It seems like you can't swing a tattered “All Together” shirt around these parts these days without someone asking whether LeBron James will stay in Cleveland. Even people only remotely interested in sports are asking not even realizing, apparently, that the answer is of no great consequence to them.

Whether James stays or goes is a question that looks to paralyze northeast Ohio for the next 6 to 8 weeks. Work won't be getting done. Those orange barrels you see on the various highways? They aren't going anywhere anytime soon as construction workers pause to consider the fate of James. I imagine grass won't get cut, little league baseball games won't get paid and dogs won't get walked either. Obsessing 24/7 has gripped this area and it won't end until James does what James wants to do.

James' decision has taken on such a life of its own that no matter what he does it can't possibly work out well. When the whims of one player become bigger than the game itself, and believe me they have when the President of the United States weighs in, perspective hasn't just been lost, perhaps the game as well. In a lifetime thus far filled with seemingly impossible expectations to live up to James has always exceeded them anyway. But when those expectations are bigger than the game itself, well, James may have just met his match.

James' credentials speak for themselves. Walking through the growing Wikipedia entry of his career is hardly necessary. Everyone knows that James is currently the greatest basketball player on the planet, and I say that without even a touch of sarcasm. And perhaps he's just in the middle of a storied career so wherever he goes and whatever he does he'll be a transformational figure.

But last time I looked, James has been in the NBA for seven seasons now and in that time seven other teams have won a NBA championship without him. And while I'm not much for the prediction game, if he plays another 10 seasons (which may be a stretch) perhaps as many as 6 other teams without a player named LeBron James are going to win championships, too.

Thus what everyone is fighting for at the moment are those potential 4 seasons, maybe more, maybe less when a team with James may actually emerge victorious at the end of a very long season. It's a prize worth fighting for, surely, but it's not a cause worth dying for.

Michael Jordan played 15 seasons in the NBA and 9 times other teams without the previous greatest player ever won the championship. Kobe Bryant is in his 14th season and has seen 9 other teams without a player named Bryant have won championships. If the Lakers don't win it all this season, it will be 10. Magic Johnson, in his 13-year career, saw 8 other teams win it instead of his Lakers. I can do this all day if you want.

The point here is not to slam James anymore than any of these other great players. Instead it's to underscore for all those currently losing sleep over the random thoughts of a multi-millionaire with more fame and fortune already than he'll ever need that there is light on the other side of all this.

I don't want to minimize what 4 or so NBA championships would mean to this town. This town's credentials as one of the most cursed speaks for themselves and walking through its Wikipedia entry on all of the many failures is hardly necessary either. I just think it's important to throw a little cold water on the faces of those that think this town and this team can't survive with out James.

The key here is not really James as much as it is Dan Gilbert. Those who think the downside of this whole dance with James is too unfathomable to ponder are forgetting that the Cavs will still have Gilbert as owner. He is an owner the likes of which Cleveland never has really seen before. His passion to win is more intense. He also knows how to constructively channel that passion in a way that makes him rare among moneyed owners who often treat their franchises like toys.

If James leaves, it won't because Gilbert didn't try to keep him. But if James leaves, the long-term health of this franchise is still in good hands. While I only have a gut feeling about James at the moment, I am far more confident that the real key to the success of this franchise lies in Gilbert remaining as owner more than it does with James staying for the next 4 or 5 years.

If Gilbert is dealt a setback in the form of James leaving, I doubt that he's going to go off crying into the night. Instead, he'll find a way to regroup and give this town a team worth rooting for, just like all those other towns that have thus far been without James and yet have found a way to slog their way through to a championship anyway. As we've seen thus far, you don't need the best player in the NBA on your team to win a championship, you just need a collection of really good players. Gilbert will find a way to make that happen.

That all being said, my gut tells me that James isn't leaving. It also tells me that he isn't staying without some changes. When I hear talk about how James and his “team” meaning his boyhood friends and other hangers on he's acquired over the years will be making this decision, it says to me that this is far more complicated to James than a decision about whether to take the money.

As he's said so many times, it's about being in the right situation, one that will bring him the multiple championships he so craves. That goes beyond just the players that surround him, but a supportive front office and a coach that he can respect.

The problem that's brewing though is that it looks like James and his “team” are in the process of actually trying to put it all together themselves as if this were just another endorsement deal. James and the “team” look to be trying to pre-package success, never mind the millions of variables outside of his control.

And yet why wouldn't they give it a try? All everyone is doing at the moment is feeding the beast. It doesn't even matter if James thinks this way because everyone else does: he is bigger than the game. Where you come out on whether or not that's a good thing might say something about the ridiculous proportions this issue has taken on.

If you don't think so, just consider that no one sees it as particularly unusual that James and his “team” aren't interested in reading the tea leaves to determine any particular team's future. They want to assure that future with a package of players, management and coaches of their own choosing that has James at the center of all that will eventually revolve around him and everyone treats it as perfectly normal.

In truth, you could actually see all this coming. Hamstrung by the constraints placed on younger players in the NBA, James thus far has mostly played the good soldier. He's kept his mouth shut, at least publicly, and did what he was told. James didn't choose Cleveland, it was chosen for him. It worked out well enough, certainly, but he just as easily could have been someplace else these last seven years.

Now his time has come and he likes the feel of the controls more so, I'm betting, then the controls of one of the several luxury sports cars he owns. You would, too.

And yet I still keep coming back not to James but to Gilbert. From a business perspective he's accomplished more than James. He does know what it takes to actually win. It's just a matter of time before that translates to the basketball court, with or without James.