When the Cavaliers were swept out of the NBA Finals earlier this month, they joined the Orlando Magic as the only teams to be swept in their only Finals appearance to date. But having an 0-4 all-time record in the NBA's championship series is far from the only thing that links the Magic and Cavs. That Orlando team, which was swept by Hakeem Olajuwon's Rockets in 1995, and the current Cavs team, have a number of parallels. Erik Cassano looks at the eerie similarities between the two teams.

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But having an 0-4 all-time record in the NBA's championship series is far from the only thing that links the Magic and Cavs. That Orlando team, which was swept by Hakeem Olajuwon's Rockets in 1995, and the current Cavs team, have a number of parallels. And if the Cavs are wise, they'd pay attention, because the 1995 Magic serve as a cautionary tale.

Like the current Cavs, the Magic of the mid-90s were vaulted into contention in a short amount of time, thanks in large part to winning the draft lottery. In 1992, the Magic selected Shaquille O'Neal out of Louisiana State with the top pick. The following year, the Magic, despite narrowly missing the playoffs, landed the first overall pick again. The team selected Chris

Webber
and dealt him to the Warriors for Penny
Hardaway
and draft picks.

GM Pat Williams had surrounded Shaq and Hardaway with a capable roster of veteran role players including sharpshooter Dennis Scott, former Bull Horace Grant and original team member Nick Anderson.

Like the current Cavs, the Magic were the beneficiary of fortuitous playoff matchu ps
during their Finals run. With Michael Jordan only having returned from his self-imposed baseball exile in February 1995, the Bulls were not ready to make a run at another title. With the Bulls still reloading, the Eastern Conference lacked a true alpha dog.

Like the Cavs of this year, the Magic knocked off two of the East's traditional powers, the Bulls and Pacers, to reach the NBA Finals.

Even though the Magic were outclassed by the championship-tested Rockets in the Finals, everyone in basketball seemed to agree that the Magic were at the front end of a long run in the uppermost echelon of NBA teams. Shaq and Penny were sure to be right alongside Jordan and Scottie
Pippen
as the dynamic NBA duos of the '90s.

For one season, they lived up to the hype. Following their 57-25 Finals season, the Magic posted a franchise-best 60-22 mark and looked poised to give the 72-win Bulls a run for their money in the Eastern Conference finals. But the Bulls steamrolled the Magic in four straight. It turned out to be Orlando's swan song as a title contender.

That summer, Shaq left to become a Laker. Eventually the Bulls coach would become his coach and the two would team -- along with some guy named Kobe -- to win three NBA titles far, far away from central Florida.

The Magic patched the gaping hole left by Shaq with Rony Seikaly. They'd win 45 games in 1996-97 and lose to the Heat in the first round of the playoffs. Orlando would make the playoffs in four of the six years following

Shaq's
departure, but never made it out of the first round.

The Magic's fortunes continued to wither. Hardaway suffered a major knee injury during the 1997-98 season. He would never be the same player again, and was dealt to the Suns in 1999.

In 2000, Orlando signed both Grant Hill and Tracy McGrady in free agency, but Hill allowed an ankle injury to worsen by continuing to play on it, and before long, a surefire hall of fame career had been sidetracked by a series of surgeries.

McGrady was quickly found out as a player who can put up bunches of points, but can't will his team to wins. He was traded to Houston for Steve Francis in 2004.

What does all this have to do with the current Cavs? It's a living, breathing example of how next season is guaranteed to no team, how fast things can fall apart, even with the best-laid plans. And most knowledgeable basketball people would agree that the Magic roster of the mid-'90s was constructed of better material than the current Cavs.

The Cavs don't have a reinvigorated Jordan to deal with the way those Magic teams did. But they do have LeBron James, a young superstar whose inexperience was exposed on the league's biggest stage, just as Shaq's was 12 years ago.

Shaq played right into the hands of the Bulls defense in allowing Dennis Rodman to harass him during the 1996 East finals.
LeBron
did much the same thing in playing right into the teeth of the Spurs defense in this year's Finals. He's learning, much like
Shaq
was learning.

Of course, Shaq took what he learned and used it to help the Lakers. The Cavs' object is to make sure
LeBron
doesn't someday take the lessons he is learning in a
Cavs
uniform and use them to win titles for another team.

The 1995 Magic and 2007 Cavs reached the Finals quickly after beginning a new era, were dominated by a superior team and chalked it up to a learning experience. The job of Dan Gilbert, Danny Ferry and Mike Brown is to make sure the similarities end there.