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Celtics corner

By James McKay

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The Boston Celtics are in a rebuilding stage right now. With nine players under the age of 25, Paul Pierce, Raef LaFrentz and Mark Blount are the only true veterans on the Celtics' roster.

Veterans, in theory, are supposed to teach the young guys how to adapt to the NBA. Mark Blount has yet to prove himself as a solid veteran. His desire and intensity have been questioned since the start of the 2004-2005 season.

After a strong showing in 2003-2004, Blount was re-signed to a six year, \$42 million contract assuming he would be the Celtics' starting center for the future.

The following year, his hard defense and solid rebounding vanished. He started to play carelessly and it appeared he couldn't have cared less whether Boston won or lost Blount soon became reluctant to play hard and show any type of leadership roles.

He was barely used in the intense 2005 first-round playoff series against the Indiana Pacers and was recently benched by head coach Doc Rivers, when he chose to start young center Kendrick Perkins over Blount against the Charlotte Bobcats on Nov. 25.

Right now, Blount is averaging 12.4 points and 4.1 rebounds per game. His scoring has been fairly decent when you compare him to other centers around the league, but his rebounding numbers are below average. At seven feet tall, he should be able to put up more than four rebounds per game.

Paul Pierce and Ricky Davis average more rebounds per game than Blount and they play smaller positions. Another of Blount's poor attributes are his soft hands and his tendency to make poor decisions with the ball. He is 14th in the NBA in total turnovers with 41.

There have been many trade rumors around the league on Celtics' fan's Web sites and newspapers about trading Blount to the Minnesota Timberwolves for former number one draft pick Michael Olowokandi. Olowokandi can't provide Blount's scoring, but he does rebound better.

We have yet to see a solid big man on the Celtics roster that can provide good rebounding and plays significant minutes. Another positive aspect of the trade would be that Olowokandi has an expiring contract at the end of this season, so there would be no long term attachments to him. Blount still has over \$35 million left on his contract, so by trading him Boston would free up some salary cap room for future transactions.

Blount's faith lies in the hands of Head of Basketball Operations Danny Ainge. In an article published in the November 28th issue of The Boston Herald, Blount said he didn't ask for a trade. Ainge also denied rumors that Blount was on the trade block in that same article.

Ainge also denied rumors of last year's trade deadline acquisition of Antoine Walker weeks before it actually went down.

Will Blount stay or will he go? We will just have to wait and see.

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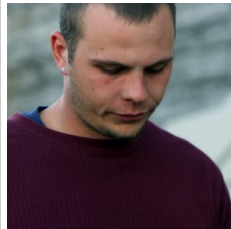
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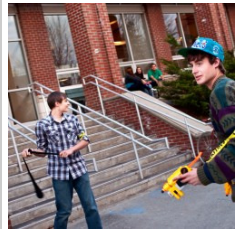
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5748 Memorial Union, Orono, ME 04469
207.581.1273 • web [at] mainecampus.com