



Byron Scott's Cavaliers are burdened with a prefabricated identity this season. No matter how good or bad they are, whether they wallow among the league's dregs or compete for a playoff spot, they will be The Team That Lost LeBron.

It's branded on them, a scarlet letter, a garish tattoo.

The lack of LeBron will be the prism through which the Cavs are entirely viewed by fans and media alike. It will devalue them, it will make them the subject of ridicule whenever they visit a city. Fans will chant, columnists will take jabs at them in the local paper, the opposing team might even give the Cavs some LeBron love during the road team introductions.

(If the Cavs could have a nickel for every time the opposing team will play Will Smith's "Miami" during visiting introductions, they'd be \$2.05 richer by the end of 41 road games.)

Even in the safe haven of Cleveland, where (some) fans still dare to wear wine and gold, LeBron's shadow still blocks out the Sun. We look at the current Cavs roster, and all we see is no LeBron, and ergo, no shot at a title.

When we look at the current Cavs roster, we see some iffy building blocks in J.J. Hickson and Ramon Sessions, and a cast of veterans that are of no use to a team that just had its soul sucked out several months ago.

So, what's the use? You need a superstar -- or multiple superstars -- to win titles in the NBA.

History has proven that. The Cavs have no superstar. So it's time to start pitching deck chairs off the Titanic. Liquidate the inventory. Everything must go. We're slashing prices.

Mo Williams, Antawn Jamison, Anderson Varejao, Anthony Parker, Jamarion Moon -- anything and everything older than 26 that's not nailed down. This team needs to be a 15-67 club within two years. It's the only way to draft high enough to get the superstar you need to win championships. Because if you don't, you're stuck in the purgatory of mediocrity, somewhere between the last lottery picks and the lowest playoff seeds.

It's the worst place to be in the NBA. Not a contender, and not bad enough to get the draft picks to get the star power to become a contender.

That is true. The middle of the pack is NBA purgatory. But let's back up for a second before we convince ourselves that you're either a 60-win team, a 60-loss team or on a treadmill to nowhere.

Finding yourself in the middle of the NBA pack isn't purgatory in and of itself. Teams get long-term sentences at Mediocre Alcatraz when they pay players more than they're worth.

If your team doles out max contracts like Halloween candy, your team is probably playing role players like stars, which is the definition of "bad contract" in the NBA. If a team has multiple 5-year, \$60 million contracts on the books, it will likely be stuck treading water until those contracts becoming tradeable.

The Cavs do have some long-term contracts on the books. The contract with the most potential to be cumbersome is Anderson Varejao, who is signed through 2014 and will make \$9.1 million in the final guaranteed year.

Beyond that, only Mo Williams and Ramon Sessions have contracts that the Cavs will, in all likelihood, be obligated to honor past the 2011-12 season. Mo has an \$8.5 million player option for the 2012-13 season.

Daniel Gibson and Chirstian Eyenga have team options for 2012-13. The Cavs can give J.J. Hickson a qualifying offer after that season.

Other than that, Antawn Jamison's contract expires after the 2011-12 season, and there is nothing else that would make you believe the Cavs are stuck in a long-term trajectory of mediocrity. If they need to get worse to get better, the opportunity will definitely be there in a couple of years.

For the short term, we'd all have more clarity about the current Cavs if we could view them apart from the LeBron elephant that is no longer in the room. If LeBron never played for the Cavs and everything else was the same, what would we see?

The Cavs now employ their most accomplished coach since Lenny Wilkens. Byron Scott was a member of the Showtime Lakers as a player. He was hired into the coaching ranks by Rick

Adelman. On Adelman's staff in Sacramento, Scott learned the Princeton offense from fellow Kings assistant Pete Carril -- the former Princeton coach who brought the offense to the mainstream. As a head coach, Scott took the offense to the Nets and Hornets, and used it to help expedite success at both stops.

The Princeton offense relies on passing, screens and ball movement. It is designed for a team like the Cavs with no true go-to scorer. The NBA version of the Princeton is modified because of the way teams play defense, and the fact that plays have to develop quicker due to a shortened shot clock. But the principles of passing, cutting and screening to create open looks for teammates is still true.

Based on media reports, Scott believes he has some pieces in place to successfully run his system. Scott thinks Andy Varejao is an ideal Princeton center due to his active feet and screening ability. The Princeton also requires multiple guards who can initiate the offense, which the Cavs now have in Mo Williams and Ramon Sessions.

Put it this way: if you could completely erase LeBron from your mind, look at this team in the vacuum of the here and now, and make a judgment, we'd be intrigued by what Scott is implementing. We'd want to see Chris Grant get on the phone to other GMs and add more pieces to this team, not scuttle the ship.

Yes, history says you do need a cast of stars to win a title. But getting and keeping those stars will be exceedingly difficult in the NBA, particularly if a lockout this coming summer yields a starkly different financial structure for the league, such as a hard salary cap.

As it is, LeBron has set the precedent: superstars do not want to play in a town like Cleveland. If the current rules stay in place regarding free agency, the next time the Cavs get their hands on a superstar, they might as well turn right around and offer him to the highest bidder.

Putting it bluntly, it's nice to think of an NBA dynasty taking shape in Cleveland, but the chances of it happening are virtually nil. In a league in which six teams have won 29 of the last 31 titles, the Cavs would be extremely fortunate to win even one fluky title at any point in the future.

With that in mind, it's probably better to build the Cavs around a coach's system instead of a superstar's talent. It presents the best possible chance for a team like the Cavs to win consistently in the future. To that end, we should be willing to give Scott and this team a chance to prove that they're worthy of being the rebuild, as opposed to the prelude to the rebuild.

But to have that mindset, you, as a fan, need to stop viewing the Cavs as a band of non-LeBrons.

The Cavs are already going to encounter enough of that sentiment every time they make a road trip this season.