

It's been something we've talked about as Cavs fans for years. Who will be the proverbial Robin to LeBron's Batman? The popular belief seems to be that the Cavs are going to need a Pippen figure if they are to overtake Boston, knock off whatever the Western Conference throws at them and win an NBA title. In Erik Cassano's latest, he says that Danny Ferry and Mike Brown are more concerned with putting the correct collective group around LeBron. And that they just might be there already.



It's the eternal question on the journey to an NBA title: What is the proper makeup of a championship team?

Do you need spotlight-absorbing superstars first and foremost, or do you need a great team philosophy where the sum is greater than the parts?

It's a question with no definite answer. Both schools of thought have been proven right over the past decade-plus. Michael Jordan won six titles with a sidekick in Scottie Pippen and a host of role players ranging from Dennis Rodman, Ron Harper and Steve Kerr to Bill Wennington, Will Perdue and Jud Buechler. Though the second Bulls three-peat from 1996-98 arguably had the best of both worlds, with a central cast of stars immersed in a great team philosophy.

The Lakers won three NBA titles from 2000-02 led by Kobe Bryant and Shaquille O'Neal. The Heat won an NBA title in 2006 with Shaq and Dwyane Wade. The Celtics won an NBA title last season fronted by Kevin Garnett, Paul Pierce and Ray Allen. So star power is definitely a means to an end.

But the Spurs won four NBA titles in 1999, 2003, '05 and '07 with a star player in Tim Duncan known more for his solid grasp of fundamental basketball than his athleticism. Duncan never really had what could be termed a sidekick. He's been surrounded throughout his career with excellent role players, produced by one of the NBA's best top-to-bottom franchises.

The Pistons won an NBA title in 2004 without a legitimate star, riding suffocating

defense and the scoring of Rip Hamilton and Chauncey Billups to a colossal upset of the Lakers in the Finals.

Going arbitrarily back to the start of the second Chicago title run in 1996, that's eight titles built on star power and five titles for team-first teams.

If the Cavs are trying to win an NBA title, they have to subscribe to one of these theories. And it appears they have. If you know the Spurs-heavy background of Danny Ferry and Mike Brown, their belief system shouldn't surprise you. But if you're looking at the Cavs as LeBron James and everyone else, it's head-smacking.

The Cavs are not a team built on star power. Or at least that's the goal of Ferry and Brown. And that's why, in the Cavs' philosophy, LeBron doesn't necessarily need a superstar sidekick to win a title.

The popular belief seems to be that the Cavs are going to need a Pippen figure, the proverbial Robin to LeBron's Batman, if they are to overtake Boston, knock off whatever the Western Conference throws at them and win an NBA title. That's certainly an option if the right exchange can be found for Wally Szczerbiak's \$13 million-plus expiring contract.

But chances are, Ferry and Brown don't believe that LeBron **MUST** have a running mate on par with his talent level to win a title.

More important to the Cavs' leadership tandem are the factors that have made the Spurs a powerhouse over the past decade. Namely, a defense-first philosophy, sound fundamentals and a deep roster filled with intelligent role players who can at least do one or two things well on most nights.

If LeBron is surrounded by that type of team, Ferry and Brown likely believe he can achieve the level of success that Duncan has enjoyed with the Spurs. Which is why, when Ferry set about remaking the Cavs roster over the past year, he concentrated on eliminating the dead weight on the bench, removing unreliable players like Drew Gooden and Larry Hughes and bringing in cagey, tough veterans. Enter Ben Wallace, Delonte West and, this summer, Mo Williams.

Going by the Spurs-based philosophy, LeBron isn't a Batman without a Robin, he's a Batman with many Robins. Some can shoot, some can rebound, some can

defend, but all can contribute.

As long-suffering Cleveland fans, it's difficult to watch a team like the Celtics sprout from perennial dreg to trophy-hoisting force in one year by making two deals to land Allen and Garnett, completing basketball's latest incarnation of the holy trinity. We want the same for the Cavs, and we have one heck of a first piece in LeBron, with only two more guaranteed seasons of him under contract as a window to get this right.

But I have a feeling that's quick-fix thinking to Ferry. Does he feel the heat to win a title between now and 2010? I'd guess so. But that would be true in any season with LeBron. Whether LeBron's free agency is impending or not, every season with him is a chance to win a title and a chance to show him you're willing to do what it takes to win a title.

In the end, Ferry might trade for another star player. But that doesn't change that fact that he and Brown believe that the key to a title is a good roster and a good system from top to bottom. It's a product of the NBA system in which they were groomed. It's a system that won San Antonio four titles, so can you really argue?

If you want to pine for LeBron's Robin and develop an addiction to the [ESPN NBA Trade Machine](#) concocting scenarios that would bring a superstar sidekick to the Cavs, knock yourself out. But know that the guys who make the actual decisions might not be on the same wavelength. Just so you're not disappointed if the trade deadline comes and goes and Szczerbiak is still a Cav.