



Calling all whack-jobs, nutcases, and NBA conspiracy theorists, there's a secret plot that everyone is failing to see, and it involves none other than the Cleveland Cavaliers.

Everyone loves ripping on David Stern. They love poking holes in his NBA, saying that the playoffs are fixed, that the refs are bribed to influence games, that the lottery is rigged, that the players collude to form their own super teams, etc. etc. The fact is David Stern has built up the NBA to a point that wouldn't have been deemed possible when he took over as commissioner in 1984.

That's not to dismiss the accusations. Maybe David Stern is guilty of executing all of these schemes to make his league rise into the upper echelon of popularity. There are certainly cases to be made, and evidence to point to all of these things being true.

The topics listed above are only the biggest conspiracies that are whispered about by NBA fans, but perhaps there are more than just these. David Stern wanted to make the NBA popular around the entire world, which has been accomplished, possibly to the credit of the larger, internal plots, but there could also be smaller-scale plans to increase the NBA's popularity from region-to-region, from city-to-city.

Take Cleveland: a city starving for a championship in any sport, thirsting for national attention that is the result of something positive, not negative publicity brought about by a fumble, drive, blown save, or burning river. When a Cleveland sports team finally wins a championship, the city will be so overjoyed that it will whole-heartedly throw itself behind whichever league that team is in. Perhaps David Stern can see that, and that's why the Cavs got LeBron in the first place. He wanted to bring the city a championship so that his league would be enshrined like no other on the North Coast of Ohio.

Unfortunately, the Cavalier teams of the LeBron era, outside of LeBron, were not that good. They had a borderline all-star center at the end of his career in Zydrunas Ilgauskas, a point guard who disappeared in the playoffs in Mo Williams, and an underdeveloped, energy guy in Anderson Varejao. Sure, in LeBron's last season they added Shaq and Antawn Jamison, but both those players were well past their primes. Outside of that, it was a bunch of Ira Newbles, Damon Joneses, and Drew Goodens trying to play key roles on a championship team. It was never going to happen.

After looking back at the Cavs roster pre-Decision, it's clear that the roster is much better now. They have a budding superstar in Kyrie Irving, an all-star center in Andrew Bynum, young players who can create their own shots in Dion Waiters and Anthony Bennett. Not to mention they have a much more developed Varejao, and solid depth in the likes of Jarrett Jack, Earl Clarke, Tristan Thompson and Alonzo Gee. This roster would wipe the floor with the old roster minus LeBron.

It would have been impossible for the Cavs to build a roster like this had LeBron stayed in Cleveland. They didn't have any assets that could be turned into young, talented players. They didn't have the pieces on the roster to trade for a star player. They would have continued to build their team with aging veterans. LeBron wouldn't have been able to get it done on his own. If David Stern was going to turn Cleveland into NBA City, USA, he had to convince LeBron to leave.

It wouldn't have been a hard sell. LeBron would get the opportunity to play basketball with his best friends in a state with beautiful weather and no income tax. Playing alongside Wade and Bosh, he'd be sure to win at least a few championships, cementing his place in NBA history as an all-time great. The Decision, a staged decision, wouldn't have been much of a decision at all. It would have been an easy choice and the only choice.

For the Cavs, it would be tougher to close the deal. The front office would have been divided. Perhaps that's why Danny Ferry mysteriously resigned as the team's general manager. Letting the best player in the league just walk away was not something Ferry was willing to do. But the organization had to get better. Perhaps Stern told them that this was the only way.

Dan Gilbert must have been onboard with the idea, but he would have to make it seem as if his organization was betrayed. Perhaps that's why he produced the infamous letter in comic sans. His emotional manifesto left the nation with a sense that LeBron leaving was entirely of his own doing, and that there was nothing the Cavs could have done about it. But maybe the comic sans font was supposed to be a secret message that there was something more behind all this: that something smelled "funny," so to speak.

Perhaps Gilbert guaranteed the Cavs would win a championship before LeBron because he knew he only had four seasons to get through without LeBron winning. Despite being on board with the plan, he would probably still feel a sense of stubbornness that the roster his organization had put together was good enough to win with LeBron, so maybe he felt that there would be teams good enough to knock off LeBron and the Miami Heat four times before LeBron was a free agent again.

With the summer of 2014 and LeBron's second round through free agency just a year away, the rumors that he might return to Cleveland are swirling. Perhaps they are not just rumors. Perhaps this has been the NBA's plan all along. To take LeBron away from the Cavaliers so that they can build a roster more suitable to winning a championship, so that when he returned they could become the next NBA dynasty, and Cleveland's love for the NBA would skyrocket.

It needs to be said that I, Kyle Ferrara, the writer of this column, do not believe the above to be true, but a case can be made for it. Just as strong a case as any others laid out by those claiming the NBA is scripted. But conspiracy or not, the Cavs are in a much better position to compete now than they were pre-LeBron, and, if LeBron does return in the summer of 2014, this roster is much, much better than the one he left. Cleveland has the Decision, scripted or not, to thank for that.

