

Armen Keteyian on a Step Stool, and Other Strange Sights from the LeBron Greenwich Stakeout

Our man in Greenwich describes the surreal experience of waiting for LeBron's Decision with the hordes of media and fans.



The [*New York Times*](#), the [*New York Daily News*](#), the [*Hartford Courant*](#), the [*Greenwich Times*](#), and the [*Associated Press*](#), along with innumerable TV outfits, coronated fifteen-year-old Mike Correa as “perhaps the first fan” to stake out the site of LeBron’s televisual denouement. Apparently, Correa arrived at the Greenwich Boys & Girls Club at 9 a.m., twelve hours before the show’s start. When I got there around 2:15 p.m., I saw Correa, a gaggle of photographers and cameramen, and a parental-looking figure who kept spelling out the kid’s last name like a pro. No wonder they went with “perhaps the first”—that’s much kinder than “perhaps the only.”

You don’t need me to tell you that *The Decision* was an overcooked media fiasco. (One notable example: even as our best and brightest were explicating LeBron’s choice of Greenwich, no one pointed out that there are only two Clubs between New York and Bristol—and you know ESPN wasn’t doing this in Stamford.) But it may be instructive to detail how redundant the media coverage was; how happily the crowd played along; and how severely both groups got screwed, thanks to ESPN’s iron fist.

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Let’s start with some geography. Greenwich, not surprisingly, offers a pretty unique take on the Boys & Girls Club—a colonial-style clubhouse that opened in 1939 and sits a couple of blocks from a car dealer specializing in Rolls Royces and, for the local sports fan, a squash shop called the Rink and Racquet, Ltd. The Club faces Horseneck Lane, and, since only ESPN personnel were allowed on the Club’s side of the road, the rest of the media set up camp in a commuter

parking lot directly across from it. On the lot's left edge, Shore Drive intersected with Horseneck, and this created a second holding pen where Mike Correa and the other fans could belly up to Horseneck.

At 2:15 on Thursday, though, this was all still pure potential. Other than the folks documenting Correa, the media stayed inside their fleet of idling, air-conditioned vehicles. The whole place reeked not of disloyalty or defeat, but CO₂.

Most of those vehicles belonged to local stations, but it was clear that this had become a national media event. For several crews, it was their first time in Connecticut since [the Annie Le case](#). Even though the Greenwich location didn't leak until yesterday—a fu-manchued cop told me even they didn't hear about it until then—the media started arriving late last night.

Many still had no idea why they were here, and in such force. The leading theory held that viewers had been pressuring the networks for something positive—there'd been too much oil spill, too much war. But even the busiest crews were broadcasting only once every four or five hours. People ate at the hot dog truck that had smartly parked close by, caught up with industry acquaintances, took multiple naps. The anchors disappeared for so long that you forgot they existed, only to pop out, apply a moist towelette, and intone for 30 seconds.

I ended up spending most of my time with three very bored people from a national finance network. They'd arrived at 7 a.m., but, since they didn't bring along any on-air talent, their only job was to get some b-roll and the crucial shot of LeBron entering the Club. This same network had also stationed crews outside Allan Houston's house and at the airport, and this kind of vigilance was replicating itself all over the place.



[The row of satellite uplink trucks.]



[A Greenwich cop escorts a cameraman back to the safe side of Horseneck Lane; in the background, ESPN's trucks and equipment.]

At around 4:00 p.m., a few fans started showing up, and the media headed over to get some color. Most outlets seemed to practice a form of jersey-based affirmative action. One reporter carried a screen-printed sign that read: "ANY FANS FROM: BRONX or BROOKLYN or LONG ISLAND." Everyone asked the same two questions: "Where do you think he'll go?" and "Will you still be a LeBron fan?"

While the crowd remained more than half media types, this worked out just fine because it was such a media-savvy crowd. One guy, who looked to be about two years away from pledging some horrific frat, granted at least a dozen different interviews. Instinctively, the fans squeezed in for crowd shots, screaming and waving signs at the cameraman's signal, then pivoting a few degrees to do it all over again.



[The fans' side of Horseneck Lane, circa 5 p.m.]

By the time the 6 o'clock news rolled around, I could count 14 traditional local news vans, plus at least that many unmarked SUVs paired with smaller digital set ups, plus 5 satellite uplink trucks, plus the cable networks, plus a couple of broadcast networks. Almost every team had multiple vehicles (still idling), and none of these numbers include any ESPN stuff.

The actual broadcasts had an eerie synchronization, as seven or eight local sports guys fanned out along Horseneck Lane. They all said the same thing, then all turned to the fans they'd ferried over from the other side of Shore Drive. The weirdest thing was how little the non-ESPN media knew about what happened next. I'm not even talking about where LeBron would sign—no one out here knew when LeBron was arriving, what direction he was coming from, what car he'd be in, even whether he'd be using the Club's front or side entrance.



[Armen Keteyian, flanked by the rest of the anchors.]



[Another small cross-section of the media fleet.]

By 8 p.m., the crowd had started to thicken up and diversify. Kids climbed trees. Ned Lamont supporters passed out stickers. Some Mormons pushed a more permanent message. One *Gossip Girl* extra walked by and screeched to her phone: “LeBrons Jame is in Greenwich! Get down here!” She turned to a friend: “Is Jay-Z coming?”

Some families also showed up, along with plenty of NBA fans. I heard a few “NEW YORK KNICKS” chants and at least one vuvuzela. For the most part, though, it all felt oddly hushed and anticipatory. Then, at around 8:30 p.m. (and for no discernible reason), everyone charged over to Horseneck’s Club side. The cops herded us back, but ten minutes later we did it again. The cops began lowering their expectations; a persistent soul on the P.A. kept telling everyone: “Stay on the sidewalk. Look at your feet—does that look like the sidewalk?”

You’d think these guerrilla tactics would be keyed to a LeBron sighting or even a crowd disturbance, but they weren’t. As the minutes ticked away, everyone on the ground stayed as confused as the media. It was now dark enough that we could see into the Club’s gym, with its TV backdrop and decorative kids. But the crowd, continuing in its role of world’s best studio audience, made it impossible to know what was going on. Each burst of cheering turned out to be nothing more than the result of a camera needing a live look-in. The fact that Greenwich’s regular traffic included so many unbroken chains of swank SUVs didn’t help.

And that’s how it ended: those of us standing 75 feet from LeBron became the least informed people on the planet. A lot of people still believed LeBron hadn’t even pulled up when the P.A. cop revealed the outcome. “It’s the Miami Heat, folks. Now stay on the sidewalk.”



[The crowd at 7:30 p.m.; by 9 p.m., they’d doubled this and even invaded the media’s side of Shore Drive.]



*[The second (more successful) charge across
Horseneck Lane—right around 8:40.]*

This morning, I finally found out that [LeBron arrived at 8:52](#). I'm pretty sure I didn't even see the top of his SUV.

At 9:15 p.m., I crossed Horseneck Lane one last time and talked to some very sullen cameramen. The crew from the finance network had heard from their airport compatriots that LeBron was on the move. They had shouldered on their cameras while the guys at a New York affiliate were still breaking down the latest batch of interns, but it didn't matter. No one seemed to have any usable footage. LeBron ended up skipping the front *and* the side entrance in favor of an undiscovered side-to-back door largely obscured by trees. A full ESPN crew was there to greet him, but no other cameras got the shot of him leaving the car. One network guy told me he got "a second of him, maybe. If someone else got it—and I don't know how—it'll be worth a lot of money."

Right about then, the cop told the crowd about LeBron's decision. All around and all at once, the boos rained down. They lasted the length of your average news segment, after which most of the people left quickly. Those who stayed coupled up with TV cameras, radio reporters, print guys with notebooks, and the show went on.