The last thing that anyone needs at the moment is another screed about how LeBron James betrayed the city of Cleveland. Pretty much every word that could be written about the personal and professional disaster that James brought upon himself this summer has been written. And there's been plenty of words already about how Cavaliers fans acted and reacted on Thursday night when James returned to town.

But as James and his talents head back to South Beach after Thursday night's beat down, Cavaliers fans are left not just with the image of what basketball is really like in this town without James. They're also left with the image that the team representing this city is a colossal embarrassment in more ways than any of us ever imagined.

Owner Dan Gilbert went on Twitter after the game and basically said that words couldn't express what he was feeling at the moment. Maybe that's a sign of maturity given the words he used to express himself after James stabbed him in the back. I was never one of those that felt Gilbert went off half-cocked on that one. If anything, he handled it with more class than he needed to.

But this is the time that Gilbert needs to stand up once again and find the right words. He needs to speak the truth not about James but about the inferior product he has put on the court, and I'm not just referring to the talent level, either. What Gilbert and Cavaliers fans saw last night was a team lay down on national television and defer to James in the way that a dog defers to its master.

But it wasn't just the lay down that grinds. What was so jaw-dropping embarrassing, what was so pathetic and what Gilbert has to come to grips with is that the team on the court on Thursday night refused to not only not have his back but they didn't have the backs of their fans either.

It's a team of soft and indifferent players who didn't care enough to actually treat the game against the Heat like it was an actual rivalry. To them it was just another game in a meaningless season, something to get through on their way back home.

The main reason that football fans in Cleveland and Pittsburgh love that rivalry so much is that the players carry it with them on the field. It's more than just fans of one city hating the players of the other. It's the fact that the players on each side seem to turn it up more than a notch when they walk onto that field and look across the field at their rival. The hits are harder and sometimes cheaper. The players act like they want to work out the frustration of every fan, one hard hit and one chop block at a time.

When Joe "Turkey" Jones tried to plant Steelers' quarterback Terry Bradshaw into the middle of the Municipal Stadium turf, head first, every Browns' fan was living vicariously. It represented exactly what they had always wanted to do if only they could get on the field. And when James Harrison knocked two Browns out of the game a few weeks ago, Steelers' fans were just as ecstatic, believe me.

The same is true for the Ohio State/Michigan rivalry. Wolverines head coach Rich Rodriguez may not appreciate the intensity of the game, but Ohio State's Jim Tressel sure does. He knows how the fans feel about Michigan and the players get that. Anyone who watched that game last week saw the Buckeyes hit just that much harder because the opponent was wearing maize and blue. It wasn't just the victory that was so satisfying. It was also the punishment inflicted on the way.

But last night at the Q, Gilbert's team acted as if the Heat were the Vancouver Grizzlies or the Sacramento Kings. And for good measure they then treated James like royalty and they were still the loyal subjects, there to serve and protect.

It wasn't just that they hugged James before the opening tip off like a long lost brother from another mother, which some did. It was more that they treated the night as mostly a joke, amazed that fans even cared enough to boo in the first place. The look and smile on Daniel Gibson's face as he interacted with James early in the game was far more offensive than Derek Anderson's gigglefest on the Arizona sidelines was for Cardinals fans.

That isn't to single out Gibson, either. Frankly everyone on the Cavs' team just seemed happy that James was in the building, oblivious really to what the fans were really saying as the boos and the chants reigned down on James like the flecks of rosin that James tossed in the air before the game as he practiced his pre-game ritual without even an attempt by any Cavaliers player to knock him off his moorings.

If any player on the Cavs really understood the frustration these fans were feeling and wanted to act on it, he should have stood at the scorers table without letting James get near it before the opening tip off. Even if it meant getting a technical foul, even if it meant getting a disqualification, one player at least and the whole team if possible should have stood lock step and blocked that damn scorer's table and not let James do his little powder act as if nothing had happened in the last 5 months.

Once the game started, it was even worse. There was a perfunctory hand in his face once in awhile as James darted in and about. But there was never a moment even hinted at where even one Cavs player took it upon himself to let James know that he had stabbed this city in its collective backs. Where was the hard foul? Where was the inadvertent elbow to face that a player like Bill Laimbeer or Rick Mahorn used to throw with regularity? Heck, most fans would have been thrilled if someone had just pushed James to the ground as he danced along the baseline. Sure, there was a report that some assistant channeled Phil Savage and told James to "shut the f*** up." And oh yea, Mo Williams supposedly gave James the cold shoulder after halftime. Ouch. We'd all be much happier if Williams had instead jammed his shoulder into James like James did to his coach last week. That's how a message gets sent.

Instead all you got was a bunch of really malleable players rolling out the red carpet to a player that screwed them and the team they play for and then acted like Kevin Bacon taking a swat to his backside and asking for another.

James casts a large shadow in NBA circles. He's a pied piper of sorts and lesser players, like pretty much the entire Cavs roster, just seem happy to exist in his orbit. He's the high tide that raises all ships and the last thing any of them want to do is anger him. You never know the blowback on that.

That is exactly what the fans got on Thursday night. Cavs' players weren't looking to represent their fans so much as their own self-interest. They know that the thing that stands between them and joining, say, the Heat at some point is James' blessing. Say something or doing

something untoward now to the King and there is little doubt that he'll carry that slight with him and make you pay somewhere down the road, if not on the court then in the wallet.

While the stated goal on Thursday night was a victory, the real goal for the fans was they wanted a strong message sent to James and the Heat that they aren't going to steal their souls and get away with it without a fight. They wanted every possession every shot contested as if this was the final game of a death match against their worst enemy. Instead what they got was a display of indifference that was every bit as damaging to the collective psyche than The Decision.

Cavs players had the chance, indeed the obligation, to establish a hated rivalry with the Heat and instead punted because it just doesn't matter to them.

Gilbert guaranteed this team would win a championship before the Heat does. I don't know that the Heat wins a championship simply because James is tragically flawed. But I do know that this Cavs team will never win a championship so long as its roster is filled with tourists. What this team needs are natives, players that give a damn about themselves and the fans. This team right now stands for nothing and on Thursday night Cavs fans found out that it will fall for anything.