

They'll Never Let It Go

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Tuesday, June 10 2008 7:00 PM -

Great piece from Jesse this morning. In it, he talks about the media's belief that New York is entitled to LeBron more than Cleveland, and therefore, LeBron will go to New York because that's what he's supposed to do. They want LeBron out of here. They've made it plain enough. The Terminator in his pursuit of Sarah Connor was a slacker compared to the single-minded determination of the punditry to see LBJ in the uniform of a team other than Cleveland. And Jesse is fed up.



I'm not enrolling in the "ESPN Hates Cleveland" school of thought. I don't think that's the cause at all. Not all Cleveland teams are created equal in the eyes of the sporting Solons, and they're all treated in their own distinct way.

The Indians are treated with indifference. Nobody cares that they have the second-longest title drought in baseball, and when they do make a run, they're regarded as foils for the anointed protagonist- the Braves in '95, Jim Leyland is '97, the Yankees in '98, Pedro Martinez in '99, the 116-win Mariners in '01, the Red Sox Nation in '07, etc. Whenever the Indians are talked about, it's generally in the context of the social iniquities of Chief Wahoo: *"Oh, you still exist? That's nice. Why don't you lose the racist hat?"*

The Browns are another story. Cleveland's sports image is tied in with the Browns more so than any other team. It's a football town, and in the NFL, with its socialistic economic structure, the tough Midwestern football towns still beat alive and well as the heart and soul of the league. Everyone knows Cleveland had its team purloined, and everyone knows that some good people stood up to resist

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this dastardly action- and won. Everyone knows about Browns fans, who are everywhere. Everyone knows about the history, about the galling defeats. And everyone *should* know that when this team makes it to the Super Bowl, it'll be the biggest story in years. We're going to get a 2004 Red Sox-type of buzz, right down to the crappy *Fever Pitch* adaptation. The Cleveland Browns will be the darlings of the nation, for better or for worse. Bank on it, people.

The Cavaliers don't inspire indifference or affection. What they get is out-and-out contempt. The opinion-shapers don't want the Cavaliers to win and contend for titles. And they *really* don't want LeBron James in a Cavaliers uniform. This is maybe the transcendent player of his generation, and here he is stuck in this horrendous offense, surrounded by scrubs that don't do jack-squat for him, with this goofball wonk of a coach who looks like a cross between an AV geek and a Milk Dud. And worst of all, he's in *Cleveland!* Who wants to make fifteen trips to Cleveland in the dead of winter?

They want LeBron out of here. They've made it plain enough. The Terminator in his pursuit of Sarah Connor was a slacker compared to the single-minded determination of the punditry to see LBJ in the uniform of a team other than Cleveland. And everyone knows what uniform(s) *those* are.

Latest to weigh in on this matter of national importance- getting LeBron James the **** out of Cleveland and to Guess Where- is Sam Smith, the veteran Chicago *Tribune* columnist and author of "The Jordan Rules," in which we learned that MJ called Will Perdue "Will Vanderbilt" because he "doesn't deserve to be named after a Big Ten school." Anyway, with the Dream Finals everyone is genuflecting over at hand, Mr. Smith decided to do a little musing on the King's options for 2010:

[LeBron as good as gone when contract expires](#)

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After describing a woeful offensive sequence at the end of Game Seven in Boston, Mr. Smith gets to the nitty-gritty:

Despite being one of the most remarkable overall talents ever to play in the NBA, James remains saddled with a defense-first, defense-only coach and a team, arguably, that doesn't have one player who would be a starter on maybe any other playoff team...

It seems a shame that five years into his career, James, who hauled the Cavs to the 2007 finals on the strength of transcendent ability and favorable matchups, continues to be surrounded by such a weak supporting cast.

It's a sin to saddle this talent with so many old, beaten down horses.

And after five years!

There is merit to this point. Cleveland's offense is... well, frankly, it's just about unwatchable at times. As far as I know, this team runs some version of San Antonio's offense, only without Tony Parker or Manu Ginobili and a lot worse. And Sam Smith is right about the lack of playoff-caliber starters surrounding LeBron.

I do take issue with the "five years" part, though. Keep in mind that this franchise spent a good two years putting itself in a position to be bad enough to draft a guy like LeBron James. Then keep in mind that after successfully running the team into the ground and landing LeBron James, the previous general manager of this team blew one lottery pick on Luke Jackson, traded another for Jiri Welsch, and fumbled away a guy in the top five at his position in the grossest dereliction of common sense we've seen from any sports executive this decade. Chop two essentially wasted years off of those five. The current general manager, in his first three years on the job, had one draft to work with. Two picks out of a possible six, neither earlier than number 25, to do match what Smith's Jordanaires

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did in the '80s:

The Jordan Bulls faced a similar issue in the 1980s. But they wisely accumulated draft picks and made deals looking toward the future and were able to grab talent like Scottie Pippen and Horace Grant.

Sounds great. I'm on board. Only it's hard to build through the draft when you have two picks in three years. Jerry Krause had two lottery picks in the '87 Draft alone, and was able to use one of them to move up for the rights to Scottie Pippen. Building through the draft is the optimum way to go. That option has been of limited availability. Can Dan Gibson be our B.J. Armstrong, at least?

So without picks, all Ferry had in the summer of 2005 was that fat free agent budget burning a hole through his pocket. He had to spend, and he had to overspend. I really can't see another way to go here. You can quibble with the guys he spent that jack on, but you're going to need to throw out some alternatives either way. Those guys are looking at Miami, Orlando, Phoenix, L.A. You know- nicer places to be than Cleveland in the middle of January. You need to overpay.

Don't think I'm hating on this area. This is and will always be my home. But I'm from here. If I'm Johnny Baller from Texas or UNC, Cleveland is going to be down on my list of possible destinations. Hell, I'd winter in Santa Monica if I had the spinach. I'm not going to lie.

I'm probably making excuses- check that, I *know* I'm making excuses. But show me a different route. That's all I'm asking.

Now this team is back in the draft. Fat contracts are about to start dropping off the books, and before they do, they might very well be fat trade assets. Ferry has two years to add the pieces that make this a championship-caliber team, and these

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two years will stand as the ultimate judgment of this regime. The grand game isn't over yet. Actually, it's just getting started. And so am I.

We'll move on to Sam Smith's logical choice as the destination for Flight 23:

It's an embarrassment, really, and why it's difficult to see James sticking it out when he can become a free agent after the 2009-10 season.

Nothing personal. Cleveland is a fine place and home for James. But when New York is calling...

And it is.

Shocking, I know. He also adds such groundbreaking revelations as LeBron's friendship with Jay-Z, his need to tap his ultimate economic potential in a major market, and the belief that it's better for the NBA when a New York team is healthy and viable. Stop me if you've heard this before.

I'm not going to stupidly knock the appeal of New York City. It's vast, it's rich, it's as cosmopolitan as can be, and the hoops culture there is on another level from that of our little football town in flyover country. MSG is a basketball mecca, and it is right smack in the middle of Manhattan, the best location for any arena or stadium in America in my humble opinion. New York is the shiz-nit. I know this. But here's the issue:

What if the Knicks and the Nets still blow in 2010? What if they don't have the complementary pieces to put around LeBron? What then?

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There is a duality here. On one hand, LeBron is all about winning championships. On the other, he's all about being a name brand, a Global Icon, the first billionaire athlete. If he leaves Cleveland because he can't win a title here, the only real requirement for an alternative destination is a place he can. That could be anyplace. It could be Detroit, or Utah, or San Antonio. If winning is LeBron's ultimate motivation, it stands to reason he won't switch uniforms for venal reasons. How is New York going to help him? If he goes there and plays for a forty-five win team, he's Tracy McGrady cross-pollinated with A-Rod. There are better legacies.

Here's the thing. LeBron doesn't need New York. He's already the [third-ranked](#) athlete in yearly earnings, ahead of every other NBA player. He's on the way to owning China.

China

. If he wants to go to New York he can be there in an hour-and-a-half, whenever he wants. Is this the resume of a man who needs to pack up the ole' kit-bag and head off to the big city to make his fortune? No

, *New York needs him.*

Remember that teenaged fan in the sweat pants who

[invaded](#)

the playing floor to congratulate LeBron for hanging fifty on the Knicks in March? That's New York- grasping at the King's hem in a plea for recognition. That city's pro basketball culture is in a shambles. They need a man on a white horse to ride in and save their sorry butts, and it's been decided- LBJ is that man. The

need

for LeBron to play in a big market is a red herring.

The belief is that New York is entitled to LeBron more than Cleveland, and therefore, LeBron will go to New York because that's what he's supposed to do. Or something like that. And I'm not even guaranteeing he'll stay in Cleveland. I'm in no position to read the man's mind. Besides, we might be dead in 2010.

It'd be nice if everyone showed the same discretion.