1. LeBron takes his talents away from Cleveland

July 8

We'll likely never have a full, clear picture of why LeBron James decided that he was better off leaving the Cavaliers for the Miami Heat this summer.

Maybe he truly felt that he could never win a title here. Maybe he was starstruck by the idea of forming a mega-team with Dwyane Wade and Chris Bosh. Maybe he needed the buffer from criticism that two other superstars could provide. Maybe he didn't get along with Dan Gilbert. Maybe he resented playing in an unglamorous Rust Belt town while other superstars got to hold court amid palm trees, swimming pools and movie stars.

Maybe he did it after months of careful consideration. Maybe he did it on a whim. Maybe he did it purely for his own reasons. Maybe he was manipulated into it by Wade and Pat Riley.

We can speculate. The full truth will probably go to the grave with LeBron.

What we do know is that, as much as LeBron's 2003 arrival was a watershed for the Cavs and basketball in Cleveland, his departure was another watershed, and the effects could last for far longer than the seven years LeBron spent in wine and gold.

The Cavs are struggling through an abysmal Year One post-LeBron. Their roster is a doughnut -- a grab-bag of complementary pieces with no central figure. The franchise's central figure is now owner Dan Gilbert, who is off to a shaky start in the post-LeBron era -- beginning with an angry letter fired off to the media on the night of LeBron's defection, and continuing with a team that is quickly becoming a runaway freight train of failure.

LeBron might not have the heart of a champion, at least in the Michael Jordan sense. But he's an extremely good basketball player, and losing him was devastating for professional basketball in Cleveland, which is now background noise once again.

The 2011 NBA Draft might offer little in the way of building blocks, as many of the top underclassmen could opt to stay in school for another year while the NBA's impending labor drama plays out. Meaning the Cavs might not even be able to begin rebuilding in any kind of earnest until the 2012 draft.

In between, there will be a lot of losing, and a lot of watching LeBron win. And if any of us remembers Art Modell hoisting the Vince Lombardi Trophy 10 years ago, we know what the final insult could be.