

It's finally time to charge full force into Round Deux of 64 Since '64: the bracket style tournament that finally confirmed, once and for all, that Earnest Byner was better than Craig Ehlo. Now that the 64 are down to 32, the talent gap is thinner, the debates are testier, and the votes are likely to get a lot closer. The winners advance to the "Sweet Sixteen of So What," proving their place as mighty, modern era Cleveland sports heroes. This week, Jeff Ellis and Andrew Clayman explore the first half of the remaining brackets, including King James' next test, a pair of former Browns teammates locking horns, and Man-Ram crossing paths with a legendary linebacker.

Bracket Breakdown, Round TWO, Part 1

By Andrew Clayman & Jeff Ellis

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And now, without further ado, let us begin Round Two!

Round 2, Brown & Orange Regional



#1 LeBron James vs #8 Victor Martinez

Round 1: James def. Couch (96% of vote), Martinez def. Sherk (72%)

JEFF ELLIS: Round two begins with the Cavs and Indians respective captains of recent

history. Of course, Victor has since been shipped to greener pastures (and monsters), but most of the city's attention remains focused on the future address of King James. It's probably safe to say that just about everyone in Cleveland would prefer to lose Victor five times over than watch LeBron suit up for the Knicks. So I don't anticipate this one being close at all. We all know that this tournament is #23's to lose. The question is, who can give him a contest?

ANDREW CLAYMAN: It's not hard to find parallels between LeBron James and Victor Martinez. Both were signed by their teams as teenagers. Both became the best players and undisputed leaders of their teams right around the same time period—2004. And both players could be playing on the East Coast next year. Umm. Only kidding, of course. In any case, Victor made his mark in Cleveland to be sure: over 100 homeruns, 500 RBIs, and a .297 batting average across his eight years here. But it's mainly just another testament to the cartoonish might of LBJ that a player of Martinez's talents doesn't stand a snowball's chance in this matchup. Much like his BoSox teammates, Vic can go home and enjoy the offseason, because his tournament ends here.



#4 Earnest Byner vs #5 Kenny Lofton

Round 1: Byner def. Ehlo (78%), Lofton def. Metcalf (87%)

JE: Fresh off easily besting Eric Metcalf, Kenny Lofton has his running skills challenged again by one of the Browns' all-time great backs, Earnest Byner. This is a matchup of two underrated athletes. Lofton was overshadowed at times by the big boppers and bigger personalities on the '90s Tribe teams. Byner, of course, played second fiddle to Bernie Bernie Bernie, and to a lesser extent, Kevin Mack—whose bruising style seemed to appeal a bit more to the fan base. Anyway, Kenny still managed to make 6 All-Star Games and Byner was named to two Pro Bowls, but I'd say neither quite got their due until we faced the voids they left behind (namely, prototypical leadoff hitter and big play running back). My vote goes to Byner. Lofton had more sizzle, but Earnest's value to the Browns was enormous, and the franchise never fully recovered from his departure to Washington. It should also be noted that Earnest Byner is the 16th leading rusher in NFL history, making it all the more shameful that we ought to remember him for one unfortunate incident.

AC: Jeff, you do realize that both of Byner's Pro Bowl seasons were with the Redskins, right? In fact, he rushed for more yards during his 5 years in Washington (3,950) than his 7 years as a Brown (3,364). He was a better receiving RB in Kosar's offense, but a more valuable player as the featured back on Washington's 1991 Super Bowl Championship squad. Because he split time with Mack (and later Leroy Hoard), Earnest was never "The Man" in Cleveland. Kenny Lofton, on the other hand, was the star on top of the Indians' Christmas tree in the '90s. He was the best leadoff hitter in baseball, led the league in steals five consecutive years, won four Gold Gloves as the best defensive center fielder in Tribe history, and hit .300 with an .800 OPS during his 10 years in Cleveland. Kenny ranks 3rd in Indians history in runs scored, 9th in hits, and of course, first in stolen bases. He constantly made things happen—at the plate, on the bases, in the field. I forgave Byner for the Fumble many moons ago, but he has no business winning this one.



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