Two stories broke this week. One local, one national. On the local front, it turns out that Andy Varejao doesn't want to play for the Cavs anymore and feels disrespected by how Danny Ferry and the teams front office have treated him. In national news, the NFL lost one of it's most exciting defensive players when Shawn Taylor was shot in the leg and killed by an intruder. Erik Cassano hits on both of these stories in his latest excellent read for us. Also, check the credits page of the SI Cleveland Collection Issue, in which Erik contributed too ...

Two stories broke this week, one local, one national.

The local story was kind of troubling. Anderson Varejao doesn't want to play for the Cavs anymore. He thinks Danny Ferry hasn't acted in good faith during the way-too-long negotiating process that probably reached an impasse at about the time Ferry tried to perform an end-around and negotiate with Varejao directly during a trip to Brazil last month.

Worse yet, according to ESPN.com NBA writer and noted Cavs skeptic Chad Ford, LeBron James views this as a step backward. Consider the source -- Ford's was an unnamed person "close to LeBron ," and it sometimes seems like the ESPN trio of Ford, Marc Stein and Ric Bucher go out of their way to paint the Cavs in a negative light -- but when the scuttlebutt is that your superstar is growing increasingly unhappy with the lack of improvement in the roster around him, it's something worth paying attention to.

Anyone who read that story before going to bed on Monday, as I did, could be excused for wondering if 2008 was going to be 12 months of payback for what has been a pretty darn good 2007 for Cleveland sports.

Then we got up, checked the e-mail, turned on the TV, whatever it is you do while the a.m. coffee is brewing, and the public pout-fest of Varejao, the breach of protocol by Ferry, even the gathering impatience of
LeBron
, all took a back seat. More than that -- anyone with a heart and soul should have felt like a first-rate dope for spending one second worrying about fallout from the Varejao
contract saga.

Redskins safety Sean Taylor had died. At some point while you were snug in your bed overnight, resting up for just another routine weekday, a 24-year-old man with magnificent athletic talent, an 18-month-old daughter, a future wife and every reason in the world to live expired. He bled to death because a bullet from an intruder's gun hit him in the femoral artery.

Taylor hung on for a little more than 24 hours after the now-murderer entered his house and shot him in the leg. But the loss of blood was too much for even his well-conditioned body to overcome.

Taylor's death should shed light on an aspect of professional sports that has become almost an accepted fact of life. Young athletes too often can't or won't sever the ties to past lifestyles once they reach the money-laden pinnacle of their profession. Instead of fame and fortune creating distance between a professional athlete and trouble, in many ways it compounds problems.

Professional sports teams and leagues put their young players through the paces with rookie symposiums, classes and mentoring programs. They try to tell guys like Taylor that they will be targeted for their fame and wealth, that if they hang out at nightclubs festooned with gold and diamonds, beautiful girls hanging on their arms, driving an expensive SUV, trouble will find them. If they go around brandishing guns to settle disputes, as Taylor allegedly did two years ago, trouble will find them.

But once the classes end, it's up to the player to stay out of trouble. They're grown men, after all, and are responsible for their own welfare. Some apparently just don't fully realize what that means.

It means if you fancied yourself a gun-toting thug in college, you have to abandon that lifestyle because your employer has invested millions of dollars in your ability

to keep yourself safe. If you fancy yourself a motorcycle daredevil, like Kellen Winslow and Ben Roethlisberger did, you have to give up a potentially-dangerous hobby because if you crash and kill yourself, you could set your team back years on the field.

By all accounts, Taylor had come to the realization that he needed to change his ways. Some attribute it to the birth of his daughter. Some attribute it to a reality check Taylor received during his 2006 armed assault trial, stemming from a 2005 incident in which Taylor allegedly brandished a firearm at a person over two reportedly-stolen all-terrain vehicles. Whatever the reason, interviews with Clinton Portis
and other Redskin teammates since his death painted a picture of a new, less volatile Taylor with a
newfound
commitment to being a family man.

Unfortunately, even if you're ready to let go of a self-destructive lifestyle, sometimes the lifestyle isn't ready to let go of you.

About a week before Taylor was murdered, an intruder reportedly broke into his house, rifled through his belongings and left a strategically-placed kitchen knife on his bed pillow. Authorities haven't said as much yet, but one would have to strongly consider the possibility that the incident is tied to Taylor's death.

Taylor apparently knew he was in danger. News reports said that when he heard his soon-to-be murderer enter the house, he grabbed a machete that he kept near the bed for protection and closed the door to the room where he, girlfriend Jackie Garcia and their daughter were sleeping. After Garcia had taken the baby and hid herself under the covers of the bed, the intruder reportedly broke down the door to the room and shot Taylor.

In other words: This almost certainly wasn't a random burglary. If that story, as relayed to authorities by Garcia, is true, the person who broke into Taylor's house did what they came to do -- injure or kill him. Burglars interested in material loot generally try to stay away from people when committing a crime.

Taylor is now a statistic, a cautionary tale about the dangers of extreme wealth combined with a volatile lifestyle. It's a lesson too few professional athletes learn, and a lesson some learn too late.

In a world where money reigns supreme and contract squabbles burn bridges, everybody in professional sports can learn a lesson from Taylor, both in life and in death. It's not just about the money, it's about how you handle yourself once you have money. Once you get drawn in to a volatile, sometimes-violent lifestyle, stepping out of that lifestyle can be anywhere from excruciatingly difficult to nearly impossible.

As with any untimely death, the real tragedy here isn't necessarily the loss of Sean Taylor. His mortal suffering is over. It's the life he left behind, the daughter who will never know her father, the family that will never be.