



For a long time now – somewhere around seven years – the sports-following population of Northeast Ohio has treated LeBron James with a fearful reverence.

We revere him because of what he does on the basketball court. We fear him because this summer, he possesses the power to take that away from us and hand it to another team's fans.

Because LeBron embodies greatness that we seldom see in this town, and because he's a local product, we are slow to criticize him, quick to turn a blind eye to his faults and even quicker to shower his name with superlatives. On one level, it's good. You should appreciate the good fortune of living in Ohio at a point in time when the best basketball player on the planet is from Ohio and plays for Ohio's NBA team.

But maybe what you learned as a kid is true: too many sweets can be a bad thing.

If LeBron truly is all about Akron and feels a strong sense of connection to the region at large, maybe it's time we stop worshipping the ground he walks on and start treating him like family.

In other words, put the right things in his head. Because in the wake of the Game 2 embarrassment versus the Celtics, I'm not sure LeBron has all the right things in his head.

LeBron's stat line was decent enough – 24 points, seven rebounds, four assist, three steals and two blocks in 41 minutes. But that's just the thing. It was decent by his standards. He can fill up a stat sheet to that tune while jamming out to Jay-Z on his headphones.

It was an early February stat line in an early May game – versus the hated Celtics, at home, in the second round of the playoffs, with a chance to take command of the series headed to Boston, where the Cavs have won once in three years.

LeBron set the tone for a whole lot of garbage from the starting five. Only Antawn Jamison joined LeBron as a double-figure scorer among the starters, and he cancelled that out by acting as Kevin Garnett's chew toy at the defensive end.

What did I see out of LeBron on Monday? If I'm being brutally honest? I saw a guy who is going to win a lot of little bronze men and have a lot of MVP acceptance lovefests at venues of his choosing over the coming years. I also saw a guy who is never going to get familiar with hoisting gold trophies.

I saw Peyton Manning. I saw a player who is the best in the business during the regular season, who might stumble into a title or two over the years, but will never form the centerpiece of a dynasty, no matter the supporting cast.

I saw a player who is maybe a little too comfortable in his own skin as a media icon, as dominant force on the court, who goes for way too many recklessly-launched three-balls with the game on the line when running a play and trying for a higher-percentage shot is the more logical solution. A player who is a little too in love with the "Did he really just do that?" play, who tries to drop jaws as much as he tries to win games. A player who tries something like shooting a free throw left-handed as soon as he knows the game is locked up, then turns his elbow bruise into front page news across the country.

LeBron is allegedly the hungriest superstar out there. He knows he needs titles to cement his star in the constellation of Jordan, Kobe, Magic, Kareem and Bird. He talks about it all the time. But then the playoffs arrive, elite competition beckons, and LeBron's supposedly-developing killer instinct goes cold.

Last year, he tried to singlehandedly haul the Cavs over Orlando, averaging 40 points per game for the series and turning dribble-drivers Mo Williams and Delonte West into spot-up shooters in the process. LeBron was a one-man show who eventually stopped looking for help, and the Cavs lost the series in six games.

At least the Cavs legitimately had horrible matchup problems with Orlando, so the blame makes the rounds. But LeBron didn't help his team win just because he tried to score all the points. If anything, he hurt the Cavs in that series by trying to do too much and not demanding more from his teammates.

This year, LeBron had a nice warm-up against an overmatched Bulls team in the first round, but has now led the Cavs to three miserable halves of basketball in the first two games against the Celtics.

Either his elbow is bothering him way more than he's letting on, something else is wrong, or we're once again seeing LeBron and his teammates dazed and confused when encountering a hard-to-solve playoff opponent.

The Cavs do not look like a championship team at the moment. They're going to have to look like a championship team – and LeBron is going to have to look like a champion – if they want to knock off the experienced, composed, proven-title-winner Celtics and even have the privilege of worrying about how to handle a rematch with the Orlando Magic in the conference finals.

Right now, what I see is a team that is quickly gaining a reputation as a paper tiger. A team that is a close cousin of the Dallas Mavericks of the 2000s and the Sacramento Kings of early last decade. Impressive regular season accomplishments and not much to show for it in the way of postseason hardware.

If this season ends with another humiliating playoff defeat, if LeBron follows up his second straight MVP award with a third straight non-congratulatory storm-off after an early elimination, the “overrated” chants will grow deafening for both player and team. And, as much as I hate to say it, it will be deserved.

If that happens, LeBron will have a lot more weighing him down than where he wants to play next season.