

Have Things Ever Been This Bad?

Written by {ga=mikeperry}

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While contemptuously watching those vile, inbred, disgusting, dirty, hated Pittsburgh Steelers and their toothless hilljack fan base celebrating the team's 24-19 victory over the New York Jets in the AFC Championship Game, thus earning their second trip to the Super Bowl in the last three years and third career trip for Ben "No Means No" Roethlisberger, I got to thinking about the last time things were this bad for the average Cleveland sports fan.

It has been quite awhile.

In the 1990's we had the Indians dominating the American League, though never winning a World Series title. Even without a ring to show for it I will never forget watching that team. Albert Belle was the most dangerous right-handed hitter in the game and Carlos Baerga was destined to collect 200 hits and drive in 100 runs, with 20 home runs, every year for the endless future. Manny Ramirez and Jim Thome were up-and-coming sluggers we watched grow up in the system before our very eyes, and we stole Kenny Lofton, the best leadoff hitter and defensive centerfielder in the Majors, for virtually nothing.

And that pitching staff...The Bulldog, El Presidente, Charles Nagy, Mark Clark and a young Chad Ogea with Assenmacher and Plunk setting the table and Jose Mesa slamming the door. Man, that was fun.

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So we had something to root for in the 1990's.

In the 80's there were the Kardiak Kids early and Bernie's Boys late. Browns football was fun to watch in the Decade of Greed, but no Super Bowl championship was forthcoming. I still have the Divisional playoff game against the Jets, the double-overtime game, on tape and pull it out about once a year to watch. That game inspired me to buy scalped tickets for the AFC Championship Game against the Broncos (at the healthy sum of \$40.00 for a ticket on the 20-yard line...can you even park for that anymore?), and I sat with my buddies in sub-zero weather, drinking homemade Hungarian tomato wine to keep warm and watched as Elway ripped out our hearts. What I would give to have the Browns in that kind of position again.

The Browns were our team to root for in the 80's, and we even had a couple of flashes from the Indians in '85 and the Cavaliers in the early part of the decade. World B. Free was acquired via trade and, to be honest, is the only reason we still have a reasonable facsimile of NBA basketball in Cleveland. World put fannies in the seats and carried that team to the playoffs, but that was a long time ago.

There were quite a few bad years to choose from in the 1970's, but I settled on one year that, for certain, was a horrible year for Cleveland sports fans. The year 1974 should be wiped from the record books.

There are quite a few parallels. In 1974 the Browns were abysmal, and we had to start the calendar year by watching Warren native, Ohio State alumni and former Cleveland Browns receiver Paul Warfield win a Super Bowl with the Miami Dolphins. The Browns traded Warfield to the Dolphins in 1970 for the draft pick that brought them Purdue All-America quarterback Mike Phipps. Warfield should have been a Brown for life, but he got his ring with someone else.

Then, after the team drafted Billy Corbett, an offensive tackle from Johnson C. Smith (College? University? High? I have no idea) with its top pick in the draft, a second-rounder, the team lost five of its first six under Nick Skorich and never recovered – finishing 4-10. The Browns lost to the Steelers twice and finished last in the AFC Central, six games behind Pittsburgh. By the way, the hated Steelers would go on to win the first of their four Super Bowls in the decade.

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How about the 1973-74 Cavaliers? In the team's last season in the dark, sweaty bandbox known as Cleveland Arena, the Cavs under Bill Fitch finished 29-53. The team was last in the NBA in scoring (at 100.3 points per game) and had a bunch of players in their first or second year, with 13-year veteran Lenny Wilkins running the show. The Cavs would move to the Richfield Coliseum the next season and, within a couple of years, miracles would happen. But after the 73-74 season things looked pretty bad for the Cadavers, as Pete Franklin called them.

And, finally, the Indians. Under Ken Aspromonte the final record, 77-85, wasn't exactly terrible...but the Indians did finish 14 games behind the Baltimore Orioles in the AL East and were never serious contenders in the division. Two things stand out from this season; this was the year, on June 4, when infamous Ten-Cent Beer Night took place (we all have heard the story a million times) and, second, the Indians made the following trade with the Yankees: Chris Chambliss, Dick Tidrow and Cecil Upshaw went from Cleveland to New York in exchange for Fritz Peterson (best known for trading wives with Mike Kekich), Steve Kline, Fred Beene and Tom Buskey. I would say we didn't get nearly enough, wouldn't you?

Here we are, in 2011, in the following situation: The Cavaliers are the worst team in the NBA after being spurned by a local kid that never grew up, the Browns have hired yet another head coach after a pretty bad season, the Indians had a rough year, signed Austin Kearns as their only free agent and are asking fans to have faith in them. Oh, and the toothless hillbillies from a couple hours east of the city are going to the Super Bowl again.

Please, take a moment and think about things. Then drop me a quick email explaining why I should have any hope as a Cleveland fan. Which franchise is headed in the right direction? Why should I have faith that things will turn around for the Cavs, Browns or Indians?

Meanwhile, I think I am going to make an appointment with my doctor to see if I can get on some kind of medication for the dark despair I am feeling. But, then again, is Paxil or Zoloft strong enough to get me to put on a happy face and see the bright side of things? I have no idea where the bright side is, or how to find it.

By the way, go Packers. However, I'm pretty certain you have no chance because the entire world of sports is set up to make one town, our fair city, Cleveland, Ohio, suffer.