Tuesday night's Cavaliers romp in New York shows why you should treat LeBron James' free agency as what it is: An event that is more than 18 months away. For now, it's best to live for the moment, because that moment includes a 119-101 beatdown of Knicks that left LeBron's alleged future fans somewhere between nauseous and numb, as the realization slowly dawns on them that, before they even get a shot at LeBron, they're going to have to endure two more years of horrible basketball. And that used to be us.

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That used to be us. The scene played out at Madison Square Garden on Tuesday used to occur regularly at then-Gund Arena, with a team in powder blue and black force-feeding us players like Ricky Davis, Darius Miles and Lamond Murray, stacking 50-loss seasons one on top of the other. But now, the burden of losing and longing for better days ahead belongs to some other team's fans. It's time for us to appreciate our basketball riches in Cleveland.

If you focus on what might happen in the summer of 2010, you're going to miss a very good Cavs team treating us to what might be the best season in franchise

history. It's certainly shaping up that way, with the Cavs winners of 11 of their first 14 games and second only to the Lakers in margin of victory.

If you listen to the national media counting the ways in which LeBron could depart for a bigger market the summer after next, if you keep a running tally of the times LeBron has appeared in public wearing Yankees or Cowboys gear, calling New York his favorite city, or saying anything that could be construed as something less than 100 percent loyal to all things Cleveland and Ohio, you're really missing out on the big picture in favor of harping on the details that have nothing to do with basketball.

Would it be better for us if LeBron were a rabid Browns and Indians fan? Would that make us more comfortable with his level of loyalty to Cleveland, that he's putting his mouth where his money is, so to speak? Would it make you feel better if Cleveland and Akron were one and two on his list of favorite towns? Would your palms be a little less sweaty if LeBron wasn't as tight with New York-based hip-hop mogul Jay-Z? Probably.

But what if a Browns and Indians-loving LeBron turned tail and ran into the waiting arms of the Knicks or Nets in two years? Would it make you feel any better knowing that at least he's still a Browns and Indians fan who is coming to town twice a year to dismantle the Cavs? Probably not. In fact, you'd despise him even more if that was the case.

Is the idea of linking LeBron's favorite football and baseball teams to his basketball future starting to sound ridiculous? It should. Because when the Cavs are this good, as they rarely are, your primary job as a fan is to sit back and enjoy the ride. It's an easy job in practice, but through our own innate negativity as Cleveland fans, and through the power of repetitive suggestion from many members of the national media, we're turning what should be a time of celebration into a time of worry.

If you're combing through the many interviews LeBron has given on the subject of his future, looking for answers, I'll save you some time. What we know is what

LeBron has been saying all along. He does have a tendency to tailor his message to his audience, but in the end, what he keeps saying remains fairly consistent:

He likes playing in Cleveland. He likes the fact that home games are within an hour's drive for most of his family and friends. He views Northeast Ohio as his home. He likes how the Cavs are treating him and his family, and likes the alterations Danny Ferry has made to the roster in the past year. In other words, he thinks Ferry and Dan Gilbert have basically done a good job building up the Cavs organization.

Having said that, he's not going to commit to anything right now. He doesn't have to commit to the Cavs or anyone else long term, so why would he? It keeps his options open, lets him react to the situation as it stands in the summer of 2010, and keeps the pressure on Cavs management to continuously look for ways to improve the team.

LeBron is helping build the Cavs into a contender in more ways than one. In addition to his superlative play on the court, the threat of losing him to free agency is keeping Gilbert, Ferry and Mike Brown vigilant about building a championship contender. The Indians and Browns can worry about five-year plans and value signings. The Cavs can't afford to do that.

LeBron knows this. If a star player wants to force his team's leaders to keep their collective foot on the gas, the threat of losing him to free agency is just about the biggest hammer in the bag.

That's not to say LeBron is simply using New York as a decoy to keep the Cavs on their toes. His interest in New York is legitimate. LeBron is very intrigued by the idea of playing on basketball's biggest stage. He repeatedly refers to New York as the "Mecca of basketball," and loves the unparalleled spotlight Madison Square Garden provides. Some of his biggest games have already occurred there. Just shy of 24 years old, he already possesses the fourth-leading scoring average among visiting NBA players in the history of Madison Square Garden.

So the good and bad for Cavs fans have both been laid on the table. LeBron likes

the C
avs
, likes playing in Cleveland and would probably not have a problem with playing the balance of his career in Cleveland if the
Cavs
continue to field title-worthy rosters. The pull of the big city shouldn't be enough for
LeBron
to leave a contending
Cavs
club to sign with a rebuilding New York club. But the
Knicks
-- and the Nets if they ever get their Brooklyn arena project back on track -- are very real threats to lure
LeBron
away should the
Cavs
stumble.

Now it's all in the open. The air is clear. It is what it is. Nothing is going to change anything between now and 2010. It's a story stuck in suspended animation until L eBron
himself moves the saga forward. Media scribes will continue to pen volumes and volumes on the subject, on top of the several hundred phone books' worth that have already been written, and it won't change the fact that they're rehashing the same material over and over.

The advent of saturation media means LeBron can be as big of a star playing in Cleveland as he can in New York. It also means that the New Yorkers who desperately covet him for their teams can bludgeon us repeatedly with columns and soundbites about his choice of hats and choice of friends and everything else (" LeBron eats pancake
shaped vaguely like borough of Brooklyn! Details at 11!")

As a Cleveland fan, you have two choices: Either get swept up in the speculation and allow it to ruin your ability to enjoy what is shaping up to be a truly special Ca vs
season, or let 2010's news wait until 2010 and live for the moment.

I'd advise you to choose the latter. Right now, Cleveland's basketball reality is a heck of a lot sweeter than New York's basketball fantasy.