

## Bucks match Heat's offer for Bell

By Charles F. Gardner

Thursday, Sep 20 2007, 01:25 PM

The Milwaukee Bucks today matched the Miami Heat's five-year, \$18 million offer sheet to guard Charlie Bell, according to team sources.

The Heat extended the offer on Monday, and the Bucks had seven days to respond.

Bell had said he wanted to go to Miami and hoped the Bucks would not match the offer. Milwaukee's previous offer had been a three-year deal for \$9 million.

Miami was rebuffed in its second off-season attempt to land a key member of the Bucks' backcourt. Earlier this summer, the Heat made a five-year, \$31 million offer to unrestricted free agent Mo Williams, who wound up signing a six-year, \$52 million deal with the Bucks.

Bell's agent, Mark Bartelstein, said he talked with Bell today and that the 6-foot-3 guard was "kind of digesting it."

"This is all part of the business," Bartelstein said. "They (the Bucks) realize Charlie Bell is a heck of a player, a huge piece of their present and future. They decided they wanted and needed to have Charlie with them."

Bell was only the second restricted free agent to receive an offer sheet this summer. In July, Indiana declined to match an offer made by Toronto for forward Maceo Baston.

"Restricted free agency is a very difficult process," Bartelstein said. "You go through an emotional roller coaster. There's going to be a little bit of a healing process."

Bartelstein said he was highly appreciative of the Heat's offer to Bell. "They treasured him and wanted him," Bartelstein said.

Miami has been seeking alternative options in their backcourt. The Heat has holdover Jason Williams and newly signed free agent Smush Parker at point guard, and the current primary backup for shooting guard Dwyane Wade is first-round draft pick Daequan Cook.

Asked about Bell's approach to returning to the Bucks, Bartelstein said, "He's a professional. He will do everything he can to get himself prepared to have a great season."

Bucks general manager Larry Harris said, "This is a very important signing. We're extremely excited to have Charlie back in the fold."

The Bucks backcourt now appears set with Michael Redd and Mo Williams as starters, with Bell able to play his usual versatile role behind both players. Others in the mix are newly signed free agent Royal Ivey, Lynn Greer and rookie Ramon Sessions. Swingman Desmond Mason also can play as a second guard but will be used primarily at small forward.

"The Bucks have a terrific young team," said Bartelstein, who represents five of the team's players, including Bell, Williams and Bobby Simmons. "Larry Harris has done an incredible job of putting a real talented group of young players together. The Bucks made a statement about how valuable Charlie is to them, an impressive statement."