



It's really easy to hate LeBron James.

I know this because a lot of my friends feel that way about him, and I see their point. The whining about what he perceives as missed calls. The reaction to every physical slight as though it were a gunshot wound. The mercenary bouncing between teams in the new league order. I get that. I get it all.

Being from Boston, a Cantabrigian, truth be told, I suppose it's expected that I'd unconditionally hate James, as well. After all, he just ousted my beloved Celtics from the National Basketball Association's playoffs. The Celts are going home for the summer, while James and his Cleveland Cavaliers move on to compete for a championship. His eighth consecutive trip to the NBA Finals, by the way.

I do not hate LeBron James.

I am, quite frankly, in awe of the man.

Minus James, that Cavaliers team is a potential lottery draft contestant. This is a squad that was such a mess mid-season that management pulled the pin and blew it up. Goodbye to beloved Celtic fourth quarter killer, Isiah Thomas. Hello, younger faster new squad. Rodney Hood, George Hill, Jordan Clarkson, Larry Nance, Jr.

"Hi new Cavs! Do you know where the Flats are? No? Good, focus on your game."

But it ultimately all comes back to James.

For New Englanders, I offer this: Imagine Rob Gronkowski regularly hitting a target nearly 24 feet away that measures 18" by 24." James and Gronk are roughly the same size. Now, throw

into this equation the idea that Gronk gets hit on every play, as to some extent does James, but without 30 seconds between plays.

Again, to compare James with a superior athlete like Gronkowski: last night James played 48 minutes in a 60 minute contest. Zero time off the field as the defense took hold, a break NFL players enjoy. Sheer willpower. Not to mention, making his teammates better.

It may seem at this point that I am overflowing in my appreciation for what James brings to this game, and perhaps I am. But as someone who has played this remarkable game I can say with no hesitation that a 6'-8" man who can find a teammate regularly with a bounce pass is a truly beautiful commodity. We're talking Larry Bird and Magic Johnson beauty here. I love the Celtics. I also love, as a fan of the sport, seeing a big man who sees the whole floor the way that James does.

So, he beat the Celtics. And I say that because it was truly him that beat the Celtics. I was in the old Garden with my Dad and saw Michael Jordan knock down 63 against the Celtics in a play-off game. He did not beat the Celtics that day, the Bulls lost. But without those numbers, LeBron James did beat the Celtics. He goes to the Finals.

Another of the many lessons that my Dad imparted, both on and off the hardwood, was this: if a team is good enough to beat your team, it's good enough to root for going forward. I will root for LeBron James and I will feel fortunate to have been witness to his gift for a game that I love. Point blank: the man can flat out play.

Go Celtics. Until next year.