

A Changing of the Guard?

Written by {ga=tribefan6180}

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Anyone who has logged onto facebook or twitter over the last few days has no doubt seen the new (and to most Clevelanders, improved) version of the "We are all witnesses" graphic.

What was once an iconic image of Ex-King of Cleveland LeBron James, who abdicated the throne for a sunnier realm, has been altered such that it now shows the new Cleveland hero, Peyton Hillis, in a similar pose.

While we can all certainly take some vengeance-filled pleasure in this clever take-off on the image of That Guy Who Left, there's something about it that just doesn't quite fit.

Reason being that Hillis cannot and will not ever be the guy who truly fills the role James once did in Cleveland. And thank god for that.

Cleveland is a blue collar town full of hard working folks who identify with perseverance and tough luck, hope and disappointment. This is not a place where royalty was meant to be worshipped, or even exist.

Hillis has easily slipped into the role of hero, icon, and idol. But he'll never be a king. He doesn't play like someone who is above the rest of us. He doesn't carry himself like someone who is above the rest of us. And he certainly doesn't appear in any way to believe that he IS someone who is above the rest of us.

While LeBron was shooting Sports Illustrated covers, getting tattoos branding himself as a monarch, and smugly embracing his "king" moniker before his career had really even begun, Hillis was wrestling hogs and dragging vehicles around by a rope tied to his waist as a training exercise in some tiny, no-name town in Arkansas.

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King? The man was wrestling pigs.

And what now, since Hillis has become a star in Cleveland and across the NFL?

The only qualities the man seems to exude since his ascent to stardom are humility and overwhelming gratitude.

Earlier this fall, Hillis issued his now-famous quote about Cleveland: "I love this team and I love this town".

In other words, he's wholly thrown his lot in with the rest of us. He's one of us now. Not a would-be king of the Browns or of the city of Cleveland who lords over us, his little subjects.

The "witness" image of James wasn't just a photograph of a local hero. It held greater connotations that meant to depict James as something bigger than the rest of us. Something more powerful. Superior, even.

Which is why it just doesn't quite work using Hillis' instead.

Because that's an image fit for a king, and Hillis doesn't want the job. He wants to be a hero, a star, an idol, certainly. But not a king.

And that's lucky both for Cleveland and for Hillis, because we tried embracing monarchy for just long enough with The One Who Quit to know we're not interested in doing it again.

James made a colossal mistake in thinking he was bigger than his teammates and his town,

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and we all made a mistake too by reinforcing that for him.

But we won't make that mistake again, which is both the reason we've so whole-heartedly embraced a player like Hillis and the reason he'll never look quite right recast as the subject of that "witness" image which we've all grown to associate with a player who sought to convey that we belonged to him, rather than that he belonged among us.

Oh sure, the popularity of the new version of the image the very week LeBron returns to town is certainly good for a laugh - a way to take a little something back from the man who took everything from us.

But going forward, the comparisons between Hillis and James should end there. Casting Hillis in James' former role would be insulting to the humble, team-oriented Hillis, and would reflect on the people of Cleveland as an indication that we hadn't really learned our lesson.

So let's all get a good laugh out of the joke the image makes, and then let's let any association between these two men cease for good. I believe we've spent enough time in the presence of royalty to know that nothing good will come of crowning another Cleveland king.