In his latest, the talented Erik Cassano takes a look at the paranoia Cavaliers fans have about LeBron James, and him potentially leaving Cleveland. With LBJ able to sign a long term deal with the team on July 1st, Papa Cass takes a closer look at the situation.

Visit the Papa Cass blog at http://papacass.blogspot.com/

The Cavaliers and the Cleveland media seem pretty sure LeBron James will sign on the dotted line when a contract extension is offer to him this summer. Pretty sure. LeBron seems the same way, when he talked about sitting down with the Cavs and "getting something done" right after his team was eliminated by Detroit.

But it doesn't stop the pins and needles for anyone involved.

I've tried to get my head around it for several years. Why is everyone so fixated on LeBron leaving Cleveland?

Is it the "OIC" factor, that "c'mon, this is too good to be true, something bad is bound to happen" feeling every Cleveland fan either wholeheartedly embraces or ferociously tries to suppress?

Is it emotional scars left over from the Carlos Boozer fiasco?

Is it the leeches of the national media who are constantly slithering around the perimeter, whispering things like "LeBron will never be the next Jordan playing in Cleveland."

There wasn't this type of impending critical mass when Tim Duncan approached

his contract year. Or Kevin Garnett. Or even Kobe Bryant.
Nobody is concerned about whether any other member of LeBron's stellar 2003 draft class is staying put. We seem to take it for granted that Chris Bosh is going to remain a Raptor, that Carmelo Anthony is content in Denver, that Dwyane Wade will be the centerpiece of the Heat for years to come.

Like LeBron, they are all eligible for contract extensions this summer. But unlike the others, LeBron has his team and his city intently and fearfully waiting for D-Day, the day he makes his decision.

He also has the rest of the NBA waiting. Many teams with cap room are likely waiting to see what LeBron does this summer. If LeBron signs, it will be business as usual. On the off chance he doesn't, more than a few teams with salary cap space will probably reel in their spending this summer, knowing there will be a LeBron sweepstakes in the summer of 2007.

Maybe it's the celebrity status of LeBron that has us so pensive. The other players mentioned above are fine players, but only Bryant is in LeBron's league. And when all is said and done, LeBron might leave even Bryant in the dust of history.

Cleveland is the unlikely bearer of a once-in-a-generation talent. Like someone entrusted with carrying a priceless artifact on a long journey, we're afraid of the worst case scenario. We're afraid of dropping it, and losing it forever.

The big-city and national media, which knows Cleveland's supersized inferiority complex, is only too happy to pile on, telling us our city isn't worthy of LeBron, that he'll never reach his full star potential in Cleveland, that GM Danny Ferry did a lousy job of putting a team around him.
Luckily, they don't make the decisions. And most of what they say can probably be chalked up to jealousy.

In reality, it would be in LeBron's best interest to sign his extension. For a guy who needs no more attention, to reject the extension would be to open a Pandora's box of frenzied media inquiries as to his future plans. Not to mention the hard feelings it would create on the homefront. No matter what happens, LeBron must still play a minimum of two more years here.

The Cavs say all signs point to LeBron signing. LeBron has repeatedly said he's happy here, and wants to remain here. Wouldn't it be nice if everybody means

what they say, and this whole contract extension circus ends without a hitch this summer?

I hope it's like the getting a shot at the doctor. You're hating it, you're nervous, you brace yourself for the pain, then the nurse says "all done," and you didn't feel a thing.

Then we can all get our Band-Aids and lollipops, go home, and get ready for next season.