Being a Cleveland Cavaliers fan during their most recent campaign was a trying endeavor. Often times, it took effort. This is something that should be fun and should never be seen as a chore. Spending an evening watching your favorite team play (notice I did not say “compete”) should be used as an escape.

Quite frankly, the 2010-2011 season for the Cavaliers fans was a disaster. Much has been written about the events that transpired in the summer of 2010. When related to the Cavaliers’ season, it is usually done so in a way that takes one player out of the equation and props him up on a pedestal. One truth that is never discussed is what led to the Cavaliers only winning 19 games last season and losing a record 26 games in a row. It was not simply the subtraction of LeBron James. Last season’s abomination took years to create. It did not happen on July 8, 2010 when LeBron James uttered his regrettable “South Beach” death-blow.

Let’s rewind all the way back to 2003. The Cavaliers landed the first overall pick in the draft and selected LeBron James. This is because the previous year’s Cavaliers team was terrible. Reaching the playoffs is not a realistic goal for a team that won 17 games in the previous year. Jim Paxson, Gordon Gund and Paul Silas had a pretty bad team that had the addition of an 18 year old rookie who had a lot to learn about the game of basketball. The good news is that Cleveland was in the NBA Draft Lottery. The bad news is that the General Manager Jim Paxson used that selection on Luke Jackson.

The following season was an improvement for the Cavaliers. Despite the loss of Carlos Boozer,

which was clearly the ownership group's fault, the Cavaliers had made a significant step in the right direction. Additionally, Luke Jackson, the first round pick for Cleveland was not contributing. LeBron James had improved his game and Cleveland almost made the playoffs.

NBA teams that almost make the playoffs typically have a difficult time building through the draft. This is even more of a true statement for teams that make the playoffs but are not true contenders. This is where the 2005-2006 Cleveland Cavaliers come into play. Because of a bad trade made in 1997, Cleveland did not have a first round selection in the 2005 draft. Cleveland's pick turned out to be the tenth overall and Charlotte selected Sean May. Obviously, Sean May on that Cavaliers team would not have resulted in Cleveland beating Detroit in the conference semi-finals. Having said that, one has to wonder how things would have been different if Jim Paxson did not waste a pick on Luke Jackson and had Wayne Embry not traded the 2005 first round pick for Tony Dumas and Wesley Person.

From 2006 and onward, LeBron James was simply too good. Cleveland were true contenders. The fact that they only made it to the Finals once and did not win a game in that span does not mean that had they were not in the picture. Once again, the biggest hurdle in building around LeBron James in a small market is that he was simply too good and the previous front office made it very difficult for Danny Ferry to build a long-term winner around James in Cleveland.

Cleveland had two first round selections in 2007 and traded both of them. The selections were Rudy Fernandez and Jared Dudley. Once again, the Cavaliers were already a formidable playoff team at this point despite the holes in the roster. A talent as great as LeBron James covers up those vulnerabilities, gets the team out of the lottery and in a position to fill square pegs with round holes.

The Cavaliers front office was put in a position where they had to make moves that were short-term solutions. The lack of first round draft picks, bad selections with the few lottery picks that they did have and an aging team built around a superstar cemented Cleveland's fate to be a poor team in 2011. The easy storyline is that LeBron James left and the Cavs suddenly won forty-two less games than they did with him. The truth is that there were plenty of factors that led to the Cavaliers having the second-worst record in the league. It is something that was bound to happen as a result of at least seven years of mismanaged rosters, bad decisions and being in a less-than desirable market for young NBA stars. The poor showing by the Cavaliers required bad decisions by Wayne Embry, Jim Paxson, Gordon Gund, Dan Gilbert and Danny Ferry. It is not fair to point to one of those men and place blame on his shoulders.

Unfortunately, the easy storyline is the one that gets passed around as if it were the truth. The damaging effect is that the nineteen win season is used as a justification for the decision LeBron James made (including “The Decision”). These are not black and white issues and it saddens me when writers point to a lackluster season as a means for justification.

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