

Mets Can't Be Too Greedy With Trade Offers for Beltran

Written by Rob Smith

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With the July 31 trade deadline approaching, the New York Mets will be fielding calls regarding a few of their top players from teams around the league. [A Buster Olney tweet](#) earlier today indicates that their most coveted asset, star shortstop

[Jose Reyes](#)

, won't be going anywhere. If the organization is indeed set on keeping (and presumably, re-signing) Reyes, they will almost certainly be trading his teammate, right fielder

[Carlos Beltran](#)

. The 34-year-old Beltran has rebounded nicely from an injury-plagued 2010 and will have his share of suitors both at the trade deadline and in the offseason when his 7-year, \$119 million contract expires. However, due to a multitude of factors in play, the Mets need to make sure their asking price for the six-time All-Star isn't so high that they scare off interested teams and wind up having to hold onto Beltran for the rest of the season.

Normally, when a player of Beltran's caliber becomes a free agent, the team that he finished the season with has the option of offering that player arbitration. "Type-A" free agents (which Beltran will be) will usually decline arbitration, become a free-agent, and seek a long-term deal with another team. The team that initially offered arbitration receives the first-round pick of the player's new team (unless that team finished in the bottom half of the MLB standings, in which case the new team forfeits their 2nd-round pick instead) as well as a "sandwich" pick which comes immediately after the first round of the draft concludes, as a sort of severance package. One by-product of this rule is that when teams are looking to deal premier players in the final year of their contracts, they'll dangle the impending high draft picks in front of interested teams

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as an excuse to demand more talent from those teams in any trade. Clubs trading FOR said rent-a-player don't mind because at the end of the season, THEY'RE the ones who can restock their farm system with a couple extra high draft picks.

How does any of this boring CBA talk relate to Beltran? You've probably heard of his agent, Scott Boras. [On Tuesday, Olney wrote \(must be an ESPN Insider to read entire article\)](#) that when Beltran signed with the Mets following the 2004 season, Boras successfully negotiated a clause into the deal which stated that when the contract expired, there would be no draft pick compensation tied to Beltran's departure. Thus, any team trading for Beltran won't have the extra draft picks at their disposal when the 2012 draft rolls around. It also means that the Mets shouldn't receive as much talent as they normally could in exchange for a player with an .856 career OPS like Beltran.

Instead of asking for a less-talented package in return for their star outfielder, [Adam Rubin of ESPNNewYork.com reports](#) that the Mets are offering to pay the \$8 million or so owed to Beltran for the rest of the 2011 season. The caveat is that while the acquiring team gets a half season of Beltran for free, the Mets want a bevy of young talent; the type of productive, cheap labor that MLB teams cling to these days. It's an intriguing, yet dangerous strategy. The Mets probably figure that the \$8 million giveaway will be made back by filling roster spots next year with the cheap, minimum-salary contracts acquired in the trade, as opposed to overpaying for free agents like they normally do (e.g. Jason Bay).

New York has to be careful here, though, and make sure that they don't overplay their hand. Asking for the farm on July 19 is one thing, but everyone in baseball should be fully aware that the financially-strapped Mets can't afford to pay Beltran for the rest of the season AND get nothing in return for him once he bolts. They have to get rid of Beltran by the deadline, and they're counting on the time-tested principle of supply and demand to convince somebody to cough up the stud prospects they want before somebody else does. The longer they wait, though, the possibility of getting low-balled becomes more and more real. This isn't a situation where the Mets want to play "chicken" with other teams. The Red Sox, Yankees, Braves, Giants, etc. can move forward without Beltran. The Mets can't set themselves up for future success by holding onto him. My advice: get a solid, young starting pitcher (think Atlanta's Brandon Beachy, San Francisco's Madison Bumgarner, or Philadelphia's Vance Worley) and be done with it. In the trading deadline game of musical chairs, the Mets can't afford to be left with Beltran on the roster when the music stops at 4 p.m. on July 31.

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Rob Smith is a contributing writer for the Business of Sports Network. He can be reached on Twitter

@

[RobSmithUSF](#)

or on his personal blog,

<http://smithersports.blogspot.com/>