The Decision: Validated
By Kevin Mallory

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Well, last Thursday night, five months after the melodrama that was “The Decision,” came another soap opera with LeBron James returning to the city he, essentially, dumped. Again, the city of Cleveland had its collective heart ripped out and torn asunder. Yep, their former hero, savior, and all-everything LeBron James came into Quicken Loans Arena facing the most hostility from a home crowd since Alex Rodriguez returned to Seattle after signing that massive 10-year, $252 million contract with the Texas Rangers in 2001.

Throughout the night, James was serenaded with chants of “a-%%hole,” “Akron Hates You,” and “Scottie Pippen.” It was a shame that the men representing Cleveland on the basketball court didn’t share that same fervor. Despite all of the chants, boos, signs, and catcalls, James (38 points, eight assists, and five rebounds in THREE QUARTERS) made the loudest statement.

In effortlessly converting reverse layups, fastbreaks, and fadeaway jumpers, James may have very well validated his decision of leaving Cleveland. On the surface, can you really blame him for ditching Cleveland for Miami? Beautiful weather (no winter), beautiful women in bikinis, no state taxes, and playing with two of the top 10 players in the league sounds like a good bet to me. But after Thursday night’s debacle, we now have to reevaluate his former comrades in Cleveland.

On many of those nights during those seven glorious seasons, James seemingly carried the Cavs. We all remember the magnificent 2007 Game 5
Eastern Conference Finals performance against the Detroit Pistons in The Palace with James scoring 29 of his team’s final 30 points.

How about the 2009 playoffs? Is it me or was the only thing memorable about that year’s playoffs for Cleveland, besides getting bounced in six games by the Orlando Magic, was James averaging over 35 points and seven assists a game. While James has received much blame for the Cavs’ postseason disappointments (sorry, it comes with the territory of being, arguably, the best player in the universe), his teammates haven’t done much in the clutch to help him. Instead of deriding LeBron for not being “clutch,” fans and pundits should be asking about the magic of Mo Williams: he always seems to pull a disappearing act when it matters.

Thursday night’s 118-90 beat down from the Miami Heat, and the team’s following game, a 34-point blowout loss at Minnesota, a team coming in with four wins, illustrates how far the Cavs have fallen. In fact, Cleveland coach Byron Scott summed it up quite frankly.

“We played like the word that starts with an s and ends with a t,” he said. "To me, we're playing like the worst basketball team in the NBA right now."

Sadly, there is no hyperbole in Scott’s words. During the Cavs’ recent four-game losing streak, they have been beaten by an average of 23 points per game. They ONLY lost by 10 to the Pistons. This team does not have many, if any, first offensive options. Antawn Jamison and Williams are serviceable options, J.J. Hickson is a budding talent and Daniel Gibson’s game seems to be
evolving, but besides that, whom can the Cavs turn to for offense? Anthony Parker. Sorry. Jamario Moon. Nope. Anderson Varejao. You're kidding, right?

There were hopeful Clevelanders who thought that although the sizzle of LeBron departed, there would be enough meat on the floor. Scott has done a great job in the past of resuscitating seemingly morbid franchises in New Jersey and New Orleans. Yet, those teams were led by spectacular point guards in future Hall of Famer Jason Kidd and All-Phro Chris Paul, respectively. Scott does not have those luxuries walking into the Q anytime soon.

The Cavs with LeBron provided style with substance, winning 127 games in the last two seasons. The Cavs without LeBron have neither; you could say there is no substance, just a mixture of elements.

"We're hitting a major speed bump," Jamison said. "We're trying to change a flat tire and we're just taking our time with it." The problem does not seem to be the tire. It might be time for the drivers (Cavs' owner Dan Gilbert and the Cleveland front office) to buy a new car.

Maybe now I understand why Cleveland directs so much of its vitriol at James. He not only depressed a city but also left them with a stunningly inferior product on the court. I spoke with a native Clevelander who is a senior at Spelman College about whether LeBron should issue a public apology to the city of Cleveland. Her words, while not many, spoke volumes.

“We deserve it (an apology),” she said. “Cleveland has nothing else.”