



The year 2010 might have been a little short on good news for Cleveland sports fans, but it was far from uneventful.

That's why this year's countdown is a little different, rebranded from "Top 10 sports stories" to "10 biggest storylines."

Here you'll find the good, bad and ugly that made 2010 another memorable year in Cleveland sports. Some spots on our countdown will make you dream about the future, some might give you nightmares. But it's all here -- our send-off to 2010, as we wait with equal parts anticipation and trepidation for what 2011 will bring.

Over the last five days of the year, our top 10 Cleveland sports storylines will be unveiled here, leading up to No. 1 on New Year's Eve. Check back daily as the countdown continues.

### 10. Gilbert makes a play for Izzo

*June*

When the Cavs were ousted from the playoffs by Boston in May, just about every person in the Northeast Ohio basketball-watching public could feel the Cavs' grip on LeBron James beginning to slip. The Cavs underachieved in the postseason for the second straight year, LeBron had a miserable series and didn't seem all that bothered by it, and owner Dan Gilbert had very few avenues left through which he could improve the team.

The team's basketball leadership was one of the few ways Gilbert could still tweak things, and tweak he did. Mike Brown was fired, and shortly thereafter, Danny Ferry resigned. The front office was now a blank slate, paving the way for Gilbert to pursue a big-name coach to take over all aspects of the team's basketball operations and -- he hoped -- appeal to LeBron.

Gilbert, a Michigan State alum, had just the guy he wanted in Spartans coach Tom Izzo.

Gilbert spent several weeks getting in Izzo's ear, and by the time the story reached the web and newspapers, the talks were advanced. Gilbert reportedly had a large sum of money on the table, and one report said Izzo had informed his players about his decision to leave for Cleveland.

But as quickly as the fire was lit, Izzo extinguished it. On June 16, Izzo announced he was staying at Michigan State. One of the deciding factors for Izzo was his inability to talk directly with LeBron about his intentions. Whatever Izzo did or didn't hear from LeBron's camp was

apparently enough to create a feeling of uneasiness with Izzo about the superstar's future in Cleveland, and Izzo quickly decided the Cavs job wasn't worth the risk.

We all know how that ended up. Two weeks later, the Cavs hired Byron Scott as their head coach, and a week after that, LeBron was a member of the Heat.

### **9. Cavs roll over and die in LBJ's return**

*December 2*

We could have lived with the handshakes and hugs and well-wishes and general pandering that went on between the Cavs and Heat. We could have accepted a loss against a blatantly-superior Miami team. We weren't looking for anything outlandish in LeBron's return to Cleveland.

All we wanted was a Cavs team that cared enough to back up the support of a loud, boisterous, revenge-minded sellout crowd. Just try to win. Just play like you care.

Looks like that was too much to ask.

After keeping things close for most of the first quarter, the wheels completely fell off for the Cavs as the last stragglers were finding their seats. Instead of responding to a late first-quarter run by Miami with some effort of their own, the Cavs went soft and squishy, submitting to the Heat in every way imaginable, eventually losing 118-90.

As the saying goes, it wasn't even that close.

LeBron had 38 points and toyed with Cleveland's nonexistent interior defense all night. The dominant performance in a hostile environment galvanized the Heat, who entered the game with a 9-8 record. Miami rattled off 12 straight wins, including another win over the Cavs in Miami on Dec. 15 -- though, to be fair, that game was much more competitive.

But the damage was already done. The Cavs lost 11 straight after that Dec. 2 game, and went from a possible fringe playoff contender to a team that is, unquestionably, in the race for the No. 1 pick in the 2011 draft.

The Heat found a new sense of purpose here in early December. The Cavs became everything we feared they were post-LeBron: a psychologically devastated group that can't shake the ghost of LeBron. A team that is in desperate need of a teardown and rebuild.

## **8. Pryor among OSU players suspended for first five games of 2011**

*December 23*

It's a very 21st Century reason for a college athlete to get suspended: selling memorabilia to the guy who does your tattoos.

That's exactly what happened to Ohio State football players Terrelle Pryor, DeVier Posey, Mike Adams, Dan Herron and Solomon Thomas. After an investigation by the NCAA, the five players were all suspended five games for selling memorabilia including Big Ten championship rings, Pryor's 2009 Fiesta Bowl sportsmanship trophy, and Gold Pants trinkets awarded for beating Michigan. The buyer was reportedly the owner of a Columbus tattoo parlor who had done tattoo work on the players before, possibly in exchange for the memorabilia.

Pryor was the biggest offender, selling \$2,500 in memorabilia and receiving \$50 in discounted tattoos, according to a report in The Plain Dealer.

The suspensions might yet be reduced, as Ohio State plans to appeal to the NCAA. But it once again raises debate over whether college players -- who help generate a great deal of revenue at a school like Ohio State -- should be allowed some form of payment, which might prevent episodes like this.

Pryor, a junior, had previously stated his intentions to return for his senior season. It remains to be seen whether the suspensions will influence he, or another of the other players, to declare for the 2011 NFL Draft.

## **7. Tribe continues to slide into irrelevance**

*April-September*

Paul Dolan is right. Now isn't the time to spend. Maybe not next year, or the year after, either.

On the heels of a 69-93 2010 season, the Indians remain victims of a couple of different circumstances that will likely tether them to the lower end of the standings for the foreseeable future. First, baseball's financial structure is terribly unbalanced. No secret there.

Second, the Dolans are like a lot of small market owners, completely reliant on the revenue they generate from ticket and merchandise sales. They don't possess the personal stash to make an upfront investment in jump-starting success. They can't buy a marquee free agent or make a major trade on spec. Heck, they can't even keep their own players on spec.

Which is why, when you look at the top end of the Tribe's roster, all you can really see is a bunch of future ex-Indians. Shin-Soo Choo is already starting to rattle his saber, with a couple of opaque, off-the-cuff remarks made to ex-Indian Jhonny Peralta and the South Korean media about wanting to play for a winner. He's a free agent after the 2013 season, and unless the Indians start contending, his departure will occur via trade before that.

Big market teams are circling overhead like buzzards, looking for meat to pluck off the Tribe's carcass. Rumors have dropped this winter that the Yankees are interested in Fausto Carmona, the most proven starter in the Tribe's rotation. He's signed for a while, so the Indians aren't obligated to trade him. But if he starts raising a stink like Zack Greinke did shortly before getting dealt from Kansas City to Milwaukee earlier this month, he could make for quite a distraction.

Meanwhile, the stockings over the fireplace are virtually empty. Austin Kearns is the lone addition to the big league club so far this offseason, and the rest of the winter probably won't yield much more.

Sports is supposed to be an escape from reality. With the Indians, we experience the same reality that many of us face each day: sacrifice, doing without, stretching the budget to make ends meet.

It's not baseball anymore. It's a trip to the grocery store.