Numerous national pundits have been blaring from the rooftops their belief that Hughes is a terrible fit with LeBron James. Their games are too redundant, they say. They're both slashers, LeBron needs a shooter to jack up his kickout passes. Those purported experts apparently don't know the Cavs from a pina colada. Wednesday night is proof why. Papa Cass checks in with his latest.

Visit the Papa Cass weblog at http://papacass.blogspot.com/

Admit it.

When Larry Hughes went hobbling off the floor in the third quarter of Wednesday's Cavaliers season opener, you got a sick feeling in your stomach.

You had instant visions of a LeCharles Bentley season-dead-before-it-even-lived fate for the Cavs.

Given Hughes' injury history, you'd be excused for feeling that way. Because prior to that limp to the locker room (later diagnosed as a case of leg cramps), Hughes showed why he is so valuable to the Cavs, and so integral to their chances of contending this season.

Numerous national pundits, and a few unidentified, alleged "scouts," have been blaring from the rooftops their belief that Hughes is a terrible fit with LeBron James.

Their games are too redundant, they say. They're both slashers, LeBron needs a shooter to jack up his kickout passes.

Those purported experts apparently don't know the Cavs from a pina colada. Wednesday night is proof why.

While LeBron struggled against a Wizards defense hellbent on revenge for last spring's playoff loss, Hughes was free to roam, create and shoot, and became a poor man's LeBron.

Locked in on the rim all night, Hughes scored a team-high 27 points, one more than LeBron. While he was at it, his defense helped keep Gilbert Arenas in check at the other end of the floor.

Hughes stated his case with the verve of a high-priced defense attorney. He belongs on this team because it's virtually impossible to stop both he and LeBron simultaneously.

Wednesday was the matchup headache Danny Ferry must have envisioned when he forked over $60 million of owner Dan Gilbert's money to acquire Hughes in the summer of 2005.

That's why we suck in our breath every time the rail-thin Hughes darts through traffic, draws contact or gets his foot stepped on. Without Hughes, the Cavs are a playoff team, nothing more. And LeBron has to work overtime just to ensure that much.

With Hughes, the Cavs are a dynamic team capable of stunning the best in the East, and maybe even a few from the West.

That's what made your heart thump last night. That's the subject that even the papers dodged Thursday morning. The notion that another major Hughes injury would leave us with another season of what-might-have-been.

And that's a phrase that is just way too common around these parts.