It bothers him, Cleveland.

Tuesday evening at Quicken Loans Arena, during the Miami Heat player introductions, LeBron James was nowhere to be found when his name was called out. He later explained that he was "in the bathroom" during introductions, but that sounds like a fairly lame excuse to me.

James has been involved in hundreds, if not thousands, of basketball games during his existence and has never missed being introduced.

Think about 10 famous people right now, sports personalities, actors, musicians, politicians, whatever. Think of 10 famous people (I'll wait here).

James is a bigger egomaniac than all the people you thought about. By a wide margin. He is more addicted to the glitz and glamour, seeing his name in lights and having people fawn over him, than anyone else you thought about. He lives for running out on the court and doing his special little routine with Dwyane Wade and the rest of his teammates. It totally gets his juices flowing.

He would not miss that to use the bathroom. He has his pregame routine down pat and, trust me, does not have to make any emergency bathroom stops...especially right before a game that was extremely important for his basketball team.

No, the reason James was not out there on the bench, doing his saluting and hand-slapping, was very simple...he did not want to face the wrath of the crowd. It absolutely drives him crazy that the crowd at Quicken Loans Arena, a crowd that used to give him its undying support, adulation and even blank-eyed love, has a strong loathing for him. The arena where he has felt the most comfortable during his career...an arena where his posse and family had full run and home to an organization that catered to his each and every whim...now has nothing to offer him but scorn and disdain.

And it bothers him, Cleveland.

James is such a narcissist that he honestly thought he would be able to "take his talents to South Beach" and the Cleveland area would continue to love him and show their undying devotion and affection. He was convinced the people that hung on his each and every move, as well as who forgave all his transgressions great and small, would continue to be LeBron James apologists regardless of what uniform he wore on his back.

Think about that. This leads to the conclusion that during his seven-year tenure in Cleveland all those people who packed The Q (and Gund Arena before that) were not Cavaliers fans per say, but LeBron James fans first and foremost. It did not matter which team he played for, those 20,000-plus people there every night were there to see HIM! Cleveland Cavaliers or Miami Heat didn't matter.

And, in his eyes, those 20,000 turned on him. He left the Cavaliers to move on to what he considered a better situation for him, which should not have mattered to his fans in his eyes. I mean, he still does his Bike-a-Thon, right? All those people that criticized him after he made "The Decision?" Well, they were just haters. They were never really true LeBron James fans, anyway.

And besides, he isn't from Cleveland. He is from the 330, from Akron, and those in the 330 aren't really that impressed with Cleveland anyway. Heck, he's a Yankees fan. He loves the Dallas Cowboys. Growing up he rooted for Michael Jordan. What did he really owe the City of Cleveland? Nothing at all. He blessed them with his talents for seven seasons; they should appreciate and fondly remember when he was blessing them with his presence on their basketball team, right?

Going on national television to announce he was moving on to Miami was a business decision, and the hour-long special on ESPN actually benefitted some New England boy's and girl's club. How can he be criticized for that? Apologize to Cleveland and Cavaliers fans? Why? They were the lucky ones. They got seven years...no championships but seven years of his "talents." Why should he be sorry for moving on to play with Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh, his friends? They are his friends!

When James came back to Quicken Loans Arena Dec. 2 and was greeted with the most vicious boos in the arena's history he was genuinely surprised. Though he will never admit it he was hurt. And he wasn't about to give the fans in Cleveland another chance to hurt him like that again. He is a global icon and global icons should not hear the boos.

It bothers him, Cleveland.

The Cavaliers salvaged quite a bit of pride and won back quite a few fans with their performance Tuesday evening. They did what they should have done Dec. 2. There was no love-fest, no glad-handing or hugging before the game. There was no joking around with the player that put a knife into the back of the 21,000 fans that were there to express their displeasure with James, only to be quieted when the Cleveland players on the floor displayed none of the passion the Cleveland fans in the stands displayed off it.

This night was different, and the Cavaliers took their pride back. They also gave the only gift the fans wanted, a win over James' new team, to them with an exclamation point, and it felt good. Ryan Hollins played like a man possessed, J.J. Hickson dominated Chris Bosh, Baron Davis was cool and calm in keeping the team's intensity where it should have been and the fans were in a frenzy. If the team would have played like this on Dec. 2 you would have to think this season would have gone quite differently. But that's all water under the bridge.

What mattered was Tuesday night, when the worst team in the NBA took it upon itself to make a statement, to the fans, to the Miami Heat, to LeBron James and to itself. It showed how much pride and determination can mean, and in the process dealt a blow to its opponents by denying them the chance to move into sole possession of second place in the Eastern Conference playoff race...all while assuring the Heat cannot win 60 games this season. This is a measuring stick in the NBA, 60 wins, that separates great teams from special ones. And the Miami Heat

are not special.

As for James, he was not going to give the fans the chance to make him look like a chump again. It was bad enough that the parking garage staff at Quicken Loans Arena would not let his entourage into the player's parking lot with him, no way were the fans going to get to show how much things have changed again. No way was he going to let them point out that maybe, just maybe, they were actually Cavaliers fans while he was here...not just fans of LeBron James.

He might say the right things to the media about the fans in Cleveland, about how great they are, how he treasures his seven years with the Cavaliers because of them and how he hopes for nothing but success for them in the future. But the fact of the matter is this; it is a serious blow to James' ego when they react to him with bitterness, hatred and vitriol. These were his people and they have turned on him in his eyes. He, who blessed them with seven years of his "talents," feels like he deserves better than that. Being surrounded all his life by yes-men and apologists who have always told him what he wanted to hear, and never taught him that loyalty is, indeed, a two-way street, James thinks he should be appreciated. And when the fans in Cleveland show him ridicule in lieu of respect it bothers him.

And he wasn't strong enough, as a man, to face it.