



Usually I end my Lingering Items columns with a question to ponder but today I flip the conceit: Are sports fans in general cynical or is it just Cleveland sports fans?

Though I don't usually weigh in on the answer but ask because I'm concerned. About me, about you about the nature of sports in Cleveland generally. I had just finished writing my once or twice a year column on the Cleveland Cavaliers and decided to let it sit for a few days. Something about it didn't seem quite right. When I returned to it, the problem became clear. It seemed to be drenched in a baseline cynicism that can best be summed up as "the Cavs suck, what's new?" That really wasn't what I intended to say. Thus beget the question to ponder and then another, more existential variation: did I have anything more to say about Cleveland sports that I hadn't already said?

At that moment, the answer was "no." I seemed to be saying "of course the Cavs need to fire Byron Scott because, well, it's just their turn in the barrel. This is Cleveland and this is how we roll. The Browns and Indians have just done another in their various yet endless resets and so it just stands to reasons that the Cavs are now on the clock."

It's almost beside the point that on some level it happens to be true. What I was really dealing with was not the quixotic attempt to find a different angle to the same ol' same ol' but a better way of talking about what really is interesting to me about the fact that the Cavs do need to fire

Scot.

Let me deal with the Cavs for a moment in the form of a casual observer, which I am not. It's true that I don't write much about the Cavs, but there are two reasons for it. First, there are many better suited to school you on the nuances of just how lousy the team plays defense. Second, I don't find the NBA a particularly compelling form of professional sports entertainment. The individual games, especially when played by third tier teams, are about as meaningful as a Pringles commercial. If the Cavs beat Orlando by 10 or lose to them by 20, it means nothing except in the race for ping pong balls.

But what is compelling about them and hence what makes me far more than just casual about them (and the town's other two teams) is the inexorable journey they're on as they try to become relevant in a sport that seems more relevant to a billion Chinese than a 100 million Americans. Indeed if I had to really ferret out exactly what interests me about sports in general, it's that journey and all the various missteps that are taken along the way.

When I consider that context, I realize that I'm not particularly cynical about sports or even Cleveland sports because after all these years the results hardly matter. What I am cynical about is the ability of those that control Cleveland sports to do the right thing when it comes to navigating the path from the outhouse to the penthouse. It's not exactly like I need to go chapter and verse on each of the teams in this town but I will if you dare me to. Until then, suffice it to say that no matter how many days and weeks and months and years seem to pass the ability of any Cleveland team to build itself into a winner always seems fanciful. It's like the fans are stuck playing an endless game of chutes and ladders except that the team rarely finds a ladder but always lands on the chutes and usually the one that takes you not just one or two rows back but the one that takes you all the way back to the beginning.

And so it is with these Cavs at these moments. They have cap space. They have one verifiable talent and they have one incredibly bored fan base. Is it right to hold only Scott accountable for it? Of course not. But it's not right to give him a pass, either. Let's look at what's really driving the conclusion.

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