To Veto or Not to Veto

September 2007: The GFHL hosts its inaugural draft for a 12-team keeper league. In the middle of the fifth round, Hockey Without Borders calls the name of Patrick Marleau. Coming off a pair of seasons in which he averaged 33 goals and 82 points, there was little doubt in the room that his new owner had found great value with the 50-something pick in the draft.

11 rounds and several hours later, the Angels of Harlem (owned by yours truly) take a flyer (literally) on an up-and-coming Mike Richards. Some thought it was a bit of a reach in the 16th round, seeing as though most experts were pegging his upside around 60 points. But I was happy to snag him as a depth guy who could chip in at least a point every other game, while contributing in categories like PIM, faceoffs and shorties.

November 2007: A scant two months later, Richards was shocking the hockey world, producing at better than a point-a-game clip through the first six weeks of the season, while being his usual reliable self in the categories I had actually drafted him for. In fact, based on our league settings, he was a top-10 player through the first quarter season.

Marleau, meanwhile, stumbled out of the gate. Actually, that's putting it kindly. He was horrific.

Clinging tightly to the golden rule of trading (buy low, sell high), I held my breath, prayed that things would return to normal soon, and offered up Richards for Marleau. To be honest, I was expecting the offer to be rejected. Was 6 weeks of weirdness enough to make Marleau's owner forget that he had just spent a 5th round pick to draft him, while I got Richards in the waning rounds of the draft?

Apparently so. The deal was done. And within minutes of announcing it to the league, I started hearing the dreaded whispers: VETO.

Now, you might think that my competitors were upset that I was stealing a proven point-a-gamer for a player that most of the hockey world still viewed as a defensive centre with some offensive upside. But no. Turns out the rest of the owners were just as entranced by Richards' magical start as my trading partner was, and they all thought I got fleeced.

After much discussion and clarification of our rules, the crisis was averted. There was no veto, and in fact the word has never been spoken in the five years since, despite some pretty awful trades. (Remind me to tell you about the time I snagged Stamkos and a first round pick for Patrik Berglund and Bryan Little!)

The policy I set forth at that time and maintain to this day is this:

No Collusion = No Veto.

It's that simple. Veto power, if you have it at all, should not be used to save poor managers from themselves, or to prevent good managers from being too shrewd. It should only be used to maintain the integrity of the league by preventing underhanded dealings, such as one team sending their best players to another team with a promise of a share of the prize money in return.

Why do I take this position? A few reasons.

1. Vetoes are Often Done Out of Selfishness: I've played in a lot of leagues where vetoes were invoked more frequently. In my experience, the vast majority of vetoes are executed out of self-interest, not in the interest of what is best for the league. A top team makes a beneficial trade, and its closest competitors don't like the improvement of the team they're duking it out with, so they move to block it. This violates the spirit of competition. If you think your competitor got a steal, go out and improve your own team; don't try to tear theirs down.

2. Vetoes Create Strife: Nothing disrupts league harmony faster than a bitter veto battle. More than a few leagues have imploded due to veto controversy. Yes, it's frustrating to see lopsided trades, but in the absence of any suspicion of foul play, your league will be better served if you roll your eyes and allow managers to learn from their mistakes, rather than stopping them from making them.

3. Owners Have a Right to Manage Their Team in the Way They Think Best: Every good manager has an objective in mind as they build their team, and the objective is not always to win as much as possible right now. The tendency is to evaluate a trade based on its immediate impact, but some of the owners in your league are not building for today, they are building for tomorrow. If they see fit to sacrifice a piece of their present to improve their chances in the future, that's a legitimate strategy.

And yes, this brings us to the edge of a rather slippery subject in fantasy sports: the issue of tanking. I've written on this in the past , so I won't repeat myself here. But as a commissioner, I recognize that a team is better served by finishing last and getting the first pick in the next draft, than by finishing a slot or two higher, and I have no problem with them managing their team to that end – provided that there is nothing underhanded going on, and that their motives are truly to build the best possible team long-term. It may take a conversation with the owner in question to assure yourself that this is the case.

4. Trades Are Tough to Evaluate: Unless you've got a crystal ball, it's often very difficult to determine at the time of a trade who got the best of it, even in cases that seem fairly obvious. The Marleau-Richards trade is a good example. Based on their history and expectations going forward, I really felt like I had won the deal. The rest of the league disagreed. Who was right? Well, that season, Richards' hot start was not a mirage – nor were Marleau's struggles. Richards went on to total 75 points, while Marleau bumbled his way to 48 points and a -19, frustrating me to no end.

But, let's look at their totals over the next three seasons: Richards posted 80, 62 and 66 points (total: 208); Marleau rebounded with 71, 83 and 73 (total: 227). On a pure scoring level, Marleau was the long-term winner; factor in Richards' other contributions and you might be able to call it even. Either way, a veto would have been a huge injustice.

Funny post-script to the story: As Richards continued to excel and Marleau refused to pull his head out of his ass, I cursed myself all season for making that deal. In the end, I found myself in the championship final against my trade partner. Late on the final day of our match-up, I needed one powerplay goal to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. Midway through the third period of the final NHL game of the season, Patrick Marleau scored his (measly) 19th goal of the season on the powerplay: the biggest goal of my fantasy hockey career.

So, what say you: To veto, or not to veto?