

It almost seems unfair. Getting to watch a kid as talented as Greg Oden don the scarlet and gray, only to likely see him leave us after just one season. Erik Cassano agrees. And in his latest for us this morning, makes an impassioned plea to Big Greg in the hopes of convincing him of staying in Columbus for just one more year. Congrats again to the Buckeyes for a great season ...



(With apologies to Maurice Williams and the Zodiacs, Jackson Browne and whomever else covered this song...)

*"Won't you stay
Just a little bit longer
Please won't you stay
Just a little bit more*

*Well the papers won't smear
And Thad won't shed a tear
And the Celtics won't fear
If you take your sophomore year
and play -- one more song."*

Greg Oden, I'm saying this as objectively as I can. Believe me, no one wants to see your NBA career start more than I, but you need to come back to Ohio State.

Just one more year. I promise.

Yeah, I can see that look on your grizzled, old teenage face. I'm asking you to pass up on millions of dollars to play college hoops for one more year. Ridiculous, huh?

Oh sure, you say. Every Buckeye fan and their cousin wants to see you come back. We're going to spend every waking hour between now and the football spring game gnashing our

teeth over Monday's national title game loss.

We want you back for purely selfish reasons. We want you to come back and right the wrong that occurred against Florida. You have bigger, greener fish to fry. You have checks to cash, and you desperately want to try one of those patented chin-up dunks on Dwight Howard next year.

Well, sure, I guess selfishness does play into it more than just a little bit. But there is more to it than that.

You aren't quite there yet, Greg. You need this year to prepare yourself for what the NBA will throw at you.

It all became clear while watching you play your first real workhorse minutes on Monday. Unfettered by injury or fouls, you turned in a major performance -- 25 points and 12 rebounds in 38 minutes -- that might have singlehandedly won the game had the opponent not been Florida. You were blocking shots (4, very emphatically), snagging rebounds and displaying a rapidly-developing offensive arsenal.

But you were also tired in the second half. You missed layups and fumbled passes that helped give the Gators the breathing room they needed to win. You were plainly sucking wind as the half wore on.

It's the unfortunate byproduct of a smart strategy by coach Thad Matta, one that called for judicious monitoring of your minutes, first as you eased your way into the swing of things with a mending right hand, then as you developed a propensity for drawing fouls early in games. Under Matta's watchful eye, you routinely missed huge chunks of the first halves of games during the NCAA Tournament run as Matta guarded against your third foul.

The bottom line is, you haven't been completely challenged by the grind of a college basketball season, let alone what is going to be expected of you as a No. 1 or No. 2 NBA draft pick.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not questioning your toughness. I'm questioning your readiness. The NBA game is exponentially faster, the players are far stronger and the schedule is infinitely more grueling with long West Coast road trips and a highly-irregular season pace, with stretches of four games in five days followed by two games in six days.

Combine that with the fact that you are going to be headed to one of the NBA's bottom feeders, and their front office and fans are going to be looking to you to reverse the fortunes of their downtrodden team. Being a franchise savior isn't easy. Ask LeBron James.

I don't doubt that you have an army of people readying you for what the NBA will bring, Greg. But don't you think you'd be better served making the jump to the pros after having really tested yourself at the college level? After playing a sophomore season where the training wheels come off and you are really allowed to flex your muscles?

Money will probably ultimately lure you to declare for the draft. I can't really blame you there. But before you hire an agent and ready yourself to pull on a Grizzlies or Celtics cap at the end of June, just take a moment and ask yourself if you'd rather enter the NBA as a kid, behind the learning curve and relegated to the bench as a rookie, or as a man, ahead of the curve and ready to dominate.