



We've been patient with the Cavs. We – or at least most of us – bought into the idea that the team was in need of a complete rebuild after LeBron left. We knew it would take a few years. We knew there would be losing.

It's been a few years. A few years that included two No. 1 overall picks and two No. 4 overall picks. Few teams get the chance to draft four top-five picks in the span of three years. Few teams win the NBA draft lottery twice in the span of three years.

But the losing? It's still there. And it might be worse than ever.

After 166 losses in three years, Byron Scott was shown the door as Cavs coach. Mike Brown re-entered, ostensibly to rebuild a team culture centered on staunch defense. It would be worth any of the offensive shortcomings that typically plague Brown-coached teams if it means a defense that clamps down on passing lanes and challenges every shot the other team takes. Because you simply don't contend for an NBA title without elite defense.

Twelve games into Brown's second go-around as Cavs coach, and the Cavs are 4-8. The

record is bad enough, but then you actually watch the team play, and you realize they're lucky to even have won four.

In Wednesday night's loss to the Wizards, the Cavs didn't even try to play for three quarters. The only player who gave max effort on every play was Matthew Dellavedova – an undersized, undertalented and undrafted rookie who has to play all-out unless he wants a seat on the first bus to Canton.

The Wizards – a team that won't be confused with the Miami Heat any time soon – rolled up a 27-point third-quarter lead. The Cavs didn't play defense, they didn't play offense, and they committed brain-dead unforced turnovers, which has become a staple of the season thus far.

A furious fourth-quarter rally cut the deficit to four, but you almost didn't want the Cavs to win the game, lest it reinforce the idea that you can jerk around for three quarters and pull a win out of your nether regions in the end. They ended up losing 98-91.

Wednesday's no-show came one week after a blowout loss in Minnesota that prompted a players meeting. The meeting was reportedly a heated, contentious affair that should have served as an airing of grievances, and above all, a wake-up call.

Two nights later, they looked flat in a home loss to Charlotte. Saturday night, they needed a late rally and overtime to win their first road game of the season in Washington.

In other words, that meeting did little to spark the team's competitive fire.

The Cavs are pulling out all the stops at every level to try and find a solution. Players meetings haven't worked. Lineup-shuffling by Brown hasn't worked. It makes you wonder how deep the rabbit hole goes.

What is wrong with the Cavs? And where do they go from here?

The lack of effort would seem to be symptomatic of discord behind the scenes. Either players aren't getting along with each other, Brown isn't connecting with them or, worst of all, there is a mutiny in progress against Brown.

Brown isn't the easiest coach to play for. Much like former Browns coach Eric Mangini, he's authoritarian, he values heavy-handed discipline and he doesn't really care whether the players like it or not. When he finally brainwashes the players into his line of thinking, he'll get results. But initially, players don't really like playing for him.

Secondary to that, Brown developed contentious relationships with the two superstars he's coached in his career – LeBron and Kobe Bryant. They are, arguably, the two most influential players in the NBA. Knowing that there is a massive social network among NBA players, it's easy to wonder who has said what to whom via texts and phone calls. Is Kyrie receiving negative feedback on Brown from very high places in Miami or Los Angeles? Is that coloring his opinion on playing for Brown? Maybe or maybe not, but it's at least worth bringing up.

But players are ultimately paid millions of dollars to be professionals and play for the coach that the team has hired. If they're not even trying to compete for large stretches of games, that's a poor reflection on them, not the coach.

This is a problem with two solutions. Three, if you count standing pat and waiting for things to improve organically, but that seems like an option that is rapidly disappearing over the horizon.

The two active solutions are to fire the coach or execute a major trade that turns over a significant portion of the roster.

Brown was hired last spring and signed to a five-year deal. Brown certainly has his warts and caveats, and it's understandable that he's highly unpopular with the fan base right now, but he's probably not going anywhere for at least several years. That leaves a large-scale trade.

Former GM Danny Ferry made that kind of trade in February 2008. It was a three-team deal with Seattle and Chicago that sent away Drew Gooden, Larry Hughes, Ira Newble and Donyell Marshall, and brought in Ben Wallace, Wally Szczerbiak, Delonte West and Joe Smith. The Cavs struggled in the short term, but that deal – along with a deal to acquire Mo Williams in the summer of '08 – paved the way for the Cavs team that won 66 games the following season.

High-volume trades often involve more than two teams, and as such, are difficult to assemble and execute. It could take months of prep work and hours upon hours of phone calls to put the pieces together – and even then, large trades have been known to fall apart at the last minute.

But if GM Chris Grant wants to get proactive about improving this team, it might be the only option. This roster is apparently struggling to stay motivated. It's a roster that is, overall, too young to contend and contains a fair number of mismatched and/or nonproductive pieces.

There are no scoring swingmen on the roster save for sporadic outbursts from C.J. Miles. Irving, Dion Waiters and Jarrett Jack look like redundant players – all undersized backcourt volume-chuckers who need the ball in order to impact the game. Andy Varejao continues to do a poor impersonation of a rim-defending NBA center – but he has to, because Andrew Bynum can't even play 20 minutes a night right now.

Both 2013 first-round picks are bringing absolutely nothing to the table – Anthony Bennett because he's a hard-boiled hot mess between the ears and Sergey Karasev because he needs to spend about a year living in the weight room before he'll have anything approaching an NBA body.

Everything – the attitude, the makeup, the remedial learning curve for Brown's Ph.D.-level defensive schemes – all of it seems off. The only solution could be to try and find players with better attitudes who can bring more complementary skills to the table.

Brown, Bennett, Irving and company might serve as the whipping boys in the court of public opinion, but ultimately, the person with the most heat on his neck might be Grant himself. This rebuild was his vision. The draft picks, trades and signings are all his. The coaching hire was his. If this team doesn't win, the buck stops with him. And it could be his job on the line if the Cavs trudge to another high-lottery finish this season.

Armed with that knowledge, don't be surprised if this roster undergoes a transformation sometime between now and Valentine's Day.