It seems like the ink is still wet on the contract extension LeBron James signed with the Cavaliers, one that keeps him in Cleveland until at least the summer of 2010. But that hasn't stopped the national media from counting the ways that LeBron could wriggle his way out of Cleveland, even before his contract with the team expires. In his latest, Erik Cassano looks at the latest of these stories, and also examines Danny Ferry's work as Cavaliers GM.

I know TrueHoop is one of the best NBA blogs out there, tested and approved by the Akron Beacon Journal's Brian Windhorst.

If Windhorst says it's a good source for NBA news, it's a good source for NBA news. That's how much I trust him with my basketball knowledge.

But, damned if TrueHoop still isn't affiliated with ESPN, and thus, still among the national media legion counting the ways that LeBron James could leave Cleveland.

Apparently, we in Cleveland shouldn't dread only the approach of the summer of 2010, when LeBron can opt out of his deal and become an unrestricted free agent. We should also fear the summer of 2009, when LeBron could express his displeasure with the state of the Cavs roster by telling Danny Ferry that he's not signing a new deal here come hell or high water, thereby forcing Ferry to trade him.

No rest for the weary. As long as LeBron stays in Cleveland, we will constantly be subjected to this relentless onslaught, Le Bron's

many escape hatches from the
Cavs
paraded in front of us for the pleasure of East Coast basketball fans who know, in their heart of hearts, that it would be best for the league if
LeBron
would ditch our little, nondescript Midwestern burg for the
Knicks
, Nets or Celtics.

East Coast basketball fans and scribes just want what's best for the NBA, after all. I got choked up as I wrote that. On vomit, not tears.

It's easy to count the ways LeBron could leave Cleveland when it's Sanitized For Your Protection. LeBron just takes off the Cavs uniform and puts on a
Knicks
uniform. Simple, right?
LeBron
saves the
Knicks
, and Cleveland ... well, who cares?

But this is what irritates me: TrueHoop can talk about LeBron demanding a trade from the Cavs like it's moving a chess piece on a giant table. But do you realize how cutthroat a move like that would be? Do you realize the set of brass ones it would take to go up to your boss and say "I think you've done a terrible job building a team around me, trade me now because I'm leaving."

Bridge nuked? Check. Now LeBron gets to head to his new team with a Jeff McIn nis -e
sque
reputation as an "independent contractor" who will simply demand a trade when he doesn't like a situation.

LeBron fancies himself a slick businessman. He'd have to know that treating the organization that drafted him with such coldness would be a bad move. The East Coast media might think Cleveland is an insect to be squashed in the world of sports, a doormat that can be trampled with no fear of retribution. But LeBr

on
would have to be a better businessman than to callously demand a trade without seriously considering all options and discussing it with many different people.

These are the residual scenarios that are seldom considered when spinning the "Where Will LeBron Go?" wheel.

Most scribes who pen columns insinuating that LeBron's loyalty to the Cavaliers is hanging by a perpetual thread seem to come to the same conclusion: Danny Ferry is a dolt who has butchered the construction of the roster around LeBron. It's a sentiment shared by many Cavs fans who claim to know what's going on with the team.

(Keep in mind there are many Cavs fans who think Ferry is the one who let Carlos Boozer out of his contract. Hopefully those fans will arrive in 2008 any day now.)

I tend to defend Ferry in these matters, and I take a lot of heat for it. Why do I defend a GM who is viewed as so uniformly indefensible? I could go the route of blaming all the draft picks wasted by his predecessor, Jim Paxson, the Jiri Welsch trade that robbed the Cavs of two first-round picks in three years and the Boozer fiasco

But the missed draft picks were a big reason why the Cavs were bad enough to get LeBron in the first place, so it kind of becomes a Catch-22.

My reasoning for defending Ferry on roster matters is this: what more do you want from the guy? In two years, he infused the team with enough talent to allow Mike Brown to implement a defense that allowed LeBron to use his vast talents to beat a superior Pistons team and earn the franchise's first NBA Finals berth.

When the Cavs drafted LeBron in 2003, they were among the worst organizations in pro sports. They had Boozer, Zydrunas Ilgauskas, and literally nothing else worth building around -- even though Ricky Davis had a pretty high opinion of himself at that point.

Two years later, the Cavs were starting Ira Newble at the two-guard and completely fell apart down the stretch, narrowly missing the playoffs with Brendan Malone, an interim head coach, at the helm because Paul Silas decided that spiting Jeff McInnis was more important than winning a game in which LeBron scored 56 points, and was subsequently fired.

At the same time, Gordon Gund was selling his majority stake in the team to Dan Gilbert, signifying an organizational paradigm shift from old-school to new-school.

Enter Ferry and Mike Brown shortly thereafter. Starting together from essentially scratch, with LeBron their only real asset, the tandem that everyone loves to hate has won 120 regular season games through Tuesday and four playoff series in about two and a half seasons.

Yet everyone expects Ferry to poof a roster rivaling that of the Spurs and Mavericks onto the floor, or his name is mud and we can't blame LeBron for wanting to leave.

Ferry hasn't batted 1.000 with his moves. Far from it. But no GM does. Given the compost heap Ferry inherited, with no huge expiring deals save for Z's, one free agent class of note and one draft in three offseasons, I don't know if the greatest GMs in the game could have done much better with the Cavs.

Ferry hasn't had a lot to work with in his three years running the Cavs roster. He's going to make mistakes, like any GM. But to go from no playoffs to the top of the conference while still enduring underproductive veterans and fallout from the Jim Paxson era, that's as close to a magical transformation as you'll find in the NBA.

No one here is looking to heap undue praise on Ferry, who still has a lot of work

to do. But with tens of millions of dollars in expiring deals over the next two offsea sons , Ferry has a chance to do the work. It would be nice if he'd get credit for what he has already done.

For crying out loud, LeBron probably has more confidence in Ferry than anyone in the stands or on press row. And he's the one who is supposed to be storming into Ferry's office and telling him to shove it, remember?