



Unleashed on the masses on February 1, 2006 ... The Cleveland Fan has evolved into the most trafficked fan run Cleveland sports website in cyberspace, boasting a community of 50,000 strong (and growing) with close to 2,000,000 page hits each month. The site was brainstormed and blueprinted in the fall of 2005 and created that winter with the help of Steve DiFranco from www.OhioConnect.net

In bringing TheClevelandFan to life, my mission statement was simple: Create an alternative to the traditional media sources and a place for Cleveland sports fans to congregate to read opinion on the teams we live and die for, and also a place for fans to have intelligent discussions about those teams.

We're about three and a half years old, and in that time, we've been lucky to really grow this little thing of ours. There's been a couple keys to that growth. First and foremost, our writers. It's the #1 reason for our growth, and without these guys, we'd still be a blog on steroids, which is actually how I used to describe the site in the early days.

When I started this, I was pretty sure that I could put together a group of talent that could rival some of the print and online sports media options in this town. I just didn't know I'd be able to do it this quick, and with writers this good.

We have some writers that have been with us from day one (Tony Lastoria, Mitch Cyrus, Cris Sykes, Mansfield Lucas, Mike Furlan, Scott Swerbinsky, and Steve Buffum). Others I personally recruited (Hiko, John Hnat, Jesse Lamovsky, Paul Cousineau, Erik Cassano, Nick Allburn, Dan Wismar, Brian McPeek, Sam Amico and Gary Benz). And

some new blood that we're now adding to the fray (Pick 'Em Pete, Greg Popelka, Jerry Roche, and Dave Kolonich) as we get set to enter into our fifth year out in cyberspace.

Collectively, I'd take my group in a heartbeat over the crew at The Plain Dealer or any of the newspapers (and their affiliated websites). And my writers (generally) aren't forced to write on deadline, and produce the mindless garbage that deadline pieces often turn in to. We don't have to hold back and write safe neutral pieces for fear of having our press passes revoked. We don't want press passes. Let the PD guys sit in the press box, unable to cheer for hours before, during, and after the games only to walk away at the end of the night with a couple of watered down talking points from athletes that are only interested in giving them the bare minimum and getting them out of their hair. My writers are all people that have lived and died with the teams we cover since the day they were born. Unlike Shaw, Livingston, and a lot of the other print guys in this town, none of our writers grew up cheering for other teams before being paid to come to Cleveland and write about ours. I encourage our writers to call it like they see it and to hold nothing back. To write passionately, from the heart, and from the viewpoint of a fan, not an elitist media type.

If you want the post game quotes, the copy of the box score, the emotionless and neutral account of the game ... we're not your spot. There's plenty of places to get that drivel. If you want smart, passionate, humorous analysis of what just happened and what it all means, we're your guys. If you want a place to vent, rejoice, or talk Cleveland sports, [our message forums](#) are the place to do it.

The other big key to our growth has been the partnership with Sportstime Ohio. It's a partnership in the sense that they run our columns on the front page of their site, and we work with STO on a host of web-related activities. STO loves our writers. We love the credibility and exposure we get from being on their front page. It's been a perfect

marriage, and the guys and gals at STO like our guys and gals ... they're all Cleveland fans. And really great people, with a unique opportunity in front of them here in this town.

One of my main mission statements with the site is to continue to improve the site, a little bit at a time. If it's looking for a new writer, making aesthetic improvements, or adding new features, bells, and whistles ... this is what keeps me up at night. I want nothing more than to just make this place the coolest place on the web to hang out and read and talk about Cleveland sports. I think we've done a pretty good job of that through the first three and a half years, but there is so much more we can and will do.

As always, any comments, questions, complaints, suggestions on how we could do things better, please, do not hesitate to contact me by email at any time at richswerb@gmail.com .