

SPORTS



Jordan Clarkson is a fan favorite and the longest-tenured player on the Utah Jazz, but the veteran shooting guard turns 32 this summer and may be a better fit on a contending team.

FRANCISCO KJOLSETH The Salt Lake Tribune

End of the road?

Veteran guard Jordan Clarkson, unsure if he'll be with the Jazz next season, considers his Utah legacy.

By ANDY LARSEN The Salt Lake Tribune

As time ticked toward the end of the Utah Jazz's disappointing 2023-24 season, you could tell: Jordan Clarkson had given a lot of thought to the possibility that he's already played his last game in a Jazz uniform.

"Tomorrow's tomorrow, I don't really try to look too far forward," he said in the final days of the campaign. "But I love this organization, I love this state, city. I love playing for this team, [head coach Will Hardy] and everybody. If it's the last, that just is what it is."

Clarkson will turn 32 this summer, making him the oldest Jazz player left on the roster by two years. He's also the longest-tenured player on the team by three years, the only player left who played in the Donovan Mitchell/Rudy Gobert era. As a result — and, of course, due to the scoring binges that turned him into one of the NBA's most dangerous sixth men — the San Antonio native might be the most beloved player by the Jazz fanbase right now.

But Clarkson's age and tenure with the Jazz also work against him staying with

Jordan Clarkson's career statistics

Year	Team	G	FG%	3pt	Pts	Reb	Ass	Stl
2023-24	Jazz	55	.413	1.7	17.1	3.4	5.0	0.6
2022-23	Jazz	61	.444	2.5	20.8	4.0	4.4	0.5
2021-22	Jazz	79	.419	2.4	16.0	3.5	2.5	0.8
2020-21	Jazz	68	.425	3.1	18.4	4.0	2.5	0.9
2019-20	Cavaliers/Jazz	71	.454	2.1	15.2	2.6	1.9	0.6
2018-19	Cavaliers	81	.448	1.8	16.8	3.3	2.4	0.7
2017-18	Lakers/Cavaliers	81	.451	1.4	13.9	2.7	2.7	0.7
2016-17	Lakers	82	.445	1.4	14.7	3.0	2.6	1.1
2015-16	Lakers	79	.433	1.4	15.5	4.0	2.4	1.1
2014-15	Lakers	59	.448	0.6	11.9	3.2	3.5	0.9
Totals:		716	.438	1.8	16.0	3.4	2.9	0.8

* NBA Sixth Man of the Year (2021)

* NBA All-Rookie First Team (2015)

the team to some degree. For the second consecutive season, the Jazz chose to prioritize young players over veterans down the stretch. Clarkson played just one of the Jazz's final 16 games, being listed out with a groin injury that did bother him somewhat, but was something he might have played through.

Therefore, his concern about his future is

justified — especially given his love for his current team.

"I love playing for his organization," Clarkson said, citing team owner Ryan Smith, CEO Danny Ainge and general manager Justin Zanik by name. "I consider those people family to me. The state of Utah was a place that I was able to call home and I really loved my time here."

Despite the past tense used above, Clarkson is still a Jazzman on paper, and there's still a realistic shot he's in Utah next year. Rumors have flown about the Jazz trading Clarkson during the last two deadlines, and this year, he thought there was a significant and even likely chance he was to be traded to the New York Knicks, he said. Instead, New York traded for his old teammate Bojan Bogdanovic, and fellow scoring guard Alec Burks, leaving Clarkson in Utah to consider his future.

From the front office's point of view, the problem has been finding a fit in the trade market. As a veteran over 30, Clarkson makes most sense on a contending team. But his salary (\$23 million in 2023-24 before falling to \$14 million in each of the next two seasons) makes it difficult for those teams to trade for him; usually, good teams with players in that salary range want to keep them. They're also usually sparse on the kind of assets the Jazz want.

Furthermore, there was his on-court production this season, which, frankly, wasn't great. Clarkson put up the worst effective field goal percentage of his career. Among NBA players playing significant minutes, he

FRANCISCO KJOLSETH

With Utah on board, NHL should consider realignment

By IAN MENDES The Athletic

In the aftermath of Utah landing an NHL team for next season, Gary Bettman did a wide range of interviews.

The NHL commissioner hosted press conferences in Phoenix and St. Lake City, in addition to conducting multiple television interviews. It was during one of those television interviews in which Bettman dropped an interesting nugget about keeping Utah in the Central Division — the same one the Coyotes have been playing in for the past three seasons.

"We didn't have time under these circumstances to focus on

COMMENTARY »

realignment or a whole host of other issues related to geography," Bettman told Sports Illustrated's Caroline Cameron on April 18.

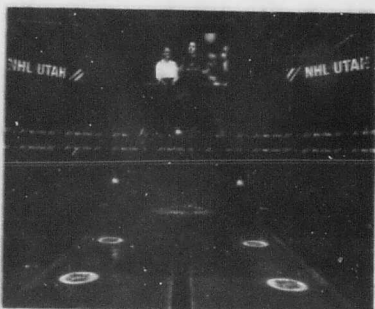
Bettman's comment hints at the fact that realignment — perhaps related to geography — is something that could be in the cards when the league has a chance to exhale from the frenetic pace that enveloped Utah securing an NHL team. The league has toyed around with realignment on several occasions in recent years. The Coyotes themselves, for example, were in

the Pacific Division from 2013-14 until the Seattle Kraken came along and pushed them into the Central Division in 2021.

When Winnipeg re-entered the NHL in 2011, they also helped accelerate a substantial realignment of the divisional format. After the Jets played their first two seasons in the Southeast Division, the league radically altered its entire structure, moving from six divisions of five teams to the current four-division model we see today, with the Atlantic, Metropolitan, Central and Pacific.

Utah entering the NHL fold gives us a natural opportunity to

REALIGNMENT: 36



The Delta Center is pictured during an introduction for the Utah NHL team on April 24. On screen are team owners Ryan and Ashley Smith.

BILL EGAN The Salt Lake Tribune