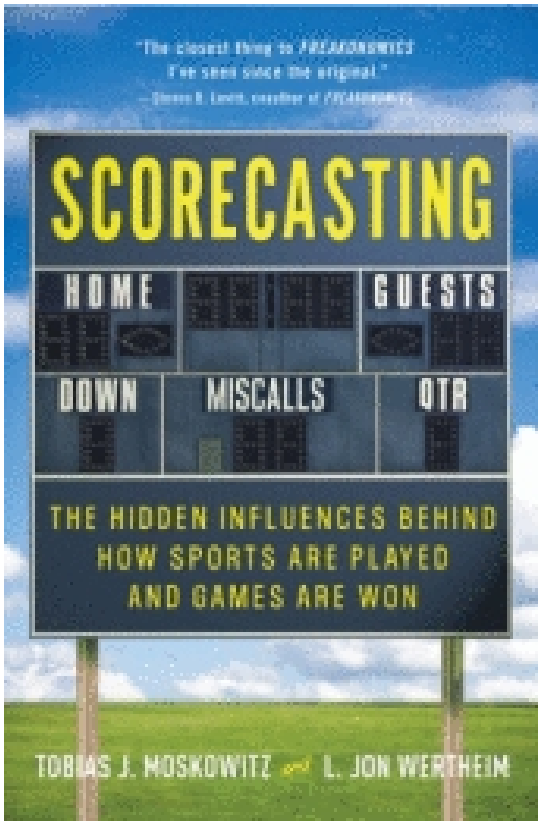

Dan Gilbert's visceral reaction to *The Decision* pales in comparison to Mike Bianchi's sentiments regarding the Magic's star blocker. This Orlando Sentinel writer's NBA column practically flew off the page in a 24-point Arial rage last week:

If Dwight Howard leaves Orlando, city should sue Magic, NBA

What? I thought players had a right to play where they want to play, go where they want to go. Wasn't that the painful lesson learned in Cleveland? That idols fall and life moves on but we will never ever ever forgive . . .

How would you possibly quantify this loss?

If Dwight Howard ends up pulling a Shaq and leaving after next season for Los Angeles, the City of Orlando should immediately sue the Magic and the NBA for $500 million in damages.

We should have thought of that. Is this a random number or does it have something to do with that sparkling new arena?

That's how much it cost to build the new arena . . .

I'm guessing the city needed a new arena. How is that the Magic's financial obligation?

... we were led to believe [the arena] would be the Dwight House for years and years to come.

Hmmm . . . there's a familiar tune. Cleveland was slammed for misbehaving after being misled, left at the altar and stuffed in a rim. Everything looks different when the names are changed. Switch out "Orlando" for "Cleveland" and "Dwight Howard" for "LeBron James" and Clevelanders look like saints. Back to Bianchi:

Now there are rumblings and rumors and angst and anxiety that Dwight might try to orchestrate an exit a la LeBron James and Carmelo Anthony when his contract is up after next season.

Go for it, Mike:

If he does then we were sold a half-a-billion-dollars worth of hot air.

Feel better? Starting to understand Cleveland's jersey burning, soul crushing angst?
Punchline:

The Amway Center would suddenly transform into the Scamway Center.

Conclusion:

And this is why NBA commissioner David Stern needs to crush the player's union during the ongoing collective bargaining negotiations and implement an NFL-style "franchise" tag that makes it nearly impossible for star players like Howard to leave teams, towns and taxpayers stranded.

Or maybe the NBA should hand out "promise" rings - it's senior year and we're going off to different colleges but nothing will ever part us. Except for the inevitable. Otherwise known as free agency, human nature, greed and judgment calls - good or bad.

Maybe it would help to review my favorite chapter in Scorecasting , sort of a Freakonomics for sports written by Tobias J. Moskowitz and L. Jon Wertheim. The chapter is titled and subtitled:

The Value of a Blocked Shot - (Why Dwight Howard's 232 blocked shots are worth less than Tim Duncan's 149).

Moskowitz and Wetheim tell the story of John Huizinga (Yao Ming's agent - a story in itself) and his theory of blocked shots. Huizinga breaks down various types of blocking and places a value on each based on outcome (goaltending, ball into stands, ball to your team, ball to opposing team, etc.). Here is the explanation for the subtitle:

It turned out that Howard often blocked shots into the stands, whereas Duncan otten tipped the ball to a teammate. More important, Howard also committed goaltending violations more often than Duncan did. (In fact, Duncan, despite being a prolific shot blocker, hasn't goaltended in over three season.) Howard may have blocked 8.3 more shots than Duncan did, but they amounted to a value of only 0.53 points per block for the Magic. Duncan's average block was worth 1.12 points for the Spurs.

After reading Scorecasting, at least all of the NBA sections, maybe it would be in Orlando's best interest (and Cleveland's) to evaluate how they evaluate a player's contribution. There's also a great chapter on why, unless your team has at least one superstar, your chance of winning the NBA championship is 0.9 percent. So much for teamwork. According to the authors:

At his 2009 induction into the Basketball Hall of Fame, [Michael] Jordan gave a speech that revealed much about his turbo-powered competitive drive. He told a story of once scoring 20 consecutive points late in a game to lead the Chicago Bulls to victory. Afterward, he was admonished by Tex Winter, the Bulls' eminent longtime assistant coach, "Michael, there's no *I* in *team."* Jordan recalled his response: "I looked back at Tex, and said, 'There's an *I* in *win.* So which way do you want it?'"