

Fool's Gold: Are the Golden State Warriors the Most Overrated Team of All Time?

The 2016-2017 Golden State Warriors are champions of the basketball world once again. This is their second title in three years, having defeated LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers both times. They went 16-1 in the playoffs which is the highest post season winning percentage in the history of the NBA. By every conceivable measure they appear to be a great team.

Unless you ask other NBA players.

Charles Barkely, Scottie Pippen, Rasheed Wallace, Robert Horry, Julius Irving, and Magic Johnson have all had less-than-kind things to say about this Warriors' team. All of them have publicly questioned their greatness, insinuating that they are the product of a watered down, less talented and more easily exploited league.

We here at Rambling Ever On decided to take a closer look into this controversy. What is it about this Warriors' team that causes all of these former (and current) players to withhold praise, or worse, to openly doubt? We have done our best to get a good sampling of reaction from various NBA players who have played in different eras.

We started our investigation with the players from the 80's and 90's, since they seemed to be the most vocal in their criticism. Craig Ehlo, a former Cleveland Cavalier from the 80's and 90's, noted "I have no doubt we'd take them. 5 games at most. We didn't win the championship but the league was tougher back then. And with the new rules Mark Price would hit 22 threes a game, minimum. Between me, Wilkins and Price, we'd have the Splash Triplets. Curry would ride the bench in the

90's NBA."

Patrick Ewing, Hall of Fame center for the New York Knicks bristled when asked if the current Warriors are better than the 1996 Chicago Bulls. "Man, we played those Bulls' teams! They were great. Best ever. And we played them close. These pretty boys from Oakland would be crying on the court if they had to play me, Mason and Oakley. We sweep them or they would give up. Whichever comes first."

It appears there is a level of skepticism about the Warriors. We dug deeper.

Michael Olowokandi, the number one pick in the 1998 draft has also recently spoken out. "I'm confident the 99 Clippers would take these Warriors. I know I only averaged 8 points per game for my career, but the league was tougher back then. Draymond Green wouldn't be able to touch me. I'd go for 30 every night."

The skepticism and verbal attacks are not reserved for players from the 80's and 90's. NBA players from every decade are stepping up and taking their shots at Durant, Curry and the Warriors. Fred Carter, the leading scorer on the 1973 Sixers had some choice words.[1.The 1973 Sixers went 9-73 – the worst record in NBA history.] "Back when I played, there were only 17 teams in the league. There are 30 teams today. Obviously that has watered down the league. And we didn't have any of those European players. Those guys should just stick to soccer." Carter continued, "We didn't have the three point shot in my day either. It didn't exist. If it had been around, I am confident that at least half of my team could have shot it at least as well as Stephen Curry. Probably better."

Fred "Curly" Neal of the Harlem Globetrotters added his own perspective. "Those guys are fancy. They dribble, they drive, they shoot from anywhere on the court. But we did all those things and we did them better. We looked better as well, you

know what I'm saying? Don't give me that 16-1! The Globetrotters won 8,829 games in a row!"

Surely, we thought to ourselves, that at the very least, the current players would have a healthy respect for a team that has won 207 regular season games and two NBA championships in the past three seasons. So, we approached LeBron James, arguably the great player of his generation, to get his thoughts. James was thoughtful and political with his response, yet with enough negativity it was clear the questions about the Warriors extends beyond the older generations. "Well, they were a great team. No doubt. But they played in an era that honestly didn't have a lot of great teams. And their style of play worked for them in that era but would not be as effective against the great teams of other eras." We asked James if his Cavaliers team would beat the Kevin Durant led Warriors in a seven game series. LeBron smiled, "Absolutely. Our team could defend the perimeter which would have contained Curry and Thompson. We would have neutralized Durant completely. Our teamwork and passing would have made it impossible for their defense to key on any one player. And defensively, we played a physical and aggressive style that would have knocked them off their game. We would have won that series in 5, maybe 6 games."

There you have it. The Golden State Warriors, who set the NBA record for the most regular season wins in a single season AND over a three year span, winners of two NBA championships, are just not very good. In fact, ask any player, past or present, besides Dell Curry and Mychal Thompson, and they would tell you that pretty much any team that has ever played in the NBA could beat these guys. Even some great college teams could probably give them a good run for their money. In fact, there have been rumors that members of the 1995 College of Charleston Cougars are saying they believe their team could also defeat the Warriors in a 7 game series, but none of them could be reached for comment.

Why I Stopped Hating LeBron James

I remember the Summer of 2010 quite well.

Especially July. My church puts on a huge basketball camp every summer and a church from another state always comes to help us with it, normally the Rejoice Church in Owasso, OK. I remember being at the church one day working and then several of their adult workers gathering around the church soundbooth computer with me to watch "The Decision."

I remember my reaction to it: anger, confusion, repulsion. It was the same kind of reaction I'd have to a TV show that killed off my favorite character. I honestly didn't care that LeBron left Cleveland. I wanted him in Chicago but not choosing us didn't really draw the ire. No, I was mad because LeBron chose to play with Dwayne Wade, four years removed from a Finals MVP and Chris Bosh, a perennial all-star.

Then, it got worse. I was housesitting for a lady at church and happened upon the Miami Heat pep rally celebrating *before the season had even started*, complete with the new Big 3 all in full uniform and LeBron predicting they'd win championship after championship.

I was disgusted. When the regular season finally started three months later, I was in full "I hate LeBron" mode (not real hate, but what I call "sports hate" – just a fun way to say I don't like them). I know I will never hate an athlete as much as I hate Tom Brady but he was becoming a sort-of NBA version.

So when Miami made the Finals every year from 2011 to 2014 I watched every second as though my life depended on it. I

cheered Dallas' victory and gloated like a child to anyone who would listen. I blamed Harden and the refs for the 2012 Miami win. I thought they were finished again in 2013 in Game 6 until that unforgettable last minute. But at least I got to enjoy immensely the Spurs getting revenge in dominating fashion the next year.

One thing was sure though: Every year he was in Miami, I wanted LeBron to go down like I wanted Shooter McGavin in *Happy Gilmore* to go down.

But what he did after the 2014 season undid it all. He came back. And more importantly he gave his reasons, beautifully written, for coming home to Ohio. I was blown away. By it all. [By how thoughtful and honest the essay was](#). By the humility to forgive Dan Gilbert for all that he said after LeBron left. By the willingness to go back to an awful basketball franchise and try to win it all for the people. By the love for his home outside of basketball. By owning up to "The Decision" so we all could move on from it. Even by the inspirational Nike commercial he did with the city of Cleveland to give them an unforgettable way to celebrate his return. It was all admirable.

It was all so opposite of 2010. As many journalists have written, there is no reason to hold on to those two nights in July any longer. He cannot undo them. All he can do is move forward. And that is exactly what he's done, with incredible life maturity. It reminds me of the way Jack and Sawyer changed on the TV show *Lost*, except it wasn't scripted. It was raw and genuine.

So watching him pull Cleveland from Basketball Hell these last three years has not bothered me at all. It was the circumstances I hated in Miami, far more than the man. I was disappointed that Cleveland won it all last year, but solely

because of Mike Lytle's [article](#) on Golden State being better than the 96 Bulls. (Hey, what can I say? I'm a bigger fan of REO than any NBA result.) But a small part of me cheered that Cleveland finally won something. It was absolutely perfect that LeBron—being born in Akron, drafted by his hometown team, having forsaken them and then having returned with contriteness and realness you rarely see in professional athletes—was the one to lead them. If you juxtapose LeBron's ["Together" Nike video](#) with the result of Game 7 from last year's NBA Final, it feels like a superhero movie became real life.

I have opinions on LeBron as an athlete as far as his legacy but those comments can wait for another article (or you can just look at my Twitter feed). But no matter how much I argue for or against him, none of it comes from the same extreme hatred I have for athletes like Tom Brady. What LeBron did three years ago is too special to me. It was significant way beyond sports. And as a human, more than a sports fan, I loved it. I'll never be a LeBron fan, but I'm not a hater either. I feel like he has earned that much.

[The NFL on REO: The Draft](#)

An Exhaustively Researched Hypothesis

The NFL just concluded the 2017 draft. As usual, it was three days full of excitement, drama, and way too many opinions. It also helped confirm in my mind a little hypothesis I have been

developing for some time: The NFL is the girl in high school that is socially oblivious, dumb as a box of rocks, kind of a jerk, but is pretty hot. Allow me to elaborate. That girl from high school had no problem getting dates. All the dumb, hormone driven, high school boys could easily overlook her lack of intelligence, her meanness, or her propensity to say or do publicly embarrassing things because...hotness. All those other negative qualities did nothing to lessen her popularity with the guys. That's the NFL. The NFL draft is three days of the NFL showing off, patting themselves on the back, and doing it all in the most bombastic and cringe-worthy manner possible. And we still watch. Because hotness. The NFL is hot, has been hot for a long time, and will be hot for many more years to come. It will be hot until all the negatives about the sport finally surpass how attractive it is to fans. And believe me, that time is coming.

The NFL is socially oblivious because teams continue to draft players with awful character simply because they are good at football. Of course the Bengals drafted Joe Mixon. Because Mixon is really good at football. Nothing else matters to the league or to many of the teams. They will take any little PR hit in the hopes that players like Mixon can help them win. I'm all for second chances. I really am. As a Christian, second chances are pretty much built into the DNA of my faith, but giving someone like Mixon a "second chance" doesn't have to mean drafting him and paying him million of dollars. It could mean something entirely unrelated to football. Something that might actually help him become a solid, productive member of society.

The NFL is dumber than a box of rocks because it keeps letting Roger Goodell announce the name of each drafted player in the first round. Goodell doesn't do many things well, besides being the owner's dancing monkey, and his inability to correctly pronounce the names of the draft picks is the cherry on top of his curdled sundae. Beyond the fact that he

struggles with pronunciation, he has no stage presence, makes the whole thing very awkward, and he gets booed vociferously every time he walks up to the podium. It's bad television and it's a bad look for the NFL. But we still watch. Because hotness.

And for the love, stop with the weird hugging!

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DqVpmy9hJnw>

Even with all this, and so much more, ratings were up from last year. That's because we are all a bunch of hormone riddled boys and the NFL looks good in a short skirt. I fear I may have taken this analogy to a very uncomfortable place. Moving on!

Draft Winners and Losers

I think we can all safely say that Chicago giving up what they did to move up one spot to draft a completely unproven QB was a strange decision. I'll go one step further: It was a bad move. I officially declare the Bears as the biggest losers of the 2017 NFL Draft.

From my vantage point, I don't believe there was any one team that clearly won the draft – a lot of teams had solid drafts. If I were a draft expert (I'm not) I would hand out quite a few "A" grades this year. Many teams seemed to be working with actual plans to make their teams better. Novel approach for sure, but it looks like planning and strategy were more popular than usual. A few teams that got better this weekend: San Francisco, Houston, Arizona, and Philadelphia.

Travis Rudolph

I'm sure you heard the story about the Florida State wide receiver, Travis Rudolph, that went to a local school and sat down with a boy who was eating alone. The boy was Bo Paske, who has autism. The story went viral and Bo was able to go to many FSU games and events after that, due to his new friendship with Travis. Look, I don't know Travis but from all appearances, he seems like a great guy. Sitting down and eating with Bo was such a small gesture, but something that clearly spoke to so many people across the country. If a little act of kindness can have that kind of an impact on people, imagine how much we can do by just being decent and kind.

I've since read that Travis' father was killed in an accident at work – the weekend before the draft. Rudolph did not get selected by any team in the draft this year, but has signed as an undrafted free agent with the New York Giants. I am rooting for him and praying for his family during this time of mourning. I'm sure this has been an incredibly confusing emotional rollercoaster for them.

If he can put up moves like this in the pros, he might just make it.



Titans Talk



I can honestly say that my initial reaction to the Titans taking Corey Davis with the 5th pick of the draft was confusion and a little bit of frustration. I thought it was a reach. I liked Davis, and have been reading up on his career at Western Michigan for the past few months. I even liked the idea of the Titans drafting him, but 5th overall just seemed way too high. Then, the other two wide receivers with first round talent were taken before the 10th pick and I realized that Jon Robinson knew what he was doing. Perhaps picking Davis caused the run on wide receivers. Perhaps he knew that other teams were going to take a wide receiver early. Whatever the answer, Robinson bet that none of the best receivers were going to be available at 18 (the other first round pick for the Titans) so he had to get his guy at 5. I'll take that. It was definitely a "need" pick, but if Davis is as good as expected, he will help the offense tremendously.

I "bet" last week that Robinson was going to trade at least one of his first round picks. I was wrong. He kept both picks and added a lot of speed and explosiveness to the team. He did trade a lot after that though, which sort of made me right. No? Okay. That doesn't make me right at all. I did say he would take a receiver and a corner back though, so I should get some credit.

After watching and listening to the Nashville Predators in the playoffs, I can't agree more with [this](#) take. The Titans desperately need to develop more traditions at Nissan Stadium. This team is about to be one of the best in the AFC, and it's

time the fans took their fanaticism to the next level. There are actually some great ideas listed in the comment section of the linked article on [Music City Miracles](#), ranging from borrowing/stealing a few ideas from the Predators or using the pre-game warm-up chant from the movie, *Remember the Titans*. (Disclaimer: I don't condone all the comments or language used in the above comment section.) The Titans fan-base needs to get serious about this and make Nissan Stadium a place opponents fear and the Titans love. Just imagine 69,143 fans doing this chant in unison on a Sunday afternoon!

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=zrUMn6RS2Uk>

Final Thoughts

That's it for this week. From this point on, until closer to the start of Training Camp, this "column" will be sporadic. There is just not enough NFL news each week during the offseason to justify a weekly article. Things will start to ramp up the closer we get to the season starting. And once the season does start, this will be at minimum a once a week endeavor. I hope you guys enjoy it and will stick around for the ride. Thanks for reading.

The NFL on RE0

[Titans Tuesday](#) is dead! Vaya con Dios Titans Tuesday!

It was fun while it lasted but after churning out two dozen amazing and insightful articles that focused on the Tennessee Titans, a few things became very clear:

1. I am probably not as amazing or as insightful as I

think. Nah! That can't be it.

2. The REO readership doesn't care about the Tennessee Titans very much. The stats bear that out with depressing accuracy. Sad face.
3. The best performing editions were those that branched out and covered general NFL topics and not just things related to the Titans.

What that means is that instead of continuing Titans Tuesday, I have decided to let it evolve and become something that is more comprehensive of the whole league. That is not to say I will ignore my favorite team. The Titans will get their own section each week. If you have don't care for the Titans, you are more than welcome to not read that section.

With the table set, as it were, let's get to the topics of the day:

The 2017 NFL Regular Season Schedule

Back when the Colts and the Patriots played nearly every season, you would hear a lot of talk about how the NFL manipulated the schedule to get those kinds of matchups. You still hear that kind of talk these days, when various fan-bases cry and moan about how their team got the short end of the stick, or how their rival team was gifted with one of the easiest schedules in the league.

If you are one of those conspiracy nuts, stop it. Just stop. There is no conspiracy. There never has been some grand conspiracy. The NFL doesn't sit back and attempt to devise ways to screw over this team or that. They don't conspire to make one team's schedule as easy as possible. Do you know how I can say this with utmost certainty? Because the NFL schedule is basically set in stone years in advance. Yes, there are two games every season that are fluid until the previous season ends, but for the most part, every other game was decided

years in advance. Allow me to demonstrate using the Tennessee Titans schedule:

The NFL schedule is almost beautiful in its symmetry and logic. My only concern is that Roger Goodell is going to see how wonderful and perfect the schedule is and he will try to sabotage it in some way. I'm sure it tarnishes the shield or something. It's 2017 and Roger Goodell still has a job as the commissioner of the biggest professional sports league in the country. If that is not a sign of the end times, I don't know what is.

The NFL Draft

The draft is tomorrow.





I am no draft expert but I have no problem pretending to be one on the internet. Not being an expert doesn't seem to have stopped thousands of others from spouting their draft wisdom. I do not follow the college game close enough to have a strong opinion about most of these players so I will condense my thoughts about the NFL draft and put them in bullet points (nifty little footballs) to facilitate easy reading and comprehension:



As far as I can tell there are no great QB's in this year's draft. At least, there are no QB's that multiple teams are falling over themselves to draft. That's not to say that there will not be a handful of teams that convince themselves that they have to draft a QB high, which will create a mad frenzy at the top of the 1st round.



While there do not seem to be any "can't miss" type players, this draft does seem to be extremely deep in a variety of positions. I have a feeling that in a few years, this draft will be looked upon favorably outside of the QB position. Cornerback and Wide Receiver seem to be particularly deep this year, which bodes well for teams that need help at those positions. Yay for the Titans!



A recent [stat](#) was released that showed that more than 30 of the players that are hoping to be drafted have been arrested. That is nearly 1/7th of the total number of players that will be selected this year. So, for the last

time, any people out there that are still beating the NFL for their off the field issues yet conveniently ignoring the problems in the college game, enough is enough. The NFL is importing their problems and they have very little choice in the matter. There is no other talent pool they can dip into to acquire players. If we are going to be fair about the real problems in the NFL we need to start by addressing the myriad of problems in College football. I need to hurry up and finish this article before a few more college players get busted for drug use or get arrested for domestic violence.

Titans Talk



I'll keep this brief because I really have no idea how Jon Robinson is going to operate in this year's draft. If I were a betting man, I would put money on Robinson trading one his two first round picks. I think he values picks and not having a second round pick is probably driving him crazy. If he can still get a player he likes by trading either the 5th or the 18th picks, he will do that in a heartbeat.

I don't see any way around the Titans drafting at least one cornerback this year. Adding Logan Ryan this offseason was a good move but they also lost Jason McCourty, which offsets the Ryan addition a little. McCourty had lost a step or two and he was certainly not worth the money his contract was due to pay him, but he was still a body in the rotation that could give you some quality minutes from time to time. The Titans need at

least one starter in this draft and perhaps another nickel or dime corner.

Did anyone else get a surge of parental pride when you saw the video clip of Marcus Mariota arriving to the first day of OTA's? It was still mostly dark outside when our man got to Saint Thomas Sports Park. He was walking fine and looked ready to get to work. If he is 100% healthy this season, I think he will have a Pro Bowl type of year. He gets it. He gets all of it.

If you haven't jumped on the bandwagon yet, you need to do so soon. After going 9-7 last season the Titans are poised to be one of the breakout teams of 2017. Don't wait too long to get on board or you are going to be left behind.

Finally, thank you and good luck to Paul Kuharsky. Paul has covered the Titans and the AFC South for a long time. He announced on Monday that he has been let go by ESPN. While I disagreed with Paul at times in how he covered things, or his opinion on certain players or situations, I truly believe he wrote with integrity and passion. He will be missed in that role but hopefully this will be the beginning of a new, more fulfilling chapter in his life. He can still be heard on The Midday 180 on [104.5 The Zone](#).

See you next week as I recap the draft and address a few more reasons why Roger Goodell needs to be fired.

Dear Cleveland, You'll Regret Passing on Deshaun Watson

"If they [the Browns] pass on Deshaun Watson, they're passing on Michael Jordan." (Clemson coach Dabo Swinney)

Since I was a child, my dad has made the same joke about how to punish me when I've done something not too serious but still displeasing to him: "I'm writing you out of the will!" He told me this in 2010 when I rooted for Auburn over Oregon in the College Football National Championship game after the NCAA gave America a big middle finger by letting Cam Newton play. He said it again in 2015 when I did a Facebook tournament on fantasy-fiction giants and didn't include Mark Twain. He said when I was a teenager more times that I can count.

I fear this article may bring one more.

The Cannons are Gamecocks. It's our sports DNA. And to be a Gamecock you can no more support Clemson than you can take the square root of a negative number (and yes, anyone who claims to pull for both probably believes in unicorns and other imaginary things)[1. That's a joke. Root for sports however you want.]. Yet I cannot deny any of what I'm about to write. So much so that I'm writing it.

I agree in essence with what Dabo says above. Dabo says it in his own hyperbolic Dabo way but the man won a National Championship in large part because he says things like this often and people buy it and play up to it. So don't let the name dropping detract from the truth of the statement. Dabo probably believes Watson will be Jordan but at minimum I know he thinks he's a can't miss prospect and will be an exceptional NFL quarterback. I do too.

The fact I believe this is a testimony to its truth. This is undoubtedly the biggest anti-bias piece I've ever written. I am supposed to loathe Deshaun Watson and wish him the worst at the next level. But I can't. I respect him too much. By sports fan contract I am supposed to hate the Green Bay Packers and St. Louis Cardinals, but I can't deny how good Aaron Rodgers and Yadier Molina are, both I'd say are Top 5 at their position of people I've ever seen play.

Same for Watson, even though I doubt I'll ever sports hate Green Bay or St. Louis the way I do Clemson. But after three years of seeing him lead a complete turn around of the Gamecock-Tiger rivalry and vault Clemson to the next and highest level, I have a decent grasp of DW as an athlete. I've watched him play dozens of times. As the saying goes, my two favorite teams are USC and whoever is playing Clemson. He as real a deal as I have ever seen.

Here's what I mean: In November 2013, we had just finished our fifth straight win vs. Clemson which hadn't been done by either school in nearly a century. Then Watson showed up. His freshman year they beat us 35-17 as he played on a torn ACL. He missed part of the game or it would have been 42-10 at best. The following year we rallied from down 28-10 to pull within 28-25 in the fourth quarter and the next drive Watson calmly led them down the field, converting three backbreaking 3rd downs, ran for the eventual touchdown and put the game away. In 2013 I was crowing about that five game winning streak over our hated rival. Within two years we were 3-9 and they were on onside kick away from winning the whole thing. Within three years they beat us 56-7 and did beat Alabama to win it all. Football teams of course have many moving parts. You couldn't have watched Clemson the last two years and not been blown away by their D-line, their receiving corps (watch the game-winning drive vs. Bama to see a clinic of how to catch a football) and everything else. But Watson was the Alpha Dog. The Superhero. The [I'm Keith Hernandez](#) on the

team. "He's a program changer," says Dabo. Gamecock fans cannot argue.

Clemson was in much better shape when Watson arrived in 2014 than the Browns are presently, but if there is any QB in this draft that can be the most crucial piece to turning around a sadsack franchise like Cleveland, it's him. I am not going to throw an avalanche of stats at you. If you want those they are easily accessible on the internet. If you want someone to talk about throwing motion or release time, you'll have to go elsewhere.

No, my opinion on Watson comes not just from his known ability to lead an offense to score almost at will on even the best defenses in the country, but also from a word I often disparage in talking about quarterbacks: intangibles[2. Since I know many of our readers will know what I've written about Tom Brady, let me go ahead and anticipate some objections. I believe the QB is the most important position in football. Yet I believe they control maybe 20% of what happens. I believe intangibles are a real thing in quarterbacking (See: Cutler, Jay), but I don't think Tom Brady has some intangible that Dan Marino didn't that causes him to win Super Bowls. I do not think Brady is a bum. He's clearly one of the 15-20 greatest ever. Just not near the greatest to me. Intangibles don't cause Atlanta to fall out of FG range twice and the Atlanta safety to deflect an interception off his hands so Edelman can make a near physically impossible catch. There's no contradiction here. As great as Watson is, I don't think he could come back for his senior year and play for Wake Forest and win the championship. That's the essence of the Brady argument.]. After watching Watson time and time again on the biggest stages it is painfully obvious to me that he thrives under pressure. It's obvious that he cannot be rattled. It's obvious that he can throw an interception and shake it off and come back and throw a gorgeous long ball the very next drive.

Watson smiles a lot. Watson exudes confidence that can be felt

on a 2D TV screen. Watson is exactly the kind of athlete that can look at a 53 year NFL Championship drought and but completely unfazed by it. He's basically the anti-Jay Cutler in this regard. I have no doubt his teammates will love him. Coaches will adore working with him. For all his similarities to Cam Newton, I cannot imagine him leaving in the middle of a press conference even after losing the Super Bowl. It is this, far more than throwing motion or TD to Int ratio, that I think makes him can't miss.

Talent matters of course. Danny Wuerffel of Florida was the best college QB I've ever seen (had Watson stayed four years he could have passed him) and he flopped in the NFL. But Watson isn't a system QB and he has the right tools to play at the next level. I have zero doubt.

After the 56-7 mauling by Clemson over us a few months ago, Watson said, "It was like a daddy spanking their child." I want to be angry at Watson for that, but I can't. I texted my brothers that quote and Ashley replied, "You have to admit that's funny right there." And it's also true[3. Not be outdone, Clemson WR Mike Williams threw the ultimate shade at my school by saying he didn't know any of our secondary players' names. Sometimes in sports you just have to take it. Gamecocks have no comeback to that right now.]. I'm proud to be a Gamecock but Clemson gets the football accolades for this time. The most important position on a football field is the quarterback. Cleveland desperately needs one. They need Deshaun Watson. Or else they will regret it far more than I will regret being written out of my dad's will for saying so.

Happy Birthday 'One Shining Moment': 30 Games for 30 Years

The ball is tipped, And there you are...

If you can hear music in your head when you read those words, this is for you. If you get chill bumps when you read those words and hear the music in your head, this is *definitely* for you.

The greatest playoff in American sports appropriately has the absolutely perfect song that has become associated with it for three decades now. I'm old enough to remember the first playing of One Shining Moment. That championship game is the first one I remember watching til the end. I've been through the David Barret version, the Teddy Pendergrass version, survived the Jennifer Hudson one year travesty and have thoroughly enjoyed the best of them all, Luther Vandross. What a song!

And so its 30th birthday has me feeling all nostalgic. Sports and highlight reel nostalgia are like peanut butter and jelly. March Madness and highlight reel nostalgia are like a Chick-fil-A sandwich and sweet tea.

With that in mind, I want to share 30 of my favorite One Shining Moments in the NCAA Tournament of the last 30 years.

The Game: 1987 Indiana v. Syracuse (Championship)

The OSM: I remember Keith Smart shooting it. I remember the

body language of the Syracuse players after it was over. I remember the feels I got by seeing "One Shining Moment" make its premiere. It was like finding out about Christmas all over again: "So they can put the best highlights with this glorious music and give us three minutes of chill bump heaven!?!?" YES, LET'S DO THIS EVERY YEAR!

The Game: 1990 Loyola Marymount v. New Mexico St. (First Round)

The OSM: Bo Kimble, in tribute to his teammate Hank Gathers who died walking off the court the previous week, shot his first free throw left handed with 14:46 left in the second half. Why does this moment make me cry 27 years later?

The Game: 1990 UConn v. Clemson (S16)

The OSM: Any game where Clemson loses is a real treat to me, but this one was special because UConn was down 1 with exactly 1 second left. They had to go the length of the court. A-75 foot pass and Dick Stockton with the call: "The shot...YES! The shot's gonna count! The shot by Tate George...wins it!!!" Euphoria in my house ensued.

The Game: 1991 Duke v. UNLV (Final 4)

The OSM: "*Can Anyone Beat UNLV?*" That was the Sports Illustrated headline going into the NCAA Tournament. They were undefeated. They beat Duke by 30 in the championship the year prior. In their Final 4 rematch, Anderson Hunt hit a three on UNLV's first possession and Christian Laettner came down and countered with a three. Laettner scored 9 points in the first three minutes as Duke opened up a 13-5 lead. That shot sent a message that Duke would not be blown out again. They went on to pull off an upset for the ages.

The Game: 1992 Ga Tech v. Southern Cal (2nd Round)

The OSM: A game that meant nothing really, it was pure exhilaration for a moment in time because James Forrest for Ga Tech caught a pass, down two, with 0.8 seconds left and pirouetted from 25 feet out and nailed it. Miracle shot.

The Game: 1992 Duke v. Kentucky (Elite 8)

I have visual images of this game seared into my brain. The hideous mustaches from Martinez and Farmer. The neck brace from Laettner's mom. I remember Laettner not missing a shot (10-10 FGs, 10-10 FTs). I remember him stomping Timberlake. I don't need Google to tell me that the guy for UK who hit the shot before Laettner's was Sean Woods. This game was like something out of a fantasy novel. The Final Shot is on the short list of greatest sports moments ever. Thomas Hill's reaction is almost as iconic as Laettner's shot itself.

The Game: 1993 Cal v. Duke (2nd Round)

The OSM: Duke was coming off back to back championships. Cal nipped LSU in the first round and LSU coach Dale Brown said "They don't have a prayer" of beating Duke. With just over a minute to go and Cal down by one point after leading basically the whole game and by 15 at one point, Jason Kidd (11 points, 10 rebounds, 14 assists, 4 steals) made an incredible circus shot from his knees and got fouled. He made the free throw, and Duke never led again.

The Game: 1994 Arkansas v. Duke (Championship)

The OSM: Grant Hill tied it with 90 seconds left with a three pointer. Scotty Thurmond, who used to practice by shooting threes over a broomstick, then made the tie-breaking three pointer over the outstretched arm of Antonio Lang that

essentially won Arkansas the National Championship.

The Game: 1996 Purdue v Western Carolina (1st Round)

The OSM: Western Carolina Coach Phil Hopkins broke down and cried in the post game press conference, as his 16-seeded team had three shots to tie or win to try to become the first ever 16 seed to beat a 1 in NCAA Tournament history. It still hasn't happened.

The Game: 1996 Princeton v. UCLA (1st Round)

The OSM: UCLA, coming off their first national championship since The Wizard left, was a 4-seed and heavy favorite over Ivy League Princeton. But Princeton showed UCLA the exit "through the back door".

The Game: 1998 Kentucky vs. Duke (E8)

The OSM: A sweet, sweet revenge game. This time it was Scott Padgett with a the late game-changing shot, even if not as legendary as Laettner's. He broke the 81-81 tie with a three. I can still see his reaction in my head.

The Game: 1999 Gonzaga v. Florida (S16)

This was Gonzaga's coming out party, going from a 10-seed Cinderella all the way to the Elite 8 before barely falling to eventual champ UConn. But what made this special, the third straight win for Gonzaga as an underdog, was Gus Johnson's call as it ended with Florida missing the potential game-winner: "Gonzaga!!!! The slipper...still...fits!!!!"

The Game: 1999 UConn v. Duke (Championship)

The OSM: By the Vegas gambling line, this is the biggest Championship game upset of my lifetime, even bigger than N.C. St over Houston in 83 and Villanova in 85. Duke just wasn't going to lose. But UConn went toe-to-toe with them and up by a mere point with 40 seconds left, point guard Khalid El-Amin made an acrobatic driving layup to break Duke's momentum. It was the difference.

The Game: 2001 Hampton v. Iowa St. (1st R)

The OSM: I was a Junior at Bible College on Spring Break and I plopped down in the guy's dorm lobby and waited all day for a great buzzer beater or upset. It finally came late afternoon. Iowa St., the 2-seed, was in complete control and led by double digits late in the game but Hampton came back and finally took the lead on an awkward looking hook by a big man named Johnson with six seconds left. The image of Hampton's coach being picked up from behind by a player as he kicks and fists pumps in excitement is one I'll never forget. At the time it was only the fourth time a 2-seed lost its first game.

The Game: 2005 Illinois v. Arizona (E8)

The OSM: Chicago got a little Illini fever in 2005 during their run to the championship game. But the Elite 8 game was the one to remember, as they were down 75-60 with just over four minutes remaining and the run was surely over. But they came storming back, and Deron Williams tied it with a three with 39 seconds left before they won in OT.

The Game: 2006 George Mason v. UConn (E8)

The OSM: An 11-seed mid-major beating a 1-seed Big Conference

Giant to go to the Final Four? Just doesn't happen. My favorite part? Verne Lundquist's call after it ended: "By George the dream is alive!"

The Game: 2006 UCLA v. Gonzaga (S16)

The OSM: This was a truly special Madness finish. Gonzaga gave up a 9-point lead in the last few minutes with the nation's top scorer, Adam Morrison, breaking down a crying before the game was actually decided. Gus Johnson: "WHAT A GAME!! U-C-L-A!!! HEART. BREAK. CITY." I get chills. Every time.

The Game: 2007 Georgetown v. Vanderbilt (S16)

The OSM: I was pulling for Vanderbilt but this was a fantastic finish, with Vandy leading for much of the game but Georgetown pulling it out when Jeff Green scored the game winner at the final buzzer. It looked in real time like he traveled and I imagine some Vandy fans still think he did.

The Game: 2008 Kansas v. Memphis (Championship)

The OSM: So many story lines in this one. Memphis led by 9 with less than two minutes to go. And even up by 2 with the ball in the last 20 seconds, two made FTs by Derrick Rose would all but clinch it. All year Memphis was terrible at FTs and Calipari brushed it off. But they missed several down the stretch, including one by Rose here and gave Kansas a chance to tie. And Mario Chalmers hit perhaps the biggest shot in March Madness history, maybe behind Laettner.

The Game: 2009 N. Iowa v. Kansas (2nd Round)

The OSM: Kansas was looking good to repeat, with the overall #1 seed in the tournament. But 9-seed N. Iowa fought and had

the lead in the final minute. And then a guy with a last name with like 14 consonants in a row forwent milking the clock and took an insane three with 37 seconds left that went in and sealed it. "YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS WITH THAT SHOT." (Dan Bonner)

The Game: 2011 Kentucky v. Ohio St. (S16)

The OSM: Just like the prior game, this one comes down to how the #1 team in the tournament lost well before it was supposed to. Diebler for OSU tied it at 60 with under half a minute left but Brendon Knight won it on an insane off balance jumper with a few seconds left. I jumped around my small Chicago apartment when this one went final. Not a Big 10 fan.

The Game: 2011 VCU v. Kansas (E8)

The OSM: OK, so George Mason pulled the 11 seed mid-major over College Basketball 1-seed Goliath five years prior. There's no way it could happen again. Right? But it did. Shaka Smart, VCU's coach, stole my heart this tournament. Against Kansas, they put on a clinic of dribble penetration and kick-out three-point shooting. Early in the first half Joey Rodriguez found Jaime Skeen on such a play to extend VCU's lead to 20-10 and you could feel the upset was possible.

The Game: 2012 Lehigh v. Duke (1st R)

The OSM: Duke used to never lose these games. A wide open dunk by a guy named Adams to extend the lead to 61-54 Lehigh with under two minutes left is a play I could watch over and over. That was the moment you felt it was going to happen: Duke was really going to lose. "Absolute Madness!" (Jim Nance)

The Game: 2013 Wichita St. v. Ohio St. (E8)

The OSM: I was torn this game because Ohio St. winning would have nearly sealed me winning my church bracket competition. But I love the upset more. Ohio St. had cut a 20 point deficit down to 3 when Tekele Cotton for WS nailed a three as the shot clock wound down to make it 65-59. Ohio St. never got closer than four after that.

The Game(s): 2014 Kentucky v. Wichita St. (2nd R)

and also Louisville (S16)

and also Michigan (E8)

and also Wisconsin (F4)

The OSM(s): Yes, I'm grouping these games together. These were like quadruplets. It felt like the same game four times. The one Harrison twin made more clutch shots in this run than 99% of players in their careers. Every game was heart stopping. Every game was won in the final two minutes or final seconds. Nantz, after the one vs. Wisconsin to win it: "Aaron Harrison...Beyond Belief".

The Game: 2015 Georgia St. vs. Baylor

The OSM: R.W. Hunter, Jr. (the player) hit an improbable, deep three to win the game 57-56 for 14-seeded Georgia St. R.W. Hunter Sr. (the coach), fell off his chair when he hit it. Classic game. Classic moment.

The Game: 16 Villanova vs. UNC (Championship)

The OSM: I don't need to say much. You saw it. Incredible back and forth game. Incredible UNC comeback from down 10 late in

the second half. Incredible shot by Paige to tie it. Incredible shot to win by Jenkins. "DOUBLE ORDER! SAUTÉED!" (Bill Raftery)

So do me a favor...if you love this nostalgia, give yourself 15 minutes today and watch about five of the OSM videos. They are all on Youtube. My personal favorite? 2006, which you can watch [here](#).

Yay March! Go Gamecocks!!

Championship Game Preview: Can '16 Alabama be the Greatest Team of The Modern Era?

In a mirror image of last year's epic championship game, undefeated and #1 Alabama takes on #2 and one-loss Clemson tonight. Several people, among them REO Contributor Mike Lytle, have confessed to me they are pulling for Clemson because Alabama has won far too much. This has been my reaction (minus the commandment breaking):



It's Like Goliath vs. Jezebel

I confess I have Bama fatigue due to their success and they are among the last teams I'd like to see win it. But if Alabama induces weariness in my sports fandom, Clemson winning would induce war crime-level torture.

Yet I cannot deny that Clemson likely stands a better chance this year than last, in which they were a play or two away.

They have everything Alabama does: 3-deep roster talent, exceptional coordinator coaching, unshakeable confidence. If quarterback is the most important position in football, and it is, then they have a decided advantage over the Tide. If D-line is the second most important position in college football, and it is, then Clemson isn't losing ground there either ([as I wrote last year](#), and it's still true). They won't get intimidated or pushed around and the Tiger offense likely will not get rattled into a turnover that leads to a TD the other way, as other teams have 11 times this year vs. Bama[1. Someone may point out that Watson threw 15 picks this year but they were not really the kind Bama is used to getting. Only 1 was returned for a TD and there was no pressure on that play.

The vast majority of his ints were bad reads or tipped balls, not throws made because he was pressured.]].

As a Gamecock, I'm terrified.

I wasn't too worried before the Ohio St. game. Clemson blew

out several teams this year, including mine, but had so many close calls that I figured they were just a step behind last year. They gave up 43 to Pitt, 36 to Louisville, 34 to FSU, 35 to Va Tech and needed N.C. St to miss a short FG to pull that one out in overtime.

The Opposite of a Late Season Collapse

How did this team not only dismantle Ohio St. but also shut them out? I could discuss Xs and Os all day (Ohio St. could not throw it downfield as well as the teams that put 34+ on Clemson, which is also not what Bama does well) but sometimes sports that involve 18 to 21 year olds are more complex than typical analysis.

Personally, I believe Clemson is better than last year and suffered a tad from last year's hangover and did just well enough to get back to the playoff and now they are turning it on. They beat us about as badly as you can beat a team, they raced out to a huge lead the following week vs. VT and swatted them away when they needed to at the end (just as they did with Louisville and Florida St.) And most impressive of all they then rolled one of the most consistent teams in college football in the semifinal.

It's scary.

Clemson has a lot to play for...their first championship since 1981 and second ever, a chance to truly join college football royalty, and a chance for their end of year result to match the swagger that Dabo has modeled and instilled over 8 years now. And for everyone else...a chance to at least put a dent in the Bama dominance. They have the tools for sure.

If Bama wins, can we complain about UConn Women's Basketball?

On the other side, Bama has nearly as much to play for: 5 undisputed championships in 8 years which hasn't been done in the poll era, and (in my humble opinion) a chance for the 2016 version to enter the argument for greatest college team of my lifetime, the modern era[1. I do not think it's fair for me to try to compare modern teams to teams I never saw play. Facts and stats are great, but the eye test is something. So I'm talking about since I began watching college football and the first championship I remember is Oklahoma winning in 1985.].

They had two close games this year: one vs. Ole Miss which was not as close as the final indicated. They got down 24-3 and then destroyed the Rebels for the next two and a half quarters 45-6 before Ole Miss tagged on a couple of meaningless TDs. They also beat LSU in Baton Rouge by "only" 10 points. And I watched that game start to finish and doubt LSU could have scored if they played 8 quarters so that game never really felt like Alabama was going to lose.

Other than that, they really weren't even threatened slightly.

They are as imposing a defense, I think, since their 1992 version which may be the greatest ever. I don't trust Hurts, Scarborough and Harris like I trusted Coker and Derrick Henry.

Hurts is not a substandard passer by any means (22 TDs and 2600+ yards), though, and considering how Coker got batted around like a pin ball last year it may be better to have a better running QB vs. a team that gets pressure like Clemson's. Plus, Bama always seems to just find a way to score, to win. It's an intangible for sure and it goes team wide. Some Bama fans were sweating when they got down three TDs to Ole Miss. I turned to my wife and said, "I bet they win by 14".

And in my opinion, should they win tonight becoming the first ever 15-0 team at this level of football and winning every game but one by 10+ (tonight's result pending), they would be one of the ten best teams ever.

I will wait to see if they win before ranking them but as of

right now I would say the following ten teams are the best of this era, in no particular order:

1995 Nebraska

2001 Miami

2004 Southern Cal

1992 Alabama

2010 Auburn

2005 Texas

1996 Florida

1991 Washington

2013 Florida St.

1988 Notre Dame

So if Alabama wins I will add them where I think they belong on the list, and produce a new article later this week with the Top 10 ranked in order (including 2016 Bama) and comments about each one.

If Clemson wins, I will jerk my TV from the wall, throw it out the window, rend my garments, pull out my beard, fast and weep violently into my wife's arms and probably disappear for 6 months.

So this is how it's going to go...

So how will it go tonight? I will give some random predictions for the game and a prediction for the final score:

- Alabama will NOT score on special teams or defense tonight.
- If Clemson turns it over once or less, they win; twice or more and they lose
- Watson runs for more yards than Hurts
- Hurts throws for more yards than his season average because they are behind in the second half.
- Watson has less total yards but less turnovers than last year, plays an overall better game and wins MVP
- Dabo wears a K-Mart sweatshirt.

I'm guessing it won't be as fun as last year, it will be more low scoring but it will be a cleaner, more professional looking game. Clemson will be by far the most explosive team Bama has faced this year. The SEC is down. Taking out defense and special teams TDs, Bama only averaged 28 PPG game this year, which feels low. So I'll go out on a limb and say Clemson doesn't turn it over and pulls the (sort of) upset:

CLEMSON 27, ALABAMA 17

See y'all in six months.

Titans Tuesday: Pride

One thing my 33 faithful readers will know[1. It was 32 for a long time, but I finally convinced one of my good college friends, Matt, to start reading.] is that I fully expected the 2016 Tennessee Titans to exceed most expectations. I would wager that the majority of the national sports media would have had them finishing with no more than four or five wins this season. I think their 9-7 record goes beyond exceeding expectations. It shatters them. And I am unbelievably proud of the Titans for that accomplishment.

I did not address the horrible loss to the Jacksonville Jaguars on Christmas Eve for a few reasons. One, I was on vacation with my family for Christmas and I did not want interrupt it. Two, where we were staying, there was no WiFi access so I was effectively shut out from the internet world. That ended up being a good thing. I didn't want to write about that loss. The grief was still too near. Let's leave it at this: That one loss did not keep the Titans from the playoffs. As a matter of fact, there were six other losses that contributed to missing the post-season. It was disappointing watching the team get outplayed by a team as bad as the Jaguars, but it seemed sort of inevitable in retrospect. Prior to that three game winning streak (Bears, Broncos, Chiefs) the Titans had not won more than two games in a row the entire season. A let down after two huge, emotional wins made perfect sense. I hate it but this team was just not good enough to get over that hurdle. They will be next season.

The Tennessee Titans have battled and fought this entire season. They did not mail it in once. Even the Jacksonville game was more about an emotional letdown and not a matter of poor effort. They established an identity, something that has been lacking for years in Nashville. They made the rest of the league take notice. Mike Mularkey and Jon Robinson make a good team. They are the right men for the task ahead. Amy Adams

Strunk is the right owner. Marcus Mariota is the right quarterback. (I will gush about him next week in my season wrap-up article.) This team had no off-the-field issues this season. No arrests. No scandals. This is a team every Tennessee Titans' fan can be proud of. And here is the great part: this team will only get better. If you have been burned by the Titans for too many years and are hesitant to jump on board, hesitate no longer. It is time. The Tennessee Titans are no longer a joke. They are no longer the laughingstock of the NFL. And they will no longer be a team the media ignores. They will force everyone to pay attention.

Be proud Titans' fans. The Titans are back.

“It Started With a Bunt”: The 2016 Sports Year in Review

It was such a crazy year in sports that I wouldn't be surprised to find out on Pottermore that the Chudley Cannons won the British and Irish Quidditch League Cup.

Okay, that will be my last Harry Potter comment. Because this year American sports proved yet again that truth will always be stranger than fiction. 2016 will go down as the most fascinating sports year ever and it's not even close. And I want to rehash the five main sports championships from this year in the big three sports, in chronological order:

You're Dixie's Football Pride, Crimson Tide

I suppose it's appropriate that in a sports year where

significant droughts ended, that it started off with a winner that has now won four of the last seven College Football National Championships, could easily win a fifth in two weeks, and has been THE college football program for the last 80 years (No apologies to Notre Dame whatsoever).

Fireworks led 2016 that warm Monday night in January in Glendale, AZ. [I predicted Alabama would beat Clemson 31-30](#). I was close on margin, but even I still can't accurately predict scores in college football because I grew up in an era where teams didn't regularly put up 550 yards and 40 points of offense in a game.

And the 45-40 barnburner was one of the most exciting games I've ever seen. I don't know if it's one of the best I've watched, but it had no shortage of plot twists, bold coaching and NFL athleticism on display. There were five TDs in the fourth quarter alone. Jake Coker got smacked around and still threw for 335 yards. Deshaun Watson had nearly 500 yards of offense by himself. Kevin Dodd was spectacular. O.J. Howard was magnificent. Nick Saban gets another jewel in his coaching crown for turning the game at 24-24 with a brilliant special teams call.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7M-iEsfL4Qk>

Clemson lost but they still won in some ways, knowing they can tell recruits that they are toe-to-toe with Bama and were an unprecedented onside kick away from likely winning.

Miller, Not Manning

As exciting as was the College Football Playoff championship, the Super Bowl was equally as ugly and boring. It featured one

offensive TD drive and a gazillion punts. [I've already dealt at length with Peyton Manning's legacy](#) so I won't go into that here. Plus, it's not the story of the Super Bowl. Manning wasn't even mediocre in the game; he was bad. The man of the hour was Von Miller, who was supported quite well by everyone else playing defense for Denver. They trashed Tom Brady pretty good in the AFC Championship and carried the inept offense yet again in the Super Bowl. Harassing Cam Newton all night, it was Miller who bookended the game with two strips of Newton that lead to both of Denver's touchdowns.

While it was sometimes ugly, it is still a thing of beauty watching a defensive lineman or linebacker destroy an offensive line and disrupt everything. I grew up watching Lawrence Taylor and Reggie White do it and I have no doubt this was a part of the appeal of the movie *Waterboy*. Von Miller really did look like Bobby Boucher at times, so much that I fully expected him to ask Manning during the postgame if he remembered that time Von Miller showed up at half time and the Mud dogs won the Bourbon Bowl.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cq-ZpBDSW8A>

Still, the Super Bowl and NFL playoffs were captivating as always and gave us story lines galore. Yet I doubt anyone knew how much better 2016 was going to get.

One Shining Moment Was the Final Moment

I thought the 2016 NCAA Tournament produced a mixed bag. The first round featured the usual bevy of great upsets: 14 S.F Austin over 3 West Virginia, 12 Yale over 5 Baylor, 13 Hawaii over 4 Cal, and the biggest upset prize in first round

history: 15 Middle Tennessee St over 2 Michigan St. I personally think this was the biggest because no 2-seed that had ever lost in the first round had as much Final Four and Championship Contender hype as the Spartans. Plus, Michigan St. nearly always outplays their seeding. This was a bizarro world result.

The middle rounds induced tons of yawns, although Syracuse as a ten seed coming back to beat Virginia in the Elite Eight was a real treat and Villanova over Kansas that same round was intense. The two Final Four games gave us the biggest blow-out in Final 4 history (Villanova over Oklahoma by 44) and another blow-out (UNC over Syracuse by 17).

But then the championship redeemed it all. Villanova led UNC by 10 with about 5 minutes to go, 67-57, and I almost went to bed. But I thought about the dozens of times I've seen a college basketball team make up that deficit with that time and I stayed up. Boy am I glad I did. UNC came all the way back to tie at 74 with 4.7 seconds left on a double pump clutch three by Marcus Paige. That should have been the ultimate One Shining Moment, but it wasn't. Kris Jenkins then put his name in March Madness history next to Laettner, Jordan, Keith Smart and Bryce Drew with a way beyond NBA range 3-pointer at the buzzer to win.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L7FFJUz0tdo>

“DOUBLE ORDER, SAUTÉED!”

Considering Laettner's shot was in the Regional Finals and Jordan's was with 17 seconds left, was this the biggest shot in tournament history? Time will tell[1. Spoiler: No shot will ever beat Laettner's.].

The Biggest Collapse since Shooter McGavin Blew a 4-stroke Lead on the Back Nine

Ok, so I'm not really serious about that. I just love this Gameday sign so much:



It was made as a parody reaction to how many times people had talked about Golden St. blowing a 3-1 lead to Cleveland in the NBA Finals.

I suppose you could call it a choke. There is a case for that. Golden St.'s record setting offense was erased for nearly the final five minutes of Game 7 (that's not hyperbole; they scored 0 points the last 4:37). GS had 13 points in the fourth quarter of Game 5 and 13 again in the fourth of Game 7. Harrison Barnes literally shot 9% from the floor (2-22) in Games 5 and 6. Draymond Green's suspension was in part due to his hot head.

Yet this somehow felt different in other ways. In the classic huge comeback debate—did one team win or the other team lose—it feels more like Cleveland won than GS lost. Love him or hate him, LeBron put together a stat line for the ages: 30-11-9 for points, rebounds and assists per game for the series. Nearly a triple double in an epic Finals. He added 2.6 steals per game and 2.3 blocks per game and if you are reading

this I doubt I have to elaborate on the block heard round the world in Game 7. I will say this though: It's been six months and I still don't think people overreacted to it, as we often do in sports any more. It was an instant legendary play worthy of its accolades[2. Credit has to go to J.R. Smith as well for forcing Iguadala to alter his layup].

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=N11oeH0Ihgg>

Then you have Kyrie Irving's three with 50 seconds to go. What a shot. Definitely the biggest since Ray Allen in 2013 and on the short list for biggest ever, since it was Game 7. And then you have to credit Cleveland's defense in the final three games. Now, I know some of you reading this will recall that there was (at least to some people) some shady refereeing at times during this stretch of games. I won't expound upon that too much, but I will say that people who know basketball best believe that Cleveland was getting away with some pulling and grabbing, especially on the perimeter[3. Yet you have to still credit Cleveland for getting away with it. Just like you have to credit Baltimore on San Francisco's final offensive play in Super Bowl XLVII for being aggressive and stopping the score. Cleveland did what they had to do defensively to shake up the Warrior's picture perfect offense.]

At the end of the day, the story is that a mega superstar forsook his home for greener pastures, humbled himself to come back and promised them a championship. And after 50+ years of failures in the big three sports—everything from fumbles to blown saves to getting torched repeatedly by Michael Jordan—the man delivered. Any other year LeBron James leading Cleveland in ending their 5-decade long title drought would be the runaway winner for story of the year. But 2016 wasn't like any other year.

The Eye of the Cubbie

The Cubs won the World Series this year. Let that sink in.



Take hours if you need. Days even.

Has it sunk in yet?

For me it has!



Yes, it happened. It really happened. I watched it. I felt the chill bumps. I cried the tears. I heard the car horns all night.

How do you analyze this? Especially when you're a fan? Through memories I suppose. What memory will I cherish the most as being integral to the Cubs' 108-year in the making run to winning the World Series?

Was it finding out that Anthony Rizzo had the Cubs listen to Rocky music and quotes in the clubhouse after going down 3-1 in the World Series?

Was it the HR's by Fowler, Grandpa and Baez in Game 7?

Was it seeing Schwarber defy the odds and not only play in the World Series but deliver clutch hit after clutch hit?

No, I'm going with the bunt:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SoK2ubAJopk>

"The Bunt." That's what it should be called. It's not but it should be. The play of the playoffs to me. All the way back in Game 4 of the NLCS vs. the Dodgers, Ben Zobrist ended 21 innings of frustration for the Cubs offense (0 runs over 2+ games) by laying down a perfect bunt. The Cubs scored 4 that inning, won the game and didn't lose again in the series. Here is what I wrote on Facebook that night:



And yes, I think we Cubs fans will look back years from now and be thankful as much for that 40 foot dribbler as any 400 foot HR. Zobrist would end up being World Series MVP and he made an MVP play that night.

The Cubs making and winning the World Series was so significant that I did Facebook Live, which I hadn't done before and haven't done since. But it was a truly unique event in the last century of American sports history.

And it made 2016 special. It is only fitting that the Cubs won with the help of Rocky, who to me is the greatest fictional underdog story of our time. And in a year where a European soccer team beat 5,000 to 1 odds to win the Premiere league, and where a man took the weight of an entire city on his shoulders and ended 50 years of sports Hades, it was only fitting that for the last championship be won by the Cubs. Who credited Rocky.

What will 2017 bring? Will the Detroit Lions win it all? Will Alabama finally lose? Will someone other than Golden St. or Cleveland make the NBA Finals? I Don't know. But next year has a hard act to follow. 2016 was incredible in the truest sense of the word. I'm glad I was alive for it.



Titans Tuesday: The Joy of Sports

I watch every Tennessee Titans' game with my boys. I have three boys, ages seven to thirteen, and they all love sports. They really love the Titans. My youngest will wear the same Titans' outfit every Sunday while watching the game. My middle son will wear a Titans' jersey and his Titans' gloves. My oldest doesn't wear anything special but pays more attention to the game than any of them.

We watched the Titans take on the Kansas City Chiefs a few days ago, as most of you probably did. My oldest was only able to watch the first half with us because he had the opportunity to attend a college basketball game. I hate it that he missed the second half, because the football he got to see was not that enjoyable. The Titans were a mess in the first half. They made multiple mistakes on offense and defense. They allowed the Chiefs to dictate the terms of the engagement. But even with too many missed opportunities, mental errors, and bad plays on the field, the Titans were still only down 17-7 going into halftime.

Then it got good.

I've [written before about controlling my emotions and reactions while watching sports with my kids.](#) In the past, I did a bad job of modeling positive behavior when my teams would lose. I made a commitment that I would work on this and

the results have been mostly good. And my kids are following right along since they no longer have to watch their dad make a fool of himself yelling at the television screen every few minutes. Don't get me wrong; I still get animated. I still cheer. I still yell at the TV from time to time. But I do my best to not allow the result of the game to affect the rest of my day.

With all that said, I had a pretty loud and intense inner dialogue going on throughout the second half. I knew how important this game was for the Titans' playoff chances. I knew they were capable of playing better than they played in the first half. So when things did not go as desired, my inner idiot did a lot of yelling and venting. On the outside, I remained calm and jovial. I smiled at my boys. I joked with them. I talked about how much better this Titans' team is than in previous seasons. But inside, I was fuming mad and frustrated.

Fortunately, for my mental well-being, the Titans did start to play better. The defense made play after play in the second half, keeping the Chiefs scoreless for the final 30 minutes of the game. The offense didn't do a lot, but when it counted most – the fourth quarter – Marcus Mariota and company did exactly what they needed to do to win the game.

What a way to win the game though! When Ryan Succop lined up to kick the game winner, I knew Andy Reid was going to call a timeout. So, I didn't get nervous at all. I did swallow a little harder when he missed that kick by a good five yards though, but I figured it could help him make the kick that counted. I sat there with my two boys. We all moved the edge of the couch. I put my arm around both of them and said, "If he doesn't make this, this was still a really fun game to watch." They nodded in agreement. Right before the kick happened, my teenage international student/daughter strolled into the room. My boys yelled for her to come watch the kick with us. She happily complied. We were ready.

The snap...

The hold...

The kick...

Good!

The scene in my house after the kick was one of joyful insanity. We were all jumping, yelling, whooping, high fiving, and hugging. There were enough smiles in the room to last us the rest of the year.[1. We got to relive all the best moments when my oldest son got home from the basketball game. He had heard they won while at the game but didn't know the particulars. We were very happy to share them with him.]

This is why we watch sports. It's for these moments. Thank you, Tennessee Titans, for giving us a season to remember. No matter what happens in the next two weeks, this season has been a joy to experience.