This whole Lebron James saga which played out live on national TV and the internet the past couple of weeks was an eerie reminder of the whole Manny Ramirez saga which in its own way played out on TV back in 2000. While ESPN may not have been as big then as it is today and the internet was still very much in its infancy, similarities exist between the exit of James and Ramirez from their Cleveland franchises and what the Indians ultimately became and what the Cavaliers may ultimately become.

The NBA Summer of 2010 has been billed as the ultimate free agent party with the presence of so many stars and big names being available, something not seen in a long time (if ever) and may never be seen again.

But, like this year in the NBA, we also saw a lot of the same hype a little less than ten years ago with Major League Baseball free agency after the 2000 season. A free agent period that for the first time really in sports history was played out to an extreme through the media and TV with Scott Boras, Alex Rodriguez, and the Texas Rangers, as well as Manny Ramirez, Jeff Moorad, the Cleveland Indians, and Boston Red Sox.

That 2000 offseason in MLB may go down as the biggest free agent spending spree (frenzy) ever. Yes, spending since then has still been ridiculous, but the crazy spending these days is done mostly by the Yankees. Back then you had a wide variety of teams involved in the hysteria, and when you consider the "then" dollars spent and who it was spent on and for how long, wow, it will be hard to top those huge, bloated deals.

For a trip down memory lane, here are the top ten free agent contracts signed that offseason and who it was signed with:

Alex Rodriguez: 10 years, $252M (Rangers)
Manny Ramirez: 8 years, $160M (Red Sox)
Mike Hampton: 8 years, $121M (Rockies)
Mike Mussina: 6 years, $88.5M (Yankees)

Darren Driefort: 5 years, $55M (Dodgers)
Denny Neagle: 5 years, $51.5M (Rockies)
Kevin Appier: 4 years, $42M (Mets)
Charles Johnson: 5 years, $35M (Marlins)
David Segui: 4 years, $28M (Orioles)
Todd Hundley: 4 years, $23.5M (Cubs)

In all but two of these deals (Mussina, Ramirez) it ended badly for the organization that signed the player. Either the player bombed or did not come close to living up to the value of the contact (who really does?), or in the case of the Rangers they could no longer afford Rodriguez and shipped him off to the Yankees a few years later.

So where is the Cavaliers-Indians connection here?

If anyone can recall, Ramirez's agent at the time was Jeff Moorad. He took the negotiations public through ESPN cameras and their program "Outside the Lines". From October to December in 2000, Moorad allowed ESPN cameras to catch every available detail on film of the negotiation process, much of which was shown in the ESPN special (click here to view a transcript of the show). While that show was not broadcast live like the LeBron James sendoff, the show is painfully similar as you see the negotiation process and ultimate decision to leave made by Ramirez caught on TV.

It was something - in a roundabout way - that was very similar to this whole LeBron James saga. While Ramirez did not publicly humiliate Cleveland by dragging his decision out onto national TV and ultimately left for more money, the way it all transpired is very scary with how it compares to how things played out for the Cavaliers up until last week.

Consider where the Indians were after the 2000 season for a second. They were still in the midst of their 455 sellout streak (a streak which came to an end two games into the 2001 season), they had made five straight trips to the postseason from 1995-1999 and just missed by one game after the 2000 season, they had made two World Series appearances during that time, they were one of the top five franchises in the game during that period, and they were a perennial title contender.

In the same vein, consider where the Cavaliers were at the end of the 2010 season just two months ago. They were in the midst of their best attendance run (by far) in franchise history, they had made five straight trips to the postseason from 2006-2010, they made one NBA Finals appearance, they were one of the top five franchises in the NBA, and they were a perennial title contender.

Pretty scary, huh?

If you are Cavaliers owner Dan Gilbert, you better be.

The exodus of a star player is always tough to swallow, and as a result the initial reaction from fans is to rationalize it in their mind that they and the team will be alright, and as fans we tend to find ways where we can prove everyone wrong and win without that player that has spurned us. I mean, we are Clevelanders, we are getting used to this kind of treatment.

When Ramirez left the Indians, owner Larry Dolan promised to continue to commit to a winner and went on a spending craze where he inflated payroll almost $20 million higher than it ever had been in franchise history and brought in guys like Juan Gonzalez, Ellis Burks, and others to help the team. He put together the only $90M+ payroll in franchise history that 2001season, and it is still the highest payroll in team history by almost $12 million.

Unfortunately, while the Indians won the AL Central and made the playoffs that year, they showed their age and reality had begun to settle in. The team didn't even sellout half of their games that year, and with the loss of revenues and an aging roster, the Indians realized the run was over and made the hard decision within a year to tear it all down and rebuild.

Could we potentially see the same from the Cavaliers?

It's possible.

This by no means is to imply that Dan Gilbert is any worse or better than Larry Dolan. It is just to show the similarity of the situation at hand between what is happening to the Cavaliers now and what may happen versus what happened to the Indians ten years ago and what did happen.

Gilbert is full of piss and vinegar and won't go down without a fight, and he certainly has the cash flow and a much more friendly NBA salary system on his side. He also has 10,000 or so season ticketholders to appease for the upcoming season. So, you can bet that the Cavaliers will go out and try and trade for a couple of high profile players before the end of this summer.

Unfortunately, though, the high profile players they get will likely be those who have horrible contracts or that are in or nearing the twilight of their career. They aren't going to get any big time frontline All Star type that is going to fill the shoes of LeBron James.

They may find a one-year stop gap reclamation project (Tracy McGrady, Gilbert Arenas?) to put a band aid on the situation like the Indians did with Juan Gonzalez for Ramirez, but in the end this team is going to need more than a few band aids to fix themselves. More like major surgery to gut the roster and start anew with young players and lots of draft picks to get back to where they ultimately want to be: a championship contender.

Staying the course and just adding to the roster will very likely only produce Cavaliers teams that we saw under Mike Fratello in the 90s, teams that were competitive, but never really a title contender and seemingly just spinning their wheels every year. The cold hard reality in the NBA is that for most teams you have to be bad before you can get better. Where do you think the nucleus for teams like the Spurs, Magic, Thunder, Cavs (before James departed) and so on came from to make them into what they are today? The draft. And not just the draft, but drafting high.

Right now with the Cavaliers everyone wants to be “cavalier” in their own mind because they are still upset over "the betrayal" and want to prove to James and to everyone else we can win without him. But over the course of the upcoming season I think reality will set in, and after a 40-45 win season which may get them a seven or eight seed and quick playoff exit (to the Heat? ugh), reality may set in with Cavaliers owner Dan Gilbert to tear it down and rebuild it after next season. The same realization that the Indians came to after 2001.

The similarities between the two situations with James and Ramirez departing are pretty scary indeed.

Follow Tony and the Indians Prospect Insider on Twitter @tlastoria . His new book the 2010 Cleveland Indians Top 100 Prospects & More is also available for purchase on Amazon.com or his site .