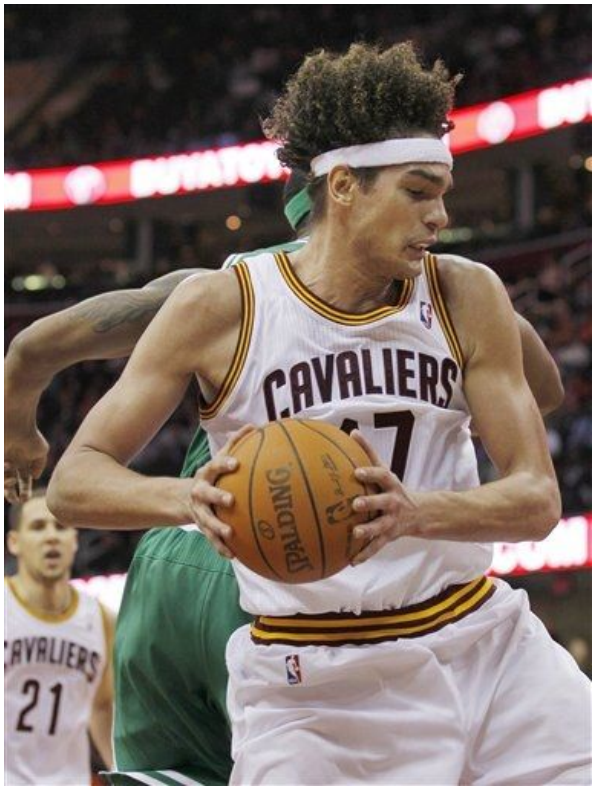

Here’s the question no Cavalier fan wants to face, much less answer: Is it time to give up on Anderson Varejao? Is it time to say “Nice knowin’ you,” and “Buena suerte, mi amigo”? Is it time for the Cavs to recognize that purging the roster of one of the last remaining ties to their ill-fated divisional championship teams would place their fate in the hands of a new generation of players, exemplified by dynamic young point guard Kyrie Irving?

Yes, it would be extremely difficult for Dan Gilbert, the front office, and the entire cadre of devoted Cavs fans to bid adieu to the one guy who has been a valuable constant over the course of nine mostly exciting seasons. But Varejao’s hectic, damn-the-torpedoes style of play has caused him innumerable injuries, especially during the past three seasons. His real age of 30 translates to more like 60 in the NBA world, so he's no spring chicken any more. There may be four more productive years left in that decrepit body, but it's not likely.

Andy appeared in 81 games in the 08-09 season and 76 games in the 09-10 season. Since then, he’s missed 51, 41 and 8 regular-season games. Mathematically, that means he’s appeared in just 55 percent of the Cavs’ games since the beginning of the 2010-11 season.

Interestingly enough, his injuries have not hampered either his style or his statistics—when he

can play. Last season, which was shortened by both an injury and a player strike, Varejao averaged a career-best 10.8 points and 11.5 rebounds per game. This season, despite missing the last couple of weeks, he's averaging a career-best 14.1 points and 14.4 rebounds per game.

Two weeks ago, the old injury boogeyman visited poor Andy once again. He suffered a bruised knee on Dec. 18 and hasn't played a minute of regulation since. He recently returned to practice in a limited role but hasn't gone through contact drills. He said last week that he still felt pain when he tried to bend or push off on the knee, and he thought the injury needed another week to heal. What was initially diagnosed as costing perhaps four or five games has now cost him at least nine, including tonight's contest in Charlotte.

Last season, Varejao was on his way to a career year for before being shelved in mid-February with a fractured wrist. He was supposed to be out four to six weeks but didn't return at all. Two seasons ago, it was a complete tear of the *peroneus longus* in the mid-foot of the right ankle and foot, which was suffered while running a non-contact drill during a practice session.

Yet, despite Andy's "injury-proneness," he apparently is one of the more talked-about trade targets in the league by more than a few franchises.

Why is he so coveted by other NBA teams? First of all, the likable Brazilian has a PER of 22.2. Next, he is working on a team-friendly $17 million contract this year and next, with a team option for the final year. Besides hustling for every rebound and loose ball, his jump shot developed nicely over the off-season, making him a solid scoring threat up to 18 feet from the basket. So his overall stats indicate that he could be a vital addition to a team that might be on the verge of a trip to the NBA playoff finals. And he's the type of player who could ignite any hometown arena in which he might play.

The only deals that the Cavalier front office would reportedly entertain are those involving the fabled "offer they can't refuse." It's difficult to understand the reticence of the Cavs' front office toward a trade involving Varejao. His value is at an all-time high: perhaps one or two high-potential younger players and/or maybe a draft pick. Consider too the fact that, clearly, this team isn't going anywhere soon. It's 7-25 so far this season, one game worse than it was after 33 games two seasons ago, shortly after the traitor from Akron took his talents south. That team, you might remember, was in a state of perpetual hysterical chaos. Yet, based on comparative won-loss records, even that hot mess was incrementally better than this year's edition.

No one knows Varejao's delicate situation better than Cavs head coach Byron Scott. Last month, when the 6-foot-11 center/forward initially went out with the bruised knee, Scott observed:

"He's going to get nicked up, banged up during the course of the season. You just hope he stays away from the serious injuries. He got a pretty good bruised knee right now, and we want to make sure we get that thing as healthy as possible before we put him back on the floor."

Getting him back on the floor as soon as he's healthy could not only help the Cavaliers win a few more games, but the P.T. could serve to again showcase one of the most dynamic big men in the league. Given Andy's experience and enthusiasm, seeing him on the court again undoubtedly would cause a bevy of NBA general managers to drool like hounds in the hunt.