

## The Myth Of LeBron James

Written by {ga=jb}

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Simply put, this is one of the finest articles we've ever run on this site, and one of the better columns I've read in my 30+ years as a rabid Cleveland sports fan. The first time I read it, I laughed. I cried. I reminisced as the last two decades flashed before my eyes. Mansfield Lucas talks about the trials and tribulations we've all been through as fans. And says we are participants soon to be fully delivered from a lifetime of disappointment by one of us. The Chosen One, from Akron, Ohio shall lead us. A MUST READ.



They don't know. They can't know. They know the names. They partially recall the times and circumstance. They casually cite them as they weave in and out of our lives once or twice a decade. But they don't live it. So they can't know it.

George Lucas became a cultural icon and bizillionaire not because of a quaint throwback film that will go down with *"Dazed and Confused"* as one of the best and most non-pretentious flicks ever. He became a global icon, to coin a phrase, as a result of a six-part sci fi saga that was part western, part classical myth, part political allegory and part morality tale. The story centered on the life and death of a single protagonist whose destiny was to fulfill one prophesy: as The Chosen One, he was to bring balance to The Force of universal good and evil.

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LeBron James was born in Akron, Ohio just before the dawning of 1985. He missed Akron's boom days as The Rubber City. By the time he entered the world, the plants, the jobs, and the soul and identity of the city had moved down south. The residents of this rust belt city were discovering what their southern brethren would learn when the words "NAFTA" and "free trade" entered their lives a few decades later; that capitalism will irrevocably follow the least costly human capital to produce goods. As it was in the time of Moses, the deliverer of the Hebrews when he fled to Midian, so it was east of Medina. Like many young people born throughout northeastern Ohio in the 70's, 80's and 90's, LeBron James grew up after the rubber plants, steel mills, and other big manufacturing factories had closed down. The good times were gone and our once proud cities in northeast Ohio started to look like sets from post-apocalyptic Chuck Heston movies.

We all know the story. Well, most of the long-time fans do anyway. A kid grows up in the projects, or Section 8, depending on the story. It is the story of the son of a troubled single mother who struggled with what you too often see in places like that, so much so that he ends up with a foster family for a few years before moving back in with her. He grows up in the 'hood with his Mom. He also grows up as the guest of a working class white family. He sees way too much as a kid and lives the life that sends so many, too many, the wrong way. For whatever reasons, probably his own inner strength, innate character and intellect, he perseveres. By age 13 people know he does some pretty special things with a basketball in his hands.

He ends up at Akron's oldest and most storied parochial high school, no doubt recruited as much for his athletic ability as for any other reason. It's all good though. It's a good match. Next comes AAU ball, a couple state titles, and those now famous Nike and USA basketball camps when you first started seeing his name in national print and whispered in reverent tones among those who know. LeBron James gets glossed with the incredibly pretentious title, "The Chosen One". They thought they knew. They didn't. Hell of a guess they made though; it all seems like destiny.

Bron wasn't even a concept when it started. Can you count [Ray Chapman](#)? Probably not. Hell of a distinction though. Think of Ray when you are across the street from his resting place taking in a ball game. He'll know somehow. Does it count when your truly rancid

[NFL football team wins a title](#)

after obtaining a brilliant young quarterback with movie star qualities only to move shortly thereafter? No, I'm not talking about Paul's Browns, who greased the skids for the Rams departure. And speaking of the Browns' unprecedented and unmatched string of championship game appearances, can anything truly painful have happened to Cleveland sports fans during those years? Cleveland fans would tell you it is so.

You know the story. If you found this site, you should. You've likely seen the grainy film. Dwight Clark didn't make it; [Willie Mays did](#)

. The team with the most wins in baseball history, a record that stood for about 5 decades, went into the World Series with arguably the best pitching staff of all time. A tape measure shot goes into deep center field in the most screwball version of a diamond that was ever assembled, ready to break open game one of the series. The Grady Sizemore of his day runs it down like a bullet, makes The Catch and wheels and throws to kill the inning. The greatest baseball team ever up to that point never recovers and gets swept.

### If we only knew.

Bron wasn't born when the Browns got it done one last time shocking the Colts, ironically in a game that no one nationally gave them a chance of winning. I wasn't born yet, either. Chances are good you weren't born. But 43 years ago was the last time we won a title. Cleveland professional sports: 1948.1964. Never.

Of the three Cleveland franchises still alive and in their collective sorry assed history of nearly the last half century, the Cleveland Cavaliers are arguably the most sorry assed. While we measure heartbreak and promise unfulfilled by the Indians and Browns in terms of World Series failures and bizarre losses in conference championship games, the best years of the Cavs are lionized by six game conference championship series losses that really weren't that close. I know we love them. We're Clevelanders for cryin' out loud. When your team's retired jersey numbers include Bingo Smith, Larry Nance, Austin Carr and Brad Daugherty, you got issues right there. About the best that can be said is that when

you enter the Association with the Portland Trailblazers and Buffalo Braves (Clippers), at least you aren't the worst in your class.

Bron wasn't born when bad things started to occur with regularity to Cleveland teams in big games. The Browns' near misses of early Super Bowls via league and conference championship blow outs at the hands of the Vikings and Colts preceded him. He would have missed the blocked punt ending the near playoff upset of the last perfect NFL team. He would have loved the fan energy and the unselfish play of the Cavaliers' fleeting [Miracle at Richfield team](#)

, but again, that was a decade too early for LeBron. Certainly, Bron wasn't even a thought in Gloria's mind when eighty thousand thunder stuck frozen fans

[watched Mike Davis step in front of Ozzie Newsome](#)

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By 1985, however, Bron was almost a year old when the Browns squandered a 21 point first half playoff game lead against Dan Marino. You can't feel too badly about that one, though. The prize for the other Cinderella team that year was to get housed by the best single season football team I've ever seen. The 21 point fiasco was merely a warm up act for the upcoming tragedy in three parts. We know it like we know ourselves. [The Drive](#). [The Fumble](#).

The

“what's-that-rubber-band-on-Bernie's-finger” game. Three up, three down in our Super Bowl shots to the same inferior horsed faced team. The most beloved group of players in my time as a Cleveland sports fan came away from three trips to the penultimate goal with nada more than the limitless unconditional adoration of millions of

die-hard fans, and a few car dealerships after retirement. Our regional Ohio hero, Bernie Kosar, who rigged the system to play for us after having enough common sense to grow up in the Mahoning Valley and NOT be a Pittsburgh fan proved to be mortal and gone within four more seasons.

By this time, we Cleveland Fans were starting to get a complex. What the hell was up with this any way? Why would our beloved Browns have such bad luck? The dots weren't connected. We thought we were Jason, or Odysseus, just sailing along hitting some bad luck. We had no idea who or what forces were

messing with us.

A nice distraction hit us as the Browns were declining and the real-life version of Commodus in *“Gladiator”* was given more responsibility to run the franchise by his declining father. The Cavaliers, moribund after years of the goofiest owner in professional sports history who did his damndest to destroy the franchise, struck gold. For once, we weren't the franchise that drafted the better player only to see him overdose and die the first time he tried a commonly used recreational drug in his era. The “Team of the 90's” had it all, inside players, an all NBA point guard,

his super athlete running mate in the back court, and some quality role players playing for a bona fide professional coach whose resume included a hall of fame career and championship as a coach. The Cavs started winning, and winning big. Again, we know what happened. Fate decided that after Willie Mays and John Elway, it wasn't enough.

[We had to be the punch line to create another legend,](#)

one even bigger and better than those two hall of famers arguably the best ever at their positions. Nope, not enough. We had to create the best player in the Association's history, the Babe Ruth of the NBA. A few more daggers courtesy of MJ were required

before that marvelous but oft injured group of unselfish and genuinely likeable men quietly went their separate ways, leaving us to again wallow in our accustomed mediocrity.

A funny thing happened on the way to our long-awaited baseball dynasty. Some assholes moved our most beloved sports franchise in secret over greed and the imperative to create a family legacy that ceased to exist less than a decade later anyway. Ouch babe. While some may say the Save Our Browns movement

that created the first example of a powerful pro sports league blinking and acquiescing to a group of fans was our finest hour, and they'd be partially correct, the whole betrayal and the resulting scenario still leaves a hole in my soul unlike any other Cleveland sports experience.

The Tribe certainly did their best in the mid 1990's to fill that gap. The opening of Jacobs' Field and the magnetic personalities of an unprecedented influx of young players, combined with a few

outstanding veterans, created both a summer of magic and a love affair rivaled only by the 1980's Browns in this fan's opinion. This group of arguably four to six hall of fame players and the best outfield ever assembled turned in what we all thought was the season that would lift the curse. When you go 100 and 44 in a short season and beat the living snot out of teams offensively, have the lowest team ERA in the majors, and an automatic bullpen, victory is all but certain. This was the year we'd all been waiting for: Cleveland dominance and national fear and loathing.

What's that? Jim Poole bunting?  
Never mind. We'll get them for sure in  
1996. Or not. What we got was a  
premonition.

1997 had to be the year. An  
underachieving Indians' team did the  
unthinkable in the clutch: Sandy  
Alomar hit a miracle home run to beat  
the heavily favored and heavily hated  
Yankees as their untouchable closer  
was slamming the door. A shaky  
World Series opponent had us on the  
ropes, but had been beaten back by  
this team of destiny, and now we

stood but two outs from the long awaited Cleveland sports title that no one born after 1964 had ever seen. I can still recall standing there in front of the television, pacing. It was surreal. So this is what it was going to feel like? This is what I've waited for and believed would happen someday? This is why I'd spent thousands of hours of my life being a fan so it could lead up to this one moment? Years of cheering my heart out for the ridiculous and the sublime got me to that moment. Steve Holden and Webster Slaughter. Mike Phipps and Brian Sipe. Braylon Edwards and Paul Warfield. John Bagley and Terrell Brandon. Don Ford and Mark

Price. Jerome Whitehead for a number one pick. Jack Brohammer. Ron Brown and Tom Sklandany. Mack Mitchell and Dave Puzzoli. Hanford and Minny. Fritz Peterson. Ernie Camacho and Lenny Barker. Super Joe. Class acts like Duane Kuiper, Bernie, Byner and Campy Russell. Dooshbags like Keith Hernandez and Andre Rison. Pete Franklin, Bruce Drennan, Bob Kravitz and Doug Clarke. Hal. Oh my God, I can see my house from up here.

Banjo hitters, Mesa meltdown,

Grover in a coma, I believe it's getting serious. Extra innings. Gut wrenching loss. Who let that Aztec priest in my house and what is he doing to my chest?

About then, a few of us started to accept the inevitable. We defined something called the Cleveland sports experience, or The Cleveland Experience <sup>TM</sup>, for short. Abbreviated as the now infamous "TCE", we believe it is the work of a malevolent spirit, Jobu, immortalized by Pedro Serrano in "*Major League*", by far

the best of a trio of Cleveland-centric 1990's movies that included *"Howard The Duck"* (The Ted Stepien of movies) and *"The Light of Day"* (the Chucky Brown of movies). Give Jobu enough rum and he allows you hope. But it is never enough. If you replaced all the brewskis imbibed at the nickel beer night riot with rum, Jobu would not be sated. Jobu is like the mythical Lucy holding the football for The Cleveland Fan who is Charlie Brown waiting to kick it. We always believe that Lucy will hold that ball and allow us to kick it. But we know Jobu plays tricks and moves it every time, and every damn time we run

through the failed kick full speed and fall flat on our backs, breaking our hearts and sacroiliacs. The forces of darkness will always defeat Cleveland Fan and mire us in TCE. After all, we are a band of blood brothers bound by:

- The (real) Catch
- Jim Chones' broken foot in The Miracle of Richfield Cavs' run (thought I'd forgotten? Shame on you).
- Red Right 88
- The Drive
- The Fumble
- The Shot
- The Injuries

- The Betrayal
- The Mesa
- The Drop aka the sunlight in Grady's eyes
- The Guran-Sheed bad ball bounces of last season

It isn't a pretty picture. I get visibly piqued when they think they know. Boston fan used to whine about the Red Sox through two Celtics dynasties, a Stanley Cup, and multiple recent Super Bowls. Up yers Chowds. Pain? What do you know of pain? Gimme 6 Bill Buckers and a dozen Bucky Dents for the Celtics' '84 title win alone. Cubs' fan? You

cheesy poseurs. You get MJ, a Sox title, and the 46 defense. A pox on you, HBO, as well. I got your goat right here. I can go on and on about whining fans of single teams in other cities that co-habitate with championship franchises and how hypocritical they all are. Buffalo fan gets a pass. Y'all's teams suck. Bad. San Diego fan gets no love as they live in America's most beautiful city. But both y'all have only had two franchises for most of this time frame, having only had cups of coffee with the same NBA franchise.

The national media and

commentators bring these incidents up in isolation sometimes.

Occasionally, a few who lived among us connect the dots as Steve Kerr did last week. But they don't know. They can't know. They haven't lived the whole TCE.

Up the road on I – 77 He comes. They think he was glossed The Chosen One for his physical basketball skills seemingly imparted from some Platonic ideal. They think

he is called that for his hoops IQ and court vision. They now seem to understand and appreciate that LeBron James would rather be defined as the brightest star in a constellation, not the destructive super nova that results in a black hole for his franchise. They do this but a week after pillaring him for his actions consistent with what makes Bron be Bron.

Let's put this in the proper perspective. Watching LeBron James do what he did that Thursday night in

Detroit in Game 5 against that media hyped “great” defensive team wasn’t a spectacular basketball performance. It transcended that. It wasn’t even really about athletics. What he did was reach a level of human perfection that is not even considered to exist in the realm of the possible. What he did was legendary, mythical. We weren’t watching Bron on the court, we were watching Achilles on the plains outside the walls of Troy. We were watching Michelangelo paint the ceiling. We were listening to Lincoln say a few words to consecrate the final resting place of thousands of young men in south central Pennsylvania. We were watching

greatness and perfection that should not exist in the reality of our human condition. It was beyond any reasonable expectation to achieve, beyond even our ability to witness with credibility. And yet we were all witnesses.

And he topped it in game six.

When LeBron James subjugated his own accomplishments for those of the team the next game, he somehow he

managed to step up even from his personal perfection the previous game. When he gives yet another post game interview where he comes off as level headed, confident but not cocky, well-spoken but with real perspective, you marvel at all he's accomplished and the man he's become given the challenges of both his immense obstacles and great blessings that seem to otherwise shape the maladjusted young men who seem to disproportionately represent today's professional athletic superstars. LeBron James is as differentiated by his character as much as by his talents and accomplishments. I am so proud he's

one of us.

I know the NBA is supposed to be a dues paying league. I know the Spurs are the Spurs and Bron is but 22. I know that TCE has left me a bitter, jaded fan, always expecting the worst, always expecting my beloved Browns, Indians and Cavaliers to pull defeat out of the jaws of victory and break my heart.

That said, I believe that in about a

fortnight or so the curse will be lifted, Jobu will be cast into the fires of [Gahanna](#)

, just to the east of Columbus, and The Chosen One who has been sent by forces we can not possibly hope to understand with our mortal minds will restore balance to the Cleveland professional sports force.

The Cavaliers will be world champions soon. Believe it. The Chosen One will deliver us safely

across the shore where we will rejoin Otto Graham, Lou Groza, Satchel Page, Lou Boudreau, and even Ray Chapman. Swing low, oh sweet chariot, carrying us all forth to witness rim jarring posterizations and impossible fade away treys, coming forth to take our long suffering asses home to that long awaited championship Promised Land.

With apologies to a great ad campaign, we are not all witnesses.

We Cleveland fans are participants soon to be fully delivered from a lifetime of disappointment by one of us. The Chosen One, from Akron, Ohio shall lead us.

Up your butt, Jobu.