The closer you get to the NBA trade deadline, the harder it is for NBA front offices, agents, players and "people close to the situation" to keep their mouths shut while teams do real negotiating.

At this time of year, nearly every player under contract and every future draft pick is brought up in trade discussions whether it be as a centerpiece, sweetener or salary filler in a potential deal. Occasionally, some names are leaked out to the most in-the-know media types like Adrian Wojnarowski, Ken Berger and Marc Stein.

Just which names are leaked is fascinating.

Agents want their player's name leaked to drum up interest from other teams, either in trade season or upcoming free agency. *"If [team] wants him, he must be worth acquiring!"*

Friends and family of players want a name linked to a particular team to drum up too. *"See how valuable [player] is?" or "[Big market team] really wants [player] because they were linked in the past and now [team] needs a guy like [player] or their season is lost!"*

Front offices want trade parameters leaked in order to get better offers from other teams for their player. *"[team] will give me this. Who can top it?"*

Media guys leak names, sometimes weakly verified or only tangentally linked, because there's a attractive name or team in the rumor which would drum up readership. Anything with Knicks , Celtics
,
Lakers
and

Nets
gets a ton of hits to the site.

Which of these reasons above was the impetus to leaking the Dudley-for-Shumpert offer?

Big-name team involved? Check.

Previously linked to each other? Check Check.

Knicks trying to get more for Shumpert than the Dudley and a (likely protected) #1? Makes sense.

Suns trying to get more for Dudley and a #1 than Iman Shumpert ? Makes sense too.

What this means

First, we can take away that Jared Dudley is on the trade table. He is the Suns best asset to acquire a good young player: still in his prime, paid less than his value to a team, high level of respect throughout the league, no free agency in sight.

He was linked in an offer to Memphis for Rudy Gay last month, and now has likely been offered in a package for Iman Shumpert. We don't know if he was included in an offer for James Harden
last fall before Harden went to Houston, but logic says that his name probably came up. Same goes for any deal with Boston for young
Avery Bradley
.

The Suns want to get younger, and Jared Dudley and their #1 picks are the best assets they have.

We can also take away that Iman Shumpert is on the trade table. The Knicks know that their championship window is only open for a short time with 8 players over the age of 30 on their roster. They brought in
Jason Kidd
, Marcus Camby,
Tyson Chandler
and friends to win NOW, not later. Their salary cap is cooked. There's no time to develop a young player that isn't producing today.

The Knicks need another shooter on the wing, so why not leak an early offer (Jared Dudley and a #1) to the masses to see who can top it? Memphis did that last month with Rudy Gay and ended up getting what they thought was a better offer from Toronto.

The Suns love Iman Shumpert. For sure, any Suns fan knows the name Iman Shumpert. First, he was surprisingly in the mix at #13 on draft day 2011. Suns fans asked "who?" but then word leaked around the draft that many teams liked him too. Eventually, the Suns took the surer-thing in Markieff Morris who at the time looked like a certain 10-15 year player in the NBA. The Suns then (I think) hoped to acquire another #1 in the 20s to take Shumpert, but he was already gone by #17 to the Knicks. Shumpert had a great rookie year and many teams drooled over his potential.

Last summer, the Suns were trying to find a home for Steve Nash and asked for, who else, Iman Shumpert. The Knicks nearly did the deal, but ultimately balked and Nash went to LaLa land.

What's going to happen?

Who knows. With 6 first-round picks coming in the next 3 years, the Suns certainly have picks to offer in a trade for a good young player who has not yet reached his prime.

But Suns fans fretting over giving away a lottery pick can likely take a deep breath and relax. I have no inside info, but I really doubt the Suns would give away an unprotected pick AND Dudley to acquire a single asset. The Suns worked hard to get these picks and they won't throw it all away for a one player.

I do, however, think its okay to give away a lottery-protected pick with terms like Minnesota's pick to the Suns. The Suns have that very pick - Minnesota's - plus two from the Lakers plus three of their own. The Suns could offer "a first round, lottery-protected pick" that equates to any of their assets that falls below #13.

That way, the Suns get to keep all picks that land in the lottery.

What would Dave do?

I would make this trade in a heartbeat. I would offer Jared Dudley and either Minny's already-lottery-protected pick or a Lakers pick with lottery protection (not sure this can be done - to trade an asset you don't have yet with brand new protections on it - but I'm pretty sure it can) in exchange for Iman Shumpert.

To make the trade work, the Knicks would have to send back a few million in salary. The salary filler could even be Marcus Camby's or Steve Novak's long-term contract coming back. Both were signed under the new CBA, meaning the Suns could release them and spread the salary over "twice the years remaining + one" to minimize the cap hit to less than $1 million a year.

I love Jared Dudley and what he brings to a team, but the Suns need youth and high upside talent back on this team in the worst way.

Iman Shumpert brings that. He would instantly be the best young prospect on the Suns' roster. Shumpert is a playmaking combo guard who would look great next to the Suns own playmaker Goran Dragic as well as the backup Kendall Marshall. Shumpert is not a PG, but he passes well enough to help make plays. And he would make a great defensive perimeter trio with Dragic and Tucker on the wing.

Plus, Shumpert has a huge amount of swag. He is a magnetizing personality oozing with self-confidence that the Suns have been lacking since Amare left.

Do it, Suns. Sweeten the deal with a lottery-protected pick and eat a middling salary in return.