



Al Jolson's "You Made Me Love You" floated in the air, my mom's humming mixing with the aromas wafting from the kitchen, while my brother went 10 for 10 at the hastily drawn free throw line in our backyard. I was in awe of his ability, the swish, swish, swish a sound I came to associate with 3-in-one jello, Brown Betty casseroles, my mother's famous paper thin carrots in butter and having my brother all to myself for a few hours.

My free throws veered wildly, my arms tired easily and my brother was endlessly patient, all to no avail. He continued to improve and I continued to aim carefully only to hit the side of the garage.

Fast forward to the 2010-2011 NBA season in Cleveland. A convoluted series of events – all bad – created an atmosphere of anger and despair centered around a game which brings joy to millions. As the season limped to its inevitable conclusion, the Cavs were benched and the Playoffs began. I swore I would not watch. Too painful.

My resolve lasted only so long. The second phrase of Al Jolson's hit song played in my head – "I didn't want to do it" – as I tuned in to Game 4 of the Celtics/Knicks matchup. And what a game. Down by 23, a train wreck in unalterable motion, the Knicks kicked it up a notch. Down by 10, down by 6, the Knicks melted in the last minute or so but forced the Celtics to take them seriously.

And that's why we watch. How fun was that? How fun to see Spike Lee's hat and listen to Jeff Gundy and Mark Jackson discuss its merits. How fun to see a beaten and outmatched team, mentally and physically, burst onto the court with a new strategy and nearly take the game.

In the brutal "win or go home" Playoffs atmosphere, at least the Knicks didn't have far to drive. And I remembered why I fell in love with the game in the first place. The sheer beauty of world class athletes flying across the court, above the rim and into the hearts of fans.

Then I hear the big news. Philly beat the Heat. Stop it. Philly beat the Heat? Forced Miami into a game 5? Flash to video of LeBron looking disgusted and somehow I feel validated. It's wrong I know, to revel in someone else's loss. But there I was, standing on the coffee table, doing the nanny nanny boo boo dance.

Ah, basketball – you made me love you. I didn't want to do it.

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