

Sports

by Jerry Keys



When the dawn of technology in the typical household began to surface in the mid-1990s a great number of locals connected with others who, without the Internet, they would most likely have never communicated with. The first place I found myself in was the baseball chat rooms. The two things usually asked by others were, 'Who is your fav team and where are you located?' Of course, I would say Cleveland.

Obviously, everyone took it for granted that it was Cleveland, Ohio. It was not hard to notice after being asked, 'Did you ever go to the old Municipal Stadium?', 'Are you close to the riverfront?', or 'Are you aware we still have an NBA team?' After notifying others it was Tennessee and not Ohio, it was met with one question, 'Where is that?'

Throughout the years it has been mandatory for me to dislike Cleveland, Ohio. The main reason stems from the decades old Cleveland Brown-Pittsburgh Steelers rivalry. It did not help the Cleveland Indians were placed in the same division as the Minnesota Twins after the 1994 restructuring of the divisions in baseball (expanding from two divisions in each league to three). But, it was not always that way.

During the 1980's the Browns usually got the best of my beloved Steelers. I received a bit of solace when my second favorite team, the Denver Broncos, snatched victory from defeat in two AFC Championship Games vs. Cleveland. In the early 1990s, the Steelers began to exhibit a more polished football team and started giving the Browns a dose of their own medicine. It culminated in 1994 when it was apparent the Browns and Steelers were the two top teams in the AFC. They squared off in the divisional round of

the playoffs and the victor was all but assured a spot in the Super Bowl.

The Steelers defeated the Browns for the third time that season, but a week later coughed a gopher in the AFC Championship Game. Everyone's eyes were fixed on 1995 as both teams were well-stocked for a repeat. After the Browns started the season at 3-1 and stood at 4-4 at the halfway point, the news came after Week 10. The Browns owner Art Modell was moving the franchise to Baltimore. The Browns had been a fixture in Cleveland since the conclusion of World War II; roughly fifty years. Modell declined to join in the Cleveland-area "Gateway Project" due to the fact he was afraid of losing his revenue stream from the "old Cleveland Stadium".

Once Modell realized he made a grave financial error (the Indians and Cavaliers received new stadiums), he asked for a \$175 million request to the tax payers placed on the ballot. He wanted the taxpayers and fans to foot the bill for refurbishing the stadium. After he did not receive the funds, he decided to relocate the team. At first, being a Steeler fan, I was ecstatic. The Browns are gone! As weeks passed by I began to encounter empathy for the Browns fans. Yes, I hated the Browns, but they have a very loyal fan base. Although fans in the "Dawg Pound" reacted violently in the final home game, the Browns did pull out a win.

Three years passed before Cleveland received another team. Fans considered the new team a carryover from the old; as did the fans in Baltimore (old Browns are now Baltimore Ravens, carryovers of the old Baltimore Colts). Up to this day, speculation circles why Baltimore was not awarded a franchise for the 1995 season. Maybe the devastation in Cleveland could have been avoided. The "new"

Browns have completed eleven seasons and earned one playoff appearance (of course, a loss to Pittsburgh). I no longer despise the Browns as I used to. I am sure I do when they face my team, but beyond that; I have a hidden feeling of cheering for them, especially if they can seek revenge against their ex-owner's team in Maryland.

Another team in our Big Sister Cleveland is the Indians. The Indians were so horrible, they were the team casted in the cult baseball classic Major Leagues (I and II). The Indians had been around since 1901 and enjoyed World Series triumphs in 1920 and 1948. The 1954 squad was probably one of the ten best teams ever assembled (111-43) but failed to capture the Series, losing all four games. From 1960-1993, they did not even sniff a division title. Do you know a friend who hates dogs or cats, but if they see one on the side of the road virtually starving to death, even they stop off and buy a bit of food for them? That was the way many baseball fans felt about the Indians. They were cheered sometimes out of pity.

When the Indians finally fielded a contender, the strike killed 1994. An even better and brassier team emerged in 1995 and returned to the Series after 40-plus years. As with the Browns, their opponent in the '95 Series was Atlanta. The Braves, being my second favorite team and losers of the '91 and '92 Series, had a very deep fan base in the South. I had to pull for Atlanta. Two years later the Indians returned and were heavy favorites over upstart Florida. Cleveland had the lead going into the 9th, but lost it and the Series in the 11th. Once again, I felt sympathy for the Indian faithful. The next year, Cleveland led the vaunted 1998 Yankees 2 games to 1 in the ALCS, yet lost the next three. They led the 2007 ALCS 3 games to 1 over Boston, yet watched

the Red Sox take the next three.

Some feel the Browns and Indians window came and went without a hint of a title. Sometimes it is the journey more than the destination. The Indians made post-season play 1995-99, 2001 and 2007. Many think they would have seen the playoffs in '94 as well. The Browns made it to the AFC Championship Game in 1987, 1988, and 1990, losing all three to Denver. Even though each team from Cleveland now is in the same division as my favorite teams (Steelers, Twins), I still find myself rooting for them if my team(s) are eliminated. It is more the journey than destination.

All this is leading up to the present. We all know "King James" exited Cleveland for a ring. Michael Jordan roughly stated, "You never saw me calling up Bird and Magic saying 'hey let's get together and win a title,' I always wanted to beat them to get the title." The simple question is, 'Should he stay or should he go?' We all know LeBron James did not leave for the money. The Cavaliers were more than willing to pay him whatever was necessary. He grew up in Ohio and was common knowledge; James would bring a championship home.

The Cavaliers pre-James life ended at the hands of Jordan in the 1992 Conference Finals. The jump and fist pump of MJ is often included on highlight reels. Cleveland made the play-

offs several more times, but was never considered a threat. From 1998-99 to 2002-03 the Cavs were the doormats of the NBA East. Much like MJ, James took over a hapless franchise and took them to heights unimaginable. In his fourth year, he led Cleveland to the Finals. Unlike MJ, James was without a strong supporting cast and was beaten by Tim Duncan and San Antonio in four games.

Over the past three years, James never received a sidekick. He did have Shaq this year, the 38 year-old Shaq. When Magic entered the NBA in 1979, he had Kareem; MJ received help in the 1987 draft (Scottie Pippen and Horace Grant); and Shaq needed Kobe to finally claim a title. Kobe would never have won a title "without Shaq" if Pau Gasol was not acquired.

James leaves for Miami to team with Chris Bosh, Dwyane Wade and GM Pat Riley. The oddity is the Heat are not LeBron's team. Wade was a fixture in Miami's 2006 NBA Championship. The Heat are Wade's team (and Riley's if you want to get specific). Shaq went to Cleveland to help James win a ring, not the other way around. James has ten years of dominance ahead and Shaq has almost twenty years under his belt in the NBA. I am by no means a NBA expert, but it seems Bosh should have joined James in Cleveland.

Three kings in Miami...after the Lakers hopes of four NBA titles in a row

were nixed in 2003 by San Antonio, they decided to remove all doubt for the 2004 NBA Finals. In addition to Kobe and Shaq, the Lakers added Gary Payton, Grant (former MJ teammate), and Karl Malone. There was talk of 70 wins and not "if" but who they would dehumanize in the Finals. The underachieving Lakers finished the year third in wins in the West, barely beat San Antonio in the playoffs and were embarrassed by Detroit in the Finals.

One year later, everyone was gone (even coach Phil Jackson) except Kobe. Miami...be careful what you wish for.

The Cavalier's owner vowed to win a championship before Miami did. James turned his decision into a media circus and held Cleveland hostage for a month. Your departure has turned me into a Cav fan. If James never obtains a ring and Cleveland returns to the doormat of the East, the Cavs win. How would James react if Cleveland won a title before him? And just by chance...in 2024 the Cavaliers re-acquire an aging 40 year-old James for a stretch run with the NBA's current superstar (name unknown) and finally give James the ring he always desired. Just not the way "The King" wanted it to be.

My grandmother always told me "what if" is borrowing trouble. Maybe for LeBron it will be "borrowing worry."

Note: Ongoing chart from May 2010 issue.

Albert's Ascension

Homeruns

Andres Galarraga	399
Al Kaline	399
Dale Murphy	398
Joe Carter	396
Graig Nettles	390
Johnny Bench	389
Albert Pujols	388

RBIs

Bob Elliott	1195
Julio Franco	1194
Joe Kelley	1194
Jim Edmonds	1191
Tony Lazzeri	1191
Boog Powell	1187
Scott Rolen	1186
Joe Torre	1185
Heinie Manush	1183
Robin Ventura	1182
Jack Clark	1180
Albert Pujols	1180