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Good teams have huge collective egos. It comes with the territory of success.

Millionaire athletes who routinely beat other millionaire athletes are bound to develop a high opinion of themselves, as a unit if not individually.

There is nothing wrong with believing you are good. Confidence is a key ingredient in sustained success, in any endeavor. That's why so many motivational-speaker types wax poetic about visualizing success in order to make it happen.

The Cavaliers are Cleveland's Exhibit A on the effects of success. All season long, the Cavs have been drubbing opponents on a regular basis, winning at around an .800 clip for most of the campaign. They made it well into February without a home loss, and their road record isn't too shabby, either. In short, the Cavs expect to win every game, and have developed a sharp distaste for losing.

If the Cavs are following the Michael Jordan method to championship hardware, that's great. Jordan detested losing and did everything in his power to avoid it.

Jordan also knew that he was the best player every time he stepped onto the court. By the time the Bulls achieved their second three-peat from 1996-98, that attitude and completely rubbed off on his team. The Bulls won 72 games in the 1995-96 season and didn't release their iron grip on the NBA for three years.

With that kind of success comes a sense of entitlement. Those Bulls, like the Celtics of the '80s and the Spurs of this decade, did their share of whining to the referees. They believed it was their birthright to get the benefit of the doubt on every call. Great teams tend to openly, sometimes bitterly, contest every call and non-call that go against them. Teams like the Celtics, Bulls and Spurs believe that more leeway and respect should be shown to them than the average team. When they don't get it, those in authority hear about it.

The Cavs have very much developed that attitude, particularly as the 2009 portion of the schedule has unfolded. With their status as an elite team cemented, the intermittent chirping at the refs has turned into a pandemic of whining, both on and off the floor.

There is a big difference between this year's Cavs and the teams mentioned above: The Cavs haven't won a title yet. And that's the reason why the Cavs' status as the league's next great crybaby team is so troubling.

If the problem was confined to LeBron shuffling up to the refs with his arms out and a pained expression on his face after every foul or non-foul that he finds dissatisfactory, that would be one thing. You roll your eyes. It would be nice if LeBron would whine a tad less, but due to his unprecedented combination of speed and size, he does get hacked a lot with no toot from the refs' whistles. Many times, he has a legitimate beef.

If the effect on the rest of the team was limited to Anderson Varejao mimicking LeBron's arms-out and just-sucked-a-lemon facial expression after getting busted for lifting his pivot foot, you'd roll your eyes again. Andy is good at playacting. He has a career as a mime waiting for him after his basketball days are over.

But that isn't all that is going on with this team.

The first sign that something is really wrong with this team's attitude occurred two weeks ago when Mo Williams failed to make the cut for the Eastern Conference all-star team. Mo is having a good year and is a key component on a top-shelf

team. He had a case built for a trip to Phoenix. Not an airtight case, but it wouldn't have been an embarrassment if the coaches had voted him in.

But they didn't. Orlando's Jameer Nelson made the cut instead. And the Cavs started crying bloody murder.

Ben Wallace made up a new word to characterize the diss, calling it a "shamockery" -- an affront that carries qualities of both a sham and a mockery. LeBron spouted off to the media. Mike Brown, who will be coaching the Eastern Conference all stars, had some choice words.

The bees' nest settled down after a few days, and the Cavs stuffed their hands into their pockets, sulked back to work and resumed the task of winning games. But then, fate intervened and offered the Cavs a whole new soapbox.

Jameer Nelson went down with a shoulder injury. The NBA front office would need to name a replacement. The Cavs crossed their fingers, rubbed their rabbit's foot, and waited for the slam-dunk announcement that the East all-star roster would be rounded out by ... Ray Allen.

Strike two, Mo. You're out.

The demonstrative complaining morphed into an something bigger, a episode of finger-pointing that reached all the way to the top of the organization. Squarely in the crosshairs? NBA commissioner David Stern, a man not afraid to flex his authoritarian muscles when needed. As a general rule, Stern doesn't like to be questioned about his decisions. Cavs management fired away, however.

Danny Ferry politely questioned Stern's knowledge and appreciation of the Cavs. But he questioned it nonetheless:

"I know Commissioner Stern has followed our team's success but maybe doesn't appreciate how important Mo has been to our team."

Comments like that probably make the hairs on the back of Stern's neck stand up. What Dan Gilbert said probably makes Stern reach for his stress squeezey-ball. And you wouldn't like him when he's using his squeezey-ball.

"Ben Wallace was right when he called Mo originally being passed over for

the All-Star game a 'shamockery,' " Gilbert told The Plain Dealer via e-mail. "But not naming him as the natural and obvious replacement for the unfortunately injured Jameer Nelson is stupidiculous, idillogical and preposterageous."

Maybe Gilbert meant it half in jest. Maybe he was just trying to inject some levity into the situation. But when you're dealing with the all-powerful long-standing commissioner of the league in which your team plays, it might be best to assume that he was born without a sense of humor, likes to be called "sir," and doesn't want to hear your voice unless he addresses you.

Instead, Gilbert didn't just question Stern. He didn't just accuse Stern's people of making the wrong choice. He did so in a condescending tone, using Wallace's made-up word as the basis for a juvenile string of commissioner-flaming nonsense.

Gilbert might have thought he was being funny. To us as Cleveland fans, it was funny. To Stern, it was a franchise owner saying "Since you're so ignorant as to what is going on in Cleveland, I guess I have to use Mike Tyson-speak to communicate with you. I hope you find my style impetuous."

I think Gilbert has been an amazing owner with regard to the product he's put on the basketball floor, and the improvements he's made to the Cavs organization as a whole. But I also see a streak of Mark Cuban in him that is a bit unsettling.

If you've seen the classic baseball movie "Bull Durham," you're probably familiar with the scene in which Crash Davis tells Annie Savoy that a player on a streak has to respect the streak and shouldn't do anything to disrupt said streak. In other words, "Don't (blankety-blank) with a winning streak."

Thumbing your nose at David Stern with made-up words is most definitely blankety-blanking with a winning streak. Unlike in Bull Durham, it's about a lot more than perpetuating superstitions.

If you're a conspiracy theorist, you could readily draw a line between the reactions of Gilbert and Ferry to Mo's second all-star snub, and the league's decision to strip LeBron of his historic triple-double last week at Madison Square Garden by taking away his ninth rebound.

Did the rebound rightfully belong to Wallace? Probably. But the NBA has let greater injustices slide past without lifting a finger. The decision to strip LeBron of his triple-double seems punitive in nature when taken in the context of when it happened (two days after the game) and the fact that it happened right after the remarks of Gilbert and Ferry went public.

If there was any chance the league would let the triple double slide into history as a subject of debate, it was lost after the Cavs' bigwigs took their discontent over Mo's snub to the media.

Since then, the Cavs have developed an us-against-them mindset. That's great, but only if it leads to steely resolve and wins. If it leads to paranoia and a meltdown, the Cavs are going to be watching the NBA Finals on TV come June.

Before the Cavs were dealt their first home loss of the season on Sunday, LeBron got in another parting shot at the Eastern Conference coaches and the league over Mo's snub, saying "That's how they always treat us they wouldn't take me as an all-star if they had their way."

That's just crazy talk. Unfortunately, in Cavs land, emotions seem to be winning out over zipping it and getting to work at the moment. In the process, they're getting on the bad side of David Stern, the man who controls the refs, signs off on trades, and generally plays the role of puppet master.

Not to insinuate that Stern would influence the outcome of a playoff series, but it's never good to try and win a championship when your team's owner and superstar player have built an icy, ego-driven wall between themselves and the commissioner's office. It's a chance no team -- certainly not a team in a city that has gone 45 years without a major pro sports title -- should be willing to take.

Think I'm off base? Think back to the 2006 Finals, and ask yourself if the Dallas Mavericks will ever win an NBA title so long as Mark Cuban owns them.