You gotta love Dan Gilbert. The Cavs have the second highest payroll in all of basketball at 90 million dollars. He spares no expenses when it comes to the Cavaliers franchise. He's managed to keep LeBron happy, and the Cavs are one of only three teams in the NBA to get past the first round of the playoffs three years in a row. Recently, Gilbert shot back at the national media types that seem to think LeBron is destined to leave town as soon as he is able. Erik Cassano talks about it in his latest.

Dear Mr. Gilbert,

...Or Dan. I can call you Dan, right?

I appreciate you going to bat for the city of Cleveland against all the LeBron-to-New York hysteria that flares up anytime LeBron appears in public wearing a Yankees cap, or calling New York his favorite city, or wearing anything that might resemble pinstripes.

As you so eloquently put it during Thursday's pre-training camp press conference, it is indeed a slap in the face to Cleveland and the Midwest in general. East Coast and West Coast blowhard types believe that possessing players like LeBron James is their birthright, because historically, that's been the pilgrimage destination for stars and stars-to-be.

Kareem and Wilt? They didn't toil in obscurity for their entire careers. They ended up with the Lakers. Reggie Jackson didn't stick in Oakland or Baltimore. He packed up his star and headed for The Bronx.

Throughout the history of professional sports, New York and Los Angeles have

usually had the biggest say in who is a true star and who isn't. Mickey Mantle wouldn't have been "The Mick" had he played 15 seasons for the Indians. Joe DiMaggio wouldn't have been referenced in a Simon and Garfunkel song if he played most of his career for the St. Louis Browns. Even if their career stats stayed the same, they wouldn't have become icons.

So this whole LeBron-as-worldwide-icon-while-playing-in-Cleveland thing has the East Coasters perplexed. It doesn't compute. Even in this era of instantaneous communication, 24-hour cable networks and unblinking spotlights, LeBron *needs* New York to become bigger than life. Right? Because that's the way it's always been. If you can make it there, you can make it anywhere. But if you can't, you'll be lucky to find face time hawking used Fords at the local car dealer.

Sure, Mr. Gilbert, it's arrogance in its purest form whenever a national scribe pens an article predicting LeBron's departure to New York simply because New York is calling his name. You are excused for being ticked. We're all ticked. Finally, a homegrown, legitimate superstar to call our own, someone who might finally end our 44-year title drought across three teams, but is anybody happy for us? The way we were supposed to be happy for the Red Sox in 2004? The way we'll be expected to give Chicago a hearty pat on the back if the Cubs win the World Series this year?

No, everyone outside of Ohio seems to resent the fact that LeBron is here and can't wait to take him away from us. Heck, if I had a camera and a soapbox, I'd be tempted to rant, myself.

But having said all of that, Mr. Gilbert, I'd caution you to scale it back. Because if you start a war of words with the national media, you're only going to vilify yourself and make the situation worse.

Thursday, you essentially said the LeBron-to-New York and/or Brooklyn rumors are the product of bored sportswriters with too much newshole to fill. You hinted at your desire to take the LeBron rumormongers to task for their apparent anti-Cleveland slant.

You should have cut your comments at what you know, not what you suspect. A simple "I have not heard anything from LeBron or anyone closely associated with LeBron that he intends to leave the Cavs organization" would have sufficed. Maybe add in a Danny Ferry line: "I believe we have put together

the kind of organization that LeBron will want to be associated with both now and in the future."

Beyond that, no comment. I know Mark Cuban has become something of a mentor to you among NBA owners, but don't become a talk-first, think-second chatterbox like him. Nothing good can come of it. All you'll do is trigger a round of reprisal columns painting you as a franchise owner who is somewhere between dense and stupid, displaying yet another reason why the Cavs organization is too backward and incompetent to deserve a talent like LeBron.

By arching your back and hissing at the national media, you're giving their words far more weight than they deserve. Trust me, Mr. Gilbert, there are plenty of John Q. Everyfans among us who will do that with little prompting. We don't need that out of the guy at the top of the Cavs organization.

Worst of all, you've potentially cued LeBron and his camp in to a valuable bargaining chip for the summer of 2010. LeBron might be the nicest guy in the world to you right now. But when it becomes all about business, LeBron and his reps will believe that they can use the media to manipulate you, should it come to that.

LeBron already uses the media to manipulate. Anyone with his ability to stay in front of the camera usually does. It's called being media-savvy.

I can't imagine, at this point, that your relationship with LeBron and his handlers would become that contentious. But as you know, Mr. Gilbert, this is a business, and you don't want to tip your hand prior to reaching the negotiating table.

To borrow a phrase you might be familiar with, it's time for you to Rise Up, Mr. Gilbert, and put the sports gossip columnists in their place. They're beneath you, they don't deserve your attention, and you shouldn't give it to them.

You've done a lot right as the Cavs owner, Mr. Gilbert. You sank a ton of money into the Cavs organization, upgrading the team facilities and fan amenities at The Q, constructing a new practice facility in Independence, ratcheting the team's payroll up to the league's second-highest. You want to win a championship, and you're putting your money where your mouth is. You've hired solid basketball guys to run the show in Ferry and Mike Brown, and you're not meddling in their affairs.

As we watch the Browns foul up hire after hire, as we watch the Indians continue to try to win a World Series with a small-market payroll, it's thrilling to know we have an owner in town who is willing to spend what it takes to bring home a title.

So please, Mr. Gilbert, don't let your mouth tarnish your fantastic actions as Cavs owner. Let it be, Mr. Gilbert. When you're standing on Public Square on a warm June afternoon, holding the NBA championship trophy alongside a giddy, dancing LeBron, surrounded by thousands of adoring fans, you'll have the last laugh.