

Fed-up Knicks fans transfer allegiance to transplanted Nets

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Howard Beck

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NEW YORK—In the best of times, the New York Knicks made Nelson Ortiz weep.

It happened in 1994, when Pat Riley's squad buckled in Game 7 of the finals and lost the championship to the Houston Rockets.

It happened again in 1999, when the eighth-seeded Knicks returned to the finals, in fairy-tale fashion, only to get crushed by the San Antonio Spurs.

"I cried in 1999," said Ortiz, 26, a devout Knicks fan since childhood. "I cried in 1994."

These were bittersweet tears, born of hope. They are warm memories compared with the years of emotional torment that followed.

The losing. The lawsuits. The humiliation. The blown draft picks. The foolish trades. The false promise of Isiah Thomas. The petulance of Stephon Marbury. The feckless leadership of James Dolan. The callous dismissal of Jeremy Lin.

The madness. The mayhem.

"A debacle," Ortiz said.

Ortiz kept faith through it all, his blue-and-orange cap pulled tight, waiting for the Knicks to honour his devotion. He is waiting no longer.

When the Nets open their home season Saturday night against the Raptors, Ortiz will be draped in black and white — a proud, newly converted fan of the transplanted Brooklyn team.

"I was rubbed the wrong way for so long," said Ortiz, who lives in Bay Ridge, "that I guess I was kind of looking for an out."

A new era is upon us. The Nets are a New York team now, after 35 years in New Jersey. Their arrival has spawned a new breed of fan: the Knicks-to-Nets defector. They are the disillusioned, the angry, the hopeful. And their numbers appear to be growing, based on social media and anecdotal accounts.

Find a fan who switched teams, and he will tell you about three others who have done the same: a brother, a girlfriend, a co-worker. Many are Brooklyn natives who are thrilled to root for a Brooklyn team. But the defectors say they were driven away, by the same grievances that Knicks fans have been reciting for years.

"I don't want to take this parallel too far, but it was like an abusive relationship," said James Graham, a Prospect Heights resident who renounced his Knicks fandom. "I got out."

This change in fan loyalty has particular relevance to Toronto: If an NHL team were to move to Markham, would many Maple Leafs fans, tired of decades of losing, switch allegiances and cheer for a club north of the city?

There is no Gallup poll for team allegiance, so the trend in New York is hard to quantify. Nets officials say they are not keeping track. But this much is known: The Nets have sold nearly 11,000 full-season tickets, triple the number from last season. Most are coming from Brooklyn (37 per cent), Manhattan (23 per cent) and Nassau County (6 per cent).

It is doubtful they all became basketball fans overnight or were closet Nets fans all along. It is more likely that a great number are, in fact, Knicks apostates, who are making Mikhail Prokhorov, the Nets' brash owner, look positively prophetic for declaring in 2010, "We're going to turn Knick fans into Net fans."

Of course, Prokhorov had lots of help, mostly from the Knicks. Few teams in the past decade have tortured their fan base as relentlessly, with a toxic brew of bad basketball, bad characters and bad karma.

The Knicks have not won a playoff series since 2000. They have had a losing record in nine of the last 11 seasons, compiling a record of 357-529. They have been sued for sexual harassment and picketed by fans. Last season, a dispute between Madison Square Garden and Time-Warner Cable left thousands of viewers without Knicks games. That came just months after the team raised ticket prices by an average of 40 per cent.

Dolan, the Garden chairman, might be the most reviled figure in New York sports.

"The only thing that would make me go back is if they sold the team," said Brian Dowling, a 35-year-old defector who lives in Long Island. "I don't think it will happen anytime soon."

Dowling added, "At a certain point, I just asked myself: Is this worth it?"

Knicks fans have been asking this existential question for years, to no productive end. Who else could they root for? The Chicago Bulls? Impossible. The Boston Celtics? Unconscionable. The team in New Jersey? Meh.

But, reborn in Brooklyn, the Nets now exude cool. They have the sleek black uniforms, the imprimatur of Jay-Z and the billion-dollar arena. With an all-star backcourt and a promising core, the Nets present a worthy alternative to fans across the region, but especially to the 2.6 million people who call Brooklyn home.

"It's a unique phenomenon, and it's a unique opportunity," said Graham, 41, who lives five blocks from the Barclays Center.

Graham grew up on that same street, a devout Knicks fan. He idolized Patrick Ewing, agonized over Bernard King and got his heart broken by Michael Jordan. He was at the Garden on May 7, 1995 — the day that Indiana's Reggie Miller scored eight points in nine seconds to beat the Knicks in a playoff game.

"I remember my coat coming off, and my coat going back on," Graham said with a rueful laugh.

Back then, it was the Bulls and the Pacers who caused Knicks fans the most anguish. Now it is usually the Knicks franchise itself.

In a single sentence, Graham referred to the team as "disheartening," "illogical" and "insensitive," directing most of his anger at Dolan.

"I didn't make the switch lightly," Graham said. "I was a loyal fan for a long, long time. And that loyalty, now that it's been pried away with a crowbar, now it's attached to a new team."

The defectors all describe a similar evolution.

They were depressed by the Thomas-Marbury era. They were heartened by the 2008 arrival of Donnie Walsh and Mike D'Antoni — as the new team president and coach — then distressed to see both men run off. They embraced Amar'e Stoudemire as the foundation of a promising new lineup in 2010. They cringed when that lineup was torn up in a hasty trade for Carmelo Anthony.

If there was a catalyzing event in this movement, it came July 17. That was the day the Knicks chose to let Lin — their inspiring, crowd-pleasing young point guard from Harvard — leave for Houston, rather than match a three-year, \$25 million contract. To many fans, it was the ultimate slap in the face. Lin had provided more thrills and joy in a two-week span than any Knicks player had in the past 10 years. He was more popular than Stoudemire, more beloved than Anthony.

In the days that followed, Twitter timelines and fan forums were filled with wails of betrayal and outrage, and threats to abandon the team. Many followed through. Many swallowed their rage, maintaining their Knicks allegiance in spite of themselves.

"Every rational part of my brain wants to be a Nets fan," said Brian Koppelman, a Knicks season-ticket holder since 1989.

When the Knicks let Lin walk, Koppelman swore he was done. He posted about it on Twitter and wrote an essay for Grantland.com. Then he balked.

"What makes it so difficult with a sports team is memory and connection, and the little emotional resonances that you have and you carry with you," said Koppelman, 46.

For long-time Knicks fans, the franchise is still synonymous with Ewing and King, Walt Frazier and Earl Monroe, Bill Bradley and Red Holzman.

"My very first memory I have when I was 4 years old is me and my dad at the Garden watching the Knicks," Koppelman said. "When I close my eyes and think of the Knicks, I still see Earl Monroe."

So while Koppelman says current Knicks' ownership "deserves to be abandoned" and "deserves to be pilloried," it is history that keeps him coming back. This is the Knicks' eternal advantage, and it is the reason team officials have projected unwavering ambivalence — even arrogance — about the Nets' encroachment on their territory. The Knicks have the legendary names, the storied arena, the two championship banners hanging in the rafters. But the Knicks have been living off the fumes of that legacy for decades now. The last banner was hung in 1973. The charm is fading.

The Knicks still have Woody Allen and Spike Lee (who is staying faithful despite his Brooklyn roots) in their corner. But other celebrities have joined the defector movement. Actress Ellen Pompeo, who had been a semi-regular at Knicks games, now has Nets season tickets. Filmmaker Edward Burns has also embraced the Nets (but says he still supports the Knicks, too).

Other notable Nets supporters include rappers Fabolous and Busta Rhymes, R&B singer Ne-Yo, actress Rosie Perez, actor Michael K. Williams and pop star Justin Bieber, who wore a "Hello Brooklyn" Nets shirt on the Jimmy Fallon show.

Then there is Ethan Hawke, who in an interview with Spike TV said he felt "completely betrayed and abandoned by the way the Knicks management handled Jeremy Lin." Hawke said the Knicks were "in my DNA," but that he planned to take his son to Nets games this season and would re-evaluate his loyalties.

For now, the Knicks still have a sizable edge in fan support, including a 2-to-1 advantage in Brooklyn, according to Dan Migala, a partner at Property Consulting Group, a Chicago-based sports marketing firm.

About 24 per cent of Brooklyn residents either watched, attended or listened to a Knicks game last season, said Migala, citing data provided by Scarborough Sports Marketing. By comparison, 12 per cent of Brooklyn residents watched, attended or listened to a Nets game, a difference of about 250,000 people.

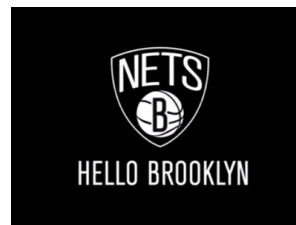
But those figures were based on a Nets team based in New Jersey, not one playing with "Brooklyn" across the chest. To those who live in the borough, that makes all the difference.

"Wherever I go in the world, I don't say I'm from New York," Ortiz said. "I say I'm from Brooklyn, and people understand that."

Although it was supposed to happen Thursday, the rivalry will eventually be settled on the court. When the moment comes, Knicks fans are vowing to take over the Barclays Center, just as they did for years in New Jersey.

"I hope not," said Ortiz. "But if they do, I hope they leave crying."

It wouldn't be the first time.



Danny Leon gets a Brooklyn Nets tattoo at the Barclays Center October 6, 2012 in the Brooklyn borough of New York City. The Brooklyn Nets tattoos were offered for free by Spike TV as a promotion for their upcoming show "Ink Master".



Brooklyn Nets Tattoos Offered For Free During Promotion

Dumb Office Arguments: Are Knicks Fans Allowed to Become Nets Fans?

By Grantland Staff on July 16, 2012 11:30 AM ET

JIM MCISAAC/GETTY IMAGES

Over the weekend, news broke that the New York Knicks were dragging their feet in matching the Houston Rockets' \$25 million contract offer to point guard Jeremy Lin. As the nervous laughter of Knicks fans ("Ha, this is hilarious ... can you imagine? No, but really, guys. Sign him") turned into acts of hair-pulling and fist-shaking and full-blown Twitter meltdowns, our fearless leader, Bill Simmons, posed the question: If the Knicks, following the apparent financial advice of Carmelo Anthony, turn their backs on the most exciting, well-liked player to rock blue and orange since [insert beloved Knicks player Sprewell, Starks, Ewing ... Renaldo Balkman], would New York fans be wise to turn their backs on the team and become fans of the other New York franchise, the Brooklyn Nets? Simmons certainly thought so. We asked several members of the Grantland family, some of whom count themselves as Knicks supporters, for a verdict.

Mark Lisanti

Under what should heretofore be referred to as the Lin-Dolan Clause of Desperate Fandom, a team switch should be allowed under extraordinary circumstances. Here, we have two: (1) a backbreaking, morale-obliterating move by an utterly incompetent owner who has zero regard for his fan constituency, and (2) the arrival of another team within not only the immediate region, but the city borders. (And also, as long as we're on the subject, [3] the incompetent, suggestible owner is seemingly still under Rasputin-like sway of ousted managerial war criminal Isiah Thomas, who, we'll soon discover, has been adding ground glass to Dolan's smoothies as he tries to convince his mesmerized buddy to give him a controlling chunk of the team in the "statistically unlikely" event of "death by slow stomach bleeding.")

Joe House

This is America. And in America, we express our opinions on important matters like where to live, what to eat, which Kardashian is our favorite (hi, Khloe!), and who should run the country by spending our dollar bills. For most sports fans in this great land, the question of what teams to root for — and where to spend fan dollars — is easy: Who are the locals? I live in Washington, D.C., so I root for the 'Skins, Almost-Bullets, Caps, and Nats. Now, whether or not I actually attend games and/or spend dollar bills on team merch depends on the team and franchise trajectory that year and whether or not I feel like I'm being gifted. What does this have to do with the Knicks and the Nets? Mostly nothing, because I have never understood how people in New York figure out whom to root for, having heard 86,593 different explanations for who does what on what basis. But if it were me, I would look at my dollar bills and ask them: If I send you to this team, will you feel the way Redskins' fans feel about Dan Snyder?

Michael Weinreb

You may switch allegiances in general only if you are under the age of 14. You may switch allegiances to Brooklyn if you are an artisan pickle manufacturer, play the banjo in a bluegrass punk outfit, or are Adam Driver.

David Jacoby

Regardless of what some people believe (read: Bill), there are no rules for being a sports fan. You can be a fan of whatever team you want, whenever you want. The team you root for is a completely subjective concept, and there isn't some committee (read: Bill) that sets guidelines and allows you a window to make a switch. That is some bullshit. Who is someone else to tell me what team they "are fine with" me being a fan of? When I turn on the television and see two teams trying to win a game, I don't send an e-mail to a distribution list asking if it is OK for me to want one team to win more than the other, it just happens in my heart. If you're a Knicks fan and you want to root for the Nets, go right ahead. Who cares? That is what I will be doing. I know this opinion is unpopular, but you know what isn't unpopular? Fucking freedom. So while all of you are asking each other permission to root for one team or another, I will be draped in the American flag drinking a Budweiser with a bald eagle perched on my arm switching sports-team allegiances. If you have a problem with that, then you should really reevaluate what is important to you.

Sean Fennessey

Imagine a man living in Oklahoma City. It's 2007. He is a lifelong Dallas Mavericks fan, a team that resides little more than 200 miles due south. He attends every home game, driving three and a half hours both ways to watch Dirk Nowitzki, Jason Terry, Josh Howard. The season is over. His team has just been eliminated from the NBA playoffs, a no. 1 seed humiliated by the exhilarating underdog Golden State Warriors. Seven weeks later, the Seattle SuperSonics draft a Texas Longhorn forward named Kevin Durant — the same Sonics that have been threatening to leave their native city. Oklahoma City is the rumored destination. The man starts to dream. His imagination wanders. One day, maybe I'll root for Kevin Durant. Soon, a team will be just minutes away. Season tickets will be cheaper. A fan base will be energized.

Things worked out for the man in Oklahoma City. Things will work out in Brooklyn.

Chuck Klosterman

In what universe is switching "allegiances" from one team to another remotely controversial? At the professional level, you should always focus on whatever a team represents in the present tense: You should be motivated by the current roster, the current coaching staff, the current ownership, the uniforms they're presently wearing, the facility where the team plays, geography, and whatever bizarre interior drive dictates your self-created relationship with the franchise. Remaining loyal to a team is not like remaining loyal to an actual person. If you want to change who you're rooting for in the middle of any given game, that's totally acceptable. Honestly, if you truly love sports, you should fight the urge to root for anyone, ever. You should just appreciate the game itself. The word "fan" derives from the word "fanaticism," which is a bad thing. There are certain teams I always root for (and probably always will), and I will always feel stupid about it. It's a real weakness.

Katie Baker

Several hours into a wedding this weekend, I glanced at my phone to see the name "Kurt Thomas" all up in my Twitter feed. We're still making these jokes? I thought. The Camby signing was days ago! Alas, I'd forgotten one of the rules of thumb of being a Knicks fan: If it sounds like a punch line, it's probably true. And so a day of cartoonish courier dodging ended in controversy: The Knicks, everyone's sources started to say, would not be re-signing Jeremy Lin. Here's the weird thing, though: I'm not even mad. Bewildered? Yes. SMH? Sure. Occasionally bursting into peals of maniacal laughter? Every few minutes. But for whatever reason, this is just (bad) business as usual to me. These are the Knicks. These are my Knicks, the same team I've known and loved and absolutely despised for pretty much my whole life — the epic dysfunction, the "Garden Kremlinologists," the fact that a pal of mine can write a reasonable, measured take on the team's offseason and then have the entire thing rendered obscenely obsolete within hours. I wouldn't even begin to judge anyone for whom this is the last straw; anyone who says "fuck this noise" and buys one of these kick-ass tees and never looks back, except perhaps in disgust. Vaya con dios, in this case dios being Jay-Z. But there's no way I could do it myself. It's barely even crossed my mind. Maybe it's Stockholm Syndrome, or maybe it's just that I'm no longer living in Brooklyn, where the walking distance to the Barclays Center would be tantalizingly short and the lure intoxicatingly strong. Maybe I'm stubborn, or stupid, or both. But I'm sticking around. I'm going down with the ship, playing "Go New York, Go New York, Go" on a waterlogged and out-of-tune violin. I may be a bitter old biddy by the time the Knicks finally win a post-'70s title; more likely, I'll be dead. But I just truly don't think I could ever imagine it any other way.

Brian Phillips

I hate to make it sound like sports isn't the most important thing in the world or something, but ... do you like the Nets more than the Knicks? Would you maybe rather be a Nets fan than a Knicks fan? Then be a Nets fan. I mean, I realize identity is tricky and feelings are complicated, but George Washington didn't kill the King of England so you could suffer against your will for the Cablevision Corporation. You don't need permission here. Make your own rules.

Shane Ryan

Allowed? Yes. This is America, home of the freedom to shift allegiances at the first sign of trouble. But is it a good idea? Hell no. Am I changing the question and annoying my editor? Yes. But look — the best, most ecstatic, most euphoric championships always come after a drought. It's a confirmed fact. I root for the Yankees, the Giants, and Duke basketball (I encourage you to take a minute to puke), and all three teams provide great empirical data. The two best Yankees World Series came in '96 and '09, after RELATIVE periods of drought (yes, you may puke again). The titles in '98, '99, and 2000? Still fantastic, but not nearly the same experience. Ditto the Giants — as wonderful as this year was, it will never compare to 2008. Duke's titles have been separated by about a decade each except for the '92 run, which was easily the least spectacular of the four. You probably know without looking that they overcame UNLV in '91, but who was their opponent in '92? It took you a minute to remember Michigan, right? Obviously there are a million circumstances that go into the value of each championship, but when you've suffered through the lemon years, the rush of success, when it finally comes, is like a shot of adrenaline to the soul. Consider the Red Sox; which of their titles was more emotionally transcendent? The one that came after 80-plus years of unthinkable heartbreak, or the one three years later, when they beat the Rockies? Just like Jonathan Papelbon, that's a no-brainer. So stick with it, fellow Knicks fans. Jeremy Lin is a passing fad, and that title is somewhere on the horizon, waiting for us in the fog. When it comes, you don't want to be the guy cheering for Brooklyn because you felt sorry for yourself. And since I've already annoyed you with my team allegiances, let's get real pretentious and close with a quote by Tennessee Williams: "Once you fully apprehend the vacuity of a life without struggle, you are equipped with the basic means of salvation."

Sal Iacono

I'm sure NBA fans couldn't give a crap less about what a die-hard Dallas Cowboys supporter who grew up in New York feels about this issue. Too bad — here goes. I have no problem with Big Apple natives switching their allegiance from the Knicks to the Nets. Especially those who actually reside in Brooklyn. And this has nothing to do with the ongoing punch line known as James Dolan or the Knicks' Lincompetence in general. This has to do with common geographical sense. Imagine that a pro team is coming to the very neighborhood you live in. Are you telling me if you started off rooting for the Knicks you're not allowed to now pull for the Nets? Even if their home games take place down the block? How far do we go with this? What if the Nets moved into your house? How about then? Still can't root

for them? Should you just hide in your mother's pantry pretending Tyshawn Taylor isn't dunking on your makeshift backyard hoop? Of course you can root for them. But you have to decide on one team. Knicks or Nets. Can't be both. They play against each other too much. Make no mistake about it: There is a conflict. So choose once and choose wisely.

Juliet Litman

Many moons ago — also known as 2004 — when newspapers still had useful real estate listings, Miranda Hobbes decided to move to Brooklyn. Now, after countless New York Times trend pieces, a failed *Real World: Brooklyn* season, one renovation of Alex and Simon's house on *Real Housewives of New York*, and nearly the entire course of *Gossip Girl*, which featured "edgy" Brooklyn dweller Dan Humphries, the Manhattan-to-Brooklyn move is well-worn territory. This is now a common, cliché move, and Brooklyn is no longer cool. Are you listening, Knicks fans? You can't just make this well-traveled move now because you read about it in the Times via your iPhone, because Jay-Z is the owner of the Nets, or because you heard James Dolan really messed up this time. No, the only Knicks fans who are allowed to become Nets fans are the top-tier, die-hard fans — the ones who have scrutinized every Dolan move, lived in fear of an Isiah Thomas return, and survived the relative success that their former team has had in Denver. Only these people, the truly wounded, can seek solace in Brooklyn. The rest of you are stuck with the Knicks. You haven't earned the right to jump ship.

Carles

If you are a Knicks fan who hasn't turned on your team already, you might as well wait until the third year of Jeremy Lin's contract to find out if he is a star or an oft-injured salary cap albatross who never matched his first-year production. Linsanity could end up being a cultural reference that is on the same level as Crystal Pepsi, pogs, or the Bash Brothers. It's not like Mike Woodson was really going to figure out the Knicks offense anyways. Knicks fans already have to face the fact that the Nuggets have a better record since the Carmelo trade, even though they are happy to forget as they watch him play hero ball during an exciting Sunday-afternoon game. The Brooklyn Nets are just as annoying as the Knicks when it comes to operating as a wannabe superstar destination that doesn't have enough flexibility to build a complete team, so Knicks fans might as well stay put and hope Amar'e finally has the career-ending injury that fulfills his destiny as the Most Injury-Prone Man Alive and wipes his contract off the books.

Brian Koppelman

April 27, 1984. My 18th birthday. Bernard King went 17-for-26 from the floor and 10-for-13 from the line for 44 points. He added 13 rebounds and the Knicks beat Isiah Thomas, Bill Laimbeer, and the rest of the hated Pistons in Game 5 to win a hotly contested first-round playoff series. After the game, my friends and I went to this local parking lot to play touch football under the lights in celebration of both my birthday and the win. I had started watching the Knicks with my dad at 4 years old, and that night was the zenith of my Knick fandom until I had my own son, Sam, and began taking him to the games. Sam has never had a zenith. The question posed is, Can Knicks fans switch over to the Nets if Dolan doesn't match Houston's offer? This is all I've thought about for the past 16 hours. The answer: We have to. The team that we rooted for — to which I have donated 42 years (23 as a season-ticket holder) — is dead and gone. The Dolans, even more than other owners, do not care about the fans, the legacy, the history, or anything, really, at all. James Dolan seems to me to be like "Wormtongue" from *Lord of the Rings*, and his father is Theoden, under a spell and powerless to even see what's going on. But we, the fans, are not powerless. We can decide to recognize that the throne is, for all intents and purposes, empty. We can decide to recognize that the team we loved does not exist anymore. That it can never exist as long as the Dolans own it. We can decide to see the Knicks for what they actually are, not what we wish them to be, like the husband who realizes, finally, after everyone else has told him, that his wife is not only cheating, but poisoning his mac and cheese. I am done eating poisoned mac and cheese. And I am done with the New York Knicks. Let's go, Brooklyn!

Rafe Bartholomew

I grew up playing basketball in New York, and I don't care about the Knicks. I'm 2 percent happier when they win and pretty ambivalent when they suck. Currently, they seem to be in avid pursuit of some sucky form of winning a slim majority of their games and then losing early in the postseason. I'm thrilled that they've elected to do that while bringing back Marcus Camby and Kurt Thomas, the only members of the 1999 Eastern Conference champion Knicks who are still active NBA players. But that's the only Knicks news in the last week that got much of an emotional reaction (sneering joy) out of me. As a New Yorker, I take more pride in seeing other New Yorkers succeed in the league. I'm happy about the past successes of Lamar Odom and Metta World Peace and disappointed that their careers seem to be in decline. I'm forlorn that Kenny Satterfield, Erick Barkley, Andre Barrett, Corey Williams, Shaheen Holloway, Omar Cook, Taliek Brown, and Richie Parker never made it. I want New York to matter the way Kenny Smith and Nate Archibald and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar mattered. I want to be from the city that produces the best basketball players in the world instead of the most overrated basketball players in the world. But basketball is different nowadays — it's so spread-out, the talent comes from all over. So I'm from the city that once produced the best basketball players on the planet, and the Knicks, whether they're a lottery team or NBA champions, aren't changing that.

Will Nets win over New York fans?

UPDATED JUL 19, 2012 2:03 PM ET

In an interview with New York magazine earlier this month, Brooklyn-born movie director and Knicks superfan Spike Lee said he anticipated “war” when his beloved team and the new-look Brooklyn Nets square off this fall.

NBA Commissioner David Stern, a New York City native himself, remarked at the NBA Draft Lottery that he was “hoping for some sparks” when the Nets and Knicks meet — with the East River, not the Hudson, now separating the teams after the Nets’ move from New Jersey.

Nets coach Avery Johnson, in a bit of showmanship on his part, flat-out overlooked the giant, orange-and-blue elephant in the room, saying his team’s goal in its first season at Brooklyn’s brand-new Barclays Center will be to win an NBA title, not a “local championship.”

As early as 2010, the Nets began dialing up the trash talk, tweaking the Knicks with a massive billboard — featuring Nets owner Mikhail Prokhorov, minority owner Jay-Z and the slogan “the blueprint for greatness” — on the side of a building right outside Madison Square Garden.

On the court, trash talk has begun among the players, too. Newly arrived Nets guard Joe Johnson already has proclaimed his Brooklyn squad “definitely” the best team in the city, only to have Knicks forward Carmelo Anthony respond that his Knicks will “be ready for the challenge” when it comes.

The season is still three months out, but seemingly everyone with a hand or even a passing interest in the matchup is champing at the bit for the next chapter of this Gotham rivalry to get started.

The Knicks and their fans are tired of the hype, while the Nets are through being overlooked in favor of their big brother in Midtown. New York and Brooklyn haven’t even played yet, but they already dislike each other. And all I can say is it’s about time.

Because before now, the Nets-Knicks rivalry had always been a bit of a one-sided affair, even if only in the hearts and Nielsen boxes of fans.

See, New York has always been the banner franchise in these parts, while the Nets, regardless of their success — they’ve reached two NBA Finals since the Knicks’ last championship appearance — have always lingered in the background, hoping to get noticed and rarely succeeding.

But now, in completing their move from gritty Newark to the hip heart of Brooklyn, they’ve put themselves in the spotlight while entrenching themselves in their new surroundings. Once a laughingstock, the Nets have talked a big game and dedicated themselves to making sure they don’t blow it when everyone is finally watching — and they’ve put their money where their mouth is.

Since the moratorium on player signings was lifted last week, Brooklyn has added nine contracts with a combined value of more than \$330 million to the payroll (or pocket change for the multi-billionaire Prokhorov).

They’ve got arguably the best backcourt in the NBA with Deron Williams — who spurned Dallas to be part of the movement in Brooklyn — and the All-Star isolation extraordinaire Johnson, along with a slashing, All-Star small forward in Gerald Wallace.

Their frontcourt isn’t too shabby either, with 20-point per game scorer Brook Lopez and a double-double machine in Kris Humphries, who can be a fine basketball player when he’s not making a fool of himself on TV, doing the heavy lifting. Nor is the bench, which features C.J. Watson, MarShon Brooks, Reggie Evans, Jerry Stackhouse and Mirza Teletovic.

Brooklyn missed out on Orlando’s superstar center Dwight Howard — or, rather, Howard missed on Brooklyn — and that may be what keeps the Nets from being a bona fide championship contender. But even without Howard, they’re good and they’re interesting, which is more than can be said for any Nets team for the past decade.

The Knicks, on the other hand, still are the Knicks, and in this city that will always count for something.

Sure, they lost out on Steve Nash to Los Angeles and let Jeremy Lin and Landry Fields sign lucrative deals with [Houston](#) and Toronto, respectively. But as the most distinguished team in the country’s biggest market — and one of the two most profitable clubs in basketball — New York still doesn’t have to do much to get anyone’s attention.

Anthony, Amar’e Stoudemire and Tyson Chandler still are the crux of the operation at MSG, and will dictate the direction for the Knicks’ season. Much of their success will come down to the play of the Olympian Anthony, but as we saw late last season, he’s still — for all his frustrating selfishness with the ball — a heck of a basketball player.

Sharpshooter Steve Novak is back, as is the enigmatic J.R. Smith, along with a blast from the past in Raymond Felton. The Knicks also ventured to the Upper West Side and nabbed Jason Kidd, Marcus Camby and Kurt Thomas from the dinosaur exhibit at the Museum of Natural History to impart their leadership upon a team in need of some veteran savvy.

Does that make them better than the Nets? It's tough to say, as both teams are strongest where the other is most vulnerable. New York, it would seem, has the chemistry edge, though it's hardly a well-oiled machine. And Brooklyn has youth on its side, not to mention a giant chip on its shoulder.

But the beautiful and exciting part about this rivalry is that, when it's all said and done, neither team has a realistic shot at a championship anyway, so the Knicks' and Nets' next best option is to defend their pride.

The Knicks and Nets aren't competing against the rest of the league; they're competing against each other, with the bragging rights of the basketball Mecca at stake. And that we finally care at all is a watershed moment in itself.

It's Jay-Z vs. Spike Lee. Atlantic Terminal vs. Penn Station. Prospect Park vs. Central Park. Brooklyn vs. Manhattan. Like Spike said, this is war. And this is how it's supposed to be.

The Brooklyn Nets Brand

Three ways New York's newly relocated NBA franchise botched its big move

By Carles on July 16, 2012

ometimes I wonder what it was like to live when hatred and disgust for individual players and teams was primarily born of repetitive meetings based on regional rivalries and annual playoff showdowns. Now, we have so many more reasons to root against teams and the constructed villains who play for those teams. All you have to do is marry and divorce a Kardashian to inspire a season of boos in opposing arenas. The success of a team like the Heat can be rejected as the product of an overnight success scheme, resented by the fan bases that lack a team president with 'historical cred.'

While monitoring the reconstruction project that is the Brooklyn Nets, it has also become clear that we openly resent teams who show no artistry or patience, who seem unwilling to incubate a 'winning culture.' In the past few weeks, we've found out who will actually be on the Barclays Center court when the season starts, and it feels like the Nets have taken the most inorganic approach to assembling a team. The new Nets are a blank slate. Their player personnel strategies have been those of a team interested only in attracting fans, not retaining them.

These are the ways in which the Brooklyn Nets have failed as an NBA rebranding project.

Failure to Properly Identify Superstars

The Brooklyn Nets were forced to settle for a tier of players with inflated value. I can't help but think of Deron Williams and Joe Johnson as the only 'stars' that would be attracted to an unproven franchise because it was in a 'major market.'

It's hard to remember who Deron Williams actually is — he has basically been M.I.A. for two seasons due to injury and/or strategic tanking. Apparently he played well enough to have his number retired by the Turkish team Besiktas after a few games in Europe during the lockout. It will always be difficult for me to understand his decision to give up on the Utah Jazz, where he forced a trade in early 2011. Without another Westbrook-to-his-Durant young gun to earn his lumps with, it may have seemed impossible to achieve anything — especially knowing there was no way in hell one of his Olympic colleagues would want to sign in Utah to form a superteam of their own. It's easy to forget that in 2007, Williams led the Jazz to the Western Conference finals, where they lost to the eventual NBA champion San Antonio Spurs. I hardly remember that, probably because it must have been a crappy NBA season if the Spurs won the championship.

Maybe Williams felt like he could never win the fight against fellow draft-class mate Chris Paul without elevating his brand in a new market. CP3 'wanted more' than just carrying the Hornets every year, and he wasn't accused of being above a small market. He single-handedly made the Hornets relevant until the very end. Can you really be a 'franchise guy' if you go M.I.A. for two seasons of your prime?

Joe Johnson is even more enigmatic than Deron Williams. He carries himself with the swagger of an alpha dog, but he's never made his teammates better and couldn't fill seats in Atlanta. Johnson will never make sense to me, especially after leaving the Phoenix Suns, a team that was on the brink of revolutionizing the NBA with a progressive offense. He ended up being the cog in the system that they were never able to replace. Had he stayed, Steve Nash would have continued to pad Johnson's offensive stats. He'll always just be one of those guys who preyed upon middling franchises that felt pressure to offer B-list guys max contracts to make it seem like management was 'trying to win NOW.' Why is Johnson even reuniting with a world-class point guard when he wanted to do it himself all along?

It's impossible to know what these guys are thinking, which is why Dwight Howard truly is the Brooklyn Net who got away. It was his destiny to end up playing alongside the NBA's other non-substantive, alleged superstars. Had they united, after multiple seasons of playoff disappointments, all three 'stars' could claim a lack of help despite understanding the salary cap ramifications of a Big Three-style architecture. Now, the two guards will blame a lack of interior offense and defense.

Failure to Sculpt a Winning Team With General Manager Artistry

Fans subconsciously want to watch their team grow up so that they feel like proud parents when their team finally achieves something. The Nets didn't view 'building through the draft' as a viable option, mainly because of the pressure they were under to launch in Brooklyn with a contender. They weren't afraid to compound that problem by giving away draft picks.

It was probably realistic — most teams can't find a franchise guy without the top pick in a rich draft. Instead, the Nets made it clear that they were willing to spend to add the most value to the team. Unfortunately, this meant that the Nets spent the past two seasons as the most literal group of assets that any professional franchise has presented to their few remaining fans. Sure, every team in the NBA is just a collection of assets, but it's usually nice of the team to at least pretend that they're trying to win.

Nets general manager Billy King is being praised for salvaging Williams's career as a Net by acquiring Johnson from the Hawks a few days before the team's pitch to keep Deron from becoming a Dallas Maverick. They locked up Brook Lopez with a max contract after Howard fell through. Recently acquired Gerald Wallace is going to make \$40 million for four years, above market value. They'll continue to fill the roster with more affordable players.

So what? King signed a bunch of guys to contracts. It doesn't feel like he 'saved' anything. There isn't really any artistry in his management, it was just a process of striking out. No LeBron James, no Carmelo Anthony, and no Dwight Howard. It wasn't a matter of finding the players who actually believed in the Brooklyn dream. It was about finding trade partners that were willing to accept a pupu platter in exchange for their overpriced assets.

Failure to Incubate a Winning Culture

'Building an entirely new culture' used to be a hot sports term that made it sound like you understood that there was something 'beyond the game' that had to be altered within a franchise to make it a winner. Now, basically everyone mentions that modern cliché when they talk about a team that is trying to not suck anymore. There is a new wave of coaches and GMs who probably got jobs just by mentioning a desire to 'change the culture,' as if they were writing an essay to secure an MBA from the University of Phoenix.

The Nets aren't incubating anything. There are no draft picks. There are no young guys to mentor. The team's stars have already forged their identities. There aren't even really respected veterans who run mentorship programs and will serve as the team's 'adult' presence. The only thing the Nets have going for them is that they are no longer just a collection of assets on hold for the purpose of trying to obtain a superstar player.

It doesn't seem like they are going to have a special corporate or team culture, since the Nets' business model is all about exploiting rich New Yorkers with the illusion of a V.I.P. experience.

Williams was already 'above' the concept of small-market culture when he got Jerry Sloan fired, then requested a trade to a losing team that he could theoretically 'control.' The Jazz decided to ship Deron out as soon as possible, instead of letting it turn into a holdup, looking to rebuild as soon as possible, looking to reassert management's control over the culture of the team. Now, Deron can try to win a championship under the guidance of Avery Johnson's culture of winning as opposed to Sloan's.

There might not be a proper business case for launching a professional sports franchise in a highly competitive market, and perhaps the Brooklyn Nets did everything they did the only way possible. Not every team can be the Little Incubation Project That Could, better known as the Oklahoma City Thunder. The Nets don't have time to be a version of the Vancouver Grizzlies that happen to play in a market with actual performance demands. The relaunch of the Nets exposes the idea of a 'winning team culture' as effective only for small markets in which locals need the illusion of togetherness and overcoming long odds, which often result from a series of lucky bounces and prudent managerial decisions.

The intangible value of being a large-market team requires building a culture of stardom, the secret ingredient that feeds the egos of players who 'want to play on the biggest stage possible.' When the Nets have hard times, we'll talk about it. When they are doing well, we'll get overexcited about it. Best-case scenario, Adam Morrison will make the team after dominating the Summer League, leapfrogging his two superstars and leading to a Morrisanity phenomenon that will overtake New York. His underdog story will serve as the inspiration that guides the Nets to their eventual playoff exit.

No Love for the Brooklyn Nets Logo

By [Ben Detrick](#) on May 3, 2012 5:00 PM ET

DAVID DOW/NBAE VIA GETTY IMAGES

A few days ago, photos surfaced of Jay-Z in a shirt emblazoned with the new logo for the Brooklyn Nets. Despite his very public ownership of a very small stake in the NBA franchise, there was reason for skepticism: mostly, the insignia appeared as if it were designed in MS Paint by Canal Street bootleggers. One expected a CD-ROM pre-loaded with 1,000 free hours of AOL to tumble out of Jay-Z's pocket.

On Monday, the unfamiliar Nets logo was [disappointingly confirmed as the genuine article](#). Shooting for aggressive simplicity, the stark logo — a “B” inside a basketball, topped by the word “NETS” — has a simple black-and-white color scheme. Outside of the vague “B,” there are no visual markers to indicate the team hails from Brooklyn. In comparison to NBA logos from the past, it resembles the emblem used by the [Rochester Royals](#), a franchise that later leapfrogged across America until majestically morphing into the Sacramento Kings.

We know, we know. Retro branding is all the rage. Products like Pepsi and Doritos have capitalized on nostalgia by reintroducing packaging from the past. And fetishism for yesteryear abounds in trendier parts of Brooklyn, where suspender-bound bartenders mix absinthe cocktails in speakeasies that feign to flout Prohibition. Even Jay-Z has veered toward classicism. His sports bar, Manhattan's 40/40 Club, recently replaced lavender lighting and futuristic, ovum-shaped chairs with dark wood and glinting gold.

And yes, most new NBA logos are corny. “Sophisticated” and “timeless” are not adjectives to describe [a cartoon Raptor dribbling a basketball](#). More problematically, teams like the Mavs and Timberwolves, groping for modernization, abandoned their great logos of the '80s and '90s in favor of polished images that look at home on the side an energy-drink can. While the Brooklyn Nets' logo avoids the cheesiness of pandering to the now — you know, like a picture of Drake eating a gluten-free cake-sicle while watching *Game of Thrones* — it still doesn't evoke a sense of quality or grandeur or refinement. It's just bland.

But let's get an expert's opinion.

“I don't hate it,” said Cey Adams, the founding creative director at Def Jam and a graphic artist who has worked with Public Enemy, the Beastie Boys, and yes, even Jay-Z. “It's just not an improvement from the New Jersey logo.” He described the two-tone color scheme as “way too flat” and “one-dimensional.” Most NBA teams use at least three colors in their logo, and only Golden State's blue-and-yellow throwback is close to as stripped down as the Nets' new insignia. “As far as the choice to go with black and white ... not a good one,” said Adams. “I'm sure they were working outside the corporate system.”

Interestingly, Adams's theory that the Nets' new logo came from the fringes of the design community might be accurate. When the image was introduced, the organization trumpeted the implausible detail that Jay-Z was the creative force behind the logo. Shawn Carter is an exceptional rapper, an acute businessman and a trendsetter who popularized/un-popularized throwback jerseys, but his design cred is less proven.



Second Toronto team should motivate Maple Leafs

Adam Proteau
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Perhaps the most famous part of Jurassic Park is the scene in which a glass of water faintly ripples before a rampaging dinosaur threatens the well-being of the helpless humans. That's the image that came to mind when news broke this week that Bauer Performance Sports' chairman Graeme Rouston had formally submitted an application to build a massive professional hockey-ready arena just north of Toronto.

In this situation, the Toronto Maple Leafs represent the humans and the charging dinosaur is the prospect of a second NHL team in the Greater Toronto Area. It is far from a certainty we'll see the Original Six team competing with a local rival in the next five years, but those barely perceptible waves of water Rouston has set in motion should put Leafs management and ownership on notice.

Although it hardly seems possible given the current frustrations with the Leafs, the pressure to win could soon become even more pronounced with an in-town competitor. And the ramifications of continuing underachievement could eventually have a significant effect on ownership's financial bottom line.

Now, that isn't to say current Buds supporters would instantly abandon the inside of the Air Canada Centre and flock en masse to Markham, Ont., where Rouston plans to set shovels and bulldozers and have a state-of-the-art, \$325 million, 20,000-seat building opening its doors in 2014. Even if the Leafs finished 30th overall for 10 consecutive years, they always will have a large, insanely dedicated fan base.

But to think the franchise wouldn't have to pick up its game with another team in town is ridiculous. As it stands now, the Leafs were unable to completely sell out their luxury box suites in recent years and have had to make in-arena pleas on the ACC jumbotron in an attempt to address that issue. If corporations had a big-league alternative for their disposable income mere minutes up the road, Leafs ownership could have an even bigger problem on their hands.

In and of itself, that shouldn't be a negative for Leafs fans. For too long, being the only hockey game in town – at least, the only one Torontonians have shown they actually care about – has allowed the Leafs to sunbathe atop their bursting bank vault and focus at least as much on corporate shareholders as they do on long-suffering emotional shareholders. Yes, they talk quite passionately about doing everything in their power to bring the city its first NHL championship since 1967, but actions speak louder than words. And for too long, the Leafs' on-ice actions have shouted down those slick slogans and feel-good community initiatives.

Similarly, Rouston's actions also say much more than his carefully considered words these days. The highly successful venture capitalist has made nary a squeak regarding the prospects of bringing an NHL team – either by relocation or expansion – to Markham as the arena's anchor tenant. But this is a smart man who (a) has pursued ownership of an NHL franchise twice and (b) recognizes the quiet, behind-the-scenes persistence shown by Jets owners Mark Chipman and David Thomson as the NHL's preferred way of doing business in these matters. He's not about to rock the boat by making grandiose announcements or challenging the league, as did Jim Balsillie.

But rest assured, Rouston isn't working with Markham council and private business interests simply to host the 2015 IIHF World Junior Championship or the occasional rock concert at his new arena. He understands there are few major markets to which the NHL can transfer a troubled team and expect instant acceptance/success. He accepts he'll have to be patient and either pounce on a weak lamb franchise or fork over a boatload of expansion fee money to join the club.

Of course, a lot can happen between now and 2014. In the grand scheme of things right now, Rouston's application is little more than a fly on the nose of the elephantine Leafs franchise. But that water ripple he's created isn't without meaning, either. It could be the first harbinger of more challenging days to come for one of hockey's most storied franchises.

But that's not a bad thing. If he can create a bona fide local competitor to push the Leafs out of their doldrums, Rouston should be cheered on by Buds fans every step of the way.

The Leafs will win a championship someday, and so will the Cubs. That's not hubris talking, or even optimism — it's just basic math, the balance of probability that even a laughingstock should be able to win a 30-team league every century or two. And when they do, the fans that will be cheering the loudest will be the ones who remember every ounce of misery that led up to it. Or at least remember their great-grandparents telling them about it.