



I swore I wouldn't fixate on this. I swore I wouldn't look at the daily LeBron-Tracker and that I'd tune out the national media's oppressive coverage of the "Where Will LeBron Play in 2010" crap. I swore I'd spend the hours saved with my kids and by concentrating on the World Cup.

Please.

I admit it. I can't help myself.

In Cleveland the impending LeBron James decision is basketball life and death. At least it is for a five year period or so. And that's probably the best case outlook for a potential rebuild that would follow a James departure.

If James decides to grace Cleveland with his presence once he becomes a free agent on July 1st

the Cavaliers will remain a viable

NBA contender. James is the biggest reason for that but the aging process in Boston and the disarray in Orlando has something to do with it too. Add in the fact that Kobe Bryant is on the downhill side of his prime and Andrew Bynum's knee is structurally 20 years older than Andrew Bynum himself and one doesn't have to be a Pollyanna to believe the Cavaliers, with James and a couple of upgrades elsewhere, are still amongst the NBA elite.

I know Le-Collapse is still fresh in our minds. I know James basically quit on his teammates and all of us in the playoff series against Boston that ended the Cavaliers' season and threw us into this free for all prematurely. I also know 'upgrades' as they pertain to the Cavaliers' roster are apparently dicey propositions.

I know that. I feel that and understand that as deeply as anyone not drawing a paycheck with Dan Gilbert's name on it.

But the Tom Izzo fiasco and ultimate declination of Gilbert's offer to coach this team has me thinking: are we better off with LeBron here wielding previously unheard of power as a player and quasi-GM or are we better off with Gilbert thumbing his nose at James and hiring an unproven NBA coaching commodity to build this organization back up from the ground?

And while scenario one makes me sick to my stomach, the fact that I'm approaching my mid-40's without yet experiencing a championship of any kind in Cleveland makes a four or five year rebuild even more vile. Thus, scenario number two makes me even sicker.

But there is a large contingent of fans who are so turned off with James and his childish behavior that they're more and more in favor of scenario two. Some want to start with the rebuilding process right now and tell LeBron to kiss their ass as he heads out of town. They're willing to go with an unproven coach that isn't a big name who can come in and start building that winner we all desperately crave. One problem: he's got absolutely nothing to work with.

Not only would James be gone but the decks would also likely be cleared of Shaquille O'Neal,

Zydrunas Ilgauskas and most likely Delonte West and Mo Williams? Why? Because O'Neal and Ilgauskas are old, fading fast and are free agents that would command contracts that are too large for a rebuilding team to absorb and because the Cavaliers have no picks in the upcoming NBA draft. Williams and West would likely need to be dealt to acquire any picks and to further clear salary from the payroll.

Antawn Jamison would likely be dealt as well, either before the season ever started or at the trade deadline next February. It wouldn't be a shock to see Jamarion Moon and Anthony Parker dealt away if scenario two went into action. So, other than JJ Hickson, what part of that roster would you like to build around? Which of those draft picks that the disappointing Mo Williams and the schizophrenic Delonte West would bring you would be a true building block in a draft where only three or four impact players are available? I'd say the picks that Mo and Delonte could bring might be similar to the pick Dan Gilbert could likely buy on draft night.

Are you encouraged by Christian Eyenga's (last year's first rounder) progress (or lack thereof) overseas?

What kind of chance does any coach whose running Hickson and Sebastian Telfair onto the court each night have to succeed? What kind of odds are you laying that new Cavs GM Chris Grant will succeed as a general manager? I'll tell you this; he has a much better survival rate if James is in the fold.

To me, you're looking at a nuclear winter in terms of basketball in Cleveland if scenario two is the route taken. You're looking at four or five years of declining attendance and bad basketball in the hopes that your newly planted grass actually grows without any issues.

Best case.

That's if the new GM makes the right moves. That's if the new coach pulls the right strings.

And while it may happen anyway I simply see no reason for the Cavaliers to be the ones pushing the red button right now. Their hand may ultimately be forced, in which case they'll

have no choice to go Route 2. But that should be a last resort.

And don't get me wrong: scenario one smells really bad too.

I'm a huge fan of LeBron James when the clock is running during an NBA game he's playing. At any other time he strikes me as a kid who's been coddled since he was 14 years old, if not before. The whining, the crying, the flopping on the floor after any contact all diminishes the joy of watching him actually play. And that coddling has led him to become an arrogant, entitled and selfish individual. For all his talk about his teammates and his desire for rings he hasn't walked the walk in the last six weeks. He's holding a team, a city and a league hostage right now and he's doing it for kicks and grins and solely because he can.

Guys worried about winning rings don't do that any more than they quit during a crucial game in a playoff series. But LeBron owns both of those dubious distinctions as we sit here today. And yes, the Cavaliers will have capitulated to some degree if LeBron does come back sometime around Labor Day after wringing every bit of juice out of his free agency that he possibly can.

But whether you're raising the white flag and surrendering hope for years to come or raising your middle finger to a young, immature kid who should know better and who should have an idea how deeply this affects a fractured sports town like Cleveland, think about both those scenarios and tell me which one brings you closer to a title and which one brings you closer to the ledge.