championship

in five years. They were able to make it to the Finals however, they lost to the Detroit Pistons in five games. Bryant stated he couldn’t get the new guys (Payton and Malone) up to speed on the Lakers approach and it resulted in a failed “all in” attempt.

Take the 2008 Celtics for example, in the 2006-07 season, the Boston Celtics were the worst team in their division. So in the 2007 offseason, they signed Kevin Garnett and Ray Allen to multi-year deals. They went from worst to first by winning 66 games. They went on to beat the Lakers in six games en route to their first NBA Championship since the Larry Bird days.

It isn’t just basketball when teams go “all in.”

Just last season, the Los Angeles Rams had their successful core returning. So they went out and traded for pro bowl cornerback Marcus Peters and a top wide receiver in Brandin Cooks. They added Ndamukong Suh in free agency, and added Dante Fowler Jr. The Rams made it all the way to the Super Bowl but their “all in” effort fell short as they lost.

General managers in Major League Baseball rarely go “all in”. Sure it worked for the Chicago Cubs in 2016 (trading prospect Gleyber Torres for Aroldis Chapman). But ask the 1998 Padres or 2011 Brewers how their “all in” seasons went. Thanks to the moneyball effect, baseball executives tend to build through the draft and trade for prospects.

With the NBA landscape about to change tonight when free agency hits, it will be interesting to see if front offices decide to go “all in” or play it safe and build through the draft. Maybe a team like the Brooklyn Nets will go the same route as the Toronto Raptors and build an “all in” championship roster. It worked for the Raptors this year.

At 6:00 PM ET we will find out if anyone’s “all in” this year.