

If you listen to the national media, it's almost as if they feel bad for the Spurs, feeling they're not being truly tested against the Cavs in the Finals, similarly to how they tore through the Jazz like a hot knife through butter in the Western Conference Finals. In Erik Cassano's latest, he says that the Spurs opening shot across the bow was certainly impressive. He also says this series is far from over.



This is the vibe I'm getting from the national media:

*"It must be tough being the San Antonio Spurs and going through an entire postseason without ever really having your greatness truly appreciated. You are a fine art critic, and yet all you get to view are fingerpaintings*

*stuck to the refrigerator. You are a connoisseur of fine European cuisine, and all you get to sample are hot dogs. You are a world-renowned*

*music critic, and all you can listen to are three teenagers jamming in a garage on used instruments.*

*"You are trying to cement your place among the greatest basketball teams ever to take the court, and the best the NBA can throw at you is the Utah Jazz and Cleveland Cavaliers. What a pity."*

At this point, what can those of us in Ohio do but feel the Spurs' pain?

In Game 1, it sure as heck looked like the Cavs were going to follow the Jazz as a team in over their heads against San Antonio. Which is just going to add to the debate, should the Spurs polish off the

Cavs

without breaking into so much as a healthy glow of perspiration

beads across their foreheads.

Would this Spurs title be tainted, like so many have said the previous Spurs titles were tainted? If the Spurs win this series, sure it's four titles in nine years, but none have come consecutively, and this 2007 title would have come without facing Dallas, Detroit or Miami, which, along with San Antonio and Phoenix, round out the NBA teams that have any business competing in the Finals, at least in the eyes of many so-called NBA experts.

But I'm getting ahead of myself.

The Cavs weren't blown out of the gym by the Spurs Thursday night. But they were methodically dispatched by a Spurs team that seems to be taking a "Let's just get this series over with, get our trophy and start our summer vacation" attitude to facing yet another opponent they now realize no one will give them a whole lot of credit for having beaten.

I can already see what might happen should the odds prevail and San Antonio wins. Tim Duncan, standing at center floor, gets the Larry O'Brien trophy, holds it over his head, says "Yay, we won," with a straight face, then says, "Here, Pop, take this thing. I'm going to the bathroom."

Like I said, for a team trying to carve a face on the Mount Rushmore of basketball, these playoffs have been purgatory so far.

Of course, there is always a chance that the Cavs could turn this series around and give San Antonio a fight. Le

Bron

James started out this series the way he started out the conference finals: Poorly, by his standards.

If the Detroit series is any indication, LeBron will start to improve as the novelty wears off. Thursday, he and his teammates looked like they really hadn't gotten past the "Holy crap, we're in the Finals" stage. By Game 2, this whole process might look a lot more familiar.

As for Thursday night, LeBron played right into the teeth of the Spurs defense, and finished with 14 points on 4-for-16 shooting. He settled for a lot of long-range jumpers, but this time, it wasn't his fault. The Spurs masterfully hounded him.

San Antonio is generally considered the best help-and-recover defensive team in the league, and Thursday, they lived up to their billing in guarding LeBron. Every time Le

Bron

shook free from Bruce Bowen, two other Spurs rotated over to trap him.

In short, you only needed one hand to count the number of times LeBron actually got to the hoop, and you'd probably still have fingers to spare.

The Spurs were so good defensively, not only could LeBron not get his own shot off, he couldn't even find open teammates with regularity.

Contrast that with Tony Parker, who was buzzing through the lane like a honeybee in heat. Maybe it had something to do with fiancée Eva Longoria sitting 100 feet away. I said before the series started that if Parker can get to the hoop with regularity, just start concentrating on baseball because this series is going to be over by this time next week.

Thursday night stuck to the script. Parker led all scorers with 27 points, and no

matter who the Cavs stuck on him, they couldn't stay in front of him. Parker's 27 came on an array of layups and step-back jumpers. In other words, the type of game Parker is always going to have when you can't guard him.

With seven assists, Parker also got Tim Duncan involved plenty as well. Like Parker, Duncan's night was pretty much a layup drill as well.

Much has been made about Mike Brown and Danny Ferry building the Cavs according to the Spurs template. When breaking down film from Game 1, Brown might want to pay special attention to getting his guys to play recover defense like the Spurs. When Parker blows by his man, someone else has to come over and seal off the lane, or the only thing ensuing games are going to be missing is Bill Murray in attendance with a groundhog.

(Having said that, I shall be compelled to find Murray in the stands for Game 2. Holding a groundhog.)

This series is far from over. Actually, the Cavs are fortunate to have been outplayed by a significant margin and still only have lost by nine. If the Cavs

figure out a way to bridge the performance gap even a little bit, they might make a series of this thing yet.

If Game 1 was the worst game LeBron plays all series, and the best game Parker plays all series, I still like the Cavs' chances, particularly when the scene shifts to Cleveland next week.

But it would still be really nice to not have to come home in an 0-2 hole. The Cavs have until Sunday to meditate on how to prevent that from happening.