

## It's My Fault: Don't Let Me Watch

Written by {ga=stevebuffum}  
Friday, April 21 2006 7:00 PM -

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I am not naturally superstitious. I do not have a pair of lucky socks, or eat a particular meal before the big game, or avoid black cats and ladders, or sit in a particular spot on the couch. I will tell my Dad when a guy has a no-hitter going, and I step on cracks with no discernable damage to my mother's spine. (If I have gotten the saying wrong and it is really, "Step on a crack, give your mother arthritis," I am deeply sorry and bear the guilt.)

This isn't to say I haven't been superstitious in my day. I think just about every sports fan has done the equivalent of "wearing a rally cap." I have drawn vertical bars on my bowling scoresheets (for those of you still in school, there was a day when, yes, one wrote down one's bowling scores on paper, or, if one was lucky, with a thick, yellow wax pencil on a clear sheet over a light bulb heated to roughly six thousand degrees so it could be projected overhead). I have crossed my fingers in elaborate, exotic ways looking for the right combination to tap into the currents of the Invisible Luck Field that surrounds all sporting events. But it's hard to argue that I truly believed with any real conviction that these things influenced the outcome of the game.

However, it's hard to be a lifelong Cleveland fan and not come to the only rational conclusion: I jinx Cleveland by watching them.

Granted, I've seen Cleveland sports teams win. And yes, the teams have managed to lose games without my help. Heck, the Indians of the 70s or Cavs of the 80s lost a LOT of games without my help. The Invisible Luck Field ostensibly has minor influence over borderline decisions: there is nothing that overcomes Simple Ineptitude. You can slaughter chickens or hop on one foot in the sock you were wearing as your high school football team won the state championship or drink exactly three ounces of orange juice in one gulp all you want and Randolph Keys steadfastly remains Not Magic Johnson.

And there are those that would tell you my observations lack "statistical

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significance." This is shorthand for "I lack your perspective." No, you can't show a direct correlation between my presence and a Cleveland loss, but so what? Let me ask you this:

- 1) Have you ever left the room while watching a game?
- 2) Have you ever changed the radio station on a two-strike count, third down, or free throw attempt?
- 3) Have you ever covered your eyes at a live event? (Again, remember the focus here: covering your eyes before a Chris Dudley free throw or Bartolo Colon batting appearance to avoid retinal damage does not count.)
- 4) Have you ever asked a friend to describe an outcome that you had the resources to see first-hand?

You may say these things are natural, that they are simply by-products of stress avoidance, that they are endemic of sports fans in general. This, of course, is utter nonsense. What they show is an uncanny knack for baseline observation: you watch, they fail, Q.E.D.

My father has a friend who is a lifelong Phillies fan. He understands what I'm talking about. I assume he did not watch the 1980 playoff run.

I found a description of the process at work from the 1997 Indians-Yankees Divisional Playoff Series (I am "Dad"):

*Game 1: 1-year-old reading a book with Mom, 4-year-old in the tub, Dad gets a chance to see the top of the first. 2-run lead, men on base, Sandy Alomar up. 4-year-old must get out of the tub IMMEDIATELY. TV goes off with the count 1-0.*

*1-year-old tucked in, 4-year-old listening to Winnie the Pooh with lights off. Cleveland leads 6-1. Dad turns on TV. Cleveland leads 6-4. Dad turns off TV, goes to convince 4-year-old of inappropriateness of late-night snack.*

*4-year-old asleep, wife asleep. Dad turns on TV. Cleveland is losing 8-6. Dad watches rest of game, offense does not produce.*

*Game 2: Same tub scenario. Dad turns on TV to watch Jaret Wright*

*walk in a run. Dad turns off TV.*

*Kids in bed, wife finished watching ER. Dad turns on TV.  
Watches Jose Mesa hit a batter with the bases loaded to bring  
Yanks to within 7-4. Dad turns sound down, works on computer.*

*Dad no longer able to concentrate on computer, turns up sound  
in time to watch Derek Jeter hit a solo shot in the 9th.  
Goes to get a soda, comes back in time to watch Bernie  
Williams strike out. Overcomes urge to leave the room and  
actually gets to see Indians win.*

*So, the overwhelming conclusion is something that I've actually  
thought for a long time, since I was a kid, when such things seemed  
plausible: I am my own personal Cleveland Hex. How many times did the  
Yankees load the bases last night? I watched the game for maybe a  
grand total of 20-30 minutes, and I saw it twice. And a runner  
scored each time ... WITHOUT THE HITTER SWINGING THE BAT.*

I later amended this to conclude that it was only the offense that I jinxed, in that I did see the Indians prevent runs, but never saw them score any.

However, another guy on the newsgroup, George "Rick" Bohan, refined the theory further:

*Here's the way it works and I know this from many years of hexing the  
Tarheels in basketball even before 12 years or so of hexing the Tribe:  
If you don't watch or listen BECAUSE doing so will hex them, then NOT  
watching or listening hexes them. You have to NOT watch or listen for  
another reason, say, you "forgot" what time they started or your kid  
wants you to put him to bed. If, while you are taking care of these  
other responsibilities, you DON'T think about the game (honestly),  
when you tune in, (and you have to do so as soon as you reasonably can  
or you will reverse the hex) good things will have happened. And good  
things will continue to happen (usually but not always) when you tune  
in again. But, again, if you say to yourself, "I'm not going to  
watch/listen because doing so hexes the Tribe." then NOT watching or  
listening will hex them ergo you MUST watch/listen. It is very tricky  
to formulate all sorts of reasons to somewhat legitimately be away*

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*from the game and very tough to truly not think of it while you are away but I've been practicing for about 20 years and have gotten pretty good at it.*

*The only exception to the above: If you are NOT watching/listening because to do so will drive you mad and destroy your family then not listening won't hex the Tribe. This was my case during the divisional playoffs and as you know the Tribe was not hexed.*

The idea that one's desires influence outcomes isn't limited to Cleveland sports, or even to sports in general. Still, I've generated a real anxiety about having rooted for the wrong team in a complex playoff-qualification scenario in a way I never have about non-sports entertainment, politics, or other "real" things. And since the outcomes for Cleveland teams have been so uniformly heartbreaking ('86 Browns) or bowel-irritating (Ted Stepien Cavs), it seems natural to attribute a pretty heavy negative influence to one's own fannish passion.

Still, I'm adjusting my work schedule during the NBA Playoffs such that I will have to work some nights in order to finish my projects. Guess which nights?

*If you have a Fan Hex Story, please send it to [buff@swerbsblurbs.com](mailto:buff@swerbsblurbs.com) . This serves two purposes: I hope to collect enough good stories to produce another column, and it would provide some tangible evidence that the column has actually been read by someone who neither writes for the site nor is a blood relative (Hi, Dad!).*