First off, I think LeBron will be hoisting the Larry O'Brien Trophy in about three weeks. I don't like it any more than most of you, but things certainly seem to be trending in that direction. Chicago simply doesn't have the offensive firepower against Miami's smothering team defense, one of the best in the Association. The Bulls will need to win a game in Miami and the chances of them doing that aren't particularly good. I wouldn't be shocked if this series was over in five games, actually.

Moreover, I don't think either Western Conference finalist will beat the Heat in a potential Finals series. Miami will have home-court against either the Mavericks or the Thunder. Dallas doesn't have that second prime-time player- it's basically Dirk and a supporting cast of solid but limited role players. Oklahoma City does, but the Thunder is very young and there's a whiff of dysfunction in the on-court relationship between Russell Westbrook and Kevin Durant. I just don't see either team beating Miami, although Dallas would have a fighting chance at least.

I don't think Miami is a complete team. The Heaters are a turnstile at the point guard position and are as deep as a puddle of piss. But in today's watered-down NBA you don't need to have a complete team to win it all. Just look at the Lake Show, who won the last two Championships with an embalmed point guard and a one-man bench. You just need two superstars, a good defensive scheme and a couple of other guys who can do dirty work- and the Heat have all of that.

I think LeBron's Game Three line is exactly what the Heat should want out of him. He took thirteen shots (making six), launched only two three-pointers, scored 22 points, dished out ten assists, pulled down six rebounds, added two steals and two blocks and made all nine of his free-throw attempts. That line is Pippen-esque, which is appropriate because essentially LeBron is the Scottie Pippen of the Miami team (which, believe it or not, is not an insult.) He rebounds, distributes, attacks in transition, operates as his team's best perimeter defender and can pick his spots to take over. He's really the perfect second man because he does so many things so well. You don't necessarily want him as your offensive gravy train because a.) Carrying a team offensively takes away from the other facets of his game and b.) He doesn't have the go-to offensive move to be consistently effective against the elite defenses in high-pressure games.

I don't think LeBron is a "choker," a label that has been applied to him at times in the past. I saw him step up far too many times in far too many big games as a Cavalier to buy into that stuff. He performed poorly in big games too, notably in the 2007 Finals and in the first two games of the '08 East Semifinals against Boston, when he shot 8-of-42 and committed seventeen turnovers. But he didn't choke against the Spurs or the Celtics- he just didn't play well, which goes back to his lack of a go-to offensive move against elite defensive opponents.

Also, I think calling him a "choker" lets him off the hook for his el-foldo in Game Five of last year's series against Boston. He didn't choke that night. He quit, which is far worse.

I think LeBron would have been a fool to not take his talents elsewhere. He had a great opportunity in Miami, better than he had here. "Loyalty" shouldn't have been a factor. Loyalty is a sham concept in sports. When LeBron is 35 with busted knees and hops no better than mine, the same fans who demanded loyalty out of him at 25 would have been screaming, *"Get rid of his ass!"* He made the right move. But the move was never the issue, at least not with me.

I think if LeBron simply would have given an honest effort for two more games, two more weeks, whatever, my opinion of him would be 100 percent different. I'm aware, of course, what my opinion of LeBron means in the grand scheme.

I don't think LeBron "gave" us anything. You hear that sometimes from people getting his back against butt-hurt Cleveland fans: *"He gave you seven great years!"* Well, no, actually, he didn't. He was a hired gun, a mercenary who by the grace of bad basketball and ping-pong balls wound up here instead of Denver or Detroit. He wasn't working for charity. He was a highly paid

professional performing a service. He performed it very well, for the most part. But loyalty is a two-way street. We fans have a player's loyalty until he finds a better opportunity elsewhere, and that's the way it should be. A player has our loyalty until he stops performing, stops trying (in LeBron's case) or bolts (also in LeBron's case) and that's the way it should be.

I think it's easy, including for me, to forget the good things that happened while LeBron was here. There's no question he almost single-handedly turned around a woebegone franchise, taking the Cavaliers to places they'd never been before- and may never get back to again. He's the best player in the history of Cavalier basketball and it isn't even close. For six years plus he accomplished just about everything we could have asked out of a player (short of learning a post game, of course.) He created some unbelievable memories- games, shots, plays we'll never forget.

I don't think LeBron can be held responsible for most of the bad things that happened here- not even close. He didn't choose to come to a terrible, rudderless organization that could think of no better plan than to give a kid not even old enough to drink the powers of a demigod. (Think an organization like the Lakers would have handled LeBron the way the Cavaliers did? Don't think so.) He didn't choose to draft Luke Jackson, allow Carlos Boozer out of his contract or trade a lottery pick for Jiri Welsch. Yeah, he probably signed off on the desperation roster-churning that marked the last few years of his stay, but it was a rear-guard action by then anyway. Cleveland blew its chance to build a championship team around LeBron in 2004 and 2005, not 2008 and 2009. And that most certainly was not his fault.

At the same time I don't think last season's Game Five should ever be left out when it comes time to tally up LeBron's "legacy." I think his display against Boston should be remembered and should be taken into account- although I'm not optimistic it will be. Look, most of us have days where we don't give 100 percent to the job. I've had those days. But those days have consequences for those of us that indulge in them, and the same should go for LeBron. He quit that night, sold out his teammates and the city in which he played- not to mention the man signing his checks- and that should be remembered for as long as we're discussing LeBron James and the game of basketball.

Still, I think I'd like to cheer LeBron again, honestly. For all the forced distance he created between himself and this area- give him credit, he never pretended to be Bernie Kosar- he's still a local kid. He did spectacular things in a Wine & Gold uniform. He trashed us at the end of his tenure, but we're not talking about Jeffrey Dahmer here. We've all done stupid things. I'd like to see the fences mended. I'd like to hear LeBron say something along the lines of: *"Look, I'm not sorry I left. Nor should I be. I'm sorry for the way I handled it at the end. I was selfish and*

immature. I did it the wrong way. I should have done it differently."
Not the Clinton-esque "mistakes were made" stuff we've heard already. I'd like to see LeBron man up and admit he did it wrong at the end. At some point LeBron's #23 should be in the rafters at the Q and I would hope he could be there to see it.

I don't think I'm optimistic about that prospect, however.