

Being LeBron's Neighbor

Written by {ga=samamico}

Monday, June 28 2010 4:00 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, June 29 2010 11:29 AM



AKRON, Ohio - I live closer to LeBron James than any reporter in the world, less than a mile away.

So if James signs a free-agent contract with a new team, the Cavaliers will be losing their best player, and I will be losing a neighbor.

It should be noted that LeBron resides in Bath, Ohio, and I live down the street in Copley Township. LeBron's town is somewhat, well, wealthier than my own.

Either way, I run into James' mother, Gloria, and a few others who are close to him on a regular basis. And not just at Quicken Loans Arena. I'm talking about the grocery store, Akron-area restaurants and even my own favorite hangout. Sometimes, I even bump into the King himself.

With that in mind, I decided to make good use of my location. I decided to drive past James' house every day, to visit his favorite spots on a regular basis, to gain an edge in what Ken Berger of CBS Sports has termed "dartboard journalism" -- or the act of reporters throwing stuff against a wall and praying it's a bulls-eye, as they wildly guess where James will sign.

I began seeking my LeBron-based scoop this morning and here is how it went:

* **9:37 a.m.:** Drive by LeBron's house. There are a couple of cars in the driveway. One is dark blue. Or maybe black. It's hard to tell from the road. The grass looks good and the concrete surrounding the property has been kept up nicely. I do not, however, see any people. I sit there for three minutes. Some guy who looks like a security guard starts walking toward the end of James' gated drive. I leave.

* **12:12 p.m.:** I hear LeBron frequents the Cracker Barrel located between his house and mine, so I stop in for lunch. There's a man who resembles Knicks president Donnie Walsh in the corner booth. He is eating French Toast. I approach him. He looks up and I say hello. He acts

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excited to see me. I soon learn it's not Walsh, but a man named Pete whom I've never met. He spends the next 20 minutes trying to sell me life insurance.

* **2:19 p.m.:** I drive by James' place again. The dark blue, or maybe black, car is gone. Perhaps it belonged to Cavs general manager Chris Grant! Maybe LeBron told Grant he's signing with the Bulls, so Grant went home! Of course, it may have belonged to LeBron's personal chef. Maybe LeBron was out of bacon. Hmm. Things are beginning to get interesting.

* **4:02 p.m.:** Despite the fact I was forced to skip lunch while listening to Pete The Insurance Man, I feel the need to shed some weight. So I go to the wellness center by LeBron's house to exercise. On the treadmill behind me is a tall, wiry man with gray hair and a mustache. Only it's not Knicks coach Mike D'Antoni. Disappointedly, I head for the locker room and showers -- where I gladly put my keen observation skills on hold.

* **5:46 p.m.:** LeBron isn't the only person who might need bacon. I do, too. So I head to the Giant Eagle grocery store in West Akron. Not only will I be able to buy food and toiletries, but perhaps I will cross paths with Gloria James. I've never seen her in Giant Eagle, but I did see her in the parking lot about six months ago. At the time, she waved. She wasn't saying hello with the wave, but rather used the motion to indicate I could back out of my parking spot, allowing her to pull in. No matter, I enter the store. I become distracted by the suddenly rising price of plums. I forget to look for Gloria.

* **7:33 p.m.:** I read a New York Times report in which an anonymous league executive practically guaranteed LeBron would sign with the Bulls. My guess is the rumor was floated by someone who works for the Bulls, but that's beside the point. So along with searching for LeBron and his people, I decide to sniff out Bulls GM Gar Forman, who very well could be in Akron. Small problem: I have never seen Forman. I have no idea what he looks like.

* **8:21 p.m.:** An employee at the Barnes & Noble bookstore near LeBron's house tells me I'll have to leave the store if I don't stop standing at the entrance and asking every man, woman and child who comes in and out of the building if they are Gar Forman.

* **9:01 p.m.:** I swing by P.F. Chang's restaurant, not far from LeBron's house. Not because LeBron eats there, but because that is where Cavs owner Dan Gilbert took Eric Musselman when Musselman interviewed for the Cavs' coaching job five years ago. There's no sign of Gilbert. But Musselman does call to tell me how much he's enjoying his time coaching the Dominican Republic national team.

* **9:23 p.m.:** Time for one final drive past the King's palace. Only this time I bring binoculars. I still see very little. There are a couple of lights on, but the majority are coming from the top of the police car that's sitting behind me. The policeman approaches my vehicle. I quickly ask if he is Gar Forman. He asks for my driver's license. He then said I have a broken taillight and writes me a warning. He tells me to move along. But before I drive off we have the following exchange:

Me: "You just wrote a warning for a broken taillight at 9:37 p.m. on a Sunday night!"

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Police officer: "So?"

Me: "So you know what that means?"

Officer: "I can leave now?"

Me: "No! It means that LeBron is signing with the Nets! No wait. Maybe it's the Clippers! Or, well, it could be the Heat! Or ... wait. Are you sure you're not Gar Forman?"

* **11:37 p.m.:** I crawl into bed, wondering what LeBron is doing at this very moment. I can't sleep. I race to the car, back out of the garage and drive the three-fourths of a mile to James' home. I sit. And wait. At some point, he will have to leave. At some point, important NBA executives will arrive. At some point, James will sign a contract, and I will bring it to you first. And if not, I might at least be able to tell you when the chef brings home the bacon.

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