

## “The King’s” Rein is Over

Sports Opinion Article for *The DePauw*

“Not two. . . Not Three. . . Not Four. . .” Boasted LeBron James seven short years ago. This of course answering how many championships he would bring to Miami after being part of the culmination of the infamous Big 3 consisting of himself, Dwyane Wade, and Chris Bosh.

However, the then distinct confidence and conviction of his tone would undoubtedly possess a hint of palpable uncertainty in present day. Three championships (out of 8 appearances), three coaches, and a return to his hometown later, LeBron James finds himself at a crossroad in his career with an overarching question: Have we seen “The King’s” final title? The recent departure of his trusted, and insanely talented, sidekick commonly referred to as “Uncle Drew” is just one of many factors contributing to the increasingly unavoidable truth that LeBron James is indeed finished winning titles.

Let us start by what sparked this conversation in the first place: Kyrie Irving requesting a trade as reports allegedly quoted him saying he was “tired of playing LeBron’s son”. As if this was not a big enough red flag for Cleveland, the Cavaliers decided to honor Irving’s trade request by trading him to the only team standing in their way in the Eastern Conference: The Boston Celtics. A team that was put out quickly and quietly by the Cavs in the Eastern Conference Finals just one short year ago now has added All-Star Forward Gordon Hayward, via free agency, and NBA Finals tested Point Guard Kyrie Irving, via the trade. To think that this Celtics team, in its most recent form, has not now surpassed the Cleveland Cavaliers with talent, youth, and coaching is utter blasphemy. This is a Cavaliers team who just gave away their only

legitimate scoring option, obviously other than LeBron James, and in return received a broken Isaiah Thomas who will not step foot on the court in a Cavs uniform until or after the All-Star Break. . . not to mention that Thomas is on the wrong side of 30. A Cavaliers team who surrounds the best player in the world with J.R. Smith. . . Tristan Thompson. . . and Kevin Love, the only respectable piece in the bunch, while other teams are adding crucial pieces such as Jimmy Butler, Chris Paul, and Paul George. Oh. . . and it wasn't just any team who got Kyrie Irving, it was their *only* threat in the Eastern Conference as if the Western Conference wasn't already hard enough.

Serving as the cornerstone reality in this lopsided argument, let us stay on the Western Conference's dominance. Now without Kyrie Irving, I slot the Warriors, Spurs, Rockets, Timberwolves and even the Oklahoma City Thunder ahead of the deteriorating, not to mention aging, Cavaliers. LeBron has only triumphed over the Western Conference in the NBA Finals three times out of eight attempts in his illustrious career. When comparing the aforementioned "Best of the West" teams to the dysfunction transpiring in Cleveland, it is abundantly clear that they are going in drastically different directions cementing the notion that this trend will undeniably continue. The fact of the matter is that LeBron is in a no-win-situation. If he decides to stay in Cleveland with no All-Star sidekick, a Kyrie Irving or a Dwyane Wade, he is no longer a part of the best team in the Eastern Conference let alone the lethal Western Conference. Furthermore, even if he does beat the Boston Celtics in the Eastern Conference Finals, or decides to go to a Western Conference team via free agency as many feel he might, he has no shot at defeating any top 5 Western Conference foe. They are better coached, have more youth, and have a more talented cast of players than anything the Cavs can contend at this point in time. This is no slight on "The King" or his greatness as he himself garnered one of his best offensive

statistical outputs last season in his 14-year career; however, this is a statement of truth that LeBron James will win “Not Three. . . Not Two. . . Not One. . .” but zero more championships. Although he may get there, “The King’s” rein is effectively over.