The best that sports provides is an escape from the sometimes grinding reality of day-to-day living. The problem arises when we treat that escape as if it was reality.

It's easy to do. Picking up the local newspapers on Tuesday it was easy for your eyes to wander first to the news that the Cavaliers had their collective heads handed to them by the Boston Celtics in about the worst game a team as good as the Cavs could play.

The collapse may have been due to a variety of factors that range from arrogance to complacency. In the end, though and for whatever reasons, the Cavs played like an unmotivated mess.

It was a result that had been coming, actually. You could see it in final games of the regular season with the starters resting. You could see it in several games of the Chicago series just as you could see its roots in the first game of this series. The Cavs have become a team that plays like the game doesn't really start until the 4th quarter. If the game is reasonably close, LeBron James will always find a way to make those baskets late that weren't falling early. It's worked in the past, so why not?

This time that extra gear abandoned them and all of the little things that contribute to a systemic crash were visited upon them in an embarrassing loss.

The nice thing, though, is that in sports there's always another game to play and always a

chance at redemption. That's what makes it an escape.

The dose of crushing reality came in the rest of the Tuesday newspaper and perhaps provides the best reason to retain perspective about a mostly meaningless loss.

There was a tragic accident last week in Medina Township where a brother and sister, students in the Highland school system, pulled out of their driveway on their way to school and were struck by an on-coming car driven by another classmate. The sister died that day, the brother the next. The student in the other car survived with mostly minor physical injuries but with what promises to be a lifetime of mental torture.

The funeral was held on Monday and about 1,500 showed up at a local church. Most of the mourners were fellow students. Nearby, as the caskets were being moved from the church to their final destination, the family wept uncontrollably. I don't know what they could possibly have been thinking, but a good bet is that they wondered, as Bruce Springsteen sung in "My City of Ruins", "how do I begin again?"

According to the Akron Beacon Journal story, team jerseys worn by the brother and sister were draped on the caskets, a reminder that they once were active participants in one of life's great escapes. But for these kids and their family, there is no next game, no chance for redemption. There's just an emptiness, a void that will never be filled. It's just the way reality works and it's as sobering of a thought as I can imagine at the moment.

But then I scroll down a bit further on that same front page and read about the 40th anniversary of the Kent State shootings. I was only 11 when tired and stressed Ohio National Guardsmen, put there by former govern James A. Rhodes, opened fire on a crowd protesting the U.S. invasion of Cambodia.

Ten years later, when I was in college and studying journalism, I visited Kent State. It was the 10th anniversary of the shootings and the controversy at the moment revolved around a planned gymnasium on campus that would encroach on the site of the shootings. A rather large and eclectic crowd of protestors, older and mostly from out of town, carried signs and occasionally shouted "move the gym." There weren't a lot of current students taking part in the events of the day, mostly they were looking out of their dorm room windows in curiosity or walking with a

backpack on their way to study somewhere.

What struck me most that day was how little the current students appreciated the enormity of those events. It had been just 10 measly years since kids their own age, upset with the direction of this country, took to the streets to make their voices known. It doesn't really matter whether they were right or just naïve. It really doesn't matter whether they acted like idiots and wrongly provoked the guards. What does matter and yet didn't seem to on that 10th anniversary day, is that students just like them lost their lives on that very campus.

It's now 20 years since that day and I have a daughter attending Kent State. She doesn't have any plans to attend the 40th anniversary events. Her interests, like most kids, are more parochial. Next week are finals and she just doesn't need the distraction at the moment. I shake my head but I do understand.

The four students killed at Kent never got a chance to realize any of their dreams. There was no next game to play or class to attend. There was no chance for reflection or redemption or regret, just emptiness. It's just the way reality works.

As I ponder both of these stories still, there is a lump in my throat and a few tears in my eyes. Having your own kids makes you empathize with the parents whose kids were snatched away from them in such rapid and tragic fashion. Honestly, I can't think of anything worse that can happen to a parent.

But the rest of the newspaper remains and I can't help but eventually gravitate back to the sports page and read some more about the Cavs. I even got quite an unintentional chuckle when I pull out the Plain Dealer and read Bill Livingston's column because it was mostly the polar opposite from what he wrote about the team after game 1. Two days ago the Cavs were beasts. This morning, I guess, they've lost their way. Given his schizophrenic nature Livingston seems to take too seriously the old saying that consistency is the hobgoblin of small minds. It's fun to laugh even in the midst of such impossible and tragic circumstances.

In actuality there really is no great truth to be gleaned from the a loss like that only lessons. For the Cavs they can use that loss as a reminder to take care of and pay attention to all the little things that put them in the position they're in or they can wallow in self-pity and quietly slink into

the off season with the their tails between their legs.

The point is, though, that it’s their choice. For those two kids in Highland and those four kids in Kent, they never got the chance to make such a sublime choice.