



Remember the beginning of *Raiders of the Lost Ark*?

Right after Indiana Jones barely escapes a terrifying South American cave of death in which he battled huge spiders, motion-detecting spears, poisonous darts, and a giant rolling boulder in order to acquire the golden idol he was searching for, he winds up face to face with his bitter rival.

This suave, handsome, khaki-clad douchebag - with the pansy-French name of Belloq, no less - backed up by a cadre of well-armed natives who have no idea what's going on, simply takes the idol Indy had risked life and limb for and makes it his own.

"Dr. Jones," he explains smugly, "again we see there is nothing you can possess which I cannot take away."

And indeed, Belloq not only gets away with the idol, but then later swipes the Ark of the Covenant from Indy to counterbalance months of incompetent digging in the wrong place. Things ultimately even out at the end of the movie, when Belloq ill-advisedly pops open the Ark, which causes his face to melt and head to explode like an apple in a microwave.

Belloq's "and now it's mine, bitch" philosophy toward archeology can be translated into any number of sports allegories, but it seems particularly fitting with what's happening in Miami this week.

For years - decades, even - Miami has been a bastion of idol-stealing, snatching away cherished prizes from other places and then using them to proclaim its own sports glory.

But now, finally, it appears to be face-melting time in South Beach.

When the Florida state legislature refused to even vote on a proposal to provide public funding to improve Pro Player Stadium, it appeared to symbolize the beginning of the end for the Miami Dolphins. For if the somehow-now-ancient 26-year-old facility isn't given a \$400 million facelift, the team's CEO insists, there's no possible way the Dolphins can continue to conduct business in Miami.

In other words - clear off the coffee table, Los Angeles. Company's coming.

For as little enthusiasm as there should be about wildly incompetent L.A. finally getting an NFL team after nearly two decades without, I think we can all raise a glass and toast Miami finally getting its long-overdue comeuppance. And I don't just mean Cleveland should raise a glass, but planet Earth as a whole.

True, Miami never upped and stole an entire team from another city (though it came damned close to landing the Indians in *Major League*). Yet it still serves as the sunshiny capital of that dominion of thinkers. Any and all sports success Miami has enjoyed since Larry Csonka has come as a result of pillaging talent from other franchises.

While much was made about the taking of LeBron's talents, the Heat wouldn't have won their first title without borrowing Shaquille O'Neal as if he were your cousin's pickup truck. Let's not forget the Florida Marlins' rent-a-pennant team of 1997 that was subsequently sold off before the champagne dried. And then how they tried to follow the exact same template a year ago with, shall we say, less effective results.

Even outside the sports universe, Miami - and all of Sun Belt, really - has made cultural cherry-picking its moneymaker. It's lured jobs and companies from the Northeast and Midwest, promising that sunshine and warm winters will absolutely make the business more effective. It

has lured countless numbers of retired snowbirds along with their highly disposable incomes not unlike Satan tempted Jesus on the mountaintop.

Put simply, Miami is a scavenger town. And now, for the first time, the buzzards are circling over their heads.

But here's the real mind-bending question - if a pro sports team leaves Miami and nobody's there to see it, will it make a sound?

Sure, the politicians will get their thick gold-chain necklaces and small, inappropriate Speedos in a bunch and bemoan the effect this will have on the local economy. But since a new shopping mall and/or drag-queen club opens somewhere in Dade County roughly every four hours, I think Miami's economy will probably keep on keepin' on without the Dolphins. Or any of its other over-funded, under-attended franchises, for that matter.

But let's not vilify our South Florida brothers and sisters. Miami, like most warm-weather sports cities, will get behind a championship-caliber team. At least eventually. Most of the time. I mean, they may not sell out a home game in the NBA Finals or World Series, but the majority of people in Miami will be aware that the team is doing well. They may not know which team, but they'll be excited about it. In principle, at least. Probably.

But if a team is not within 11 minutes of winning a world title, does Miami have the time, patience, or baseline human character to really support it?

Best guess - the over/under on Miami noticing the Dolphins are playing in L.A. will be 18 months. Tops.

So it's not hard to understand why the Florida state legislature is a wee bit hesitant to ask the taxpayers to shell out 400 million clams to keep any team there.

Reading between the lines, if there is a concern in this political romper room, it's about the potential loss of hosting another Super Bowl, which is likely more valuable than actually having an NFL team. It's a valid political and economic fear, but even that will likely work itself out.

When and if the Dolphins leave, Miami could build a "new" stadium (let's use the term cautiously since 26 is now considered "decrepit") and pay for it by hosting a couple of Super Bowls. And then three years from now, when the "new" stadiums in Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Indianapolis, Chicago, Philadelphia, St. Louis, etc. are considered too old, Miami can lure a new team with pictures of bikinis and fresh cocaine delivered right to your door.

So even if the Dolphins head west, shed no tears for Miami. Magic City will be just fine, so long as there are other cities to take things from.

In the meantime, let's all stand back and enjoy watching its face melt.

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