

The honeymoon is over. A week after the Cavs remade their roster via blockbuster trade, and Erik Cassano says that our dream girl has already traded in her skimpy lingerie for hair curlers and fuzzy slippers and that the feel-good sports story of the Cleveland winter has been doused with a cold splash of stark reality on the heels of back-to-back losses to the Bucks and Celtics. What can we realistically expect this season from these remade Cavs this season? Erik opines.



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The feel-good sports story of the Cleveland winter has been doused with a cold splash of stark reality on the heels of back-to-back losses to the Bucks and Celtics. And the reality is, this team is in a state of transition and will likely slump, or at least plateau, for the foreseeable future.

In many ways, watching the Cavs play this week has been like taking a trip back to LeBron's first several years with the franchise, when the team had no sense of fundamentals and couldn't close games with any authority. It was a frustrating, maddening time when the Cavs absolutely refused to live up to their potential.

At least for the short term, those days have returned. And, as with those Cavs teams of LeBron's formative NBA years, the only cure is gaining experience together.

When Danny Ferry pulled off the 11-player trade that brought Ben Wallace, Joe Smith, Wally Szczerbiak and Delonte West to Cleveland at last Thursday's trade deadline, he went from the doghouse to the penthouse in many fans' minds. But while we were celebrating the arrival of real, honest-to-goodness supporting cast

talent worthy to surround
have underestimated just how much this trade rocked the
Cavs
roster to its very foundation.

LeBron, we might

In business, this type of turnover is called "transformational." The Cavs roster wasn't augmented by last week's deal; it was completely altered by bringing in players from two different organizations who have different skill sets from the players who were traded.

Counting the NBDL signings of Billy Thomas and Kaniel Dickens, it was six players in, six players out in the span of one day. This at a time when three key players -- Anderson Varejao, Sasha Pavlovic, and Daniel Gibson -- were all on the shelf with injuries. Varejao returned to action Tuesday, but it might be a month or longer before Pavlovic and Gibson get a chance to play with their new teammates.

Fans hoping that this would be the trade that finally makes the Cavs legitimate title contenders will undoubtedly become impatient as West, Szczerbiak and LeBron continue to miscommunicate

on passes, as Wallace defers to his teammates instead of taking a golden chance to crush an offensive board back through the hoop, as every player on the roster continues to pass first and shoot second because no one knows who should take the shot in a given situation.

Even though you probably won't like to hear it, the fact remains that this is likely a trade designed to mostly benefit next season's team. Give this roster a chance to jell over the final two-plus months of the regular season and hopefully more than one round of playoffs, then a training camp and preseason together next fall, and maybe for '08-'09, this is a 55-to-60 win team that is, indeed, a legitimate

championship threat.

As for this season, well ... LeBron might be the best basketball player on the planet, but even he can't speed up the effects of time. And time is what this team needs to become the elite squad everyone is envisioning.

Unfortunately, you can't have it both ways. You wanted Larry Hughes gone. You wanted Donyell Marshall gone. You wanted better players than Drew Gooden, Ira Newble, Shannon Brown and Cedric Simmons comprising LeBron's supporting cast. You got your wish. But someone has to take their place on the roster.

The result was a transformational trade that might have pushed the Cavs up a few notches in terms of overall talent, but likely set the team back several years in terms of cohesion.

That's not to say it's going to take several years for the current Cavs to reach the competitive level of the pre-trade Cavs.

. But anyone who thinks this team is going to go from frosh mixer levels of awkwardness to owning the East in the span of two weeks is fooling themselves.

The Cavs' trade was met with [a shrug in Detroit](#) and [a scoff from Orlando Magic GM Otis Smith](#), who is on record as saying he believes the trade hurts Cleveland's chances of catching his team for the East's third seed.

In Cleveland, it's easy for us to chalk up the reactions of the Pistons and Magic to false bravado, a weak harrumph from two teams who just watched the Cavs become a real threat to defend their conference crown right before their very eyes.

But there is something to the idea that tearing down half your team and rebuilding it midseason is madness for a supposedly-contending club. The popular thinking is that if you,

as a GM, are going to undertake a drastic overhaul of your team, it's better to do it in the offseason, as the Celtics did. Asking a team to endure a midseason extreme makeover and still stay in contention is probably asking too much.

Still, Ferry saw his chance to make his team better, and he jumped on it. Based on his previous record of inactivity that stretched all the way back to the 2006 offseason, you have to admire him for finally seizing the day.

If you truly believe, as Ferry said he did, that the Cavs had no chance to win a title with the team as previously constructed, then there was no reason to stand pat, regardless of the consequences for this season. You should be willing to endure whatever short-term hardship this trade creates for the potential benefit next year.

Of course, Cleveland sports fans are justifiably sick of "next year." We want a title now, and we're counting on the rebuilt Cavs to get us one.

But for the purposes of this season, championship hopes will likely once again run into a roadblock, this time caused by a new case of inexperience. And, once again, we will all be forced to endure that dreaded word: "Patience."