As another mostly lost Cleveland Cavaliers season comes to a close, I still can't shake the thought that it will be at least another 5 years, minimum, before the Cavs become really competitive and hence interesting again. And that's being aggressive about it. When a NBA team falls off the map, it's usually a 10-year rebuild, just ask Chicago once they finally lost Michael Jordan.

The real problem with NBA history in this regard is that it is so maddeningly consistent. For reasons which the NBA has yet to fully address, the sport with the least number of players is paradoxically the hardest sport for a franchise to turn itself around. Blame it on a combination of a playoff system that's too large, a salary cap that's too exception-ridden and an abiding bias by players against cold weather cities, among other things.

That's why, ultimately, fans still seethe about LeBron James. Had he not abandoned the Cavs, Dan Gilbert and the team he owns and loves would still be sitting in high cotton. Games would still be selling out and nobody would have to endure a game in which the locals field a team of D league refugees unless it was simply to rest the starters at the end of the regular season for another push to another championship.

James is likely to remain the mostly simplistically complex athlete of modern times. Appearing childlike so often, James can veer into business mogul mode when he deems it necessary and then ascribe "just business" motives to his sometimes confounding moves or ideas. He likes to play the big shot but behind the facade is just a kid playing dress up.

At this point we've all written enough James screeds to have become rather bored by the topic. But just as boring are the consistently occasional in depth pieces that attempts to paint James

as mostly misunderstood, a kind of "let's set the record straight" counterpoint to the local and national venom James has otherwise engendered since he skipped out on the Cavs prematurely. These pieces tend to infuriate the natives more than mollify them.

It was in that vein and with that attitude anyway that I viewed Lee Jenkins' latest piece on James in this week's Sports Illustrated. James and his handlers have a vested interest in trying to remake the James brand and have had more than enough willing proxies in the media. Think Brian Winthorst as an example.

Yet I couldn't help thinking as I made my way through it that this time the counterpoint worked, that James deserves a chance to grow up and add shade, nuance and context to a legacy that's far from completed. Jenkins makes a compelling case, mostly by letting James be James, the man-child in full recognition that he is and remains a man-child.

What struck me most is how self-aware James really can be. Most professional are not consumed by their failures, recognizing that failure is inevitable. You can't make 100% of every shot taken. You can't catch every ball thrown your way. You're not going to hit the baseball every time. But James is a different breed. He doesn't strive for perfection but he is consumed by his failures.

If he's to be believed, James sat secluded in Florida following the loss to the Dallas Mavericks last year paralyzed by the loss in the finals and his own disappearing act. He let himself down because, he says, he let his teammates down. Rhetoric, perhaps, but the context of his life suggest otherwise.

Indeed, every bit of regret James seems to harbor about everything stems from the feeling that he is letting others down. A psychologist could get wealthy quickly just on James but you need not have even stayed at a Holiday Inn Express last night to understand that James, raised by a single mother with her own issues, has longed to be part of a collective.

Humans, like dogs, are pack animals. A guy like James may want to be at the top of the pecking order within his pack but it's clear that James doesn't desire a singular existence outside of it.

The other fascinating aspect to the article is how needy James really is. He wants to be liked and accepted and doesn't thrive in an environment when he's not. It's likely part of that same pack psychology that he carries with him.

James talks very little about how he left Cleveland, perhaps because Jenkins chose not to dwell on it or even ask about it. But it's not much of a leap to believe that James isn't happy about his noisy exit. He's certainly not happy with the aftermath either. People were angry with him and he in turn was angry with them. He tried to feed off the anger last season, to embrace the role of villain he thrust upon himself and instead was swallowed up by it. He didn't like what he had become, not just in Dallas but in his remaining years in Cleveland, and has now started the slow process of returning to the guy he always thought he was—happy, grateful, lucky.

In some ways the story of James parallels that of Tiger Woods, maybe in most ways.

James was never in a scandal but the outcome of his missteps were every bit as damaging to him as the outcome of Woods' self-inflicted problems were on Woods. What's fascinating about both has been the aftermath.

Despite repeated public pledges to be a better person, Woods remains mostly a public douche. Nothing much about his demeanor has changed. He remains cold and aloof to a fan base that wishes he were neither. He remains in his own controlled environment ever cautious about letting anyone see that there's a human heart beating behind that impenetrable exterior. If Woods has any real friends in life it would be a surprise.

James seemed to initially run down the same path as Woods in response to his self-created flame out. But he has since recognized that it's not only no way to live but it's counterproductive to performing at a high level.

Every time Woods goes into crisis mode he changes his swing. He finds a new coach and goes on a quixotic search for a secret that will somehow improve on a record that no one outside of Jack Nicklaus has ever achieved anyway.

It's the stuff of paranoia, really, and makes Woods appear all that much more strange. He is.

When James hits crisis mode, which in his world has been the perennial flame out in the NBA finals, he doesn't try to reinvent himself so much as improve on the shortcomings that have held him back. It's the more human response which is why James is ultimately the far more sympathetic figure.

James may have a public relations motive for wanting the world to see that he's a work in progress but that's OK. He is a work in progress and an adoring fan base, wherever it may be located at the moment, is always willing to give him that space.

James' story, in the context told, is more human, which makes him more forgivable. The story's real charm, though, is simply that James, for all his fame and wealth and accomplishments, suffers like anyone else. It may not yet be time to forgive but it's probably time for perspective.