

There's a new hockey team in town, and Cavs owner Dan Gilbert is at the helm. Their name? The Lake Erie Monsters. Their affiliation? The AAA team for the Colorado Avalanche. Can Gilbert do what others have been unable to in this town, and sell hockey to the masses? Papa Cass chimes in with his thoughts on the newest addition to the Cleveland sports scene.



You're going to love and hate the Lake Erie Monsters.

You're going to love the fact that they aren't the Fighting Walleye, which widely-circulated rumors had as the decided-upon name for Cleveland's new American Hockey League franchise.

You're going to love that, with image-savvy Dan Gilbert at the helm, this franchise is going to make enough noise to be heard among the tall timber of the Browns, Indians and Cavs. The Monsters'

AHL

predecessors, the Barons, were run in such a low-key fashion, many Clevelanders didn't even know we had a hockey team from 2000 to '05.

There is a reason why the Barons looked at moving to the Quad Cities before settling on Worcester, Mass last year. That franchise was in over its head competing with three major-league teams for attention and revenue. You can't run a Quad Cities operation in a metropolitan area of 2.5 million people and expect to get noticed.

The Monsters won't make that mistake. Like the Lumberjacks, you'll at least know they exist even if you don't really follow sports.

You'll hate the Monsters because, for the first time in Cleveland's history, one of our sports teams will not pledge allegiance to the city. (Yes, for any know-it-all who wants to point it out, I remembered the Lake County Captains. They play outside Cuyahoga County, so I don't consider them a Cleveland team per se.)

Not only will the Monsters not align themselves with Cleveland, they're not even aligning themselves with a land mass. The Monsters will play for a body of water.

However, if you believe [this commentary](#) I wrote a couple of years ago, maybe flattering Lake Erie with name recognition isn't such a bad idea.

You'll love having a minor league hockey team worth paying attention to. You will, however, hate the [prices you'll have to pay](#) to see it. It's decidedly NHL without the level of competition.

Glass seats will cost you \$60. The cheapest ticket prices will be \$10, just like Cavs games.

Gilbert is betting that he's going to be able to spice up Monsters games with enough bright lights and shiny objects to make you forget that it's only a farm team on the ice. In the world of corporate sports, remember, you're not just paying for the game, you're paying for all the chotchkie tosses, laser-light displays, exploding scoreboards and sexy dancers that pelt your senses when the game is not in progress.

Knowing Gilbert's flamboyant presentation style, it will probably be Cirque du Soleil during the first intermission and Disney on Ice during the second.

Gilbert is smart along those lines. Since minor league teams are largely at the mercy of their parent clubs with regard to what players they employ, you can't put a lot of stock in wins as a crowd-drawing tool. It's all about the stuff that fills the breaks in the action.

Cleveland hockey fans finally have a team back. That's what we get out of it. Gilbert gets 41 games' worth of ticket, merchandise and concessions revenue. That's really what this is all about.

Being from Michigan, I'm sure Gilbert loves hockey. Back in his younger days, some daydream probably would have found him pulling on a Red Wings jersey and skating a shift with Gordie Howe. But more than that, Gilbert loves turning his Cleveland arena into a money maker even when the Cavs aren't playing and U2 isn't performing.

That's the real story behind the Lake Erie Monsters. Love it or hate it.