



In Cleveland, most fans think it's demolition time. The Cavs are in desperate need of some well-placed explosive charges and enough ping-pong balls to find another LeBron.

The Cavs are now among the league's rebuilders. The days of championship contention are over, and probably for quite a while. Left over to clean up the mess are new coach Byron Scott and a handful of veterans surrounded by a cast of youngsters with varying degrees of ability.

LeBron James is still the NBA story in Cleveland. The current Cavs breed apathy from a jilted, disillusioned fan base. LeBron breeds outrage. We might still throw our support behind the Cavs, but our current favorite NBA team is whoever is playing the Heat.

It's a strange, unsettling NBA season that gets underway this week. One that dawns with the Cavs and Raptors now robbed of their franchise players, a third franchise player in Carmelo Anthony engaged in a full-on campaign to get traded out of Denver, the Heat on display as an ominous sign of just how much control the players are getting in the league, league owners claiming millions of dollars in losses, and a possible apocalyptic labor stoppage on the horizon after the season.

Our staff writers weigh in on the whole crazy, confusing ball of wax.

Cavs & NBA Roundtable 2010-11

Written by {ga=tcfstaff}

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Nick Allburn

NBA Finals: Celtics over Thunder

NBA MVP: Kevin Durant

Rookie of the Year: Blake Griffin

Coach of the Year: Jerry Sloan

Cavs record: 32-50, miss playoffs

Cavs preview:

It is the grim reality of the NBA that the best thing for this Cavs team would be to tank this season and shoot for a top lottery pick, but "quit" isn't in Dan Gilbert's lexicon. No, what we will probably see is a team that plays very hard for new head man Byron Scott, but ultimately falls short of a playoff seed. It will be fun to see how projects JJ Hickson and Christian Eyenga develop, but we all know this season is going to be a painful experience, as the specter of He-Who-Must-Not-Be-Named looms over our beloved franchise. His departure left our club in an incredible hole, and unfortunately this house probably has to be torn down before it can be rebuilt, which will make the Cavs' return to relevance take even longer.

Make no mistake - there is talent on this team - players like Mo Williams, Anderson Varejao, Antawn Jamison can start on championship teams. Unfortunately the Cavs now lack elite talent, which is something that makes up for a lot of shortcomings. This team won't be bad to the point of embarrassment, they will play hard and will even be fun to watch in spurts. But this probably isn't a playoff team anymore, and there's a good chance that we see key vets like Mo Williams and Antawn Jamison sold off at the deadline.

Heat check:

Hopefully, some kind of small thermonuclear device will vaporize American Airlines Arena while it is occupied solely by NBA Vader and his band of morons. Oh wait, that's what I'd *like* to see happen.

What is more likely is that the Heat will win the title or at least come close. Will they do it? Nobody really knows. It is at least worth noting that while they may add a few more former (in many cases, *very* former) stars on the verge of collecting social security for the veteran minimum, their salary structure makes it almost impossible for them to swing a deal at the deadline to address a specific need. This is one of the big advantages teams like Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles have over these villains, and I urge them to exploit it.

In the East, Boston has the best chance to knock off these clowns simply due to their size and depth. Whoever emerges from the buzz saw of the Western Playoffs would at least give the Heat a great fight, too. As much as we hate Number Six for leaving, the slight silver lining is that we now have the villain of all villains to root against, which can be fun. To call the Heat the Yankees of Basketball at this point is a colossal understatement.

Jesse Lamovsky

NBA Finals: Lakers over Heat

NBA MVP: Kevin Durant

Rookie of the Year: John Wall

Coach of the Year: Jerry Sloan

Cavaliers Final Record: 31-51, no Playoffs

Cavs preview:

This just isn't a very good basketball team. It may not quite be as bad [as some are making it out to be](#), but it isn't a playoff contender- not even in the East where playoff contenders come cheap. And there's a very real possibility the Cavaliers will be sellers at the trade deadline, which in the short term could depress this team's level of competitiveness even further.

To be honest, I'm not sure what there is to look forward to this season. It's tough to swallow going from 66 and 61 wins to... this. Watch to see if J.J. Hickson can have a breakout year, if Daniel Gibson can pull off a renaissance, if the team can play exciting, team-oriented basketball- but the happy days of title contention (or supposed title contention) are gone for the time being at least. Worst-case scenario is [2002-03](#). Best-case is [1995-96](#). Neither scenario really satisfies.

Heat check:

Well, they're going to win a lot of games. [The loss of Mike Miller](#) until January hurts them somewhat, but the Heat has too much prime-time talent to be seriously hampered by an injury to a role player. They're going to win somewhere north of sixty in the regular season. They won't be headed in the East- Boston is too old and Orlando is too soft, although the Heat doesn't have a big man that can match up with Dewey Howard. The only team that can beat them in a seven-game series is the Lake Show- which I expect to happen.

Erik Cassano

NBA Finals: Lakers over Celtics

NBA MVP: LeBron James

Rookie of the Year: Evan Turner

Coach of the Year: Doug Collins

Cavs record: 43-39, 8th seed, eliminated first round

Cavs preview:

As was the case with Eric Mangini taking over a rock-bottom Browns team after the 2008 season, the full effect of Byron Scott on the Cavs will not be realized for several years. Hopefully the Lakers don't plunder him to replace Phil Jackson in the meantime.

Scott is a good coach who has been associated with the likes of Pat Riley, Pete Carril and Rick Adelman throughout his career. Carril taught him the Princeton offense, which is tailor-made for a team like the Cavs with no go-to scorer. It relies on passing, screens and a balanced scoring attack. You don't need one 28 point per game guy in the Princeton – in fact, that would be a hindrance -- but you do need three or four guys capable of averaging 15 PPG.

The trouble with the Cavs is, where are those scorers going to come from? Mo Williams is a capable scorer, but he's been injured for most of the preseason and has more recently been

away from the team due to a death in the family. He hasn't had a lot of time to get into the swing of Scott's offense. J.J. Hickson has talent, but is basically a lump of wet clay. Scott will need to do a lot of molding if Hickson is to turn into a franchise building block. Antawn Jamison is in the sunset of his career, and his creaky knees are becoming an increasing concern.

Ramon Sessions was the sole major addition for the Cavs this offseason, and he is an ultra-quick penetrator. But his outside shot leaves much to be desired, rendering him a one-dimensional player and ill-suited for the Princeton attack, which demands the presence of guards who can shoot and space the floor.

Having said all that, I don't expect a full-on roster blowup this season, but I do expect some turnover of the careful-tinkering variety. I think the season will end with Mo and Andy in the fold and Jamison moved for an expiring contract and/or draft pick. The Cavs will start to get the hang of the Princeton, and will be able to use its unconventional nature well enough to finish above .500 and get into the playoffs, where a first-round beatdown will surely await. But a strong regular-season finish would calm the waters around this traumatized franchise, which alone might be worth its wait in gold.

Heat check:

LeBron James is the leader of the Heat. All of this "LePippen" talk is poppycock. It's his game, it's his ball, and that won't change, even if his supporting cast is more talented now. Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh might be able to pick up LBJ's slack in ways that Mo Williams never could, but chances are, a zebra won't change his stripes. Erik Spoelstra will probably have the same trouble controlling LeBron's tendencies that Mike Brown did, and the Heat offense will often resemble "Lelso" from LeBron's Cleveland days.

Of course, if that's the case, LBJ will have Wade, Bosh and Pat Riley in his ear, which he never had in Cleveland. That could either lead to LeBron seeing the light, or a complete locker room meltdown in Miami.

The early observations of Brian Windhorst on the ESPN beat corroborate my suspicions: the Heat look a lot like the Cavs of the past two seasons. A lot of LeBron dominating the ball, a lot of teammates standing around waiting for LeBron to do something, and not a lot of size and/or

athleticism in the paint to deal with the other beasts of the East, who happen to employ the likes of Kendrick Perkins, Shaquille O'Neal and Dwight Howard.

With that in mind, I predict a Cavs-like result for the Heat. A ton of regular season wins (I'll go with 67) and a runaway 1-seed in the East, followed by a conference finals exit, as the same matchup problems and offensive stall-outs that plagued the Cavs with LBJ plague the Heat with LBJ. Pat Riley returns to the bench yet again in Miami for the 2011-12 season, if there even is a season.

J.D. Shultz

NBA Finals : Magic over Thunder

Regular season MVP: Kevin Durant

Rookie of the Year: John Wall

Coach of the Year: Flip Saunders

Cavs record: 40-42, just miss the playoffs

Cavs preview:

I guess for some people, a 40-42 season that falls just short of the playoffs would be a worst-case scenario, since mediocrity will not yield a great draft pick. But I think this team will be exciting to watch, and will ultimately be good for the Cavs franchise moving forward.

I think Byron Scott emerges as a coach that is able to get the most out of players like J.J. Hickson, Daniel Gibson, Ramon Sessions and even Mo Williams. Over the course of the season, the Cavs will find an identity as an uptempo team . . . with an unselfish style of play that features a lot of passing and motion. The offense will be uneven at times without a true floor general . . . but in the end, it'll be a lack of consistent, lock-down defense that will cause them to lose a lot of competitive games this year.

At the halfway point, I think Chris Grant and Dan Gilbert will (perhaps optimistically or perhaps rightfully) tag this team as one that can "retool" rather than "rebuild," and therefore they'll stick

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with their best players, Mo and J.J. I think Antawn Jamison will have a solid first half, and that Grant will find a deal to move him. It won't be a blockbuster . . . but I do think Grant uses the \$14.5 million trade exception, which will bring in someone notable. (And I believe that will happen during the season, not afterwards.)

Overall, this is going to be a Cavs team that can and will win some games . . . and although I think it'll be a process, I think the most important thing will be gauging how to rework the team based on what we do have in place. In short, I so believe it's going to be fun.

Heat check:

The Heat will win 65 games and be the #1 Seed in the East. (And the Lakers will win 62 and be the Top Seed in the West. Perhaps I'm ignoring the "obvious" by not predicting either the Lakers or the Heat in the Finals, but I think this is going to be the year of the *team* over the individual *players* .

I'm not sold on Erik Spoelstra, who WILL need to do a lot of brilliant coaching to pull that team together. I think the Heat may run into the same problem the recent Cavs teams did . . . in that they feel they can turn it on whenever they need to and don't work enough at team-chemistry-building during the regular season to get to the Finals this season. (And let's not forget how LeBron James handles pressure in the postseason.) LeBron will be "a" star, but Dwyane Wade will emerge as the superstar in Miami . . . and will struggle to deal with the averageness of LeBron and Chris Bosh in the playoffs.

Brian McPeck

NBA Finals: Lakers over Celtics

NBA MVP: Kevin Durant

Rookie of the Year: Blake Griffin

Coach of the Year: Doug Collins

Cavs Record: 29-53, no playoffs

Cavs preview:

As much as I'd like to flick a thumb at conventional wisdom and spitefully predict that the Cavaliers won't miss LeBron James any more than he'll miss Dan Gilbert, well, I can't do it.

I'd love to sit here and tell you that the remaining Cavaliers were suppressed by James and his "selfish unselfishness", that Daniel Gibson or Ramon Sessions will morph into Rajon Rondo and that JJ Hickson is half a season away from being the next Amare Stoudemire. I'd love to tell you that veterans like Mo Williams, Anderson Varejao and Antawn Jamison will lead this band of overachievers to 50 wins and a playoff series or two.

But I can't.

The one true chance for a Cavalier title walked off to Miami back in July. What remains is NBA fodder. There's some talented guys, certainly, but the man that made everyone on the floor better is simply not a guy you replace and expect to remain competitive.

I'm okay with really bad or really good and I've ruled out the latter. Now I'm hoping for the former because ping pong balls and draft lotteries, while never a sure thing, are the Cavs best bet. If you don't believe that just go back over the past 20 years of Cavalier transactions and name me the last big time, in their prime, free agent that came to Cleveland.

It hasn't ever happened and it's not going to now that the drawing force to bring someone here has left.

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Lose. Lose a lot. Hope to get lucky in a year where luck is rewarded. Sorry. I'm not going to piss on your shoes and tell you it's raining.

Heat check:

I don't care how many games the Heat win or where their season ends. I just hope they fly through a lot of really rotten weather throughout the season.

Chris Hutchison

NBA Finals: Lakers over Celtics

NBA MVP: Kevin Durant

Rookie of the Year: DeMarcus Cousins

Coach of the Year: Doc Rivers

Cavs record: 45-37, 6th seed, eliminated 1st Round

Cavs preview:

The 2010 Cavs are talented enough and athletic enough to surprise many a doubter. The concept that it was LeBron James carrying a bunch of stiffs will be debunked, and many will speculate that the reason that many of them didn't play bigger roles in the past was the deferred to LBJ and his ball-hogginess.

I think the Cavs will start out fast. Many teams won't know what to make of their up-and-down style. But, as the season progresses, they'll hit a couple of losing streaks due to their inexperience and lack of depth/leadership. However, the NBA is top-heavy, and they'll have enough left in a weak East to get into the Playoffs.

Mo Williams will begin to take a larger leadership role, and his production will reflect that. Andy Varejao will continue to play his brand of physical, active basketball, and JJ Hickson will graduate up to the level just below "star". Boobie Gibson will make everyone wonder why he was so in Mike Brown's doghouse, and Ramon Sessions, Anthony Parker, and Jamarion Moon will all play vital supporting roles. Antawn Jamison? I think he'll be gone before the trading deadline. He'll be a valuable commodity for some win-now-or-die team (such as the Cavs were last year).

In the end, it won't be nearly what we're used to, but it also won't be anywhere close to as bad as many around the country predict. One might even hope for the future - if the NBA were the type of league where mid-market teams had any right to hope.

Heat check:

LeBron James is getting enough media attention right now, so there's no need for me to contribute. Oh, fine. I think the Miami Heat will be proven to be soft. James is soft. Bosh is super-soft. Wade is not, but he's hurt a lot. The rest of the team? Who cares? When will "the rest of the team" find a chance to touch the ball?

On sheer talent alone, they'll probably win 55-60 games. But they're not going to be as good as

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everyone thinks they will be, teams will love to give 'em their best shot, the crowds will love to hate 'em, and injuries will take a toll.

To me, looks like another meek 2nd Round exit for The Queen.