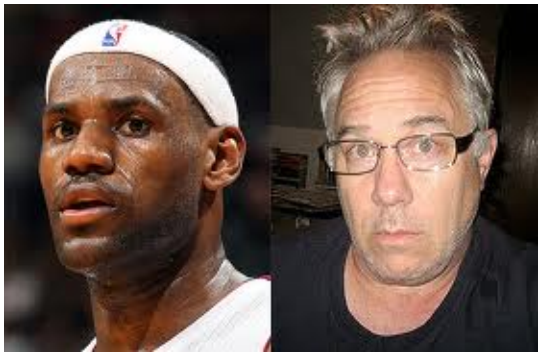

Steve: One of the advantages of being a terrible interviewer is that I don't have to adhere to any of those pesky "standards" or "best practices." This allows me to interject myself into the interview. The secret reason I committed to writing a daily column about the Indians instead of sporadically doing so was that I wanted to have The Must-Own Document of Cleveland's first Champeenship Season. (It should be noted that, since 2006, the Document has been a bit less than Must-Own.) In preparing for this interview, I read (in an Esquire interview with Shaquille O'Neal) that you were chronicling the 2009-2010 season, apparently with something of the same focus. Is this the right interpretation, or was there something more to it? "LeBron's Last Season?" A "year in the life?" "Please, God, please?"

Scott: During the Orlando playoff series two seasons ago, when it became clear that the Cavs would lose, I realized that though I was only 58 years old and in decent health, I might not live long enough to see another Cleveland team (I was at the Stadium when the Browns won it all in 1964, and still have my Championship Game ticket stub) bring a title to my old home town. It felt terrible; I had convinced myself that having the best player on the floor would translate into an NBA crown, and here was evidence that it really didn't matter, that the Cavs simply weren't good enough.

Not long after that Orlando series ended, I thought about the 2009-2010 season as a unique opportunity to follow a pro sports team playing under unprecedented pressure. Win or lose, LeBron was going to be a free agent at season's end. Mike Brown and Danny Ferry were going to lose their jobs if the Cavs didn't at least make it to the NBA Finals. Dan Gilbert would be willing to spend any amount of money if it meant the team had a better shot at winning it all. Win or lose, the Cavs were going to be a great story. But if I hadn't believed that the team had a realistic shot at going all the way, I wouldn't have made the commitment.

Steve: Your "Twitter persona" comes across as a bit of a character, but with enough emotional sincerity behind it to make it seem like an unfiltered vent. What portion of your Tweets would you say is "Scott Raab" and what portion is "The Scott Raab Bile Show?"

Scott: Close to 100% me. The animus toward LeBron is entirely sincere. The love for Cleveland and Cleveland's teams is entirely sincere. Some of the personal flaming at other media types is more or less a joke, at least to me. As a guy who makes his living writing, a medium with a 140-character limit is tough to take seriously in terms of prose. But twitter's an amazing tool and a fantastic reality show.

Steve: Is this personal at this point? Do you see yourself as a Voice of Cleveland, or The Most Pissed-Off Fan in America?

Scott: It's always personal -- almost all of my writing is first-person and heavy on feeling. I'm fine with being 'a' Voice of Cleveland, as long as it's not 'the' VoC. I left town in 1984, and while I think that affords me certain insights, it also means that I haven't suffered the past quarter-century to the same degree as a Clevelander who stayed. I have the chance to write a book about what it feels like to be a Cleveland fan -- a privilege and an honor.

I'm not sure about the pissed-off part. What I'm sure of is that no player in the history of professional sports in America has ever earned and deserved as much loathing and derision as LeBron James.

Steve: You were a guest on the Dan LeBatard Show, a name which spell-check keeps wanting to add a letter to. Are you a fan of LeBatard's work, or was this more because he's in Miami?

Scott: Both. LeBatard is a great sportswriter, a great radio host, a great guy, and a Miami media titan. I've been on a couple of times now, and I'd never turn down the chance if they asked me again.

Steve: I find that reading national columnists like LeBatard sometimes comes across as an excavating mission, where I end up having to sort through a 30 Rock episode of "Sports Screamers" in order to find the thoughtful columnist within. Has this become the 21st century's sports fan's burden? Am I overreacting to a few loudmouths (or, I suppose, loudtypists)?

Scott: I think Dan's more thoughtful than most. In print, he's totally sane; on the air, he mainly uses henchmen to do the dirty work of screaming at the guest. But I agree with your basic premise: The signal-to-noise ratio is getting worse, not only in sports journalism, but across the media landscape.

Steve: Is it possible to read a Brian Windhorst column and not lament the loss?

Scott: Brian's a friend and a mentor. He's also an exemplary reporter and writer. Any Cleveland fan who lumps him with LeBron as a whore and traitor for taking the ESPN job -- and I've heard from a bunch of them -- is a complete f*@#ing fool.

Steve: ESPN's "Heat Index:" dumb idea, or dumbest idea ever?

Scott: It's right up there with mesh condoms.

Steve: Joe Posnanski wrote something I found interesting: "I guess this is the part that surprises me: The Miami Heat are boring. I didn't expect that." I agree to a certain extent, but then, I found the Allen-Garnett-Pierce Celtics to be fairly dull (but obviously talented and cohesive) as well. This might just be me being a much bigger fan of other sports. Do you agree with this? If so, are you surprised as well? If not, are you surprised a fan as thoughtful as Posnanski could find them so?

Scott: I don't find them boring at all, and I'm not surprised that they're playing fairly amazing basketball night after night right now. I don't know when Joe wrote that, but I watch every Heat game and I haven't been bored yet. One thing they have in common with those Celtics is that they play excellent defense -- which isn't sexy at all.

Steve: What was your reaction to Bill Simmons removing the mentions of Charles Pierce and Bethlehem Shoals from the paperback version of his rambling phone book?

Scott: I've been friends with Charlie for long time, and I also consider him one of the best writers in America. I don't know Bill at all. I enjoy most of what he writes. I have no idea why he's so sensitive to criticism, especially given his success. It doesn't speak well for him. To say the least.

Steve: Please use this space to address the topic of outsiders telling you to "just move on."

Scott: F*@# 'em. The best I can do is to remind such folks of the obsessive passion that nations all over the world bring to sports like soccer. A guy born in Uruguay or Italy or Turkey who turns out to be soccer's best player and then decides he'd rather play for Yemen or South Korea doesn't show his ass back home for fear of getting his head blown off. Not a perfect analogy, to be sure, but much closer to reality than all of the 'bitter ex-GF who won't move on' crapola from folks who are too stupid to understand the nature of fanhood and the meaning of love of place.

Steve: In retrospect, do you feel some degree of self-loathing for rationalizing LeBron James' "Clevelandness" since the Yankee Hat Incident of 2007?

Scott: Zero. I wrote him off publicly as 'worthless scum' then, and was called all kinds of names by Cleveland fans for doing so. I boycotted the Cavs for the entire 2008 season and much of 2009. I'm not ashamed to admit that I returned to the fold because I thought the team was good enough to win a title -- not because I thought James was any kind of hero. I had hoped that he had grown up, and that he would remain a Cavalier, but I came back because I wasn't going to miss a Cleveland championship.

Steve: I was able to rationalize rooting for Albert Belle while he was a Cleveland Indian, despite the fact that he was largely a reprehensible human being. How would you compare the two cases?

Scott: I tend not to overthink these things. The guy with 'Cleveland' on his uniform is my guy. I really don't give a shit what kind of human being he is -- and who the f*@# really can know that anyway? I care deeply about how well he plays.

Steve: In a way, Belle's departure from the Indians caused me the least grief: he said, "I want the most money," and then he signed for the most money. Cleveland was not going to give him that. As the years wear on, that seems pretty straight-up to me. Contrast this with Manny, who feigned cluelessness to wave off Cleveland's (enormous) offer, Thome, who said they'd "have to rip the shirt from his back," and LeBron. Am I missing something here?

Scott: I still love Manny, but then I've never thought that Manny had to feign cluelessness. Thome's a shitheel and a liar. But LeBron is a special case: He was born and raised in Northeast Ohio; he tanked in the playoffs; he went out of his way to shit on Cleveland and the Cavs on his way out of town.

Steve: In retrospect, I realized that LeBron had made up his mind well before "The Decision." In fact, doing a second take, it may have been as far back as 2008 (at the Olympics). When do you think James had made up his mind to leave?

Scott: I don't know what to think. You could argue that he, Wade, and Bosh had their moves informally planned since they each signed 3-year extensions. You could argue that he was being honest when he said that it was a tough decision, and that he only made it after weighing his options this past summer.

I would argue that the Celtics playoff series was THE turning point. LeBron James quit. That was abundantly clear to fans and analysts who couldn't care less about Cleveland or the Cavs, and it was even clearer to his peers in the league. It would've been tough for him to come back to Cleveland under the circumstances -- and those circumstances include coming back to a team that has done nothing since his departure but prove right every asshole who said that LeBron had to leave the Cavs to have a realisitc shot at an NBA championship.

Steve: How should LeBron James have announced he was leaving as a free agent?

Scott: He should not have left. He should have re-signed with the Cavs.

Steve: Most Cleveland fans I converse with have said something to the effect that they were

disappointed that he left, but not angry. However, “The Decision” simply infuriated them. Does that seem like the Zeitgeist from your view?

Scott: More or less. But who knows? Maybe I’m an extremist on this issue, but I was angry about his disgraceful performance in the Boston series (on and off the court), angry about his long silence aterward, and angry about the way he orchestrated his free agency courtship. “The Decision” itself was unique, not least because of its incomparable stupidity, but it was of a piece with wearing his Yankees cap to Jacobs Field for the opening game of an Indians-Yankees playoff series. The fact that Cleveland fans -- and the Cavs organization -- gave James a pass on THAT spoke volumes about how desperate and how pathetic the state of pro sports in Northeast Ohio truly is. Imagine Larry Bird early in his Celtics career wearing the same cap to Fenway Park for the opening game of a Yankees-Red Sox series. Anyone who doubts that it would have had an immediate impact, and a profound and lasting effect, on Bird’s tenure in Boston knows nothing about the sports world beyond Cleveland’s teams.

Steve: One of your Tweets pointed me to an interesting project, “ Losing LeBron ” by Nicole Prowell and Allyson Sherlock. Tell me about this project and how you are associated with it.

Scott: I’ve donated money, and the filmmakers have said that they’ll interview me for the film. I’ve also been in touch with Brian Spaeth, a Clevelander living in Los Angeles, who’s making his own movie -- not a documentary -- about Cleveland fanhood. I like the idea of different people telling different stories about Cleveland and Cleveland sports. I hope that projects like this let folks see the place as what it is -- not the shithole portrayed by the national media for the past two generations.

Steve: The first six minutes of the “LeBron Returns” game was pretty encouraging. J.J. Hickson in particular made a couple of energetic dunks and the team appeared to have some urgency. Then, beginning in the second quarter, the team performed in a manner that would have made the Washington Generals feel right at home. I kept waiting for LeBron to pull down Anderson Varejao’s pants, or at least hit Byron Scott with a bucket of confetti. What the f*@#, man? Seriously, what the f*@#?

Scott: What the f*@# indeed. On the one hand, you can walk into any office building and discover that a solid majority of the folks working there care only about getting paid; on the other, you always hope that a team of millionaires representing your town will do so with a modicum of pride, courage, and dignity. That was a disgraceful performance by the Cleveland

Cavaliers, one of those games that will live forever in the annals of Cleveland sports infamy.

Steve: I could live with losing the game: heck, the Heat are good, and the Cavs are not. But I truly expected at least ONE hard foul on LeBron. Just one. Is this not what Ryan Hollins is on the roster for? (*It certainly cannot be for his "basketball prowess," which rivals his "flying prowess," his "liquid nitrogen breathing prowess," and his "turning lead into gold prowess."*)

Scott: This was a team built entirely around LeBron James and subservient to him in every way, a team of bottoms. I'm not sure that holding Ryan Hollins accountable for the team's collective failure makes any more sense than Ryan Hollins playing significant minutes in any NBA game.

Steve: It could be argued that the Cleveland game acted as a springboard to launch Miami into the kind of team pundits expected in the first place, while simultaneously acting as a trapdoor to drop the Cavs into the kind of team pundits also expected in the first place. That might hurt more than anything else, and makes me even MORE infuriated that Ryan Hollins did not fulfill his role. Seriously, that loss felt as bad as any I've seen, and I kind of hate myself for feeling that degree of stomach-pitting. It shouldn't have … but it did. I actually hate the Cavs more for playing like punks than LeBron for punking them. Wasn't Byron Scott supposed to do something about that whereas Mike Brown was seen as not being able to command such a response?

Scott: You thought Ryan Hollins would follow in the footsteps of Maurice Lucas or Lonnie Shelton? Why? Dude went to high school in Pasadena, college at UCLA, and weighs 230 pounds after dessert. He has all the pride, passion, and presence of a Q-tip.

Look at the Cavs in the playoffs the past two seasons: Were they a mentally tough team, able to overcome adversity, even WITH the MVP of the NBA leading them? Nope. Anything but, in fact. I'd like to think that Byron Scott would've done a better job than Mike Brown coaching those teams, but we'll never know. And General George S. Patton himself couldn't make fighters out of this year's Cavs.

Steve: When LeBron James says that the NBA would be better if it contracted some teams,

does he realize that each franchise contracted means 15 fewer player jobs, and that at least a quarter of his own team's roster is made up of players whose jobs would be eliminated? Does this comment come from a place of entitlement, profound selfishness, or extraordinary beefheadedness?

Scott: Apart from his basketball skills, there is nothing to James beyond his entitlement, profound selfishness, and extraordinary beefheadedness.

Steve: Wright Thompson's piece for ESPN was brilliant. I'm not sure I actually have a question here, but I needed to write it in print. (*n.b.: Scott was interviewed for the piece*)

Scott: Agreed.

Steve: What comes next for you?

Scott: Esquire's the best magazine around, and my job is better than any dream I ever had. I've got a great book editor, David Hirshey, at a great publishing house, HarperCollins. I'm writing a book I believe I was born to write, and I'm having a great time along the way. What comes next -- I'm speaking now as a native Clevelander and as a Jew -- is clearly some horrific personal tragedy.

*Photo credit to www.thescore.com