



LYNN ISCHAY | THE PLAIN DEALER

Thrill with Anderson Varejao's parents are in town for the game for San Antonio for Game 1 of the playoffs. This is the couple's first

ing to all the saints."

Sebastion Varejao dismissed her strategy with a laugh.

"If prayers really worked," he said, "every game would end in a tie."

His audience weighed his words with such focus, you could detect strategies shifting.

Sasha becoming 'family member'

Soccer remains the sport of the region's Serbian community, but youth league organizers noticed a change when Sasha Pavlovic — a Serb from seaside Montenegro — emerged as a key player on the red-hot Cavaliers.

"Ninety percent of our players, they have his jersey now," said Simo Petkovic, an organizer of

soccer tournaments at St. Sava Serbian Eastern Orthodox Church in Broadview Heights, where Pavlovic has attended services.

"We're a close-knit community, far from the homeland," Petkovic said. "We see him almost as a family member."

Tonight, Serbian-American soccer fans across the region will be watching for No. 3, including a new fan glued to Petkovic's basement big-screen TV.

"My mom, she's in her 70s," he said, "and she adamantly follows the Cavs now, because of Sasha."

Grandmothers form court for the King

Emma Benson watched LeBron James when he sold out games at Akron's St. Vincent-St. Mary High School.

So did her friends.

So this year, they formalized the LeBron James Grandmothers Fan Club.

"We love LeBron because he's a homeboy," said Benson, a 60-year-old Akron native. "We knew him when he was just LeBron, before he became the King."

The 30 ladies sent LeBron a giant birthday card and took buses to The Q for Cavs games. They bought loads of Cavs T-shirts and hats and plan to gather today to root for their hero.

"We could be the cheerleaders," Benson said. "That's what he should have, grandmother cheerleaders."

Cavs fan lonely in San Antonio

David Mitchell, wearing a blue LeBron James jersey, drew stares on San Antonio's Riverwalk Wednesday afternoon. The 39-year-old businessman from Delaware, Ohio, was the only ob-

vious Cavs fan in sight.

He will be lonely again tonight. Mitchell, in town for a convention, paid \$700 for a front-row upper-deck ticket to tonight's game. He plans to wear his old-school orange Cavs jersey around town today, then break out the older-school wine-and-gold "Miracle" jersey for the game.

"One guy looked at me and said, 'It's really sad you traveled all the way down here just to see the Cavs lose,'" said Mitchell. "I think they're underestimating us."

Basketball bounces across the globe

A record 128 television broadcasters from 205 nations will air the Cavaliers-Spurs series. NBA officials attribute the rising global interest to their marketing and, yes, to local marvel LeBron James.

Larry Yankow only knows that his job has grown easier.

He's president of Cleveland-based International Transport Services, which coordinates imports from Asia, and he's in China again recruiting clients.

Typically, he said, he devotes much of his energy explaining where he is from and why people should care.

Not anymore.

"I used to use the Rock Hall as a point of interest," Yankow wrote from a trade conference in Guangzhou, formerly Canton, in southern China.

Now, when he says he's from Cleveland, Ohio, Chinese often respond, "Ah, LeBron James."

Plain Dealer reporters *Laura Johnston* and *Michael K. McIntyre* contributed to this story.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter: rsmith@plained.com, 216-999-4024