

Are Cleveland's Current Teams Worst We've Ever Seen?

Written by {ga=tommoore}

Tuesday, June 11 2013 11:00 PM - Last Updated Monday, June 17 2013 8:59 AM



How bad is it right now to be a Cleveland sports fan?

It's bad, obviously, as to paraphrase one of Coughlin's Laws, "everything in Cleveland sports ends badly, otherwise it wouldn't be Cleveland."

But just how bad is it compared to other historically bad times in Cleveland sports? And, yes, we get that comparing poor eras is a very Cleveland thing to do.

On Wednesday, [Craig at Waiting for Next Year proposed that this is one of the worst times in Cleveland sports](#), what with the current negative streaks surrounding the Indians, Browns and Cavs. Craig wonders how it could get much worse, pointing out that:

- The 2012 Cleveland Indians had an 11-game losing streak, 9-game losing streak, 6-game losing streak, and a 5-game losing streak all in the same season. Nearly 20 percent of the MLB season was spent slumping hard in Manny Acta's last year in Cleveland.
- The Cleveland Browns start 2012 with five straight losses. They also ended the season with three straight losses as Pat Shurmur was shown the door and Randy Lerner sold the team.
- The Cavaliers had a 6-game losing streak, 4-game losing streak, 5-game losing streak, 6-game losing streak, 10-game losing streak and a 6-game losing streak all in the same season. That's nearly half the season spent in pretty exceptionally bad streaks.

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That led us to have a conversation with Harv 21 about how, while things are bad now, it just seems worse because we are experiencing it in the here and now. We're going through difficult times; it just seems like hard times because we are currently living them.

In a town where we know a lot about losing, it's hard to think that right now is as bad as it has ever been, especially when you consider that the late 1970s through early 1980s seemed to be just as bad, if not worse, than the current streak we are witnessing from the Big 3 teams in town.

So how do the two eras compare?

We used 1999 as the starting point for the current era in Cleveland sports as that was the year the Browns came back to the NFL. For the older era, we started in 1972 (basically the last hurrah of the 1960s Browns) and covered the same 14-year timeframe, ending in 1985. And we found that there are a lot of similarities.

Since 1999, the Browns, Cavs and Indians have combined for a .475 winning percentage (1,724-1,902) and nine playoff appearances (one for the Browns, five for the Cavs and three for the Tribe).

From 1972 through 1985, the trio combined to win at just a .445 pace (1,575-1,966) and grab eight playoff spots (four each for the Browns and Cavs).

The Browns come off as the team that is clearly worse now, with the franchise posting a winning percentage of just .326 since 1999, with just one playoff appearance and a ridiculous 11 seasons of double-digit losses.

Even though the old Browns struggled through most of the 1970s and into the '80s after making the playoffs in 1972 with a 10-4 record, they still won almost as much as they lost (a .483 winning percentage) and only had four seasons with double-digit losses. The team also made three playoff appearances during that time (four if you count the strike-shortened 1982 season), although they didn't win any playoff games.

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Not surprisingly, the current Cavs have done better than their predecessors, thanks mainly to the LeBron James factor.

Since 1999, the Cavs have posted a winning percentage of .459 (521-613) and made five playoff appearances, including the franchise's lone NBA Finals appearance.

Starting in 1972, the Cavs barely won 40 percent of their games over 14 seasons (462-686), but did manage to have four playoff seasons.

Somewhat surprisingly, the current Cavs have had almost as many seasons of 50-plus losses (six, thanks in part to the expansion-like play over the past three years) as the actual expansion Cavs (seven) had from 1972 to 1986.

The biggest surprise comes when you look at the Tribe. As bad as the Indians were for most of the 1970s – they didn't make the playoffs in the timeframe we're talking about and have five seasons where they lost at least 90 games – the franchise still managed to put up a .463 winning percentage (1,015-1,175).

Since 1999, the Tribe has won at a slightly better pace - .498 (1,130-1,138) – and made the playoffs three times. But the Indians also put up four seasons with at least 90 losses, although that is a bit skewed because three of those seasons have come in the past four seasons.

What about the owners?

While current Browns owner Jimmy Haslam is the first Cleveland owner (as far as we know) to be under federal investigation, the owners back in the day were worst (and we're not even talking about Art Modell).

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Nick Mileti, who brought the Cavs to Cleveland, was always good and getting things by using other people's money. Once Ted Stepien bought the franchise, things got so bad that the NBA had to approve any trade the team wanted to make.

The Indians were always one-step away from moving out of Cleveland under a succession of owners who never had two nickels to rub together. And one of the greatest "what if" stories in Cleveland sports history centers around what might have been if Vernon Stouffer had not, in an alcohol-fueled fit of anger, gone back on a deal to sell the Tribe to George Steinbrenner in the early 1970s.

Say what you will about the current ownership group in Cleveland, but it seems unlikely that the Dolans would ever consider moving the Indians, and Cavs owner Dan Gilbert and Haslam seem to know enough to stay out of the way and let the sports people do their jobs.

While there were no player suspensions for the teams to deal with – mainly because the NFL didn't care about Adderall or codeine, and Major League Baseball was still decades away from caring about steroids – that didn't mean there were not problems. Things were so bad on the Browns in terms of substance abuse that the team founded the [Inner Circle to help its players deal with their demons](#)

The biggest difference between now and then is probably the Internet and the growth of social media.

Thirty-plus years ago we didn't have the opportunity as fans to collectively complain on Twitter about the 10-year, \$2.5 million contract the Tribe gave to Wayne Garland. Or how the Indians traded away Dennis Eckersley for a bag of old baseballs ... or why Brian Sipe tried to force the ball to Ozzie Newsome on a bitterly cold day at the old Stadium ... Or fret over the Cavs dumping assets rather than acquiring them.

That's why, we believe, things feel worse now for some fans. Not only have the teams we root for underperformed since 2007 (for the most part), but it is easy than ever for us to share our angst with other fans, sometimes play to play and pitch to pitch.

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We don't want to end this on a down note, because it wouldn't be Cleveland sports if with the misery we also didn't carry a level of optimism that a better day is just around the corner.

From the depths of the Stepien-era Cavs came the teams of Brad Daugherty, Larry Nance and Mark Price that taught Cleveland to love basketball again.

The broken dreams of the Kardiak Kids gave way to the best run of Browns football since the 1960s as Bernie Kosar came home to lead the team to three AFC title games.

And even though it took them a little bit longer, the Indians finally woke Gabe Paul's proverbial Sleeping Giant and turned Cleveland into a true Tribe Town, rather than just a marketing slogan, during the 1990s.

Sure, things are not the greatest right now. But we've lived through darks times before only to see a better day on the other side.

Who's to say we're not on a similar journey right now, with the only unknown being when we will reach our final destination?