



Humor is the theme this week in the Cleveland Sports Video Grab Bag, as we dive into the Youtube archives for evidence of how tragedy breeds comedy in a losing sports culture. Three such clips have been harvested for your viewing pleasure, including Sudden Sam and The Hawk doing their best Abbot & Costello impression, an amusing re-enactment of the Cavs huddle prior to “The Shot,” and the hilarious absurdity of the Browns sweeping a season series from the Steelers.

To get the funny started, though, we travel back in time to a not particularly funny point in history: 1969. There's a Nixon in the White House, troops in Vietnam, hippies at Woodstock, and terrible baseball in Cleveland. The '69 Indians would have required a corresponding acid trip to be the least bit entertaining, as they stumbled and bumbled to a 62-99 record, drawing an average of about 8,000 fans per game to the lakefront (roughly 10% of Cleveland Stadium's capacity). All in all, the season had proven a monumental collapse following a promising 1968, when the Tribe went 86-75 behind one of the best pitching staffs in the game. Now, Luis Tiant and Steve Hargan had taken huge steps back, losing 35 games between them, and Sonny Siebert was gone—traded in April of '69 (along with Joe Azcue and Vicente Romo) to Boston for Dick Ellsworth, Juan Pizarro, and a slugging young outfielder named Ken Harrelson.

Ken, aka “Hawk,” was not pleased with getting dealt, and actually retired for a couple days until his situation was financially sweetened. Once in a Tribe uniform, Harrelson picked up where he left off, hitting 30 bombs and walking 100 times, but also whiffing 100 times and hitting a paltry .222. Maybe more significantly, Hawk became one of the few marketable personalities on a shitty ballclub, as evidenced by his local CBS talk show “The Hawk's Nest” and nuggets like this surprisingly well-performed vignette below with the Indians' fireballing ace “Sudden” Sam McDowell.

Video 1: Sam McDowell and Hawk Harrelson Do “Who's On First” (1969)

The lightheartedness of Sam and Hawk's supposedly off-the-cuff "Who's On First" bit has the extra effect of capturing both players at their youthful peaks. Within two years, a broken leg and a desire to play pro golf ended Harrelson's career at just 29 (he has since become the worst play-by-play man in sports for the ChiSox). Meanwhile, McDowell famously began to sputter in the early '70s, as his battles with alcohol abuse and back pain pushed him into retirement at 32.

These were happier times, albeit on a terrible team.

(My favorite line comes from Sam McDowell: "You know what this reminds me of? ...Nothing.")

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[Youtube Link: *Sudden Sam and Hawk's "Who's On First"*](#)

Video 2: Craig Ehlo Has "Got This" (2009)

A few years ago, the local sketch comedy troupe Last Call Cleveland put together this pretty fantastic video as part of an ironic (and sadly one-and-done) "Great Moments in Cleveland Sports History" series. The premise: a look inside the Cavalier huddle just before the infamous conclusion to the 1989 quarterfinals against the Bulls. Historical sticklers and snootier Youtube commenters will immediately point out that the ill-fated Craig Ehlo was not really assigned to guard Jordan on the inbounds play, as suggested in this satire. Technically, poor Craig had to step up when Michael Jordan shed a 6'10" Larry Nance like fur off a Pomeranian. Even so, [mis understandings seem to follow Craig Ehlo to this day](#), so it only seems fitting—and funnier—to play it off this way.

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[Youtube Link: *Craig Ehlo Has Got This*](#)

Video 3: NFL Game of the Week: Steelers at Browns (1986) - 2 Parts

Okay, so this one might not fit into the classic “comedy” mold like the previous two clips, but when you’ve lost to a team something like 16 out of 17 times, seeing the roles reversed can create a sort of hysterical, perhaps even maniacal fit of uncontrollable joy. There were a couple more obvious places to go with this Browns-Beat-Steelers scenario (the 51-0 drubbing, Metcalf’s pair of kick return TDs, etc.), but I decided to go with this gem from 25 years ago. This was the season—1986—when the Browns finally won for the first time at Three Rivers Stadium after 7,237 tries, and now they were looking for their first season sweep of Pittsburgh in 17 years. The balance of power in the AFC Central had switched to Cleveland, and the first of three AFC Championship Game appearances was on the horizon. But first, Bernie and the 7-4 Browns had unfinished business, as they looked to give Northeast Ohio something more to be thankful for at the turkey table. It's Steelers vs. Browns, Cleveland Stadium, November 23, 1986.

Highlights to watch for in this OT thriller:

Video 1: First Half

1:02 Happy 23rd birthday, Bernie!!

1:40 Mark Malone: shittier quarterback or sports commentator? Discuss.

2:23 If it's 2011, Chris Rockins probably gets called for roughing the QB with that slap, eh?

3:12 Reggie Langhorne’s award winning Greg Little impression.

3:55 Brian Brennan tells Wes Welker where to stick his Caucasian street cred.

4:16 Kevin Mack will eat your children.

8:01 “Cleveland's pass protection simply wasn’t going to let up.” What strange words.

Video 2: Second Half

0:17 Our helmets were less shiny back then.

0:42 Why do they keep showing plays that were nullified by penalties?

2:50 Two TDS for Dickey!

5:10 Slaughter (2nd round pick), Brennan (4th round), Langhorne (7th round): good receivers do exist outside the first round apparently.

6:40 No stretcher for you and your single-bar facemask, Matt Bahr!

7:04 Bob Golic sighting.

9:03 Bernie—he did it ugly, but damn if that gamewinning sidearm fling isn't spot on.

End: Browns win 37-31. Bernie finishes 28-46 for 414 yards. Mack runs for 106.

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[Youtube Link: Browns Steelers 1986 Part 1](#)

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[Youtube Link: Browns Steelers 1986 Part 2](#)

As it turned out, the Browns wouldn't lose another game in 1986, finishing 12-4 to take the Central Division crown. They hadn't played their last overtime thriller, however. In the playoffs, of course, there were back-to-back 23-20 OT contests, the first won by Cleveland over the Jets, and the second—won by Denver on a field goal that was actually wide right but called good because life is cruel and only a merciful death will ever free us from the unending spiral of heartbreak and misery.

Bernie Kosar 1986 (second year, age 23)

16 G, 310-531 (58.4%), 3854 yards (241 YPG), 7.3 Yards Per Attempt, 17 TD, 10 INT, 83.8 Rating

Colt McCoy 2011 (second year, age 24)

13 G, 265-463 (57.2%), 2733 yards (210 YPG), 5.4 Yards per attempt, 14 TD, 11 INT, 74.6 Rating

Having good receivers matters.

ARCHIVE: [Cleveland Sports Video Grab Bag #1](#)