

I love this column. Papa Cass is back with his latest version of "The Master List", which is a ranking of the twenty most valuable current sports stars in Cleveland. The criteria? Importance to the organization, how much the player means to the fans and the city, and also their marketability. LeBron, Grady, Pronk are 1-2-3 ... but who's in spots 4 through 20?



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In March, I introduced The Master List, a compilation of the 20 most valuable athletes in Cleveland sports. I said at the time I would like to update the list several times a year as conditions change. With some months having passed, I offer my first update of the list.

The criteria is listed below.

What does the player mean to his organization?

Is this the type of player the team thinks they can build around? Does he help them win games? Does he increase the legitimacy of the organization? How much would losing this player hurt his team?

What does the player mean to the fans and city?

How much does having this player boost Cleveland's collective morale? Is he a fan favorite?

What is the player's marketability?

Does the player get the name of himself, his team and the city out in the regional or national spotlight? More importantly, does he do it in a positive way (call this the Albert Belle rule).

Previous ranking listed in parenthesis.

1) LeBron James, Cavaliers (1)

Does this really need further explanation? He is the Cavs. Heck, he is Cleveland sports.

2) Grady Sizemore, Indians (2)

Still hot at the top of the order. Still hot to women. Although I haven't seen many "Mrs. Sizemore"; shirts for sale this summer. Maybe I'm just looking in the wrong places.

In a nutshell, Sizemore is the closest thing to a five-tool talent the Indians have. He could hit anywhere in the lineup and be productive, and is already one of the elite centerfielders in baseball.

His play and his looks make him a marketer's dream.

3) Travis Hafner, Indians (3)

Among the weapons in his arsenal: a cool, monosyllabic nickname -- "Pronk," and one of the best all-around bats in baseball. Able to clout 400-foot homers, he also has the bat control to serve singles to the opposite field.

In 2006, Pronk appears headed for his third straight .300 season, with the added bonus of 45-to-50 homers. He should be an MVP candidate. Instead, he's never played in an all-star game.

4) Reuben Droughns, Browns (5)

With an unproven quarterback, wounded offensive line and wide receiver corps on the mend, Droughns is the meal ticket for the Browns offense. As he goes, so probably will go the Browns' ability to score points.

His marketability gets docked points for repeated legal troubles, but he is still a bruising power runner who persevered to get to where he is. That always appeals to Cleveland's blue-collar sensibilities.

5) Ted Washington, Browns (13)

The large jump comes as Washington has proven he still has some gas left in the tank. Not just a token free agent signing to provide younger linemen with a mentor, he will be the one charged with stopping the opponent's running game at the line of scrimmage. For a Browns team that has been purely incapable of stopping the run since re-entering the league, Washington is a presence desperately needed, even at the age of 38.

6) Victor Martinez, Indians (7)

Say what you will about his arm, but he is the closest thing Hafner has to protection in the batting order. Catcher, first base, no matter where he plays, he will be one of best bats in baseball at that position.

7) Charlie Frye, Browns (NR)

How times have changed. In March, Frye was not even guaranteed a starting job. In August, not only is he the starter, he is the starter-or-bust. Frye himself isn't proven. Frye's backups are even less-proven. The bottom line is the Browns need Frye to morph into a solid NFL veteran on Sept. 10, when the season opens. If he can't answer the bell and succeed, the Browns are in an ocean of trouble.

8) Zydrunas Ilgauskas, Cavaliers (4)

Even after a lackluster postseason, even after sitting on the bench down the stretch of most late-season games, a 7'-3" center is still a valuable weapon in an NBA team's arsenal. Say what you will about his plodding style and pet moves, and yes, he's probably being overpaid, but as the old basketball saying goes, "you can't teach height." And you certainly can't teach the combination of height and moves Z has.

9) LeCharles Bentley, Browns (9)

This from my March post:

"Having a weak offensive line sets up a domino effect: line can't protect, quarterback gets rushed, gets hit, makes bad throws, confidence is shattered, and the next thing you know, you have Tim Couch. Bentley's arrival automatically increases the chance that Charlie Frye will be able to consistently succeed. Bentley won't get a lot of face time once the season starts, but the foundation of the Browns' offensive line just went from play sand to granite."

I'll let you go throw up now.

10) Larry Hughes, Cavaliers (8)

With a healthy Hughes developing chemistry with LeBron, the Cavs could challenge the franchise record of 57 wins this season. With Hughes on the shelf, it's hole-plugging time again.

This past season showed that the Cavs can still win without Hughes, but it's much more difficult.

11) Phil Dawson, Browns (11)

Having a good kicker is like having a consistent bullpen. You take them for granted. Having a bad kicker is like having a flammable bullpen. You get indigestion watching them. Dawson, for the vast majority of his career, has been a good kicker.

Again, I go to the plunger analogy: you don't need a good kicker until you need him. But when you need him, you really need him.

12) C.C. Sabathia, Indians (17)

At the outset of the season, I branded Cliff Lee the true ace of the Indians' pitching staff. So much for predictions. Sabathia has reclaimed his often-abdicated spot as the best starter in the Indians rotation, while Lee has struggled.

Consistency continues to be a problem for Sabathia, but no one can complain about his ability to pitch well even as the bullpen continues to blow leads.

13) Drew Gooden, Cavaliers (19)

Another big jump for a guy who proved his worth last season. Gooden swallowed his pride, took a backseat in the offensive schemes and became a good enough rebounder that the Cavs wanted him back this summer. If Gooden had left, that would have been an enormous hole for the Cavs to fill in the frontcourt.

14) Kamerion Wimbley, Browns (NR)

When the Browns selected Wimbley out of Florida State in April, I was skeptical of drafting a 4-3 defensive end and turning him into a 3-4 outside linebacker. Granted, Wimbley still has a lot of proving to do, but he is showing signs of becoming the first legitimate pass rusher the Browns have had since returning to the league.

15) Leigh Bodden, Browns (NR)

With the rest of the Browns' cornerbacks dragging various injured body parts around, Bodden has excelled in a pair of preseason games. The increased player time might cement Bodden as the Browns' premier cover corner. He certainly has the athleticism to do it. It might not be long before Bodden is drawing important assignments like Chad Johnson and Hines Ward.

16) Anderson Varejao, Cavaliers (NR)

He's still far more hustle than skill, but was there a more important piece to the Cavs' playoff puzzle this past spring outside of LeBron? At his disruptive best, Varejao clogs passing lanes, draws charges and grabs rebounds. Coach Mike Brown trusted him enough to put him on the floor in the fourth quarter of most playoff games, and he played a big role in piloting the Cavs to the second round.

Did I mention the hair? If the Cavs' marketers are smart, they'd be promoting Varejao's look every chance they get.

17) Braylon Edwards, Browns (16)

Edwards might play yet in the preseason. He thinks he's ready, and he'd better be sure of it. The last thing the Browns need is Edwards to re-injure his knee. He is extremely important to the future of the receiving corps. If the Browns are to break through and become a contender,

Edwards will have to be a key piece of it. He has the talent to be one of the best offensive playmakers in the NFL.

18) Willie McGinest, Browns (6)

This spring's ranking was based mostly on what he brings as a leader. This ranking takes into account more of what he can do on the field. He is still valuable as a mentor for Wimbley and the young linebackers, and I think he can still give the Browns good play in stretches, but his inability to suit up and play so far has me wondering whether McGinest is viewing this Browns gig as a part-time, pre-retirement job. Ted Washington is four years McGinest's senior, about 100 pounds heavier, and he has had no problem going through the rigors of camp.

19) Shin-Soo Choo, Indians (NR)

Barely on the Tribe's roster for a month, Choo is already proving his worth in a big way. His bat tends to run hot and cold, but he can get it through the strike zone quickly and make contact.

The biggest impact Choo has made so far is with his glove. He has excellent range in the outfield, the athleticism to dive for balls, and a rocket arm. He might end up being the Tribe's best defensive outfielder in quite some time.

Choo, a Korean, is also the first Asian regular on the Tribe's roster. If he excels, he could provide a tremendous chance for the Indians to connect with Cleveland's Asian communities.

20) Shannon Brown, Cavaliers (NR)

Several media outlets proclaimed the Cavs' 25th overall selection of Brown "a steal." He's an undersized two-guard who came out of college a year early, but he could end up being the team's best bench guard because of his all-around game. Skill-wise, he is a definite upgrade from the departed Flip Murray. If he can shoot the way scouts say he can, he'll be a tremendous addition.

Off the list: Cliff Lee, Bob Wickman, Jhonny Peralta, Ronnie Belliard, Flip Murray, Eric Snow

Knocking on the door: Joe Jurevicius, Kellen Winslow Jr., Jeremy Sowers, Jake Westbrook, Donyell Marshall