



July of 2010 was only three years ago. That is an eternity in basketball time. Not much has changed in real time. The price of gas has increased by about one dollar per gallon, but we still complain about how much it costs to fill up a tank. We still log onto Twitter and have inane debates with people that we don't know about silly things that do not matter in the grand scheme of things. Skip Bayless is still an idiot and has a major platform. ESPN is pushing their asinine "embrace debate" agenda. At the end of the day, we wake up, (hopefully) go to work, come home, sleep and repeat this process.

In 2010, the Cavaliers, Magic, Bobcats, Mavericks, Suns, Jazz and Trailblazers were in the playoffs. The Los Angeles Lakers came off a third straight Finals appearance with a win that secured the franchise its 16th championship. The Washington Wizards won the lottery and the rights to draft John Wall.

With the Wizards still in the lottery, some things didn't really change all that much.

The point is that a lot of basketball time has passed since the Cavaliers were last in the playoffs. In the three years since 2010, they have drafted three players in the top 4 of the draft and have the rights to pick the top player in this year's upcoming draft later this month. The Cavs have lost a lot of games to get to where they are. The franchise has only won 64 and they have lost 166 games in that time span. It has not been easy. The Quicken Loans arena has transformed from a place where the fans are plentiful and loud to one where the local fans ranked at 29th at home game capacity percentage.

The payoff has not been as quick as the fans would probably prefer. Hell, it isn't a guaranteed thing at this point. Kyrie Irving is great, but his ability to stay healthy has to at least be a question for the team to be asking itself. Anderson Varejao should have an all-time high trade value given how great his play has been, but his injuries have rendered his value to probably the lowest that it has ever been. Tristan Thompson has played very well in his sophomore season, but it is not clear what kind of ceiling he has. Dion Waiters quietly improved in his rookie year, but it is unclear if he and Kyrie Irving can coexist in the back court. The Cavs have the top pick in the 2013 draft, but it is supposed to be one of the worst in the modern era and the consensus #1 pick is an offensively-challenged 206 pound 6'11" center who is coming off an ACL tear. The team won 29.3% of their games last year (which was worse than the previous season). When you add everything up, the future appears a little murky.

Having said that, it is far too early in the process to give up on the makeup of the team. Young teams do not have a history of winning a lot of games. The Cavaliers should not be expected to buck that trend.

It is imperative that the team stays the course and does not make any panic trades or major free agency acquisitions to bolster their chances at making the playoffs in 2014. Dan Gilbert has been telling everybody willing to listen that this is the last year that the Cavs will be in the lottery in a long time. It's a great talking point, but it is important to remember that the Cavs were god-awful in their most recent campaign. Paying Al Jefferson \$50 million in four years might get the Cavs in the playoffs, but at what expense?

Which brings me to my next point. Most people in Cleveland love Dan Gilbert. He seems to be committed to the city and winning. He has shown great patience in rebuilding properly and has not forced Chris Grant to make any short-term roster decisions that would negatively impact the team's future. However, he does have a history of meddling which cost the Cavs Danny Ferry and Mike Brown in 2010. He has been well-behaved, but the man is clearly growing impatient

and Chris Grant may fall victim.

I hope that Dan Gilbert remembers the following excerpt from his open letter to Cavaliers fans in 2010:

"Some people think they should go to heaven but NOT have to die to get there."

It is probably tempting for the team to exchange some of their assets and young players to bring in a veteran to assist in making the playoffs. The problem with that is that veterans age quickly and need to be replaced sooner than later. Unless the team has a backup plan for a guy like Pau Gasol after he becomes a poor basketball player, doing so would be a mistake. I keep seeing names like Andre Iguodala and Danny Granger pop up in discussions by fans, but none of those players would make the Cavs go from a 20-ish win team to a 50+ win team who can contend for a championship. The goal should be winning playoff series and not meaningless regular season games. The city is long overdue for a winner, but the Cavs should not mortgage their future after being so incredibly patient for the right to be embarrassed by the Miami Heat in four games.

Rebuilding young teams in the NBA reminds me of the Stanford Marshmallow Experiment in the late 1960s and 1970s. In the study, children were offered one marshmallow immediately or two if he or she waited until the experimenter returned from an absence of 15 minutes. It came as no surprise to the researchers that the students who waited for the 2 marshmallows generally had higher SAT scores, lower BMIs and were higher educated than the students who wanted the instant gratification of the lone marshmallow immediately.

The Cavs certainly can trade the top pick for a veteran or allow the fact that Nerlens Noel will not be able to play until at least December deter them from selecting him with the top pick. They can grow impatient and trade the pick because they want to make the playoffs. The immediate return would probably work out favorably for the franchise and they would quite possibly make their first playoffs appearance since 2010. Conversely, the city and franchise has gone through too many losing seasons to make a short-term trade or draft a lesser player with the top pick that could have long-term ramifications.

The Cavs are a team that has been horrible when it comes to defending the paint. The team gave up 64.1% shooting in the restricted area, which was the third worst in the league. Seeing teams like the Indiana Pacers and Memphis Grizzlies go deep into the playoffs should have NBA general managers reconsidering the notion that the NBA game is changing and that centers are becoming irrelevant. The Cavs have the ability to draft a player who can be a defensive nightmare for opponents. They should not throw that away because Ben McLemore will be available to play 2 months earlier than Nerlens Noel.

In an ideal world, the Cavs would make the playoffs next year without making any major personnel moves or sacrificing their 2014 cap space. That may not happen and the team could find itself back in the lottery with a stubbly-faced Nick Gilbert. Staying the course is not a surefire failure if this happens. The outcome will be determined in 2014 and beyond.