

Sports Illustrated's website has been running a feature called "The Best Game I've Ever Seen," in which the magazine's writers contribute articles on the best sporting events they've ever witnessed. This inspired The Hornless Rhino to dig deep into his memory banks and remember the greatest Cleveland sporting events he's ever seen, isolating the one game for each of Cleveland's pro sports franchises that stands out most in his mind.



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cliché, such as the always tiresome Frank Deford's pick of the [1958 NFL Championship](#)

(way to go out on a limb there, Frank). Others are much more idiosyncratic. For example, Lisa Altobelli selected the

[1995 Beanpot](#)

, which is a college hockey tournament that most people who aren't hockey fans or didn't go to college in New England have never heard of.

Most of the essays that SI's writers have provided are worth reading, and they've made me give some thought to the best games involving Cleveland teams that I've ever seen. So I've tried to pick out just one game for each of the three Cleveland franchises that really stands out in my mind. These may not have been the teams' greatest victories, but they are the ones that stand out in my mind as being the most exciting and most memorable.

It took me a while to mull over my selections for the Indians and Browns, but let's start with the Cavs, because that choice was a piece of cake. LeBron's otherworldly performance in Game 5 of the 2007 Eastern Conference Finals. There's not much to be said about that game that hasn't already been written. It was, quite simply, the greatest individual performance by any Cleveland athlete in my lifetime, and the essence of that performance has been captured in what should become [an iconic photograph](#) of LeBron's final basket of the game.

Picking the "best" Tribe and Browns games that I've ever seen was much harder. For the Indians, I gave some thought to Game 6 of the 1995 ALCS (remember Kenny Lofton's mad dash to score from second in the 8th inning on a passed ball?), which is Tom Hamilton's [personal favorite](#)

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[Game 6 of the 1997 ALCS](#)

. That extra-inning gem featured not only Tony Fernandez's game winning home run, but the guttiest pitching performance and some of the best defense I've ever seen. The Orioles left 14 runners stranded on that memorable afternoon, thanks to Charles Nagy and defensive gems like Matt Williams and Omar Vizquel's "wheel play" to keep Mike Bordick from reaching third on Robbie Alomar's bunt in the 7th.

In the end though, I didn't pick either of those games. For me, until the Indians reach the promised land, nothing will ever top Game 5 of the 1997 ALDS against the New York Yankees. The drama actually started in Game 4, when the Yankees were just four outs away from a rematch of the 1996 ALCS against the Orioles. Then Sandy Alomar smashed a home run off of Mariano Rivera to tie the game in the 8th, and the Tribe won it in the ninth when Vizquel scored Grissom with a single off the glove of Ramiro Mendoza.

That set things up for Game 5, a game that the Yankees were still confident that they'd win. It didn't turn out that way though, as the Tribe

got three runs off of Andy Pettitte in the 3rd inning, and manufactured what proved to be the winning run in the following inning, after Jim Thome -- I still don't believe this, by the way -- bunted to move Sandy Alomar to third base, where he was subsequently driven home on a sac fly from Tony Fernandez. The Yankees scored two in the fifth and one in the sixth to make the last three innings some of the most excruciatingly tense baseball I've ever seen.

Paul O'Neill doubled with two out in the 9th to bring the winning run to the plate, but then Bernie Williams came up and hit a lazy fly to Brian Giles in left, just in front of the warning track. I had the great good fortune to be there that night, and as the ball settled into Giles's glove for the final out, I watched as the 42,000 fans at Jacobs Field erupted with an explosion of joy that had been building up for 40 years.

The AL pennants in 1995 and 1997 were awesome, but in some respects, that 1997 ALDS was the high point of those great Indians teams of the 1990s. After all, it wasn't the Mariners, and it wasn't the Orioles, it was The New York Yankees that the Indians beat in that series -- and they were defending World Series champions to boot. Just eight years earlier, Hollywood had made

[Major League](#)

, which was a Tribe fan's fantasy based on the absurd premise that the Indians would beat the Yankees in a playoff. In 1997, they did just that.

When it comes to the Browns, there are also plenty of contenders for the title of best game I've seen, including the double overtime playoff win over the Jets in 1986 (thanks again [Mark](#)!), and the Don Strock led [comeback victory](#)

over Houston that put the Browns in the playoffs in 1988. But for my money, the Browns 34-30 playoff victory against the Buffalo Bills in 1990 takes the grand prize. It is easily the greatest pro football game that I've ever seen in person, and the best Browns game I can remember. It doesn't seem to get the attention that it deserves from

Cleveland fans, but boy, the Bills fans sure [haven't forgotten it](#)

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This game had everything: lead changes, long touchdown passes, spectacular kick returns, dropped touchdown passes and a critical missed extra point. Despite the offensive fireworks, it was also one of the most hard hitting playoff games I've ever seen, and featured one of the [most memorable hits](#) in NFL history. The game was in doubt until the very last seconds, as Jim Kelly engineered a drive that put the Bills in scoring position at the Cleveland 12 yard line. However, a wide open Ronnie Harmon dropped a sure touchdown pass, and on the next play, Clay Matthews intercepted Kelly on the one yard line with :03 left to seal the victory.

A couple of memories from that game stick out in my mind. The first involved a play late in the third quarter. Thurman Thomas had just scored on a six yard pass from Jim Kelly to cut the Browns lead to three points. My two brothers (both die hard Bills fans) were sitting next to me when Scott Norwood kicked the ball off. My youngest brother saw where it was heading and groaned, "Oh, no, don't kick it to Metcalf!" Sure enough, 90 heart-stopping yards later, Eric Metcalf was in the Buffalo end zone, and the Browns were up by 10 points once again.

The second memory, of course, involved Clay's interception. We were seated high up in the west end zone, right above where Matthews intercepted Kelly's pass, and I'll never forget that moment, as the old stadium rocked with noise. It was simply unbelievable.

But the best thing about that interception was the way that NBC covered it. After the game, I went to a friend's house to watch a tape of it. Charlie Jones covered the game for NBC, and when Matthews intercepted the pass, he said "intercepted by Clay

Matthews!" That was also the last thing he said. Bernie came on with the offense to take a knee, while the NBC cameras showed the pandemonium in the stands at Municipal Stadium. The game ended, the Browns ran off the field, and Charlie Jones just shut up, and let the pictures tell the story.

For a town that hasn't won [bupkis](#) in 40 plus years, we've had our moments, haven't we?