

Misplaced Fears

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Wednesday, March 21 2007 7:00 PM -

Classic Plain Dealer. We have one of the greatest stars in all of basketball, yet all we read from those buffoons Livingston and Shaw are hatchet pieces on him. According to Shaw's latest, what separates James and Dirk Nowitzki and hence, why one team is better than the other, centers around a fear of failure. Nowitzki, the heart and soul of his team, is more motivated to succeed because failure bothers him more than it does James. Hey Bud ... maybe they're just a better team? No? Gary vents.



After Wednesday night's Cavs/Mavs game what have we learned? To the average fan, maybe it was it that the Mavs are simply a much stronger team or that the Cavs have trouble sustaining energy when it plays back-to-back games. But if you're Plain Dealer columnist Bud Shaw, maybe it was that LeBron James just doesn't have the appropriate fear of failure?

Shaw in his most recent [column](#) used the loss to Dallas on Wednesday, as well as the loss in Charlotte, to dump on James' supposed inability to finish off games. But with the silent recognition that he wasn't exactly the first to write that flawed observation, Shaw put a different spin on it by playing pop psychologist. According to Shaw, what separates James and Dirk Nowitzki and hence, why one team is better than the other, centers around a fear of failure. Nowitzki, the heart and soul of his team, is more motivated to succeed because failure bothers him more than it does James.

The column by Shaw was so ridiculous it could have been written by Bill Livingston. All it needed was some obscure reference to Philadelphia and an out-of-context homage to the cheese steak sandwich. But the biggest flaw in Shaw's thesis is the underlying premise: the reason people are driven to success is because they fear failure. Ironically, Shaw doesn't seem

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similarly driven but that's a different column for a different day.

There is, of course, any number of reasons why a person is driven to succeed and it doesn't always derive from the fear of failing. Pride, for example, comes to mind as a powerful force. Being true to one's self and the desire to give forth one's best effort at all times isn't always done because the individual fears the results. Rather, there is tremendous self-satisfaction in a job well done that is separate and apart from any concern over what result is ultimately achieved.

Similarly, the attainment of goals or the desire to achieve the intended results are just as much drivers for success than their first cousin, the fear of the bad result. But the concepts are distinctly different. Perhaps that really is the root of the difference between James and Nowitzki. Their drive to be the best takes a much different path. That isn't necessarily meant to praise one at the expense of the other, it's just to illustrate that motivation and drive are an intensely personal issue that varies, often widely, by individual.

In the case of James, the fact that he does not lose sleep over a missed shot or opportunity hardly relegates him to the loser pile. But this is essentially the argument that Shaw and others before him have advanced: James just doesn't seem to care as much as, say, Michael Jordan or, now, Dirk Nowitzki. As silly as this seems, it is now serving as legitimate discourse in the columns of your local daily.

But beyond a flawed premise, Shaw's column is frustrating for his rather selective use of examples. He notes James' failure at the end of the Charlotte game and essentially implies that it did not push James into some sort of otherworldly performance against the Mavs. But that is a rather poor way to describe James' unusual cold streak during the first three quarters of the game. Maybe his shot just wasn't falling. It happens. Just ask the aforementioned Nowitzki, who is shooting 50% on the season but was only 9 of 24 Wednesday night.

Shaw also fails to mention that James essentially took over in the fourth quarter, scoring 17 of his 31 points. But for James' performance during that period, the game would have ended in a

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blowout. But James can't do it alone. The play of the bench Wednesday night was awful. At one point midway through the fourth quarter, the Cavs lineup featured three players (Marshall, Gibson and Varejao) who had yet to score. Talk about the key to the loss. But that telling statistic collides with Shaw's premise so it was ignored.

Shaw also failed to mention the way in which James elevated his game and that of his teammates late in the third quarter and early in the fourth against Utah Saturday. Utah is a pretty fair team and seemed headed to a sloppy victory as the Cavs were seemingly sleepwalking again through another game. Then came a series of powerful, thunderous dunks from James that literally changed the face of the game and propelled the team to victory. But since no last second shot was needed for the victory, the game and James contribution to that victory doesn't get mentioned in Shaw's column, presumably because it collides with the premise.

There is no question that there have been missteps by James at key points in various games. In the first Dallas game, for example, James missed two relatively easy three-point shots that could have brought home a tough road win. But picking out these exceptions while simultaneously failing to note the other contributions paints a rather incomplete picture of one of the NBA's best players. And as even Shaw should know, no matter what James personally accomplishes, until the Cavs have a roster that rivals that of Dallas, that picture will never be complete.

This is really one of the key takeaways from Wednesday's night game. But there were plenty of others as well. The lack of team energy in the second of back-to-back games suggests that head coach Mike Brown still isn't in full control of which buttons to push. Larry Hughes' is mired in a miserable shooting slump of such proportions that he often seems lost. The Cavs bench is scary inconsistent and is likely to be their Achilles heel come playoff time. But if Shaw and anyone else ignores these and thinks instead that the key to the Cavs problems is teaching James to fear failure, then for them the wait for a NBA title in Cleveland just got that much longer.