

Going in to the 2010-11 season we were worried. Our team was aging.

We had hoped to turn Erick Dampiers non- guaranteed last contract year into a big name Free Agent. We went after every Sign & Trade you could think of that would have in impact. Nothing was happening.

Finally I read that trade discussions between Charlotte and I forget who for Tyson Chandler had broken down. I made the call to the Bobcats in hope of getting Tyson. Everyone else had pretty much given up on Tyson because of his injury history. Our trainer Casey Smith told me that Ty had a great summer with USA Basketball, our support staff thought he could play out the last year on his contract. So we made the [trade](#).

The thought was that Tyson would back up newly resigned Brendan Haywood. Wood had played well for us the year before. But by the time the regular season opened our starting lineup would be JKidd, JET, Caron Butler, Dirk and Tyson.

The talk in Dallas was of total disappointment. We had used our "DUST" chip as some media referred to our ability to trade Damp's contract on an injury prone player. The summer before we had resigned a 37 year old Jason Kidd for 3 years. We were going no where in the minds of some of the pundits. It was going to be another 50 win season, if our old team could stay healthy and another first round exit for the Mavs.

Maybe it was time to break things up and start again was the talk radio chatter. We were too old and we were wasting the last years of Dirk's career. Fortunately, the season started out great. We were chugging along and winning games, breaking winning streaks of good teams and more. Then disaster hit. First Dirk goes down. Then in his first game missed, Caron goes down for the season. Then Roddy goes down for the season. To say we were nervous would be an understatement.

I wish I could share the texts coming from some of our vets who saw the season slipping away. As one guy said "We are done"

Our response ? We signed [Peja](#). Peja hadn't played much that season and we really didn't know how much he could play. But we didn't have a lot of options. We finished out the season with Dirk coming back and a little bit of momentum, but heading into the playoffs, we were dubbed the [One and Done Boys](#) in a song by Ben Rogers on local radio, The Ft Worth Star Telegram said "[the Mavs don't have what it takes](#)" We know how the rest of that season plays out ■

Then came the lock out. As we had planned the contracts of some of our older players were ending, as well as Tyson's expiring contract. We had some tough decisions to make. Did we keep the team together for another run or go in another direction ? It wasn't an easy decision. Our plan all along had been to have the contracts of our older players expire this year and next. But winning the championship obviously made us re-think everything.

We debated and discussed it long and hard. The final decision was going to be mine. I take all the input from everyone involved, players, coaches, donnie, anyone willing to provide me with an informed position. But this was such a big decision, it was going to have to be mine for better or worse. But this wasn't an ordinary off season for another reason. The lockout happened. There was a chance that we were going to be champs for two summers in a row, if only by default, because there was a very real risk that the 2012-13 season would not be played.

As one of the owners on the committee negotiating the CBA I honestly felt that there was a 90pct chance there would not be a season. Sitting in those meetings it was as if both sides lived in two alternate universes that never intersected. As it turns out I was wrong. 3am one morning after being told that there was no real chance of a settlement, there was a settlement. We would soon find out that our 66 game season would start Christmas Day 2011. Not only did we have a 66 game schedule that included such fan favorites as 3 games in 3 nights, but we had a shortened training camp as well. Whatever routines our players had to get ready for the season were going to be thrown out the window. Add in that the new CBA that resolved the lockout was far different than our previous CBA and our Mavs staff had quite a bit to think about.

All my thoughts on the new CBA have been well chronicled elsewhere, so I won't revisit them here. But what we have not discussed publicly was our concern of bringing back an older team in a shortened season. We basically saw the 2011-12 season as a throw away no matter who we signed. Without the time to prepare and get their bodies ready, throwing a team with an older starting lineup right into the fire was going to be tough. Young guys can walk into an NBA game any day of the year. Get to your mid 30s, not so much. So to bring the gang back, we would basically be losing a year. When you look at keeping together an older team and the first year after your championship is a lost year, it's hard to justify keeping an older team together. But we were the champs. That meant a lot.

It also meant that if we kept everyone together we would have to make do with our existing roster. We would have little room to add new players. In particular we would not be in position to add someone who could come in and be a cornerstone for our future. IMHO we would be stuck with an aging team and not be in a position to make a big impact on our roster.

So we made the decision to stick with the folks we had under contract for the lockout season. We made a trade that we would thought would help, but obviously turned into a disaster. The good news was that it was a compressed season and we thought it would go by quickly and after the season we would have cap room to go after players we thought would be impact players and also fit our culture.

Culture is very important to the Mavs. Your best player has to be a fit for what you want the culture of the team to be. He has to be someone who leads by example. Someone who sets the tone in the locker room and on the court. It isn't about who talks the most or the loudest. It is about the demeanor and attitude he brings. It is amazing how when the culture is strong, the chemistry is strong. When the Mavs have brought in players that didn't fit or buy in to our culture it created on the court and off the court problems. Its possible to handle one guy who may not fit it. It's going to have a negative impact on your won and loss record if you have more than one.

Our culture is one of the reasons I won't trade Dirk.

When you turn your team upside down and try to figure out what the culture of the team is, you take the greatest risk a team can take. Dirk sets the tone for our team. He works as hard, if not harder than anyone. He helps our younger players understand what he expects and what they need to do to excel. On the court he is selfless. He would rather not have to score a point if we would win the game any way. He would rather pass the ball and let anyone else score than be forced to take the shot. Until its the time of the game where we need a point. Then he is ready to step up as often as we need it. But he knows, that his impact on a game is far more important than any averages or what appears in the box score. That mindset. That selflessness. His work ethic is something I want to be in place long after he has retired. But to do that we have to transition with him, not in a void.

It is also the reason I believe that you don't just blow up a team. Go back the past 10 years and look at all the teams that traded their best player. There aren't a lot of quick trips to the finals to point to as examples.

A quick story. The week I bought the Mavs I was asked by Nellie if I wanted to bag the season in order to get the best draft pick that we could. My response was "No. At some point this franchise has to learn how to win and develop a culture of winning. You don't create that culture by tanking the season. I don't know how many games we can win, but we are going to try to win every one of them." Thank goodness we didn't tank the season. It wasn't a very good draft. And that turn around for the rest of the season helped define who we were and are to this day.

So flash forward to the end of the lock out season. We had hoped that Dwight Howard would be available. But he wasn't. First he opted in on his contract to the surprise of many. Then, Dwight got traded to the Lakers who put together what everyone considered to be a sure lock to do damage in the playoffs. When there was no Dwight sweepstakes, we really didn't have any options that we felt were the right fit for us. We had multiple meetings with players. Some public. Some not. There was disagreement among our staff about which players would or would not be a fit for the Mavs. As it turned out, we didn't make any transitional signings. We made the decision to sign one year deals, hope we can make them work and hope that we had a team that could compete for the playoffs and be better than we were before.

We actually thought we could pull it off. Despite having to sign one year deals, we thought that between Dirk and Jkidd we could surround them with younger talent that were on last year or one year deals and get the opportunity to compete in the playoffs. This would give us the opportunity to evaluate younger players and hopefully have them turn into long term keepers for the Mavs, or we would be back in the free agent market during the summer of 2013 looking for a single big name (that is all we would have cap room for) or signing players to base the future of our team around, knowing that in the summer of 2014 we would have quite a bit of cap room. More than we had for the summer of 2013.

As it turned out we didn't have Jkidd, (he changed his mind and went to the Knicks) or for a big chunk of the season a healthy Dirk, and for a stretch no Shawn Marion either. No reason to re-hash last year. It sucked from every angle and was no fun for anyone.

So we went for a max free agent this summer. We had hoped that Chris Paul may be available. He wasn't. So Dwight Howard was our first target once again.

Let me address here the inevitable question of Dwight vs Mavs culture. We saw it as somewhat of a risk, but felt like because Dwight by all appearances and checking we did, is a good guy and with our support systems we believed we could make it work. If not, he was obviously a very trade-able asset. But, as everyone knows, we didn't sign him. He went to the Rockets. I do have to say the meeting with Dwight was very interesting. He is a smart guy. Much smarter than people give him credit for. He is also a very, very good listener. Unlike most people, he spent far more time listening than talking. And he had the best response to an opening question that I have ever heard from a player, or anyone for that matter. When we asked him what his goal was, his response was very specific "I want to be Epic". Which was a perfect lead in to the video we created for him.

Would I do it the same way again? In a heartbeat. Why? Because in the NBA, like in the non-sports business world you have to take chances in order to be rewarded. You have to be smart and you have to be more than a little lucky.

You also have to pay attention to what is happening around you. In the almost 14 years since I bought the Mavs the league has gotten much smarter. There are fewer old school owners and GMs. There is a much more analytical approach to everything. 10 years ago, or whenever it was that we were trading for Nick Van Exel, Avery Johnson and Raef Lafrentz, every team at least tried to see what kind of team they had and then proceeded to attempt to tank once they realized that it wasn't going to work. That created unique trade opportunities. Some of which worked for us. Some that didn't.

In today's game it appears that the popular path to build a team is to put together a group of young players that you hope will develop to their full potential and potentially lose a lot of games so you have a chance to pick the next Kevin Durant, John Wall or Kyrie Irving or Blake Griffin et al.

Then you have to do it again at least one more season, if not more, because any one of those players is not enough to win a championship. They are all great players now, but it takes time for them to develop into great players. Then you have to put the right players around them in order to become a championship contending team. This may be the exact right approach for teams to take to build a championship. You never know until you know.

What I do know, at least what I think I have learned from my experiences in business is that when there is a rush for everyone to do the same thing, it becomes more difficult to do. Not easier. Harder. It also means that as other teams follow their lead, it creates opportunities for those who have followed a different path.

I see quite a few teams taking what appears to be the same approach to building a team. I can understand why they are taking this approach. In the current CBA the value of a player chosen in the draft can be considerable because of the defined contract terms. And if you put together some great young players, it is very enticing to want to keep those players together for a long period.

But I also know that even if you have the worst record in the NBA, you may not get the top pick and even if you do, there is a material chance you pick the wrong player, or it just happens to be a draft when there are not any IDENTIFIABLE superstar potential players at the top of the draft.

In other words, while it may be popular I think the quantity of teams taking the same approach makes it more difficult to build a team in this manner.

So let's leave my little draft and team development missive behind and get back to the Mavs.

If we had gotten a single, max out free agent that cost us 19 or 20mm dollars, we would have had a good team. Possibly a great team if we were able to add the right minimum contract players around our core plus our new max out free agent. But we probably would not have had a championship contending team. It would be next year when we had cap room again and we would add what would hopefully be the finishing pieces either through free agency or through trade.

If we didn't get our max out player, we had planned to accelerate what we would have done next year to this year. Which we obviously did.

We went out and signed what I think (I know I'm always positive about our players, but this time I'm REALLY POSITIVE :), are a great group of players. We got players that we think fit our culture. That have a skill set that will allow us to be successful, that complement each other, fit well with Rick's system and can be a good team.

We also feel like we have some players that will be far better on our team than they were on previous teams. I like our ability to work with what i call "fallen angels". Players who are traded or left unsigned because everyone in the league thinks that they can only be the player they saw in another organization. We have taken players like Jason Terry, Jerry Stackhouse, Brandon Wright, Tyson Chandler and you can even say Vince Carter among others that were perceived as having this problem or that problem and had them contribute in new ways that were beyond what the "experts" expected.

We pay less attention to what they did in their last system than what we believe they will do in our system with our group of players. We are not always successful as last year pointed out, but we have a good track record.

If we stay healthy, I think we can have a good team. How good ? I don't make predictions. I do believe that by having a core of players that we can grow and develop with, and cap room in the upcoming season and what we feel is the ability to develop and improve the performance of our players, we are in a good position for this year and for the future. We have been hurt by not having a core of players in place that free agents see as teammates they want to play with. That shouldn't be the case next year.

In addition, because of all the financial restrictions that the new CBA puts on teams, I believe more teams are going to be blown up and the new popular approach will be adopted by more teams. Which in turn will make that approach even more difficult to be successful with. Hopefully this will create opportunities for the Mavs to add new players either via cap room or through trade that get us back in to the Finals and rewards our fans with another ring.

Let me also add that Im sure Ive missed things, mispelled words and made other mistakes in putting this together. So feel free to make any comments and I will try to make the proper revisions in response and address some of the things Im sure I missed

and one more thing on the video, it was not my idea to have my ugly mug in there. I was vetoed by multiple people who thought it should be in there

Update: It appears that most Mavs fans are aware that the video in the Howard presentation was only 2 minutes of a 3 hour meeting and was supposed to inject some fun and demonstrate some of the marketing support we put behind our players in arena. My bad for not anticipating that the mindless would focus on it as the foundation of our presentation. Anyone who has been to a Mavs home game knows we do quite a few of these types of videos.

I wish I could share the presentation with you, but in this day and age it would be fodder for Headline Porn and not looked at for what it is. It is not worth the hassle.