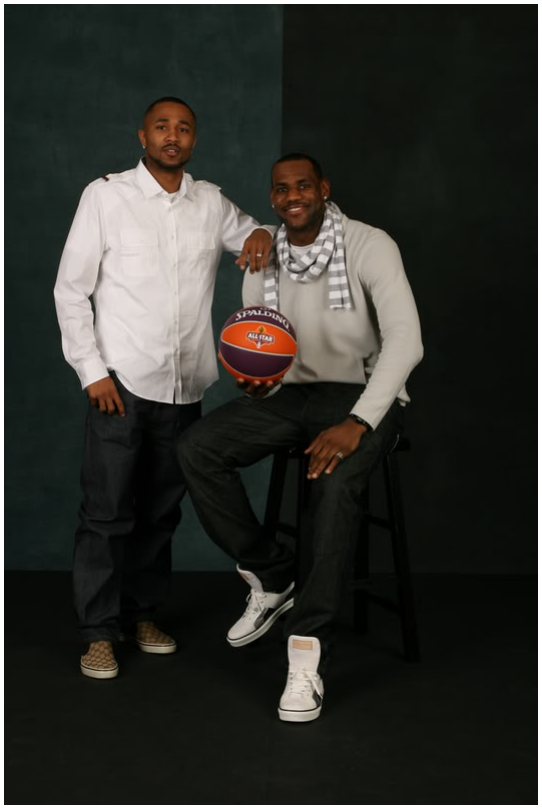
As someone who has covered the NBA for over a decade for a number of well known outlets, we always welcome it when Sam Amico has a chance to pop in and write something for us. And today, Sam checks in with some random thoughts on our Cavaliers as we get set for tonight's All-Star game and then the second half of what has the makings of a special season. Sam talks rumors, injuries, and the second half in his latest.



Random thoughts on the Cavaliers at the All-Star break:

* You have to be happy with 40-11, but it's pretty obvious the Cavaliers needed the break. They played poorly in losses to the Lakers and Indiana earlier in the week, and didn't look great in the win over Phoenix.

* Part of it no doubt has to do with injuries, part of it no doubt has to do with a loss of focus. No matter what the coaches and players say, it's only human nature to relax a little when you see some rest on the horizon. It's like a regular job in that sense. I mean, who busts their butt on the day before vacation?

* At any rate, the loss to Indiana was just plain bad no matter how you spin it, or what you thought of the officiating. It should have never come down to the two

horrible calls at the end of the game. (Yes, the call on Danny Granger was just as bad as the one on LeBron James.) The Cavs simply played to the level of their competition.

* They also should've been aware that the Pacers tend to play their best against the league's best teams -- having now beaten the Cavs, Lakers and Celtics.

* Back to the officiating. Yes, referee Joey Crawford seems to have it out for the Cavs (more on that in a minute), but the call on Granger was awful too. When two guys are going for the ball like Granger and James were, it's hard to determine who initiated the contact -- or if the contact actually had anything to do with the final result. Still, it was nice to see LeBron get a superstar call for once. He has to be the least-favored star in league history when it comes to getting a whistle.

* As for Crawford, he called three technicals on the Cavs in a game against Toronto earlier this season -- not long after he watched their warm-up routine with a smirk on his face. At the time, I thought Crawford looked like he was thinking, "I'll show them who‘s boss." It's pure speculation, but that image came back to me after the first time Crawford teed up the Cavs. Then he did it TWICE more after that.

* Crawford has a reputation as a renegade ref, as well as one who has it out for the San Antonio Spurs' family tree -- which includes Cavs GM Danny Ferry and coach Mike Brown. If you remember, Crawford was suspended a couple years ago for asking Spurs center Tim Duncan if he wanted to fight during a game. I never understood why Crawford was allowed to officiate another day after that. Especially since it wasn't his first questionable decision.

* That said, I hate to second-guess coaches, but I can't help but wonder why Zydrunas Ilgauksas and Ben Wallace weren't guarding the basket on the final inbounds pass against the Pacers. After all, there were four-tenths of a measly second left -- why not have your big men protect the rim and force a perimeter

shot? If the opponent can make a jumper in that time, well, then so be it. Instead, Z was defending the passer far away from the basket, the idea being to make it difficult for the passer to see. But it sure backfired, didn't it?

* It was painful watching Z against the Suns, as played with zero energy, which resulted in zero points for his first scoreless game in nearly two years (March 2007). It was almost as if he kept checking the scoreboard and asking, "How much longer until the All-Star break?"

* There have been rumors that Ilguaskas' injured foot is still aching, and that he may need to shut it down again for a few weeks. I didn't believe it until I watched him in the Phoenix game. He is either hurting or, at best, still trying to work his way back into playing shape.

* Yes, Ferry has spoken with Suns GM and former Cavs teammate Steve Kerr about star center Amare Stoudemire -- who will almost surely be traded. Some news outlets are reporting Ferry may be able to get Stoudemire for next-to-nothing, much like Boston's Danny Ainge stole Kevin Garnett from Minnesota and former Celtics teammate Kevin McHale.

* One of those outlets was New York Post columnist Peter Vecsey, who wrote, "Judging by what the Cavs have to offer -- as mentioned, expiring contracts and talented youngbloods -- and Kerr's connection and affection for Danny Ferry -- I'm guessing it'll be Kevin McHale-Danny Ainge revisited, unless L.A. makes Lamar Odom available."

* Of course, Vecsey also wrote that Kerr was set to replace Terry Porter as Suns coach, and that Chicago GM John Paxson was about to be fired. Both teams responded by pretty much calling Vesey a downright liar.

* Back to the Cavs. Is there reason for concern? Hardly. Not as long as they can

get back to playing the type of focused basketball they displayed in November and December. Sometimes, a break like they one they're getting this weekend is all you need.

* Nor will it hurt to have Delonte West back in uniform. The Cavs have really missed his determination on defense and steady shooting on offense. Z and Wallace could also use some time off to rest and recharge.

* Finally, be sure to catch me on SportsTime Ohio each Monday night on the "Wine & Gold Zone" from 8-9 p.m. Host Mark "Munch" Bishop and I talk Cavs and NBA, and take your calls and e-mails. (The show often re-airs from 11 p.m.-midnight that same night.) Until then, enjoy watching LeBron and Mo Williams in the All-Star Game.

Sam Amico is the editor of ProBasketballNews.com and co-host of the "Wine & Gold Zone" show on SportsTime Ohio.