



Los Angeles Kings captain Rob Blake made it public knowledge Monday that he will not waive his no-trade clause in the upcoming days prior to the National Hockey League's trade deadline, a fact that bears much more interest than it probably should in this day and age of the NHL.

Ever since the lockout ended a few seasons ago, ever since the salary-cap era began, and ever since larger and larger magnifying glasses have been placed upon player contracts and their writings-up, the no-trade clause (or no-movement clause, as it pertains to the cases of a select few players) has gained a certain degree of notoriety, and wrongfully so.

Approximately 90 players, which figures to be just less than an eighth of the league, currently have the clause (in one form or another) embedded into their contracts. So, it stands to reason, they are catching on in popularity, or, rather, players are catching on as to how to better negotiate their contracts. Really, having a no-trade clause helps players maintain some semblance of control in a business in which the winds of change are as common as a goal being scored. Hockey, after all, is a game of streaks.

So, one has to wonder, if all these players intend on staying put for better or for worse, at least intended initially, why do their names keep reappearing in trade rumors and why do they, time after time, need to justify to journalists and fans alike their desire to not be shopped? Sure, like most anything else in the legal world, should both parties be in agreement, the clause can be waived. But these players asked for the chance to stay put with their respective teams for a reason. Why for the love of God would they willingly let such a crucial building (or stumbling) block to their deals be swept out from under them? Out of the goodness of their gentle hearts?

That's what most fans, particularly in **Toronto** with regards to forwards **Mats Sundin** and in Los Angeles with defenseman Blake, are hoping for, that their captains bite the bullet and allow their rights to be sold the highest bidder as the playoffs approach. Both are unrestricted free agents at season's end (meaning they could sign another contract with whatever team in the league, even their current ones if they are eventually dealt if they so choose) and the Kings and Maple Leafs are each well out of any race to the postseason. Thus, the prospect of getting a hefty return on their most valuable commodities, losing them for merely the remainder of what is already a lost season seems like quite a bargain. But wait! Blake just cried foul at the media's attempt to ship him off prematurely and Sundin has continuously reiterated similar feelings in Toronto the past few months. Neither wants to leave their basement-dwelling teams, even if it means a chance at playing for a contender for the Stanley Cup, even as the two aged stars ever approach the ends of their careers (Blake has already won one with the Colorado Avalanche; Sundin, playing for the drought-ridden Leafs for the past 14 years has never reached the league final).

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Sundin is arguably Toronto's most marketable asset and, with the team's horrid performance this year and subsequent firing of **general manager John Ferguson Jr.**, all signs point to the team being blown up.

Last year, former superstar **Peter Forsberg** was dealt by the then-sad-sack **Philadelphia Flyers** for

up-and-coming forward

Scottie Upshall

, top defensive prospect

Ryan Parent

, and two draft picks. For a team hell-bent on rebuilding their franchise, as the Leafs appear to be, such a trade would be a model to strive towards making. One year later, on the strength of that deal - Upshall is a key contributor to his new team -

and several off-season moves, the Flyers are now contending for a playoff spot. A one-year turnaround is the best the Leafs can hope for, but such a reversal in fortune hinges on Sundin's wishes.

Even so, even though it his decision and his alone, Sundin has received flak from media types for not being willing to be swapped.

Is it right for Torontonians to push Sundin into taking the selfless plunge towards the betterment of a franchise he would, as a result, no longer be a part of? There are arguments to each side—Sundin should be loyal to the Leafs for paying him his huge salary for upwards of the past fifteen years. The Leafs, on the other hand, should lie in the bed they made when they signed Sundin to his latest contract (no-trade clause and all) last June. Sundin is also a Leaf at heart. Shouldn't fans respect the wishes of player whose blood runs white and blue? But, then if Toronto is truly where his heart lies, shouldn't he realistically consider doing what's best for the Leafs? All good questions, to which there aren't clear cut answers.

On the other end of the spectrum, **Ottawa Senators defenseman Wade Redden** was allegedly twice asked to waive his no-trade clause and refused each time. Clearly Ottawa and Toronto are at opposite ends of the standings, but that does that make Redden's decision any less sympathetic when he says he wants to see through a potential championship season with the Senators that never seems to come? On the same subject of Ottawa, forward Cory Stillman recently waived his no-trade clause to become a Senator, sent from the

Carolina Hurricanes

along with defenseman

Mike Commodore for Joe Corvo and Patrick Eaves.

So, clearly, it never hurts for management to ask that looming question. However, in the case of Redden, when general manager Bryan Murray last asked him to think about it, the fact that the conversation took place was leaked to the media, after which both sides downplayed what transpired behind closed doors. This just goes to show that the no-trade clause is an issue best left to those directly involved and not to so-called hockey pundits, all wanting to share their two cents on the matter.

Nobody will ever call into question the fact that dealing Sundin is what's best for the Leafs. Really, whatever the scenario and whoever the player, the deal on the table is usually sound, especially if comparing the return Philadelphia got on Forsberg to how well Toronto, for one example, could cash in. But this is more a question of ethics than it is of assets. In a sport that tolerates fist fighting, the issue at hand hardly fits. Leave the business decisions to those in the business, the hockey to the hockey players, and the *actual-trade* talk to those who actually know what they're talking about.

Ryan Szporer is a contributor to The Biz of Hockey.