



This is one installment in a team effort by The Cleveland Fan, highlighting the top local sports figures by jersey number. Please weigh in with your thoughts, in the Forum. As David Letterman would say, "For entertainment purposes only; please, no wagering."

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I'm going to make it, even if I have to runthrough a ton of walls ... F-- being friends. I'm going to destroy these dudes."

---Kyrie Irving, June 2009

The future of the Cleveland Cavaliers was forever altered on Thursday, February 24, 2011. That's the day that the Cavs traded Mo Williams and Jamario Moon to the Clippers for Baron Davis, Baron Davis's contract and the Clippers 1st round pick in the 2011 draft. The conventional wisdom at the time was that Davis would be unhappy and disinterested in Cleveland and from the Cavs' perspective, the trade was made with the draft pick in mind. Davis actually played well in his brief time with the Wine and Gold, most notably in a late-season home victory over the Miami Heat. [At the time of the deal, Clippers GM Neal Ashley felt pretty good about himself, commenting that,](#) "Our analysis at this point in February is that it was more valuable to get a 28-year-old All-Star point guard that we have for the next few years, cap flexibility to make sure we take care of business...as opposed to speculating on another kid that's 19 years old with one year of college experience. And I'm not that high on the draft to begin with this year." But the draft pick was the important part of that deal, an unprotected pick that would likely end up in the lottery. After the ping pong balls did their thing, the pick acquired from the Clippers wound up being #1 overall in the entire draft.

At the time, the top player in the 2011 draft was far from unanimous. Irving was coming off of a toe injury that kept him on the bench for most of his freshman year at Duke, and Arizona's Derrick Williams was coming off of a fantastic NCAA tournament that was propelling him into the discussion at #1. Plenty of NBA analysts thought Williams should be the Cavs pick at 1-1. The Cavs put both players through their paces prior to the draft, and of course ended up taking Irving. [The Irving selection prompted ESPN/Grantland's self-anointed NBA expert Bill Simmons to write the following in his draft diary:](#)

*"Our no. 1 pick? Yup ... Kyrie Irving. You know, because any time you can grab a freshman point guard who missed two-thirds of the season when you have \$20 million of point guards on your roster, you have to do it. We'll see how this goes: I see him settling somewhere between an extremely poor man's Chris Paul and a rich man's Mike Conley. **Will he ever make an All-Star team? It's possible ... maybe one or two.***

One thing I don't understand: Why does everyone keep saying this month that you "need" a good point guard to win? Didn't anyone watch Jason Kidd and Mario Chalmers just battle in the

Finals? You need good players to win.

I believe Derrick Williams will be a more effective professional basketball player than Kyrie Irving.

We will see."

[Less than a year later, Simmons had dramatically changed his tune:](#)

7. Will "Cleveland will regret taking Kyrie Irving over Derrick Williams" supplant "Orlando will regret taking Dwight Howard over Emeka Okafor" as the single dumbest thing I've ever written?

Irving is an absolute gem, so it's definitely in play. (The lesson, as always: Don't have a strong opinion heading into an NBA draft about someone you didn't see enough.) I wouldn't go so far as to call him "Kevin Johnson 2.0," if only because Kevin Johnson was really good. But Irving has three distinct K.J.-ish qualities: He's always going faster than it seems like he's going; when he drives to the basket bigger guys seem to bounce off him; and there's something about the way Irving dribbles that makes defenders instinctively back up, as if they're saying, "I don't know what's about to happen, but I don't want to get my ankles broken." He's also better in the clutch already than K.J. ever was. And he's only 19! It can't be forgotten how great it is to win the lottery sometimes.



So what happened in that lockout-marred 2011 NBA season? Well, Irving went out and averaged 18.5 points, 5.5 assists, 1.1 steals and 3.7 rebounds per game on his way to winning

the NBA Rookie of the Year Award. Left off the All-Star team, he eviscerated the competition in the 2012 Rookie-Sophomore game, scoring 34 points and going 8-8 from behind the 3-point line on his way to winning the MVP Award for the contest. He hit several game-winning shots, never shying from the big moment at the end of the game. The website 82games.com came up with a stat to measure clutch time, judged to be when the game is within 5 points and there are less than 5 min left. Kyrie Irving, as a rookie, led the league in clutch time scoring average, putting up 56.4 points per 48 min of game time, and doing it on 54.4% shooting from the field. Again, he LED THE NBA. Kevin Durant finished 2nd last year, behind Irving. After years of having to make excuses for a superstar's performance with the clock winding down, wondering if he's passing because he's afraid of the moment and "giving him time to grow into the role," watching Irving demand the ball and the spotlight when the game is on the line was like a dream come true. Irving only added to his legend this past Saturday against the Raptors, scoring 5 points in the final minute of a 1-point victory, [including a game-winning 3-pointer from way behind the arc with 0.7 seconds left on the clock.](#)

It was Irving's 5th

game-winning shot in his 85 games as a professional basketball player.

[As TCF colleague Demetri Inembolidis pointed out](#)

, that same night Derrick Williams started for the Timberwolves, and scored 5 points.

"Cleveland people love their sports. They're die-hard fans and you just have to embrace that. I feel like what you put into Cleveland is what you're going to get out of it."

---Kyrie Irving, June 2012

Since then, the accolades have been rolling in. [ESPN's David Thorpe called Irving the best 2nd-year player in the NBA.](#)

Then

[Amin Elhassan predicted that he'll be the league's best point guard by 2015,](#)

over guys like Chris Paul, Russell Westbrook, Derrick Rose and Rajon Rondo. He didn't make the 2012 Olympic Team, but was on the squad that practiced against the Olympians and made a couple of moves that were the talk of the Olympic camp. He'll be 23 for the 2016 Olympics though, and will likely be a mainstay in the rotation for the team that the USA takes to Rio. He challenged Kobe to a game of 1-on-1 for \$50,000, time and date TBD. He's followed up his award-winning rookie campaign by averaging 24.2 points, 5.6 assists and 1.7 steals per game so far in 2012/13,

[and is continuing his late-game heroics](#)

. He wasn't voted onto this year's East All-Star team as a starter, losing out to Rondo and D-Wade. The coaches corrected the fans' oversight though, voting Irving onto the team as a

reserve last week. He's the 6th

youngest player to be named to an NBA all-star team. ESPN featured him in their "Next" issue of their magazine,

[and if you haven't taken the time to read the fantastic piece that Pablo Torre published on Christmas Day](#)

, then I suggest you immediately do so. I know Irving has a limited body of work in Cleveland, but his early-career success combined with the fact that he has the potential to be not just good, but great, has him as the best #2 in Cleveland sports history in my book.



Unleash everything you have and never look back. You are the best point guard in this league, so act like it. Let's go.

---Kyrie Irving, November 2012

Aside from Kyrie, there aren't many options for the #2 in Cleveland sports lore. The best #2 in Indians history is probably CF Brett Butler, who spent the 1984-1987 seasons on the shores of Lake Erie. Butler didn't make the all-star team as an Indian, but averaged a .288/.373/.396 line with 5 HR, 48 RBI and 31 SB per season on the North Coast. He was an above-average defensive CF, and was probably best known as a Los Angeles Dodger.

Honorable mention: JHonyy Peralta and Alex Cole.

As for the Browns, the "best" #2 is probably none other than Tim Couch. Drafted #1 overall by

the new Browns in 1999, Couch went 22-37 as a starter for some of the worst teams in franchise history, but did post an 8-6 record as a starter in 2002 to help lead the team to their only playoff berth since 1994. He was sacked a league-leading 56 times his rookie year in 1999, then 51 more times in 2001. Couch's career QB rating was a surprisingly respectable 75.1, and he was retired and out of football by 2004.

Honorable mention: [Reggie Hodges?](#)

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