It just doesn't get much better than what we saw yesterday afternoon in The Staples Center. LeBron James and Kobe Bryant, going back and forth, tit for tat, and demanding to cover each other on the defensive end. In his latest, Sam hits on the spectacle we got to witness yesterday, gives his thoughts on who is the more complete player, and also addresses all the latest Cavaliers trade rumors which includes the latest on talks with the Knicks and an update on the Mike Bibby rumors that won't die.

Question: Who's better, Kobe or LeBron?

Answer: Who knows, who cares, and how long before we get to see them go head-to-head again?

That's the bottom line after **LeBron James** and Cleveland defeated **Kobe Bryant** and host Los Angeles 98-95 on Sunday.

And seriously, after watching a game like this, how can you possibly say one is better than the other?

We hear it all the time from fans and media -- James is a better passer, Bryant is a better defender. Or James is a better rebounder, but Bryant is better in the clutch.

Oh yeah? Then how do account for the fact Bryant snared a game-high 12 rebounds, to go along with his 33 points? Or what about LeBron, who made every meaningful basket in the final moments on his way to a game-high 41?

Bryant also finished with six assists to four for James ... while James had two

steals and hit the game-winner with Bryant defending him.

But again, does any of this really matter? Does any of it prove one is truly the better player?

No, no, and double no.

Everyone likes to blame NBA marketing types for turning these games into "Kobe vs. LeBron" when they should be promoting the "Lakers versus Cavs."

That sure sounds nice, and I'm all for team basketball. But let's not kid ourselves -- as they stand today, both the Lakers and Cavs are one-man operations in the truest sense.

That should change as the younger players around Bryant and James develop, and it may happen soon. For now, though, we'll have to settle for watching each team's superstar try to do everything himself.

And based on Sunday's game, that's not necessarily a bad thing.

So let's stop worrying about who's The Best -- and start focusing on the idea that Kobe and LeBron are among the greatest who ever played.

For real basketball fans, that ought to be good enough.

MORE ON LEBRON

- James was a high school football star and it's not hard to envision him as an NFL receiver. He drives to the basket like someone who's running a pass route, zig-zagging through opposing defenses with power and a purpose.

- I know this sounds crazy, but James is a better all-around player this season than last. I cite three reasons: 1). He has much better form on his jump shot. Ex-coach and current ABC analyst **Jeff Van Gundy** said James shoots with a "stonger base," meaning he jumps straight up and comes straight back down -- as opposed to falling back with his legs flailing; 2). He's an even *better*

finisher, especially with his left (weak) hand; and 3). As nearly every coach in the league has already pointed out, James is a much better man-to-man defender this year. That was particularly evident against the Lakers, as Bryant struggled to elude James without first getting a solid pick.

- James and the Cavs have beaten the Lakers five straight times, sweeping the series in each of the past two seasons. But that can be deceiving, as both games this year have come down to the final shot.

MORE ON KOBE

- Bryant may possess the best fade-away jumper in NBA history -- or at least the best since **Dick "Fall Back Baby" Barnett** was hitting the shot for New York back in the 1960s. You can lock down Bryant with perfect defense, then go straight up with a hand in his face when he rises to shoot. But as anyone who's ever defended him has discovered, Bryant will just fade back and get the shot over and around you.

- And guess what, kids? That's the type of edge you get when you put in extra work during the summer. As I've written before, it's fun to watch Bryant and James in their commercials and "Saturday Night Live" appearances, but these guys are superstars because of their relentless practice habits.

- On the downside, Bryant needs to get back on D and stop complaining to the officials after he misses a shot. Want to gripe? Fine. But at least wait until the play is dead.

- Having written that, every time I think I'm going to vote for James for league MVP, Bryant does something to change my mind. Then I'm sold on Bryant, and James does something else. Thankfully, there's still plenty of basketball left and I don't have to vote for at least another four months. Again, as someone who still really loves the game, it's a good dilemma to have.

CAVS TALKING TRADE?

- The Cavs and Knicks recently had serious trade discussions centered around Cavs guard **Larry Hughes**, team sources on both

sides confirmed last week. One scenario included a package that would have sent Knicks swingman
Quentin Richardson
to the Cavs, another involved guard
Jamal Crawford
. Apparently, those talks are dead (for now).

- One thing's for certain -- all those leg injuries have robbed Hughes of his explosiveness. Instead of erupting to the basket with a burst of athleticism, Hughes often settles for mid-range (or even long-range) jump shots. Fortunately for the Cavs, he seems to be getting better in that area. That's especially true in the last two games, when he's combined for 13-of-26 shooting from the field (including 5-of-9 on 3-pointers).

- Also, Hughes has been a big reason for the Cavs' resurgence on defense. He's still fairly athletic and never backs down from guarding the opposing team's best backcourt player.

- A lot of people continue to link Sacramento point guard **Mike Bibby** to the Cavs -- and while they do need a point guard, they don't necessarily need Bibby. They just need someone who can penetrate and dish and hit the occasional perimeter shot. Someone like
Luke Ridnour
(Seattle) or
Tyronn Lue
(Atlanta) or
Beno Udrih
(Sacramento) would suffice. As an added bonus, the Cavs wouldn't have to gut the rotation to get a guy like any of those three.