

Why I Stopped Hating LeBron James

I remember the Summer of 2010 quite well.

Especially July. My church puts on a huge basketball camp every summer and a church from another state always comes to help us with it, normally the Rejoice Church in Owasso, OK. I remember being at the church one day working and then several of their adult workers gathering around the church soundbooth computer with me to watch "The Decision."

I remember my reaction to it: anger, confusion, repulsion. It was the same kind of reaction I'd have to a TV show that killed off my favorite character. I honestly didn't care that LeBron left Cleveland. I wanted him in Chicago but not choosing us didn't really draw the ire. No, I was mad because LeBron chose to play with Dwayne Wade, four years removed from a Finals MVP and Chris Bosh, a perennial all-star.

Then, it got worse. I was housesitting for a lady at church and happened upon the Miami Heat pep rally celebrating *before the season had even started*, complete with the new Big 3 all in full uniform and LeBron predicting they'd win championship after championship.

I was disgusted. When the regular season finally started three months later, I was in full "I hate LeBron" mode (not real hate, but what I call "sports hate" – just a fun way to say I don't like them). I know I will never hate an athlete as much as I hate Tom Brady but he was becoming a sort-of NBA version.

So when Miami made the Finals every year from 2011 to 2014 I watched every second as though my life depended on it. I cheered Dallas' victory and gloated like a child to anyone who would listen. I blamed Harden and the refs for the 2012 Miami win. I thought they were finished again in 2013 in Game 6

until that unforgettable last minute. But at least I got to enjoy immensely the Spurs getting revenge in dominating fashion the next year.

One thing was sure though: Every year he was in Miami, I wanted LeBron to go down like I wanted Shooter McGavin in *Happy Gilmore* to go down.

But what he did after the 2014 season undid it all. He came back. And more importantly he gave his reasons, beautifully written, for coming home to Ohio. I was blown away. By it all. [By how thoughtful and honest the essay was](#). By the humility to forgive Dan Gilbert for all that he said after LeBron left. By the willingness to go back to an awful basketball franchise and try to win it all for the people. By the love for his home outside of basketball. By owning up to "The Decision" so we all could move on from it. Even by the inspirational Nike commercial he did with the city of Cleveland to give them an unforgettable way to celebrate his return. It was all admirable.

It was all so opposite of 2010. As many journalists have written, there is no reason to hold on to those two nights in July any longer. He cannot undo them. All he can do is move forward. And that is exactly what he's done, with incredible life maturity. It reminds me of the way Jack and Sawyer changed on the TV show *Lost*, except it wasn't scripted. It was raw and genuine.

So watching him pull Cleveland from Basketball Hell these last three years has not bothered me at all. It was the circumstances I hated in Miami, far more than the man. I was disappointed that Cleveland won it all last year, but solely because of Mike Lytle's [article](#) on Golden State being better than the 96 Bulls. (Hey, what can I say? I'm a bigger fan of REO than any NBA result.) But a small part of me cheered that

Cleveland finally won something. It was absolutely perfect that LeBron—being born in Akron, drafted by his hometown team, having forsaken them and then having returned with contriteness and realness you rarely see in professional athletes—was the one to lead them. If you juxtapose LeBron's ["Together" Nike video](#) with the result of Game 7 from last year's NBA Final, it feels like a superhero movie became real life.

I have opinions on LeBron as an athlete as far as his legacy but those comments can wait for another article (or you can just look at my Twitter feed). But no matter how much I argue for or against him, none of it comes from the same extreme hatred I have for athletes like Tom Brady. What LeBron did three years ago is too special to me. It was significant way beyond sports. And as a human, more than a sports fan, I loved it. I'll never be a LeBron fan, but I'm not a hater either. I feel like he has earned that much.