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Put off by the LeBron James spectacle? Here's a redeeming virtue.

Overlooked in the buzz over the NBA star's decision to exit Cleveland, and milk the announcement for prime-time ad dollars, is this news: LeBron James arranged to have all 'The Decision' proceeds donated to charity.

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Neilsen Co. ratings of the nation's 56 biggest cities show more than 7 percent of households with TVs were watching the broadcast – expected to be the largest audience for a news program aired on ESPN, according to the Associated Press. In James's hometown of Cleveland, where he's played for all seven years of his career, more than 25 percent of homes with TVs watched the program.

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James, who was a member of other youth organizations growing up and has been a longtime BGCA supporter, approached the nonprofit over the July 4 weekend, Sanchez says. The charitable arrangements were made final on Wednesday.

“It was a fast-moving opportunity. The goal was to help the Boys and Girls Clubs of America,” says Sanchez. “His intention was to use what was a significant event and to leverage it to raise dollars and awareness for a club he believes in.… LeBron didn’t make a penny” from the event.

“He sees the value in mentorship and giving back,” adds BGCA spokeswoman Angela Richmond. “It’s something he’s very fond of.”

Nearly 100 youths from the BGCA club in Greenwich, Conn. – near ESPN's headquarters in Bristol – were on hand to watch the man of the hour, in the gymnasium where they play nearly everyday. After the cameras turned off, before heading to other media commitments, the all-star athlete ushered the group of 6- to 18-year-olds to the stage, one youngster riding on his shoulders, as the children and teens snapped photos and asked questions, Sanchez recounts.

“It wasn’t like he just ran out of the building afterward,” he says. “He was really like a big kid.”

He calls James's philanthropy and time with the kids “an incredible gesture and a great example

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for the kids of how you're never too big to give back."

The final tally on how much the youth organization will net is expected to come over the weekend. The money will fund programs, renovate existing facilities, and build new clubs in James's hometown of Akron, Ohio, and four cities where he had considered playing next – Cleveland, New York, Chicago and, his ultimate choice, Miami.

BGCA, based in Atlanta, provides educational, community service, and recreational programs to at least 4.2 million youths at more than 4,000 clubs. In a Harris Survey of BGCA alumni, 57 percent said the organization saved their lives, according to the group's website.

BGCA relies on donation and fundraising efforts. In 2008, the BGCAs raised $671 million, with $179.5 million coming from the organization's national branch and the rest being raised through local clubs.

"This is the type of partnership that allows us to continue to do our work," Sanchez says. "It helped every Boys and Girls Club in the United States."

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