



You always think you can do better than Mike Brown. Maybe that's why fans around town have been resistant to the idea of Brown returning as head coach of the Cavs, which reportedly will be made official on Wednesday. Brown and the Cavs agreed to a five-year deal on Tuesday.

Brown's coaching style is far from Showtime, which is perhaps why his brief stint on the Lakers sideline seemed to have an oil/water dynamic to it. He preaches defense as the be-all, end-all in the game of basketball. In Brown's system, the offensive opportunities you get are predicated on converting defensive stops into points. Defense is still the end, but defense is the means, and to Brown, the end justifies the means.

His offensive sets are generally lacking in creativity. He tolerates stand-and-dribble stagnation for way too long at times. He lets the offense stall out. He relies on star players to freelance their way to points, as opposed to running intricate play sets.

In short, offense simply matters less to Brown. He's primarily concerned with keeping the other team off the board. He figures if that happens, it will lead to transition points, and the offense will take care of itself.

For five years, it was a maddening approach to basketball for a fan base that wanted to see LeBron James unleash the full wrath of his talents on the opposition. For a fan base that wanted to see what the most talented player in the history of the game could be like in the hands of an offensive visionary. Or at least a coach who would run the offense through a point guard and force LeBron to move without the ball.

That's why you always think you can do better than Mike Brown.

In 2010, with the Cavs reeling from a stunning second-round playoff dismissal at the hands of the Celtics and LeBron's free agency merely weeks away, the Cavs brass thought they could do better than Brown, too. They fired Brown, and Dan Gilbert set about wooing Michigan State coach Tom Izzo, a flirtation that lasted for about a week, before Izzo pulled back and returned to East Lansing, probably because he sensed that LeBron's defection was likely.

Brown's termination was a last-ditch effort to appease LeBron by attempting to hire a big-name coach – an effort that failed miserably, and was probably doomed to fail from the outset.

But even after LeBron made his departure official, the Cavs still thought they had an improvement over Brown. A week before "The Decision," the Cavs hired Byron Scott, a coach who took the Nets to the NBA Finals in 2002 and 2003, a coach who is credited as a major influence in the development of Chris Paul into an elite point guard.

When the Cavs drafted Kyrie Irving in 2011, we all thought they had the perfect coach to groom him. Scott was a former star guard with three rings as a player, who had been in the huddle with the likes of Paul and Jason Kidd as a coach. If anybody could speak the same language as Kyrie, surely it was Scott.

Scott was fired last week after 166 losses in three years. Kyrie has begun to develop into an elite point guard, but his repeated injuries, lack of defensive intensity and early-season admission that he takes plays off at times would seem to indicate that he doesn't yet have a full grasp of what it takes to become great in the NBA.

So where would the Cavs look to find the coach who can get the most out of Kyrie and the other youngsters on the roster? Nobody outside the Cavs organization wanted to look at Brown. The dreamers among us wanted the Cavs to go all-in on Phil Jackson. But Jackson reportedly doesn't want to coach anymore, and even if he did, he'll turn 68 in September and has proven everything he could possibly prove in his career. What are the odds the Cavs would get more out of him than the Browns got out of Mike Holmgren?

Fifty percent of semi-retired Phil Jackson for two or three years isn't enough to vault the Cavs into contention. He was a "be careful what you wish for" candidate, no matter what the record-setting resume might say.

The Cavs thought differently about Brown. After having one of the best defenses in the league for the balance of the LeBron years, the Cavs -- albeit in a rebuilding phase with a much younger roster -- regressed mightily in the three years Scott ran the team.

Dan Gilbert and Chris Grant, always good friends with Brown, perhaps started to realize what they were missing. They were missing a defensive mindset, but more than that, they were missing a team identity. Brown, if nothing else, can forge that identity.

The irony is, as soon as the Cavs fired Brown and LeBron defected to Miami, the Cavs set about building the type of team that could have used Brown's steadfast focus on fundamentals. Brown, at his heart, is a teaching coach, and he's at his best when molding wet clay. That was the state of the team at the outset of his first tenure, and it's the state of the team now.

From 2005 to '08, Brown was the right coach for the Cavs. Thanks in no small part to Brown's tutelage, LeBron is now one of the league's best defenders. LeBron would never have become a dominant two-way player if not for Brown.

Brown's defense set the stage for the Cavs run to the Finals in 2007, with a roster that was nowhere near Finals-caliber. In subsequent years, he took an eclectic mish-mash of players who were anything but great on-ball defenders -- Mo Williams comes to mind -- and molded them into a top-three defensive team.

Under Brown, the Cavs were an excellent interior defensive team, despite the fact that he was working with the slow, aging and plodding legs of Zydrunas Ilgauskas, Ben Wallace and Shaquille O'Neal. The special sauce to his interior defense was Anderson Varejao, who figures to be the only holdover from Brown's first tenure after Daniel Gibson most likely departs via free agency this summer. Varejao blossomed into one of the best help defenders within Brown's help-and-recover system, which Brown learned while serving as an assistant under Gregg Popovich in San Antonio.

Brown is simply one of the best defensive tacticians in the game. But the Cavs job evolved away from him over the final two years, highlighting another of his weak areas.

Where Brown has shown a shortcoming, other than in his offensive playbook, is in his management of large egos. He isn't a dominant enough personality to rein in the likes of LeBron, and he certainly didn't exert a commanding presence with Kobe Bryant, or any of the Lakers' complement of stars, during his year and five games at the helm in L.A.

By the 2009-10 season, the Cavs were full of veteran egos, and the coaching job was best-suited for a psychologist-coach -- one who could play politics, massage egos and rebuke challenges to his authority by world-famous superstars. Brown couldn't hold that type of team together. The same was true in L.A. It cost him both jobs.

But the idea of the Cavs getting back to that point, with a contending, veteran, star-laden roster, is strictly a matter of "if." If Kyrie continues to develop into a superstar. If LeBron at some point finds himself in a Cavs uniform again. If Grant can pull off a major trade to land impact veteran talent.

The Cavs have to hire a coach for the team they have right now. A team with a talented, but very young and still fairly raw backbone.

You always think you can do better than Mike Brown. But here's guessing Gilbert and Grant realized, over the past three years, that it's an assumption based on image, and a dash of familiarity breeding contempt.

Brown hasn't won a championship as a coach. But there are only four active coaches who have. What Brown does have is a virtually-unbroken record of success in six seasons as a head coach. He's won 65 percent of his games (314-167 career record), and has two 50-win seasons, two 60-win seasons and a Finals berth on his resume. His teams have finished with a winning percentage above .600 in five of the six seasons -- the lone exception being the 45-37 Cavs of 2007-08 (.549). You could try to give LeBron the lion's share of the credit for those numbers, but even LeBron can't lug a team that far without a system that works.

If you can do better than Brown, you can't do much better. And for a battered Cavs franchise still looking for post-LeBron daylight, Brown might prove to be the best possible hire they could have made.