

A Kid In King James' Court

Arash Markazi partied with LeBron James in Vegas and discovered a childlike star

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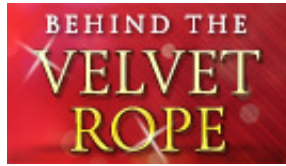
Denise Truscello/WireImage LeBron James relishes being the center of attention, especially in Vegas at his own party.

[LeBron James](#) leans against a waist-high stone wall with a 16-foot-tall Buddha hovering over him.

He's at Tao, a bustling restaurant and nightclub inside the Venetian hotel in Las Vegas, and his arms are crossed as he listens to Lynn Meritt, senior director of Nike Basketball, and Charles Denson, president of Nike Brand.

James is quiet, occasionally applying Chap Stick on his lips and nodding when he hears something he likes.

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Five security guards are stationed around him, one at each corner of the table he's about to sit at and another roving around with him, watching his every move. Anyone who takes two steps toward James is stopped and must have James' approval to come closer.

The waiter bringing him his cup of green tea with a spoonful of honey and a dash of lemon juice makes the cut, as does the scantily clad brunette with a tattoo of a heart on her right shoulder.

She wants to take a picture with him. "I can't right now," says James. "Maybe later, upstairs, I'll remember you're the one with the tattoo."

James will host a party later in the upstairs nightclub at Tao, but he is currently hosting a dinner for his friends and family in the downstairs restaurant. Wearing a gray striped shirt and gold crucifix around his neck, he bobs his head to music played by an amped-up saxophonist who weaves his way around the table like a one-man mariachi band.

I have somehow found myself at this exclusive table, seated beside Eddie Jackson, who is introduced to me as James' father (though he actually began dating James' mother, Gloria, after LeBron was born and the two are no longer together). Jackson, wearing a muscle shirt accentuating his large biceps, looks like a member of James' four-man entourage, like one of his childhood friends.

James' circle includes Randy Mims, seated to his right at the center of the table, Maverick Carter, seated at the head of the table, and Richard Paul, seated in front of James. The quartet makes up the initials behind LRMR Marketing, the management firm James founded almost four years ago with his buddies. Their offices in downtown Cleveland gained notoriety this month as the location teams flocked to for their meetings with James.

[+] Enlarge



Denise

Truscello/WireImage LeBron

James partied at Tao last weekend, complete with a king's cake and an entourage to make heads of state jealous.

Seated to the right of James is [Chris Paul](#), whose brother, C.J., is seated across from him. The [New Orleans Hornets](#) point guard has seen how James has positioned himself to win a championship by signing with the [Miami Heat](#) and joining forces with [Dwyane Wade](#) and [Chris Bosh](#) and has reportedly considered a similar move himself.

The truth is, in James' dream world, the duo he would love to play with for the next decade would be Wade and Paul, his two closest friends in the NBA. Paul has been like a brother to James since the two were in Las Vegas four years ago for USA Basketball training camp, when as a rookie he carried James' and Wade's bags to and from the team bus.

James and Paul are fairly quiet at the center of the table as they take in the scene around them. As family style plates of miso-glazed Chilean sea bass and crispy lobster and shrimp dumplings are brought to the table, James effortlessly picks up the food with his chopsticks and occasionally raises his cup of green tea to passersby as they raise their martinis and mojitos in his direction before being helped along by security guards.

When trays of dessert plates are brought over, James gets up, preferring to start his party upstairs instead of indulging in the giant fortune cookies and chocolate cake. A security guard comes over and puts plastic wristbands on our wrists and escorts us through the back of the restaurant, up a flight of stairs in the bowels of the hotel and through a back entrance into the club. About a dozen security guards, moving their flash lights, direct us to a roped off section on the dance floor of Tao next to a couple of apparently nude women in a bathtub full of water and rose petals.

James, now wearing sunglasses in the dark club, immediately stands up on the couch and folds his arms high on his chest and nods his head. He smiles as he looks at the dozens of people crowded on the dance floor. Noticing him, they stop dancing and snap pictures as the DJ screams out, "LeBron James in the building!" and plays LMFAO's "I'm in Miami."

Carter, LeBron's childhood friend and manager, begins dancing around James like Puff Daddy in a Notorious B.I.G video. A giant red crown-shaped cake is brought over to James while go-go dancers dressed in skimpy red and black outfits raise four lettered placards that spell out, "KING." Carter grabs a bottle of Grey Goose and pours a quarter of it on the floor and raises it up before passing it off.

IT'S L.A., AND IT'S LIVE

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James' infamous one-hour special, "The Decision," was reportedly the brainchild of Carter, a 28-year-old who has never managed anyone outside of his friend James. This three-day party marathon in Vegas (which James is being paid six figures to host) is also Carter's idea.

Bottle after bottle of "Ace of Spades" champagne is delivered to the table by a waiter flying down from above the dance floor like some overgrown Peter Pan on a wire. One time he's dressed like a King, another time as Indiana Jones and another in a replica of James' No. 6 Miami Heat jersey.

James, who can hardly see the flying figure through his tinted glasses, almost gets kicked in the head on the waiter's last trip down. He looks at the girls around him and says, "I wish they'd have one of these girls with no panties do that instead of the guy."

Toward the end of the night, [Boston Celtics](#) forward [Glen Davis](#) walks past James' party and looks at the scene up and down several times like a painting in a museum, soaking in the images of the go-go dancers, the "King" sign and the costumed man delivering bottles of champagne.

Davis shakes his head and walks on.

James dances on the couch and sings along with the music blaring from speakers all around him.

The more you hang around James, the more you realize he's still a child wrapped in a 6-foot-8, 250-pound frame. The night after the party at Tao, he and his crew walk through the casino at the Wynn and Encore and he pretends to dribble a basketball as he walks past ringing slot machines and tourists who do double-takes. In a Nike T-shirt, jeans and sneakers, James' pantomime seems unconscious. He stops every few feet to shoot a jump shot, his right hand extended above his head on the follow through. He weaves through a pack of a dozen friends and pretends to connect on a layup as he walks past a gift shop. He passes overhead casino signs and jumps up and slaps them, pretending to dunk. Columns covered with advertisements for lounge acts become stationary defenders, chumps to fake out before connecting on imaginary mid-range jump shots.

James probably goes through a practice's worth of shots as we walk from the XS nightclub at

Encore (James left his poolside table when he saw the club was practically empty), through Wynn and over the bridge to the Palazzo.

Soon after arriving at Lavo, a restaurant and nightclub at the Palazzo, a scene straight out of "West Side Story" breaks out when James and [Lamar Odom](#), seated at a nearby table, engage in an impromptu dance-off to California Swag District's "Teach Me How To Dougie."

Odom, smoking a cigar, can't quite keep up. James celebrates by crossing himself and taking a shot of Patron. Moments later, a handful of girls dressed as cheerleaders walk toward his table with someone dressed in James' Heat uniform. Someone throws talcum powder in the air as James does before every game, while his new unofficial song, "I'm in Miami," plays.

Odom casts a glance James' way before looking in the opposite direction and raising his glass at a couple on the dance floor who point to their ring fingers and smile.

Back at his table, James and his crew sing every word to Rick Ross' "Free Mason." LeBron raps every line to former teammate [Damon Jones](#) (who played with him in Cleveland). Jones, puffing on a cigar, nods.

James rips out the lines:

*"If I ever die, never let it be said I didn't win/
Never, never say/
Never say legend didn't go in/
I just wanna die on top of the world."*

While he looks at club-goers flashing the LA and Westside signs at him, James smiles and points to Jackson's T-shirt, which reads, "Another Enemy," and raises his glass of champagne.

Finally, Carter tells James it's time to leave the club and they do, LeBron pretending to cross-over tables and shoot over slot machines all the way back to his room.

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