As we try to keep our mind on our own goals, we know there are plans for the future, but certainly not the immediate future. Positively consumed by the events of the present day, fans of the Cleveland Cavaliers and even casual observers around Northeast Ohio cannot look past these NBA Finals. For some, it's a crusade to never let go of the bitter, but for many it's a time to move forward. Then again, it might just be about watching some quality basketball before the Association takes its summer hiatus.

It doesn't matter why the people watch, nor their motives for caring, but the NBA got a desirable match up. Whether it's about a city, an individual, or an actual team; people are going to watch, they're going to react. The talking heads at ESPN will frustrate the savvy fan, and perhaps brainwash the less knowledgeable observer of the game with knee-jerk reactions and melodramatic analysis. All of the craziness is reserved for the fans, the media, and that special demographic of talk radio and its callers; basically, the hype only applies to the people who don't matter.

The Heat and Thunder just have to worry about playing 48 minutes of quality basketball every night until one of the teams has won four games. In a way, that's the bottom line, even if it isn't necessarily the juiciest story to be told, especially with these two teams that are just action-packed with back stories. We find that the fans are empowered as part of the story, hence their viewpoint is suddenly relevant if not paramount. So, we're asking three questions about this much anticipated series. River Burns will be addressing the hyped point of view, while Demetri Inembolidis is the prevailing cooler mind, offering truth from a basketball perspective. *(Demetri's answers appear in italics)*

So, what headlines this series that we're about to see?
River says: I don't think it matters whether you're talking about the fans or the stars of the show; it's about #6 for the Miami Heat. Depending on what region we're in, and what our genuine wishes may be, it's all in how you phrase it. I can't generalize the entire fan base here because it is a somewhat split demographic, even if you leave out the Day 1 apologists, but the sentiment ranges from "C'mon, Keep on Failing" to "Will He Just Do It Already, So We Can Stop Talking About It".

Personally, I choose apathy. It's already nerve-racking enough to go at being a fan with pure intentions, and in the case of Cleveland, waiting for the other shoe to swiftly drop doom in the face of any optimism we foolishly possess. Rooting for our enemies to fail, while very rewarding when it pays off, just makes us gluttons for misery. It's not the route I'd take, but rooting for Oklahoma City might be the better option than rooting against the Heat, if only because it's an approach that will help some people sleep at night.

In a vaccuum, the scorned Cleveland fans should hold the Thunder in high regard for a number of reasons. First off, there's Kevin Durant, who just seems to do all of the right things all of the time, not a bad attribute for one of the game's best players. In Oklahoma City, they maintain that small market feel, which makes us believe good things are possible during the cold winters on the shores of Lake Erie. In a small market, you have to count on the draft to build, and hope for loyalty to maintain your core. At the present time, Durant's commitment to the Thunder makes him a hero of sorts in our part of the NBA world. That said, we know that loyalty is quite likely going to be the exception more often than the rule.

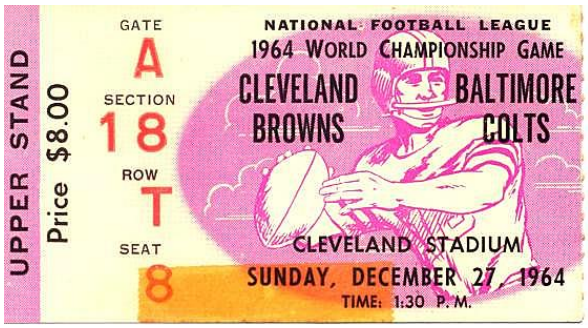
Demetri says: This is the first finals match up in many years where there is not a clear favorite

to win it all. Although there have been "upsets" in the recent history of the finals, most of the time the experts, talking heads and fans alike had an idea of which team would take home the trophy. This year's finals are completely up in the air and will probably come down to which team gets more lucky bounces, home court and which team's players come up big when it matters the most.

How do Cleveland and Seattle factor into a Championship Series between Miami and Oklahoma City?

River says: If the Thunder were just any other team in the Western Conference, it would be different, but we don't exist in a vacuum. We exist in a world where the Thunder's success leaves a fan base and a city in the dust. Of course, this Browns fan is biased, but no fan should have to watch their team win a Championship for some other city, certainly not so soon after the melancholy ending to the SuperSonics existence. Seattle isn't going to offer sympathy to a fan base who lost a single player, so at least the Heat have that going for them.

Cleveland's role, on the other hand, might be a lot more minimal these days. A year ago, the Mavericks were a no-brainer to most of us. Dirk Nowitski practically earned himself a key to the city (of Cleveland), and we were simply grateful that Mark Cuban had built an organization that could conquer evil. That may sound extreme, but we were angry, and rational thought just wasn't our highest priority. Avoiding the agony of it happening right away was denying the universe its opportunity to pour salt in the wound. There is no way we can express that much gratitude towards Kevin Durant and the gang, and do we really wish our pain of watching the Raven succeed on the Pacific Northwest?



Demetri says: No matter who wins this series, it will hurt Cleveland immensely when considering the number 1964. If the Thunder win it, it will be yet another new team to win so quickly after adopting their new home. To be in a market for four years and to do something the Cavs haven't been able to do in over forty would be difficult to stomach. If the Heat win, it will be painful to watch the summer of 2010 pay dividends for LeBron James, Dwyane Wade, Chris Bosh, Pat Riley and that smug smile of his.

Well, when it's all said and done, who wins?
River says: The fans win; all of them do. If you want the Thunder to win, that's great. If you want the Heat to win, I question your motives, but to each his won. If your interest is purely spite, as mine was for the Dallas series last year, and you don't see the desired result, then at least it's over. I don't know if that gives Seattle closure, but I'm pretty sure it might be a decent thing for Cleveland. Maybe some of us will let it go after we stop hoping it never happens for him.

Then again, over it or not, hope springs eternal that the grass is never greener on the other side for those that walk away. Of course, it was just about walking away, it would be one thing, but we were thrown under the bus. Maybe I'm the fool to suggest the water under the bridge attitude. Maybe I'm giving the Thunder too much of the business for their departure from Seattle. Maybe, the intrigue of these NBA Finals has tricked me into caring about something I insisted on not caring about.

Demetri says: My gut instinct is that the Heat win because LeBron James is playing out of his mind. The old adage goes that whichever team has the best player typically wins. Having said that, the Thunder probably have more talent than the Heat and have a deeper roster due to the nature of the way their team was constructed. The Heat and Thunder have a three-headed monster, but Oklahoma City has guys like Serge Ibaka, Thabo Sefelosha and Derrick Fisher to round out the roster.

Overall, the Heat have been playing at a statistical higher level than the Thunder in the postseason. A telling statistic is opponent field goal percentage and the Heat are significantly better with 42.4% compared 43.4% for the Thunder. Conversely, the Thunder are shooting 46.9% compared to Miami's 45.9%. Neither team is rebounding the ball particularly well in the playoffs. Miami has a +0.7 rebounding differential compared to Oklahoma City who is being out-rebounded by 0.2 boards per game.

Whichever team can defend better, be more efficient offensively, rebound, limit offensive rebounds and get some lucky bounces should win the series. Whoever that team may be will probably need six or seven games to do so.

We all seem to agree that it's going to take six or seven games to settle this one, and emotions will be high, both on and off the court. On one side, you have anticipation, high expectations, and perhaps relief. On the other side, anticipation also exists, but is it possible that one team is too young to understand the pressure, hence it won't be a factor? Both sides are dealing with outside audiences hoping that karma bites them, but again, one side feels the pressure of those circumstances a lot more than the other. One result will have us anticipating these same characters on this same stage next June, while the other result will leave us to wonder how much the earth is going to quake on South Beach.

Either way, get your popcorn ready because the show begins tonight on ABC.