

## Lingering Items - Clean Up Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Wednesday, February 17 2010 12:00 AM -

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*Cleaning up after the Super Bowl...*

It's been a week since the Super Bowl, which is plenty of time to digest the implications. With the New Orleans Saints winning, coupled with the Bidwell-owned Arizona Cardinals in the game last year, the tendency is to conclude that every dog has its day.

Well, every dog does have its day. I never thought that I'd see the Cleveland Indians in the playoffs and then when it happened in 1995 I couldn't believe how overwhelmingly satisfying it felt. Watching one of the best Tribe teams ever assembled hoist an AL Central Champs flag was a sight I'll never forget and neither will any other long-suffering Indians fan.

All of this means, of course, that eventually the Cleveland Browns will have their day. Or will they? At the moment, it all just feels so impossibly off in a future not even imagined. It's not necessary for me to go through the litany of near misses for this franchise. By now it should have been in at least two Super Bowls and probably would have won one of the them.

As I watched the game and went position-by-position in my mind it was hard to find almost anywhere that a Browns' counterpart would start for either team, outside of Joe Thomas and Josh Cribbs. There may be a few other positions where you could have a healthy debate, but generally speaking, and no disrespect intended to a modest 4-game win streak against teams in

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similarly poor shape, the Browns still seem like light years away from competing at that level.

It's a cold slap in the face that can only be overcome by faith, and I don't necessarily just mean in God. Instead, you have to put your faith in people like new general manager Tom Heckert to actually hit on good draft choices more than occasionally. At this point, there simply is little if no room for error.

Of course logic would suggest that Heckert can't help but hit on draft picks if only because this team is so talent-starved in the first place. But that logic didn't exactly hold for his predecessors. Year after year they'd manage to bungle 4 or 5 draft picks for teams similarly depleted, which only furthered that gap between them and nearly every other team.

But Heckert has to be different if the Browns are ever going to close that gap to a manageable distance. If instead he suddenly becomes mediocre at making talent evaluations then this Browns fans can kiss off another decade as well as this dog won't have its day then, either.

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Speaking of the Super Bowl, I'm not sure why I find this story fascinating but I do. Dan LeBatard, the sports writer for the Miami Herald, [wrote a semi-humorous piece](#) about partying with, among others, Minnesota Vikings offensive lineman Bryant McKinnie, during Super Bowl week.

The story focused on McKinnie's hard-partying ways but had an interesting, if fading, Browns connection. It seems that LeBatard was with McKinnie as he binged on whatever he could get his hands on, including about 20 grand worth of champagne. But as hard as McKinnie tried, according to LeBatard, he'd end up losing the bottle buying war that evening to, wait for it, Braylon Edwards. Where McKinnie bought 36 bottles, Edwards' far outpaced him with 51.

That means between the two they bought 87 bottles of champagne for the patrons, or a sub group of patrons, of the night club Cameo that night. If you're like me you may be wondering why the club happened to have 87 bottles of champagne on hand that night for purchase.

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Maybe they knew McKinnie and Edwards were on patrons list for the night and ran out and bought extra.

Putting that aside, it's actually fun to see Edwards pissing away his money in that fashion. He's been pissing away his talent so why not follow it with actual money as opposed to the potential money he won't be getting because of all those dropped balls. His living large/looking stupid moment during Super Bowl week captures the essence of why he was such a lousy fit in Cleveland on so many levels and yet it's only the second best story about Edwards and champagne *this season*.

It seems that shortly after arriving in New York via the Eric Mangini Express, Edwards was out at a night club when he spotted the pop singer Rihanna. Hoping to impress her, Edwards sent over a bottle of champagne (what else?) only to have her send it back in a "who the heck is that?" sort of way. When I heard that I went out and downloaded every Rihanna song on iTunes.

Edwards is clearly turning into a cautionary tale of excess and he has McKinnie as the near-perfect role model. Living beyond their means (Edwards has plenty of money but not plenty of stupid money, at least at this point in his flagging career) is just one of the symptoms. Pretty soon performance will fall off. McKinnie, for one, was kicked off the Pro Bowl team for missing a few practices which were attributable to his late night activities. For Edwards, the fall off will be harder to tell.

Another interesting side light to this story is that it was almost a year ago in Miami that Edwards infamously spent the night drinking with Donte Stallworth. Apparently the only lesson Edwards got out of any of that was not to drink and drive.

When it all comes crashing in on Edwards, and it will, there will be few that will shed a tear for him. He's always carried himself as one of the entitled without having the resume to back it up. As he ventures further out on the limb, just be glad he's some other team's problem.

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*Cleaning up after the NBA All Star game...*

The NBA All Star excess weekend just ended, somewhere around midnight Monday morning with Dwayne Wade besting LeBron James for MVP. While it was a feel good weekend for the NBA and its various and sundry hanger-ons just looking for any reason to have a party, the league is in the process of facing down its own labor strife.

In a column last week I talked about the storm clouds on the horizon in the NFL in the form of negotiations for its next labor contract. It looks like that may just be a warm up for a much bigger storm in the NBA.

The league's contract isn't up for another year but the parties have already started negotiating for a new contract. On the table, from the owners' perspective, are major cuts in the salary cap along with major changes in how it works. Oh yea, they'd also like to eliminate fully guaranteed contracts.

The NBA players' union is understandably upset and is itself taking a strident view of it all, as in "you want a fight you got a fight."

The owners can point to the economy as the rationale behind its move and the union can point to the league's worldwide popularity as the basis for its positions. But the wild card here is the involvement of player agents, particularly those representing the super free agent class graduating at the end of this season. They have always been the muscle behind an otherwise weak union.

The impact of the owners' proposals on the likes of players like James, Wade and the rest of the free-agents-to-bed is dramatic. Sure, those level of players will get whatever maximum contracts are allowed, but a hard salary cap in particular will make it more difficult for teams to build around them and create the kind of teams the San Antonio Spurs, the Los Angeles Lakers and now the Cavs have built. Those teams now exploit every available loophole in a weak and loose salary cap. Presumably much of that ability would be lost if a hard cap were put in place. With less money to spend, teams will end up filling out their rosters like the NFL does, with low priced, undrafted free agents.

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For those Cavs fans unable to enjoy this season knowing that James could leave when it's all over, this just adds another level to their paranoia. The Cavs can pull off major deals now but if the league's salary cap and structure change, it will be hard pressed to field a team where the salaries of James, Mo Williams, Shaquille O'Neal and whoever else the Cavs might land in a trade can fit.

That doesn't mean James might be any more prone to leave but it does mean that teams that currently are dumping salary may be far better positioned for what could be the NBA's future when it comes to landing the marquee free agents. Teams like the Cavs, on the other hand, could find themselves in salary cap hell and unable to extricate themselves for years.

Solving the NBA's problems will be a lot harder than the NFL's but eventually saner minds will find a middle ground. But until that happens, it all just becomes another factor for James and his agent to consider as they ponder his next move.

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*And something to chew on...*

As I watched Carrie Underwood, resplendent as she was in her all-white body suit, sing the National Anthem at the Super Bowl, the question occurred to me: why are country singers attracted to hockey players and not, say, part time writers on Cleveland-based sports web sites?