

Begging LeBron James to take time off? Has Papa Cass lost it? Not at all. As a matter of fact, the argument he makes for it in his latest column makes a lot of sense. His take? LeBron is playing at about 75% right now due to the toe injury and 15 straight months of basketball. His legs are worn down, which is affecting his jumper, explosiveness, free throw shooting, and 4th quarter play. His stats bear this out, and the only remedy is rest. A great read from Cassano.



LeBron ... oh, how do I put this tactfully...

We still love you, LB. I mean, you know that, right? You have almost singlehandedly resurrected Cleveland basketball. Fans that wouldn't have known Lamond Murray from Eddie Murray in a previous era now follow the team, wear the gear and proudly sport Anderson Varejao wigs at games.

There is so much good you've done for this team and this entire region. And I believe the best is yet to come.

But right now, Mr. James, you're killing us.

For the good of the team and for yourself, take some time off.

It's hard to believe that LeBron's presence and wins have become mutually exclusive over the past two weeks.

Since returning from their West Coast trip, the Cavs are 0-4 when LeBron plays, 2-0 when he doesn't. The frustrating part is that it's no coincidence.

LeBron's injured toe and more than 15 straight months of virtually nonstop high-level basketball have conspired to wear down his legs, where his celebrated explosiveness originates. Not to mention his jump shot.

In Thursday night's fourth-quarter collapse against the equally-as-struggling Heat, Dwyane

Wade gave us a reference point for how far LeBron has fallen from a year ago.

In the fourth quarter, the Heat simply gave the ball to Wade up top on most possessions and let him go to work. Whether he was stopping and popping or driving to the hoop, every possession resulted in Wade either scoring, getting fouled or both.

He was unstoppable, a one-man wrecking crew wearing away Cleveland's resolve on defense. Like LeBron would do to opponents last year, when he led the league in continuation fouls.

This year, LeBron lacks the explosiveness to fight through five defenders and get to the bucket. He's getting stopped short, which almost never happened a year ago. He's still drawing fouls and getting to the line, but his legs are also killing his free-throw percentage.

LeBron's free-throw woes directly contributed to last week's double-overtime loss to Philadelphia and Thursday's loss to Miami, where he was 3-of-8 from the stripe, including a pair of critical missed free throws with less than two minutes to play.

I think it's becoming psychological with him, like a pitcher who can't throw strikes.

LeBron is playing at about 70 to 75 percent of what he was a year ago. Right now, he is not capable of taking over games in the fourth quarter. The trouble is, because he is LeBron, his teammates and his coach will always look to him with the game on the line, even when it's apparent he is a Ferrari with two flat tires by the time the fourth quarter clock ticks inside two minutes.

LeBron is out there giving it the ol' college try, something he shouldn't be doing in early February. It's terrible to see LeBron out there simply trying to do his best if this is the best he can do.

His free time offers him no respite. Later this month, when his teammates will get a chance to recuperate over the all-star break, LeBron will be participating in the skills competition and the game itself.

In other words, an extended period of rest is going to be a rumor to LeBron until the season ends. Even then, all his off-the-court activities will kick into full gear.

With that in mind, it's time for Mike Brown and Danny Ferry to step in and sit LeBron. Deactivate him and resist the temptation to put him in for about two weeks, then re-evaluate his condition.

Do it now, before his injured toe turns into a injured foot and an injured leg.

The bright lights of national TV will try to lure LeBron back. But the game-on, game-off pattern of the past four contests is a cop-out. He gets no real rest that way. Even when ABC and TNT slather his image all over game promos, even when the possibility of a scoring duel with Wade beckons, Brown and Ferry need to remain steadfast.

LeBron needs rest, desperately. His teammates need to learn to stop using him as a crutch. When he's been out of action, the Cavs have played fundamentally-sound five man basketball because they have to. When LeBron is out there, it's right back to placing all your eggs into a basket with faulty wheels.

The Cavs can emerge from this as a stronger team. But only if Cavs management can come to the necessary but highly unpopular decision to sit their marquee player for some real recovery time.

Do it now. Before LeBron's exhausted legs cost him and his team far more than a few midseason games.