There's alot of people I am very happy for now that the Cavaliers have advanced to the NBA Finals. And Cavs radio announcer Joe Tait is high atop that list. Joe is an institution here in CTown, and one of the most gifted radio announcers in all of sports. And the man has suffered through alot of bad basketball here. In Erik Cassano's latest, he pays tribute to The Man behind The Mic.

There is a story about Joe Tait and Bill Fitch highlighted on the back jacket of my copy of "Cavs: From Fitch to Fratello," the 1994 book that chronicles the first 25 years of the Cleveland Cavaliers.

The story goes something like this:

The expansion Cavaliers were struggling mightily through their start of their inaugural season, in the fall of 1970. With their record already 0-14, the Cavs were in San Francisco to take on the Warriors.

Coach Fitch, radio broadcaster Tait and assistant coach Jim Lessig walked from their hotel to the Civic Center in downtown San Francisco for the game. Lessig
and Tait had their NBA passes and showed them to the guard at the door, but Fitch forgot his back at the hotel.

Fitch attempted to reason with the guard. "I don't have mine," he said. "But I'm the coach of the Cleveland Cavaliers."

The guard wasn't buying it. "How do I know you're the coach of the Cavaliers?" he asks.

Fitch thought for a moment, the asked the security guard, "Do you know what the Cavaliers' record is?"

"They are 0-14," the guard replied.

"Then why would I tell you I am the coach of the Cavaliers if I really am not?"

And a legacy of wry humor in the face of horrible basketball was born.

Basketball fans always wonder what would happen if the walls of the great palaces could talk. What secrets would the rickety pillars of the Boston Garden have told us about Bill Russell and Red Auerbach? What about the front-row seats at the Great Western Forum? Or the tunnels at Chicago Stadium?

Cavalier fans don't have to wonder. Their talking wall is a real person.

Save for two years when he was run out of town by Ted Stepien, Joe Tait has been there from the beginning. He has chronicled just about every possession of every quarter the
Cavs
have ever played, and most everything that has happened off the court, too.

He is a piece of living history, not because of who he is necessarily, but because of what he has seen. From Walt Wesley to Bingo Smith to Dave Robisch to John Bagley
, Mark Price to Danny Ferry as a player to Terrell Brandon to Shawn Kemp, Ricky Davis to
LeBron
James to Danny Ferry as a general manager.

Tait has been there for all of it, refracting it for all of us to hear through his familiar raspy voice and dry wit.

But Tait can also refract without distorting. He has made unbiased reporting his hallmark, despite the fact that the Cavs sign his paychecks. That can rub owners the wrong way, and it played into why Tait was chased out of town by
Stepien
, who

percieved
him as a threat. Tait spent two seasons in the early '80s calling Nets and Bulls games before returning to Cleveland when the
Gunds
bought the team.

During those crazy, tumultuous Stepien years, Tait became something of an organizational watchdog, if only because he was pressed into it. After deciding to play the 1981 All-Star Game in Richfield, the NBA commissioner's office took a closer look at the situation in Cleveland. What they saw, according to "
Cavs
: From Fitch to
Fratello
" was an all-star announcement party that featured
scantily
-clad dancing girls and a guy who ripped beer cans open with his teeth,
Stepien's
idea of appropriate entertainment.

Then-commissioner Larry O'Brien worriedly called Tait to his office in New York to find out "what the hell is going on in Cleveland."

"People tell me I can rely on you for honest answers," O"Brien told Tait. "And very few people in that organization have been giving me straight answers. So I want to hear it from you ... We're taking the very best thing we have to offer, the NBA All-Star Game, to Cleveland. And I'm scared to death it's going to turn into a freak show, a carnival."

Tait and O'Brien talked. And talked. And talked some more. By the time the meeting was over, O'Brien had decided the league would take over organizing most of the all-star festivities.

Unfortunately, that episode says more about the state of the Cavs at that time than it does about Tait. Announcers are always at their best when they can put aside team politics and off-the-court shenanigans and concentrate on the action. And that is where Tait excels.

The rare play-by-play announcer who flies solo during broadcasts, Tait is his own

color commentator. He can be critical of a referee's call at the same time he's delivering an unbiased account of what actually happened. The rhythm and pace of his delivery make a ex-jock wingmanunnecessary. An extra set of lungs on the air would probably be a hindrance, actually.

Tait is a veteran broadcaster who can inject emotion into his work without raising his voice. Whereas Tom Hamilton and Jim Donovan (both excellent play-by-play men in their own right) tend to ratchet up the volume during an exciting play, Tait is more apt to laugh after a thrilling LeBron fast break dunk than he is to scream, a "my heart can't take much more of this" laugh, like a man who has just gone on the first and last roller coaster of his life.

Tait has catch phrases, but I doubt he'd call them that. Tait's delivery is anything but contrived. "Wham, with the right hand" is a reaction, not something Tait is hoping gets printed on a t-shirt.

And perhaps that is what really sets Tait apart in the big-ego world of pro sports. He is genuine, his work is genuine, and he is humble, with a self-deprecating sense of humor. If Tait had been calling games for a big-market team all these years, he'd be spoken of in the same breath with guys like Chick
Hearn
and Johnny Most. He'd be a nationwide legend. But he's spent almost 40 years calling games for the Cleveland
Cavs
, so no one outside of this region really knows about him.

But fame isn't why Tait got into the business. He was a young radio broadcaster from the Midwest and a NBA team needed and play-by-play announcer. The rest is history, really.

Tait might have gone elsewhere, but he made a home here. Despite all the years of losing basketball, Tait always seemed to enjoy his job, even though he'd probably admit winning makes it a whole lot more enjoyable.

Four years ago, the story goes, with the Cavs bottoming out and Tait not wanting to endure another rebuilding project, Tait told then-majority owner Gordon
Gund
he was going to retire. But ping-pong balls intervened.

When the Cavs secured the right to draft LeBron, Gund asked Tait to stick around long enough to see how it all played out.

As we know, it's turning out pretty well so far.

Thursday night, Tait will sit behind the mic to call his first-ever NBA Finals game at the age of 70. No broadcaster in more deserving in all of sports. Win or lose, Tait deserves this chance for the loyalty he's shown this organization through 37 years of mostly mediocre-to-downright-awful basketball.

Whether Tait wants the spotlight or not, this is his time, along with the rest of the Cavs
organization, to shine.

For at least one quarter during the NBA Finals, I am turning off the television and listening exclusively to Joe Tait. I encourage everyone to do the same. Let a master of the craft and a local legend be your tour guide through the biggest playoff series in Cavs history.