



No one needs to rehash the gory details of the Cavs' performance over the past three years. Since LeBron departed in 2010, the team has lost a lot more than it's won, and has seemingly found itself cornered by the injury bug at every turn.

Even with the constant injuries to Anderson Varejao, Kyrie Irving, Dion Waiters and others, the losing is by design, for now at least. The Cavs have spent two years trying to build a nucleus through the lottery, and will add another lottery pick to the roster in a couple of months. You gather lotto balls by losing games, and you lose games by stripping the roster down, playing youngsters and packing the bench with low-cost (read: not very good) veterans.

When you have two rookies and two sophomores in the everyday starting lineup, the undrafted Alonzo Gee rounding out the starting five, and a bench that has, for the entire season, employed the likes of bald-treaded Luke Walton and chucker-extraordinaire C.J. Miles, it's simply not a team designed to win.

The Cavs' fortunes took a minor upswing when the team acquired Marreese Speights and Wayne Ellington in January. Combined with December free-agent signee Shaun Livingston, they gave the Cavs their first real bench since the final years of LeBron, and the team ended February 7-5, its first winning month in a long time.

But the injury bug bit yet again, Speights' attitude took a nosedive, and the Cavs are presently crawling down the home stretch of a third straight season that can't end fast enough.

Through all of the post-LeBron teardown and rebuild, the man patrolling the sideline has been head coach Byron Scott. He's now a man under fire, and many among the fans and media say deservedly so.

The team is losing. The losses aren't giving way to wins with any consistency. The team's defense has been lukewarm at best, nonexistent at worst. And the defense seems to keep redefining the reference point for "worst."

As Jason Lloyd [noted in the Akron Beacon Journal](#), an early February Dan Gilbert tweet about the Cavs reclaiming their defensive identity, and rumblings from the player ranks, have done nothing to increase Scott's apparent hold on his job.

This week, Tristan Thompson went public with emphatic support for Scott, but is his attitude indicative of the rest of the locker room, or is he a rogue loyalist? Outsiders can only speculate.

To an objective observer who hasn't tried to root for this team the past three years, firing Scott is the pinnacle of injustice. When Scott agreed to become the head coach of the Cavs, LeBron hadn't yet defected to Miami. He signed with the Cavs primarily because the job carried the possibility of coaching a contender.

When LeBron took his talents to Hurricane Alley, nobody could have faulted Scott for pulling a Billy Donovan and backing out a week later. Donovan was the coach of the Orlando Magic for less than a week in 2007, before backing out and returning to the University of Florida.

But Scott stayed. He embraced the rebuilding project. He stuck it out with a team that he knew had no chance of making the playoffs, let alone contend for a title, in the near-to-medium future.

The question is on the tip of any objective observer's tongue: Who could have done better? Who could have taken this roster and put it in a position to win more games? Phil Jackson isn't walking through that door. Nor is Gregg Popovich.

Irving and Thompson have improved – some would say dramatically -- from their rookie to their sophomore years. Prior to his knee injury, Dion Waiters had played his way into the outskirts of the rookie of the year conversation, winning rookie of the month honors in February. On an individual level, the players who were drafted to comprise the backbone of the future have improved on Scott's watch.

But it hasn't translated to wins. And wins are the barometer of success or failure in the NBA. As long as the Cavs keep losing, the individual improvement of young players will only matter to a point.

The stage is being set, but at some point, the curtain has to go up.

That time is next season. With up to four top-five picks on the roster by then, Irving and Thompson entering their third years, Waiters and Tyler Zeller entering their second years, and the cap space to make a major move, the 2013-14 edition of the Cavs should enter the season as a playoff contender.

I'd go so far as to say, with a healthy Irving emerging as one of the league's superstars, the Cavs should contend for a top four seed in the paper-thin Eastern Conference. It's not too much to ask the Cavs to recover a lot of ground in one year. A jump from the 25-win range to the 45-win range in one year isn't outlandish, given the teams they'd have to hurdle.

It's not fair to make Scott the fall guy for the smoking crater that has been the last three years of Cavs basketball. But it is fair to pull the plug on the "losing for lotto balls" portion of the rebuild after this season. It is fair to demand a Cavs team that makes the playoffs with room to spare next spring. And if those things don't happen, it is fair, at that point, for Grant and Scott to start facing a lot of questions as to exactly when we can anticipate this rebuilding project to start bearing fruit.

If Grant makes the moves he needs to make this summer, Scott deserves at least the 2013 portion of next season's schedule before he faces a serious threat of losing his job. If Grant doesn't make those moves, his feet should be the ones on the hot coals, right along with Scott's.

The Cavs were put in this situation by the defection of one player. Digging out of the situation has been a team effort. If the Cavs are once again one of the league's bottom-feeding teams next season, Scott might indeed get the axe. But if the Cavs are once again a league bottom-feeder next year, bad coaching is likely only the tip of the iceberg. The Cavs, at that point, would have much more serious and systemic problems on their hands.