

On the day after the Cavaliers disappointing game three loss to the Spurs, Erik Cassano decided to skip on his usual post game wrapup. Wednesday evening, the last night of calm before the Cavs face elimination in Game 4 on Thursday, Erik decided to drive downtown and take in all the Finals pomp and circumstance before it's gone. He quickly realized alot of people had the same idea as him ... despite certain doom.



After Tuesday's Game 3 loss to the Spurs, I was all set to sit down at my computer and write another harrowing tale of heartbreak. Of missed chances and putrid offense and coming to the realization that the light at the end of the tunnel is, in fact, the 5:15 express.

But post-midnight fatigue intervened and I decided to slack off on the traditional game recap. And I'm glad I did. Because Wednesday gave me a whole new perspective on what has become a lost maiden Finals voyage for the Cavs.

Wednesday evening, the last night of calm before the Cavs face elimination in Game 4 on Thursday, I decided to drive downtown and take in all the Finals pomp and circumstance before it's gone.

I figured it would be the perfect time to sneak in the back door and take some pictures while the NBA's multimedia marketing monster is dormant, while the dozens of satellite trucks and trailers encircling The Q lay snoozing like giant steel cows in a urban concrete pasture, snoring away to the hum of their on-board generators.

What I expected was solitude, to be the only person in the Louvre, with the Mona Lisa all to myself. What I got was totally different.

Dozens -- maybe hundreds -- of people had the same idea as me, wandering around The Q, gazing up at the 30-foot replica of the Larry O'Brien Trophy, snapping photos of it, along with all the signage that adorns the arena.

Families and friends gathered together while total strangers snapped their photos in front of anything that said "NBA Finals" on it. Kids climbed on the polished marble boulders in front of the arena's entrance, clothed with custom-made zippered coverings that bear the Finals logo and "Rise Up." Their parents just looked up, and kept looking up, at all the faux gold standing over them.

I might have figured they were tourists running out of things to do in downtown Cleveland, which is entirely possible after 8 p.m. But there were too many Cavs shirts and caps and jerseys in the crowd for it to be all out-of-towners. Besides, this was three days after the Finals shifted to Cleveland. Just about anyone staying in town for the Finals must have snapped all the photos of the giant trophy they could ever need by Wednesday night.

As I sat on a bench, gawking with everyone else at a replica of a trophy our team almost certainly won't win this year, I overheard a man yell to his friend as he was walking over to meet him.

"Had to see all this," he said. "Don't know when it's going to happen again."

Then it all kind of came together for me. This whole scene was more than a curiosity for a city that had never experienced a basketball championship series before. It was a pilgrimage of sorts, for fans who wanted to drink it all in, who didn't want to let a magical springtime ride die just yet, who wanted to bask in the glow of the fact that their city was connected to the championship series of pro basketball for the very first time.

Right then, this whole experience became very similar to the Indians in 1995 for me. The newness, the excitement, the "I can't believe my team and my city are here" feeling that seems to transcend the series itself. It's a level of awe/joy that few other cities can wring out of a four-to-seven game series.

Because it's been 43 years without a title and 10 years since a Cleveland team last competed for a title, it just means more here.

This goes deeper than being down 0-3. Deeper than being overmatched by a blatantly superior team. Deeper than double-teams on LeBron, Larry Hughes' injured foot and even Boobie's shooting touch deserting him in Game 3.

This is about us. About this region, and something that has united us over the past two months, building in intensity until several thousand people celebrated until nearly dawn when the Cavs clinched the Eastern Conference title a week and a half ago.

That's why we all came downtown on Wednesday. One night before the curtain potentially comes down on a Cavs season unlike any previous, we wanted to make sure we had this moment in time, this early June, firmly in focus, both in our cameras and our memories, as we hope for even better things in years to come.