For the past six years, LeBron James has been nothing short of magnificent. He came into the league with sky-high expectations on his shoulders, and he has somehow managed to exceed them. But he had never had that "Matrix moment" -- that one shot, in a crucial game, that made the difference. Where making the shot means victory, and missing the shot means defeat. Until last night.

In February of 2002, Sports Illustrated ran a cover story on LeBron James, then a high school junior at Akron St. Vincent-St. Mary.

The title on the cover? You probably know it already. "The Chosen One."

That title was reminiscent of a science fiction movie released a couple of years earlier. The title of the movie? You probably know it already. "The Matrix."

In case you haven't seen "The Matrix", or if it's been a while, here's the part of the story that concerns us: Neo (Keanu Reeves) is recruited by an underground resistance led by the mysterious Morpheus (played by Laurence Fishburne). Morpheus is convinced that Neo is "the one", the chosen one, the one who will lead the resistance out of the darkness. The one who will bring victory. Morpheus believes it before Neo believes it; indeed, much of the movie is about Neo developing the belief that he is that chosen one.

The movie's climactic scene comes when Neo, confronted by the three enemy

agents, finally realizes that he is the one. Make that The One. He finally sees the Matrix, the computer-generated virtual world, for what it is. And then he kicks some serious enemy ass.

Why am I bringing up a decade-old movie that starred Keanu Reeves? *Because it describes exactly where we are today.*

For the past six years, LeBron James has been nothing short of magnificent. He came into the league with sky-high expectations on his shoulders, and he has somehow managed to exceed them. But he had never had that "Matrix moment" -- that one shot, in a crucial game, that made the difference. Where making the shot means victory, and missing the shot means defeat. Black and white, and no areas of gray in between. Sure, he's had many wonderful games -- the 45-point outburst against Detroit in Game Five of the 2007 Eastern Conference Finals probably being the most notable -- but still, some critics whined that he had never hit a last-second shot to win. Even when he did win games with last-second shots -- January's game against Golden State comes to mind -- the criticism then metastasized into "but it wasn't a game that *mattered*".

The underlying tone of the criticism was that when the stakes were really high, LeBron would not be able to respond. That you could take the boy out of Cleveland, but that you couldn't take the Cleveland out of the boy. And that The Cleveland Experience -- the umbrella covering all of the sports mishaps that many Cleveland fans treat as their destiny -- would continue.

After last night, there can be no more doubts. LeBron is The Chosen One. With one shot, he has further cemented his legend. He now has his "MJ Moment" -- his dramatic last-second victory shot that will be played, over and over, for years (decades?) to come. He has shown that when the stakes are at their highest (and make no mistake, they were -- it's not hyperbole to say that the Cavs' entire season was riding on that one shot), he can answer the bell.

For us as Cleveland fans, there is an even bigger message. The curse? That self-fulfilling prophecy that doomed us to second place (if we were lucky!) for four decades? *It's over*. Let me repeat that, to let the significance sink in: *the curse is over.* We can now get past this idea that Cleveland sports teams are always going to come close, but no closer. We can shatter the inferiority complex once and for all. There is no higher power that has its foot on our collective throats. The only ones who've ever had their feet on our throats are ourselves. (
Yes, that is physically impossible. It's a metaphor. Work with me here.
)

Last night, LeBron saw the full Matrix for the first time. Not that he ever lacked for confidence before; if anything, it was his confidence that allowed him to respond the way he did. It allowed him to take on the enemy agents with one hand, and then dive headfirst into Agent Smith (or is that Agent Turkoglu?) and explode him into a million pieces.

Believe it, Cleveland fans. We have our Neo. We have our Chosen One.

And the sun has never shone brighter on the Cleveland sports scene in the past 45 years than it does on this morning.