

Yahoo: All the Kings' men might no longer include Artest

Source:

<http://newsgroups.derkeiler.com/Archive/Alt/alt.sports.basketball.nba.la-lakers/2008-07/msg00947.html>

- *From:* "\$Bill" <news@xxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxxx>
 - *Date:* Sun, 13 Jul 2008 19:54:56 -0700
-

<http://sports.yahoo.com/nba/news: ylt=AIP5afLb4CJHSg6zEDPr36CB0bYF?slug=jy-artestsummer071308&prov=yh>

All the Kings' men might no longer include Artest
By Johnny Ludden, Yahoo! Sports 13 hours, 39 minutes ago

LAS VEGAS He still answers to Ron these days, even though he recently told a Sacramento radio station he'd prefer to be called Bill. He's still as affable off the court as he is ferocious on it, and, yes, he's still a Sacramento King, enough so that he hopped a flight here from New York to help cheer on the franchise's summer-league team.

For a change, though, Ron Artest isn't talking. At least he wasn't saying anything of substance Saturday afternoon. No trade demands. No complaining about the Kings not committing to him. No regrets about not opting out of his contract. No...comment.

What are your thoughts on your future with the Kings ?

"No comment."

Do you want to have a future with the Kings ?

"No comment."

If you could be with any team next season who would it be ?

"No comment."

New York Mets cap pulled low, smile stretched across his face, Artest sounded apologetic for not being more cooperative.

"Seriously, I don't know what my future is, " he said. "I don't know, really, so I can't say anything."

Check back in 12 hours, or five minutes, for that matter. Ron-Ron changes his mind by the tick-tock of the clock. He wants to be traded. He wants to be a King for life. He's opting out of his

Yahoo: All the Kings' men might no longer include Artest

contract. No, he's not. Artest has many skills, decisiveness not among them.

That's not a knock on Artest. It's a fact. He's said enough and he'll probably say some more, but his opinion no longer matters. Eventually, someone is going to call with the right offer and eventually the Kings are going to trade him. Just like in Chicago and Indiana, Artest has become more valuable for Sacramento to move than keep.

The Kings don't seem to be in a rush. Nor should they be. As free-agency options dry up, more teams look to trades to strengthen their roster. Even if the Kings have to wait until closer to the trade deadline, some contender will likely be willing to roll the dice on Artest. When healthy and motivated, he can dominate on both ends of the floor. His contract is more than affordable (\$7.4 million) and he'll be a free agent at the end of the season, which has a few GMs thinking he'll also try to fit in and behave, at least for a few months.

Already, the Los Angeles Lakers have inquired about Artest, according to a report in The Sacramento Bee, and there might not be a more logical destination. Exposed by the Boston Celtics in the NBA Finals, the Lakers need to get tougher and better defensively. Swapping Artest for Lamar Odom, who wilted as much as any Laker during the Finals, would be an upgrade in both areas.

Phil Jackson won three titles with Dennis Rodman, so he's accustomed to dealing with non-conformists, as well as extraterrestrials, if one is to believe Jackson's nickname for Vladimir Radmanovic: My Favorite Martian. Artest, too, has been accused of being from another planet. As for any ego concerns, not even Artest is bold enough to challenge Kobe Bryant's authority in the locker room.

That's not to say Artest would be a perfect fit. At least one scout thinks the Lakers would be foolish to give up Odom, saying his length and versatility create too many matchup problems for opponents. Odom is the better rebounder and passer, and though Artest certainly is a more dependable three-point threat, he can be a ground-and-pound ball-stopper on offense.

The Lakers also would be wise to wait as long as possible to see how their young center, Andrew Bynum, recovers from knee surgery. If Bynum continues to labor, the Lakers may very well need Odom's size next to Pau Gasol. Still, Jackson and Bryant can be sure of one thing: Artest isn't going to curl up in the fetal position just because Kevin Garnett cursed at him.

The Kings also would want the Lakers to take on Kenny Thomas and his contract's remaining two years and \$17.3 million. But with the Lakers also apparently hedging on matching Golden State's four-year, \$17 million offer for Ronny Turiaf that might not be as big an issue as previously thought. As the Bee's Sam Amick wrote, "It's the price of

Yahoo: All the Kings' men might no longer include Artest

doing business if they want to acquire the underpaid Artest."

There's an old rule in professional sports that if you're going to make a trade, you better make one that doesn't help your rival. These days, though, the Kings and Lakers aren't rivals, no matter how much bitter history covers the 400 miles of I-5 interstate between them. The Lakers are coming off an appearance in the NBA Finals; Sacramento won 38 games and figures to again have a tough time qualifying for the playoffs, with or without Artest. The Kings have the potential to be major players in the expansive 2010 free-agent market. Shedding Thomas' contract (along with Odom's) could give them the option of reloading a year sooner, if they desire.

And if the Kings choose not to deal with the Lakers ? They should have at least a few more options. The Phoenix Suns had interest in Artest at last season's trade deadline. The San Antonio Spurs also are intrigued, but they don't have enough to offer to make a serious bid.

"I like his talent. I like his competitiveness. I like his contract, " one GM said of Artest. "But there's always a risk with him."

Artest's erratic behavior has often overshadowed his talent, and it's been no different with the Kings. He decided not to opt out of his contract two weeks ago then emailed the Bee and ESPN.com to say he made a mistake after watching Baron Davis and Elton Brand land lucrative longterm deals. Artest claimed to have been misled to believe the Kings considered him an important piece of their future. He later tried to clarify his comments. And last week he told a Sacramento radio station he wanted everyone to start referring to him by his middle name: William.

So where does that leave Artest now ? Does he want to stay with the Kings ? Or not ?

"No comment."

Artest smiled. Saying nothing sometimes says enough.

.