

The Miracle Tribe and Its Impossible Dream

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Friday, June 03 2011 1:30 PM - Last Updated Thursday, June 02 2011 10:28 PM



It's probably far too early in the season and the Indians have much more to prove before we should start making comparisons between them and some of the miraculous Cinderella stories in baseball history like the '69 Miracle Mets or the Impossible Dream woven by the 1967 Red Sox.

That being said, let's get started.

Baseball is filled with darling one-year Cinderella stories in which a team captures lightning in a bottle and vaults from the outhouse to the penthouse in one magical summer. In the "wild-card" era, this has become less extraordinary, but still happens far less frequently than in any other sport.

Accordingly, these one-year wonders are celebrated and remembered for ages.

Generally speaking, if you leaf through these underdog stories, there are two common threads combining the truly remarkable ones: good pitching and a great

nickname.

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With a rejuvenated pitching staff, the 2011 Indians meet half the prerequisite. Now the team as a whole just needs a kick-ass moniker.

In the 21st century, sports nicknames are hard to come by. Historically, a nickname is granted by a witty sportswriter, then the fans embrace it and do their part by bringing signs to the ballpark, dressing in character, themed accessories, etc.

But sportswriters these days are a little less interested in capturing the imagination of their readers (so as to be more interested in – I don't know – Sudoku, maybe) and to be fair, they're not here to serve as cheerleaders.

And with the diarrhetic nature of social media, far too many people (many of them idiots) now have a voice, and with it they drown one another out like the cast of *The Poseidon Adventure*. So while there are many more forums for possible suggestions, I think it would be harder for a nickname to stick if flung from the superficial ether of Twitter.

But who can say. What I do know is that now with the season entering its middle third, the Indians are going to need a spark to keep the magic going. The cutesy novelty of April and May is about to wear off. And while the energy of the fans is growing, they're no longer watching the Tribe like a giggly 15-year-old girl on her first date.

We expect things now. A trend has been established and a tone has been set.

The bar has been raised and the players must respond. And so, as it happens, must we.

This team needs a nickname.

While the Indians do their part on the field, the fans need to step up as well. This team can use

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a clever linguistic crutch to lean on to help get it through the summer.

Naturally, there are lots of possibilities.

The Amazin' Indians?

Fun, but taken.

The Incredible Indians?

Nice alliteration, but a little bland.

The Terrific Tribe?

That sucks.

Historically, Cleveland doesn't have many nicknames for teams or events. In fact, only three have really endured: the Kardiatic Kids, the Dawgs, and the Miracle of Richfield.

Wait – the Kardi-Acta Kids?

Ha! But no.

Another that stuck, albeit for the wrong reasons was the "Crybaby Indians" nickname for the

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1940 team that tried to get manager Ossie Vitt fired midseason and wound up getting pummeled with fruit down the stretch of a heated pennant race.

How about the Fly-Baby Indians? Like, they're "fly"...as in "cool" like the kids are talking these days?

Oh my.

For as good as the 1995 team was and as much fun as the 1990s were with all the home runs and mediocre pitching, those Indians aren't cemented in history the way they would have been had they been labeled with a cool nickname like, say, the "Cleveland Lumber Company." (Better than that, but kind of like that.

Let's not let that happen again.

The "What-ifs"?

Perfect sentiment, since the whole "What If?" campaign is gradually becoming this year's battle cry. But as a nickname, it sounds a little too much like the Know-Nothing political party of the 1850s. Which you've never heard of.

Who knows what the future holds and who cares about next year. This team needs a quick-glance identity and only we can give it to them.

The Carnegie & Ontario Railroad?

Too much work and nobody will get it.

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A good nickname can keep spirits up even when the team is down and distract people from the fact that the team in question is not actually as good as the nickname it's adopted.

For example, as the Cincinnati Reds marched toward an unexpected world title in 1990, they were defined by the "Nasty Boys" – relief pitchers Rob Dibble, Norm Charlton, and Randy Myers. All three had nice seasons and solid careers, but certainly won't be confused with Dennis Eckersley or Rollie Fingers. Dammit if we don't remember them, though, spearheading that slightly-better-than-average Reds team that caught fire for two weeks in October.

But it can't just be cute. For it to really stick, a nickname needs to reflect the nature of the team – which in the case of the 2011 Indians isn't glittery or glamorous and has no real star power. Rather than a team of superheroes, this club is made up of a bunch of Clark Kents.

Hey – the Clark Kents!

Not too shabby, particularly since Superman was created in Cleveland. But it's kind of clunky and doesn't roll off the tongue.

Another perfect example from the Queen City is the Big Red Machine. The Reds boasted arguably the best lineup in the history of the game and they certainly enjoyed a run of success throughout the 1970s, winning a pair of World Series and six division titles. And more importantly, their nickname rolls off the tongue like strawberry pancake syrup at an IHOP.

Over the exact same time period that the Big Red Machine reigned over baseball, the Pittsburgh Pirates also won two World Series and six division titles, but are largely forgotten. Why? No nickname. At least not until 1979, when they won a title to the tune of the Sister Sledge disco operetta "We Are Fam-a-Lee" while wearing piss-yellow jerseys, black tuxedo pants, and those bizarre painter's caps with stars on them.

See, *that* we remember.

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Here's another: the Milwaukee Brewers are perhaps the most forgettable franchise in sports, and their World Series appearance in 1982 would have long since been sucked into the vacuum of anonymity alongside Tony Mandarich were it not for the catchy "Harvey's Wallbangers" nickname given to the club's potent offense under manager Harvey Kuenn.

Manny's Ballhangers?

Maybe if the pitching sucked. Or if their testicles were immense.

The 1950 Phillies were just another National League sacrificial lamb torn apart by the Yankees in the World Series, but are immortalized as the "Whiz Kids," since they were led by young stars. So maybe we should focus on the youth element.

The C Kids?

Too much of a "Me and Julio Down By the Schoolyard" feel.

Manny's Kids?

Again, both fitting and catchy. But it either sounds like a sitcom on the WB or as if the players have some sort of terminal disease.

How about harkening back to the golden days of baseball? There were the "Miracle Braves" of 1914 who stormed out of last place on the Fourth of July to win the World Series. Or the memorable "Gashouse Gang" of the St. Louis Cardinals in the 1930s.

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The Miracle Tribe?

Maybe after a few more walk-off wins. Or if Austin Kearns' batting average tops .200.

It's not a bad idea to provide as many individual nicknames as possible – Justin “Bat” Masterson, perhaps – but don't get sidetracked. This is not the NBA, where 11 guys hitch their preposterously tattooed wagons to one player and let him carry them as far as he's willing to put forth an effort (say, an otherwise winnable conference semifinal series against Boston).

The Indians don't have that one spectacular player who can make their dreams come true like the kid named Manning in 1988 who led the Kansas Jayhawks – henceforth known as “Danny and the Miracles” – to an unlikely NCAA men's basketball title.

Still, the possibilities are there.

Josh and the Tomlin-Aires?

If he wins 20 games, we can talk.

Rage and His Machine?

Not bad, but it's tough to build a team's nickname around the closer.

Fausto and the Carmonas?

A perfect name for an alternative rock band you'd pay a \$3 cover to see at a dive bar near the

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airport. But Fausto's been a little too Norman Bates this season to structure your nickname around.

And while Shin-Soo Choo's name seems to beg to be turned into something witty, to do so would probably turn out to be overtly racist.

The Indians' relief pitchers recently labeled themselves "The Bullpen Mafia." Love it.

We've also got "Supermanahan." Perfection.

Having two Cabreras in the infield lends itself to some creativity. After beating the Tigers with a bases-loaded homer, Carlos Santana picked up "Slam-Tana" for a hot second. And Chris Perez calling himself "Rage" – while perhaps a smidge incomprehensible – is the spirit we're looking for.

Ironically, the one proven nickname a Tribe player does have desperately needs to be retired. To call Travis Hafner "Pronk" these days is utterly silly. He's 34 and made of balsa wood. His days as both a prospect and a donkey are long since past.

The Win-Dians?

A little too cute. Sort of like naming your kid Huckleberry. It seems fun until the first time you get your face slammed into a locker at school.

Maybe we need to look outside of baseball, to iconic nicknames like the "Broad Street Bullies" or "Monsters of the Midway."

The East Ninth Enforcers?

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Take one look at Asdrubal Cabrera's cherub face and try to say the word "enforcer" without cracking up.

Or maybe try to focus on what's new and different about the team this year. Like the new block "C" caps.

Ooh – we could start calling Progressive Field "C Block." Like a prison for opponents.

On the other hand, with two outfielders getting popped for drunk driving in the last six months, maybe not.

The Avengers?

Appropriate, since these guys are dishing out some payback for the last few years of struggles and they're filming in Cleveland this summer the blockbuster movie that will disappoint us next summer.

The Players to be Named Later?

Both appropriate and witty with a dash of in-your-face to the teams who foolishly parted with the young talent that now forms the core of our small-market tilt-a-whirl. But it's not terribly catchy. We need a perfect storm here, guys.

I imagine a good nickname is a lot like the Supreme Court's definition of pornography – we'll know it when we see it.

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If you have ideas of your own – no doubt better than the ones you’ve just read – by all means, send them along and we’ll lead a groundswell.

The Indians need us, Tribe fans. Let’s not let them down.