

# Los Angeles Lakers

## NBA Trade Rumors: L.A. Lakers Want Monta Ellis as Kobe Bryant's Backcourt Mate?

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By

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(Contributor) on June 10, 2011

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Ken Berger of CBS Sports reports that the Los Angeles Lakers are one of the five teams who have shown the "most sincere" interest in trading for shooting guard Monta Ellis of the Golden State Warriors.

Ellis, 25, is a prolific scorer who may not fit long-term in an undersized backcourt with Stephen Curry under new coach Mark Jackson, who is looking to instill a defensive philosophy.

Golden State also wants to rid itself of Ellis' contract, which includes two more years at \$11 million each, with an early termination option for 2013-14, also at \$11 million.

The *San Francisco Chronicle* confirms talks between the two California teams. Though it is not clear whom the Lakers would be giving up in return, most speculation has been focused on Lamar Odom.

At this point, the smart money is on Golden State pulling a deal with the Sixers for Andre Iguodala.

That said, Ellis could be a good fit for a title-contending team like the Lakers, who are seeking a slasher and perimeter shooter to take some of the load off Kobe Bryant as their primary scorer.

At first, it is easy to have reservations about this trade.

After all, not only does he play the same position as Bryant, but Ellis also occupied the same exact role last year as Bryant: a high-volume shooter who demands the ball. Among shooting guards, Kobe and Ellis had two of the four highest usage rates in the league last season.



Nevertheless, an Odom-for-Ellis trade gives the Lakers what they needed most in their series sweep at the hands of the Dallas Mavericks.

The Lakers sorely need an upgrade at the guard position—someone who is quick enough to stay in front of other quick guards, as well as make timely shots.

This trade would enable the Lakers to get younger, faster and more athletic at guard.

Besides, as Kobe's knees deteriorate further and his per-game minutes continue to drop, the Lakers need another scoring option that can help create offense.

It is clear that Ellis can score. In 80 games for Golden State last season, Ellis averaged 24.1 points, and he put up over 25 a game in 2009-2010. He can easily keep defenders on their heels when penetrating the paint and also possesses a jumper that demands respect.

Ellis' presence as a 1A scoring threat would really make life much easier for Kobe, giving L.A. another player who can drive inside and create his own shot to carve up opposing defenses.

If Ellis does come to the Lakers, it is likely that he would slide in at point guard, pushing Derek Fisher to the bench, where he belongs.

With the right attitude, Ellis could rack up assists playing for the Lakers.

He would help spread the floor, keeping teams from doubling Kobe. The trade would also free Andrew Bynum and Pau Gasol down low, preventing teams from following Dallas' strategy of packing the paint in this year's playoffs against the Lakers.

Though Ellis is far from a pure point guard, the Lakers simply have no need to a ball-handling distributor because the offense is most effective when it runs through Bryant.



Ellis can score on the drive like a point guard, and his defense remains underrated. For sure, he can be no worse than Fisher on that end of the floor. He has the quickness to stay in front of the same speedy point guards that have burned Fisher in recent years.

This quickness allowed him to earn 2.1 steals per game last year, third-highest in the entire league. As a one-guard, he would also finally match up against someone his size and pull his weight on defense.

Likewise, as we have seen with players such as Shawn Marion and Chris Bosh, players who come from teams with an offensive focus—Phoenix and Toronto, respectively—often have their defensive abilities masked.

An environment like L.A. could energize and help him take advantage of his latent defensive prowess, freeing him from expending all his energy on offense as he did in Golden State.

While he still bears the “volume shooter” label, how much of it is a product of the system he played in and the role his team needed him to play?

Considering the success of the triumvirate formed in South Beach last summer, Ellis would probably be willing to sacrifice shots for a chance to advance deep into the playoffs and win a title.

Lacking a ring, Ellis would also add an immediate burst of energy and youth to an aging lineup notorious for its lack of intensity and effort. His tenacity would undoubtedly be contagious.

The only qualm of this trade is that the Lakers would be giving up such a versatile, balanced and talented big man who is coming off a season in which he was crowned Sixth Man of the Year.



Nonetheless, if Ellis can find a niche as a point guard and prove that he and Bryant can effectively coexist, an Ellis-Bryant combo could certainly lift the Lakers back to championship heights.

In all, Ellis is too good of a player to pass up. He has yet to enter his prime and could be a solid building block for the future. Odom, on the other hand, is probably heading toward decline in a few years and still remains wildly inconsistent.

Right now, this trade is unlikely to come to fruition, as the offseason technically still has not begun, and plenty of time remains until such blockbusters are usually made.

One way or another, though, the Lakers must find a way to inject some youth into the roster and light a fire under their talent.

At the very least, the rumor provides hope to Lakerland that Derek Fisher's tenure as a starter could finally be nearing its end.



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