

Ever since LeBron entered the NBA four years ago, the widely-held belief is that he has been surrounded by an inadequate cast of one-dimensional schmucks and no-dimensional stiffs. Four years ago, when he entered the league with Ricky Davis and Darius Miles as his wingmen, it might have been closer to the truth. Somewhere along the line, says Erik Cassano, the Cavs have built a team around LeBron. Some of it by design. And some of it by accident.



LeBron James is a man of many names, most of them alluding to something biblical or royal, or at the very least presidential:

The Chosen One.  
King James.  
LBJ.

But I have another one: The Eclipse.

If no one else can call him that, his teammates sure can.

Ever since LeBron entered the NBA four years ago, the widely-held belief is that he has been surrounded by an inadequate cast of one-dimensional schmucks and no-dimensional stiffs. Four years ago, when he entered the league with Ricky Davis and Darius Miles as his wingmen, it might have been closer to the truth. As a rookie, LeBron was plugged into the remnants of a team that had won just 17 games the year before.

But closely-held beliefs die hard, and a [“Dime Smack”](#) blog entry on FoxSports.com Wednesday shows the anti-LeBron -supporting-cast prejudice is still alive and well:

“Anyone not wearing stunner-shade-sized wine/gold/blue BLEEP glasses knows this team isn’t that good outside of LeBron.”

It's not LeBron's fault. He's as good as he is, which is good enough to overshadow about 98 percent of potential teammates in the NBA. It's not the fault of his teammates, who, as part of said 98 percent, won't get a lot of love, at least nationally, simply because they play in LeBron's shadow.

Because LeBron is the megatalent that he is, there will always appear to be a colossal talent chasm between him and his teammates, unless his teammates happen to be Kobe Bryant, Kevin Garnett or the like, which is highly unlikely in any foreseeable scenario.

To the casual national media observer peeking around the corner from New York or Los Angeles once a week, it's easier to fill in the blanks with preconceived notions about LeBron's Gooden is soft, a municipal water tower has more mobility than Zydrunas Ilgauskas, etc.) than to actually tear oneself away from covering Steve Nash's bloody nose to get an accurate, current picture of LeBron's humble supporting cast here in flyover country.

And that accurate, current picture is this: While ESPN was busy following Roger Clemens around like a sex-starved groupie, the Cavs have somehow managed to build a team around LeBron.

Some of it was by design. Some of it, like finding out that Larry Hughes is a better point guard than second scoring option, happened by accident. But the Cavs have now rattled off six straight playoff wins, and 10 overall, without LeBron doing all the heavy lifting.

The Cavs are the NBA's hottest team not just because LeBron has stepped up his game, but because Hughes, Gooden, Z and Sasha Pavlovic have joined him in forming a strong starting lineup, one that has dominated the boards against Washington and New Jersey, one that has tag-teamed to keep Vince Carter and Richard Jefferson in check.

It hasn't been pretty in style, but Mike Brown doesn't coach his team to be pretty. He coaches his team to win with defense. And the Cavs, with a starting lineup that counts 6'-5" Larry

Hughes as the runt of the litter, have the big-boy team to play Brown's kind of defense. So far in the playoffs, it's worked like a charm with the game on the line.

Maybe the 2007 playoffs are all about myth busting for the Cavs. LeBron has no supporting cast. LeBron doesn't know how to win. Brown can't reach his players. All of it has been hung out to dry since the regular season ended.

Of course, this is the Cavs, a team with a history of teasing you with good play, then regressing at the slightest sign of adversity. The real test of this team's mettle will occur when they lose a game in this postseason. In the second season, they cannot afford to take two weeks to get their heads out of the sand following a tough loss, or their offseason will have begun.

But at the moment, it's all coming together just the way Brown and Danny Ferry drew it up two summers ago. Well, not *exactly* how they drew it up, but they're winning in May.

Not that anyone from a national media outlet is going to pay serious attention until the Cavs end up as huge underdogs against the Pistons in the conference finals, should they get that far. With a two-game lead against the Nets, history is on their side. The Nets have never won a seven-game playoff series after trailing 0-2.

The national media endlessly praises team's teams like the Spurs and Pistons, teams that have rosters stocked with guys who realize they are only a small part of something bigger, teams that share the ball, keep their noses to the grindstone and churn out wins with little fanfare. Those are the teams you'd want your daughter to bring home -- figuratively, of course.

Teams like the Cavs get far less respect because, from 500 miles away in New York, they look like all flash and no substance due to the fact that they have a high-gloss superstar who, unintentionally in LeBron's case, deflects the light away from everyone else in the locker room. The vs are the Sanjaya Malakars of the NBA: Nice hair, but can he play an instrument? Ca

Detractors will make the following argument: "If you took LeBron away from the Cavs, they would be a terrible team." But that's flawed thinking. The entire team was constructed around LeBron, with LeBron in mind. Take away the central cog, of course the team won't be good.

No matter how fundamental the Cavs get, they'll never be held up as an example of how the game should be played. LeBron's teammates will not get their dues as a greatly-improved supporting cast that is winning the way their coach wants them to win.

The Cavs are too rust-belt for the Kobe crowd that loves hot sauce on their Mexican food. They're too flashy for the steak-and-potatoes, Pistons-loving crowd that longs for the days when there was a jump ball at the start of every quarter.

It's the rest of the country's loss. Not only are they ignoring the finer points of the maturation of LeBron, they're also missing the development of a pretty good basketball team.

But hey, for once, those of us in Ohio can get in on the latest craze before the jet-setters on the coasts have any idea what is going on. supporting cast (i.e. Drew