

With the best journeys, it's not the destination that matters, but the fun you had getting there. ...Still, there's nothing wrong with knowing you're heading for something epic at the end of the rainbow-- and that's exactly what we've come to with the 64 Since '64 Tournament's Championship Round. While we had a blast matching up the likes of Craig Ehlo vs Earnest Byner and Albert Belle vs Mark Price, we knew all the fun was eventually leading up to one final, serious question: Who is the greatest of them all... Jim Brown or LeBron James?



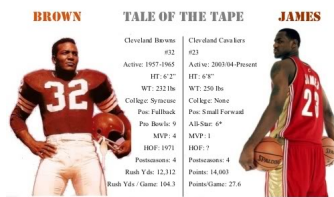
[Click Here to Vote for the 64 Since '64 Champion](#)

RD 1 Archive: Brown & Orange Regional | Wine & Gold | Red & Blue | Scarlet & Gray
RD 2: Part I | Part II ~ **RD 3:** Part I | Part II ~ **RD 4:** Elite 8 ~ **RD 5:** Final 4

Setting the Stage

Speaking with friends who've been following the tournament since it kicked off back in September, I've noticed an amusing trend in their predictions for who would win the inevitable showdown between King James and Jimmy Brown. Without fail, they all think it will be a blowout. Trouble is, they don't agree on which way the destruction will swing. "Oh, LeBron will win easy," one friend said. "He's a god right now, and people are too young to remember Brown." By contrast, another said, "Brown, for sure. He's a legend and a Hall of Famer. LeBron's still a work in progress."

So, which way will it go when the actual votes are counted? Neither man has seen a true test through the first five rounds, though James did dip below 70% of the vote in his semi-final match with Bernie Kosar. Could this indicate a potential chink in the armor? It's doubtful. In the end, generational biases, as well as sports biases (some people just prefer football over basketball and vice versa), will likely play the deciding role in who takes the title. But to run with the premise we built the 64 Since '64 Tournament on, Jeff and I are going to have these icons go head-to-head in the most objective manner we can manage.



#1 Jim Brown vs #1 LeBron James

Round 5: Brown def. Price (84%); James def. Kosar (68%)

Okay, so let's get to the nitty gritty. First and foremost, Jeff and I decided it would be best to make sure both players have a voice in their corner for this match, so we drew our straws and ran with them. The fact is, in a rare instance, we actually agree on which guy ought to win. But we'll go ahead and keep that man's identity a mystery and defend our respective clients with total conviction. He's got Jim Brown. I've got the King.

The Case for LeBron

by Andrew Clayman



Ladies and gentlemen of the jury, I'll begin with an argument that actually addresses that generation gap issue in a relevant way...

1. '00s NBA > '60s NFL

Now, I would never say that today's NBA is a purer or even necessarily more entertaining professional sports league than the NFL of Jim Brown's era. But by most measures, LeBron James is facing superior athletes to those opposed by Brown—with higher stakes accompanying the higher level of competition. It's easy to forget that pro football was once the weak sister to Major League Baseball in this country. During Brown's career ('57-'65), there was no Super Bowl, no AFL merger, limited television contracts, and not an enormous amount of media scrutiny—especially from the infantile tabloid press. Until 1960, the NFL season was only 12 games long. It increased to 14 for the remainder of Brown's playing days, but there were also only 14 teams in the league and no extensive play-off system. All of this meant less wear on the tires for Brown during his nine pro seasons. Compare that with LeBron, who is matching up with the top basketball players *on the planet* 82 games a season plus upwards of 20-30 playoff games. And for those who will say that Brown had to compete with the often brutal, rarely penalized tackling of the '60s, keep in mind that James is getting tackled in the lane dozens of time a night himself. And unlike Brown, who had Milt Plum or Frank Ryan around to run half the offense, LeBron tends to be both the quarterback and halfback on the Cavs in crunch time.

2. LeBron = The More Valuable Player

This is no knock on Jim Brown. When you're talking about absolutely transcendent talents, the second best guy might still be the greatest to ever play his sport. All things considered, though, the argument can be made that James is the more complete player and has had a greater impact on his team's success. Without question, both Brown and James radically turned around struggling franchises basically from the day they were drafted. The Browns went from 5-7 in 1956 to 9-2-1 and a NFL Championship appearance in '57. The Cavs doubled their win total in

James' rookie year and were playing in their first NBA Championship by his fourth season. The difference is in the supporting cast. Jim Brown played with numerous All Pros and future Hall of Famers, while James led an Eastern Conference Championship team on which Drew Gooden, Larry Hughes, and Sasha Pavlovic were *starters!* More significantly, as mentioned earlier, James has typically worn all hats with the Cavs—running the offense, taking the majority of the shots, grabbing boards, and usually defending the other team's top player. It's no insult to Brown that he didn't slot in at QB or play defensive back every other possession, nor am I necessarily agreeing with critics who used to ridicule his blocking ability and "teamwork" mindset. The main point is to observe, by comparison, just how involved LeBron is in every aspect of the Cavaliers success. The Browns could turn to a Bobby Mitchell or a Leroy Kelly to spell Jim. Nobody ever truly substitutes for LBJ.

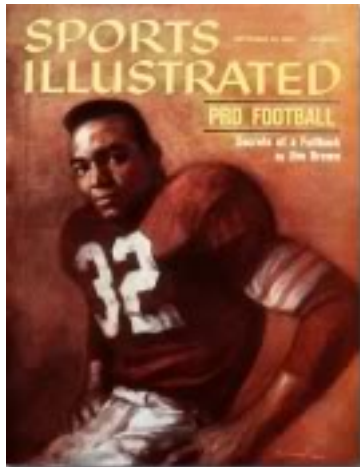
3. Fear Not the Stats

Normally, comparing anybody's statistics to Jim Brown's is a horrible mistake. In this case, the only way to do it is in relation to how each man stacks up with the greatest in his respective sport. And incredibly, #23 still stands toe to toe with #32. This is made all the more impressive by the fact that LeBron, now in his seventh year, skipped the stint at Syracuse and went pro as an 18 year-old. Consider the key categories of Yards Per Game (football) and Points Per Game (basketball), as an example. Sure, Brown ranks #1 in NFL history at 104.3 YPG for his career. But James already ranks #3 in NBA history in PPG at 27.6, and he's making ground on MJ and Wilt as he continues to improve his shooting. Essentially, for every awesome Brown stat we can spout (126 touchdowns, 8 rushing titles, 4 MVPs), there is a James stat to counter (ROY, MVP, 2-time All-Star MVP, youngest player to reach 14,000 points, and the only man besides Oscar Robertson to average 27 points, 6 rebounds, and 6 assists for five consecutive seasons). This year, James will also play in his fifth postseason—one more than Brown.

All told, LeBron has only played 2.5 fewer pro seasons than Brown, and having just turned 25, he is well on pace to shatter dozens of records—some of which nobody's bothered to think about before. Rather than judging him on his immeasurable upside, though, why not just judge him on what he's already done: put up all-around numbers that only Jordan, Bird, and Robertson touched, all while playing in an ultra bright spotlight from day one. He has shouldered the weight of Cleveland sports fans' hopes and dreams more than Jim Brown ever did, and he deserves to be rewarded for it. This Witness will now leave the stand and welcome Mr. Jeff Ellis into the King's courtroom. And yes, this will not be the first time that Jim Brown has needed a defense attorney.

The Case for Jim Brown

by Jeff Ellis



It's about time! This article is already gonna be the longest in the history of this website. No need to waste people's time any more than we need to...

1. He is Jim Freakin' Brown!

Not to be overly eloquent or intellectual, but seriously... we're talking about Jim Brown here! The whole point of being a legend is that you don't really need anybody to substantiate your greatness anymore. I mean, it's been almost 50 years since Brown last laced up the spikes, but he is still a superstar. Not only has historical context not been unkind to him, it's actually certified his power time and again. Sure, baseball may have been America's pastime back then, but outside of maybe Mantle and Mays, Brown eclipsed the star power of almost all his contemporaries in that sport. And despite nearly all of his major NFL records falling to the wayside over the decades, his place in the pro football pantheon has never really been impacted. Yeah, being a movie star helped a little, but to this day, if a discussion about the "greatest back of all time" comes up, Jim Brown is getting a mention (8 rushing titles in 9 years will do that for you). If you're in Chicago, it's Brown vs Payton. In Detroit, it's Brown vs. Sanders. Dallas: Brown vs. Smith. He might predate the Super Bowl, but Brown is still the measuring stick for the modern NFL tailback. His legend is not limited to our little corner of the world in Cleveland. Oh, and another reason he's Jim freakin' Brown—the guy was playing in an era when the running game was still the predominant offensive weapon, and defenses routinely would put 10 guys in the box, down after down. Jim absorbed a barrage of tacklers on most plays, often brushing one away and daring the next to take a shot. He hated running out of bounds—better to put a shoulder down and take somebody with you. When LeBron draws contact, he spends the next five minutes whining about it. Jim Brown almost seemed to enjoy it.

2. You Wanna Talk Athletic Ability?

This tournament has always been about crowning the best "player," but it seems like the question of "best athlete" keeps popping up nonetheless, with some claiming that LeBron is on an island by himself in that category. Of course, Jim Brown afficiandos know that ain't true

either. As I mentioned in the previous round, Brown's athletic dominance has actually landed him in three different Hall of Fames, with many old school fans claiming he was a better lacrosse player than football player (his senior year on the Syracuse lacrosse team, he finished second in the nation in scoring). Let's throw in some more versatility. Did you know that Brown was a placekicker at Syracuse, too? He punched through the PATs after each of his TDs. Not impressed by kickers and lacrosse players? Fair enough. But if LeBron fans want to bring up his brief football stint at St. V's as proof of his multi-sport greatness, I might as well add that Brown's high school days saw him earn 13 letters in five different sports—football, basketball, baseball, track, and lacrosse. He even set a scoring record in basketball at Manhasset High School that was later broken by another future Hall of Famer, Carl Yastrezmski. Apart from baseball, Brown continued playing all of these sports at Syracuse, excelling at all of them. There's no denying that LeBron is a physical beast, but as an all-around athlete, his resume doesn't come close to stacking up to Jim Brown's.

3. They Don't Give Oscars to Movies Still in Production

If the voting in this tournament has shown me one thing, it's that there are a lot of people my age who don't seem to have a depth of knowledge about the "old days." This was highlighted by Doug Dieken's round one victory over Dick Schafrath—in which voters mostly chose the winner on name recognition, rather than taking a glance at the incredible career Schafrath put together a couple decades earlier. I'm not trying to say that Jim Brown will suffer a similar fate, mind you. The point is, a lot of people may have forgotten some basketball stars from not-so-long-ago who actually compared somewhat favorably to King James at similar stages in their careers. As I've argued the last few rounds, I don't think LeBron would be a Hall of Famer if he suddenly retired tomorrow. Six and a half seasons—great as they've been—just aren't enough in the world of basketball, where guys regularly play into their mid-to-late 30s. There are too many examples of great young players who tailed off over time and lost some of their luster. Right now, there is no reason to think LeBron will be one of them. But calling him a superior player to a Hall of Famer like Jim Brown seems mighty silly when LBJ's career is less than halfway finished.

Remember Bernard King? He was a high-scoring small forward in the '80s for the Warriors, Knicks, and Bullets. In his seventh full season, he averaged 33 points, 6 boards, and 4 assists for New York, and seemed to be peaking as a superstar. Then injuries caught up with him. He remained productive (22 PPG for his career), but didn't become the Hall of Famer many thought he would. Another player worth noting is Adrian Dantley. At LeBron's age, Dantley was an incredible player for the Utah Jazz, averaging 30 pts, 6 rebounds, and 4 assists across *five seasons*

in the mid '80s! When he hit 30, though, those numbers dipped severely, and it would be 17 years before Dantley would finally be voted worthy of the Hall of Fame. Again, I'm not predicting any doomsday scenarios for LeBron's career. We just don't know. Similarly, it was misleading of Andy to use LeBron's scoring average (third place all-time) as a key stat, considering that all great players will watch their PPG decline with age. Just take a look at Shaq for a good example.

Closing Statements

JEFF: In closing, we all have certainly been witnesses to LeBron's excellent career thus far. But even if he keeps up his pace, it's just hard to ever imagine his name carrying the weight that Brown's does—if for no other reason than professional basketball in this country simply doesn't hold the history or elicit the passion that football does. While LeBron might put up numbers on an Oscar Robertson level, the average Joe on the street might not even know who the Big O was. Meanwhile, Brown is woven into the fabric of football for all-time. He's not compared to those that came before him, he's the comparison point for everybody that followed him. It's unlikely that James will ever be that, and even if he does reach that level, he certainly isn't there yet. When Jim Brown played, everyone knew who the best player in the NFL was. Can we say that undisputedly about LeBron James? I think not.

ANDREW: Yes, yes, Jeff. Wax on about how insignificant basketball is in America, and how an NBA star can never compare with a football hero. I can only chuckle and respond to that argument with two words: Michael Jordan. We can debate all day whether LeBron or Kobe Bryant is the top player on the planet at the moment, but with Kobe's suspect track record and off-putting personality, there is no doubt that James is the most likely candidate to achieve Jordan's astronomical star status. Some would say he's frighteningly close to that level already. Had Jim Brown played in today's NFL, he may very well have transcended his sport in a Jordan-like way. But his days as a action film star never earned him the notoriety or *international* stardom that James enjoys in today's media-soaked sports universe. So if legacy matters in this debate, I think LeBron will be just fine. The more important factors, though, are these: who meant more to their team, and whose highlight reel (see below) inspires the most awe? We'll leave that call up to you.

[LeBron James Highlight Reel](#)

[Jim Brown Highlight Reel](#)

