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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.

LeBron James sits with Jim Gray before an interview on ESPN on Thursday, in Greenwich, Conn. LeBron James arranged to have all of the proceeds from his hour-long 'The Decision' program donated to the Boys and Girls Clubs of America.

Rich Arden/ESPN/AP

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By *Matt Rocheleau*, Contributor / July 9, 2010

There are some clear-cut winners and clear-cut losers coming out of LeBron James's "The Decision" Thursday night, but one chief beneficiary is being overlooked in all the buzz by sports commentators, bloggers, and NBA fans.

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It's not James's new team, the Miami Heat. Nor is it Dwayne Wade, Chris Bosh, or King James. It's not the fans, the National Basketball Association, "the game," or sports in general.

Thursday night's indisputable champion is the Boys and Girls Clubs of America, which stands to collect as much as $2.5 million from the advertising proceeds of the ESPN prime-time special.

It's a charitable gesture that went largely unnoticed – and that may serve to deflect criticism of the James-ESPN "ploy" to reveal the NBA star's team choice during a live, hour-long special on

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ESPN TV and radio during prime time. Critics berated both the player and the network for brazenly cashing in on the sports world's curiosity – and, indeed, ESPN squeezed in every commercial it could before the announcement.

Finally, at 9:27 p.m., nearly 15 minutes further into "The Decision" than the network had promised, came the moment many fans had been anticipating since the NBA season ended. “This fall, I’m going to take my talents to South Beach and join the Miami Heat,” said the NBA superstar, who at 25-years-young already has a substantial legacy, including becoming the most coveted free agent in sports history.

And with that sentence uttered, millions of TVs and radios across the US turned off or tuned elsewhere.

But arguably the best news of the night came nearly a half-hour later – almost 10 minutes after the one-hour special was slated to have ended.

In a plan initiated and unveiled by James, all proceeds from ads sold for the broadcast – expected to be between $2 million and $2.5 million – will be donated to the Boys and Girls Clubs of America (BGCA). Several minutes later, one of the show’s sponsors, the University of Phoenix, announced it would make a separate donation – five full-tuition scholarships – to the organization.

About an hour before the broadcast began, the University of Phoenix also donated four of its scheduled ad spots to the Boys and Girls Clubs, so BGCA could air its own advertisements, says Frank Sanchez, vice president of sports, entertainment, and alumni relations for the nonprofit youth organization. BGCA would not have been able to air a commercial during the show otherwise, he says. The group does not pay for its own advertising; all ad spots are donated.

“We cannot be thankful enough for LeBron and the sponsors,” he said in a phone interview Friday. “As a fundraising opportunity, it was one of our most significant contributions, and it all happened within one hour.”

In addition to money generated from the event, the BGCA receives intangible gains. The organization’s logo was strategically centered on a wall in between James and ESPN sportscaster Jim Gray, who conducted the interview.

"You can’t monetize having our logo splashed all over the place” on prime-time TV, online, and on the front pages of morning newspapers, says Sanchez. “What LeBron did for our brand was huge.”

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