The Drive. The Fumble. The Shot. Will "The Pass" be the latest phrase added to the lexicons of Cleveland sports fans if the Cavs come up just short against the Pistons? Gary Benz doesn't think it should be, and in his latest effort ... discusses LeBron James' decision to dish the ball to a wide open Donyell Marshall at the end of game one instead of taking the final shot himself. Great stuff from Gary this morning.

If the Cavaliers are unable to get past the Detroit Pistons in the Eastern Conference Finals, Cleveland sports fans add a new phrase to their lexicon, “the pass” as in the pass from LeBron James to a wide-open Donyell Marshall at the end of Game One Monday night. Until Thursday rolls around and Game Two is underway, “the pass” is likely to take on a life of its own, the length of which will greatly depend on the level of disappointment that results from this series.

To recap, as if that was even necessary, the Cavs were down by two with 12 seconds left. James had the ball in his hands and was driving toward the hoop. As the Pistons defense collapsed around him, Marshall was left all alone in the corner with seemingly enough time to order dinner and do a Sudoku puzzle. Rather than put the ball to the hoop against, among others, Rasheed Wallace, who already had about 48 blocks in the game, James instead passed the ball to Marshall. It was one of those moments. Detroit players and fans were holding their breath. The ball was moving in slow motion. As it clanged against the back of the rim and careened from the hoop and the outstretched arms of Sasha Pavlovic, Detroit players and fans could breathe again. Game One was in the books.

The debate on the message boards and talk radio, locally and nationally, are almost singularly focused on that final pass. The position that is now building momentum is that James is, in essence, a coward and not worthy of superstar status. The thinking goes that neither Michael Jordan nor Kobe Bryant would have made that pass and that someone who wants to be known as the King or the Chosen One can only earn those nicknames by taking the shot and finishing the game. It’s how legends are made.

Let's dispense with the most obvious points first. For the third straight playoff game, the Cavs disappeared in the third quarter. Whatever Head Coach Mike Brown is telling the troops at halftime isn't working. The team lacks intensity and a game that was in their control was just as suddenly out of their control. There is also the little thing, again, of poor shooting, particularly at the foul line. The Cavs were 11-17, which put them in a huge hole considering the closeness of the game.

But even when these points are disregarded, the rhetoric doesn't quite hold together. Despite their reputations, Jordan and to a lesser extent Bryant did work hard to get their teammates involved in the game, both during the regular season and in the playoffs. For his career, Bryant averages 4.5 assists per game for the regular season as well as the playoffs. Jordan averaged 5.7 assists during the regular season and 5.7 during the playoffs. Just on that, alone, there is no way to know what either would have done under the same circumstances although one suspects that if the Pistons had left, say, Steve Kerr that open under the same circumstances, the ball would have found its way to him.

In the case of James, he's always been a different type of player than either of those two anyway. Since high school, he's had the reputation of someone who is just as content to pass up in favor of a teammate with a better shot as to take the shot himself. That has continued in the pros, which is apparent from the simple fact that he has averaged 6.4 assists per game during the regular season and 8.2 assists per game during the playoffs. But his playoff assists average is hardly the astounding figure it appears to be. While any number of his teammates has stepped up during various playoff games, no one has done it consistently. That has resulted in opposing teams designing a game plan around letting anyone but James beat them. That puts the pressure on those teammates, and, by extension, General Manager Danny Ferry, to make sure that they are the kind of players who can and will make that shot. That just isn't the case. Not yet, anyway. James hasn't even had the benefit of a wingman like Steve Kerr, let alone players the caliber of Scottie Pippen or Shaquille O'Neal.

On the surface, that might seem to argue in favor of James taking that shot, but the truth is it underscores why it will always be difficult for James to take that shot. The less players there are to scare the other team, the more players that team can put on James, particularly at crunch time. And until those players step up and assume their roles on a consistent basis, there simply is no reason for opposing teams to do anything different then what they currently are doing to stop the Cavs.

Second, conveniently forgotten in this mix is the fact that James did virtually the same thing last year in the deciding playoff game against the Washington Wizards. With 14 seconds left and the Cavs down by one, Larry Hughes inbounded the pass to James who immediately and expectedly drew the double team. With the clock winding down, James found a wide open (sound familiar?) Damon Jones who hit the jumper with just four seconds left, sending the Cavs to the conference semifinals.

The difference? Jones hit the shot that Marshall didn't. There was little if any complaining then by anyone that James was a coward or was afraid to take a shot with the game and the series on the line. The recollection is that James proved, once again, to be the consummate team player by finding an open man instead of forcing up a final shot.

But consider the fan reactions that might have been under either of two alternative scenarios. If James takes the shot and misses, fans would have been subjected to countless replays on ESPN and its various iterations, all of which would have drawn a huge circle around the wide-open Marshall, the same guy that scorched the New Jersey Nets the other night from the three-point line. If Marshall had hit the shot, fans would be falling all over themselves to compliment James for once again making the right decision and having enough courage to pass to Marshall with the game on the line.

In other words, it matters little how it all actually played out, except for the fact that, ultimately, the Cavs find themselves down one game against a very good and very experienced Detroit Pistons team.

There is recognition that underlying many of the comments today about James and "the pass" is the frustration of fans that a Cleveland team once again came up short. But misdirecting that frustration and the one person who single handedly rescued this franchise from the scrap heap is not the answer. It starts and ends, ultimately, with the recognition that playoffs are generally won by the better team. The Cavs, for all their accomplishments thus far, are still a very flawed team and until Ferry can find a way to eliminate more of those flaws, the deeper rungs of the playoffs will continue to be a struggle.