A great day for Cleveland sports fans. Not only did the Cavaliers acquire Milwaukee Bucks point guard Maurice "Mo" Williams for Joe Smith and Amon Ones, but we get treated to a piece on the deal from TCF legend John Hnat. John says that as Cleveland fans, we've grown all to accustomed to being on the wrong end of one sided deals. And today, the shoe is on the other foot. And the Cleveland Cavaliers are a much better basketball team.

It all starts with Ricardo Rincon.

(Note to newer readers of this site who have yet to read one of my columns: yes, this is a column about the Mo Williams trade . I tend to take the scenic route, rather than the direct highway, when I write. Stay with me, and I promise we'll get there.)

I still remember that fall day in 1998 when I heard that the Indians, desperately seeking that mythical "final piece to the puzzle," dealt a promising young outfielder in Brian Giles for a reliever named Ricardo Rincon. I heard the announcer say those words - *the Tribe traded Brian Giles to the Pittsburgh Pirates today for reliever Ricardo Rincon* - and my first thought was, "... and who else?" I could not believe that the Indians had dealt Giles for Rincon straight up.
(Note to newer readers who did not know me in the fall of 1998: I really, truly felt this way at the moment of the trade. We're not dealing with 20-20 hindsight here.)
Yet there were no names coming after "Rincon."

While the trade was terrible from an Indians' fan's perspective, it added a phrase to my vocabulary. An "... and who else?" trade is one in which the apparent disparity in the exchanged talent is so large, it leaves you asking, "... and who else?" You ask that question because you're convinced you did not hear the entire trade - there must be something that you're missing.

As Cleveland fans, we have grown all too accustomed to being on the wrong side of an "... and who else?" trade. The Giles/Rincon deal helped to slam shut the window of opportunity for the 1990s Indians. The last legitimate Cavs' point guard *(we have erased the Jeff McInnis Era from the memory banks)*, Andre Miller, was involved in such a deal when the Cavs sent him to the Los Angeles Clippers for Darius Miles. And the man who made the Williams trade - Cavs GM Danny Ferry - was himself the subject of a controversial trade, the one that sent popular All-Star Ron Harper and two #1 draft picks to the Clippers for the rights to Ferry. (In that particular instance, the "who else" was Reggie Williams; history would show that we as Cavs fans should have countered with "no, really, who else?")

Today, however, the shoe is on the other foot. Today, we have an "... and who else?" trade in which the Cleveland team is on the right side of the talent disparity. As you know, the full trade involved three teams and seven players. From the Cavs' perspective, it boils down to a trade of Mo Williams for Joe Smith and Damon Jones. And at least from a pure talent perspective, the initial reaction is *(say it with me this time)* "... and who else?"

Make no mistake about it: the Cavs are a better team today than they were yesterday. Why? Let's count the reasons:

1. Williams gives the Cavs their first legitimate point guard since Miller was sent packing. More importantly, Williams gives the Cavs their first legitimate point guard in LeBron James' career. The Cavs now have a player other than LeBron who can drive to the hole, force the defense to collapse on him, and open the rest of the court. A player who can create his own shot off the dribble. And a

player who puts up solid, if unspectacular, assist numbers (just over 6 dimes per game in each of the past two seasons).

2. Williams can shoot the ball, too. But those assists aren't as important on the Cavs, that rare team that does not need a true playmaking point guard thanks to a ball-handling superstar. Conversely, the job description for a point guard on a team with a ball-handling superstar includes "able to shoot the lights out." Williams is a very capable shooter - his .480 shooting percentage last year was one of the better percentages for guards in the league, and his .385 percentage from beyond the arc last season represented his career best. Lest we forget, some of the most important points are the ones that come from 15 feet away - and Williams, an 85% career shooter from the charity stripe, immediately becomes the Cav Most Likely to Take the Technical Foul Free Throw.

3. The Cavs are suddenly a very young, yet experienced, team. More than half of the Cavs' projected 2008-09 team is 25 years old or younger: LeBron (23), Williams (25), Daniel Gibson (22), Delonte West (25), Anderson Varejao (25; he will be 26 before the season starts, but he technically qualifies and he supports my point, so here he is), Sasha Pavlovic (24), Darnell Jackson (22), and J.J. Hickson (19; soon to be 20). If Williams proves to be the player that the Cavs hope he will be - heck, if he is just the player he was in Milwaukee - then the Cavs have a very youthful core that should be productive for several more seasons.

4. The Cavs did not surrender any core pieces or promising young players to acquire Williams. "... and who else," remember? To get Williams, all the Cavaliers had to give up, talent-wise, was a useful but aging backup power forward in Smith, and an ever-more-seldom-used three point specialist in Jones. They did not have to give up any of the talented young players listed above (or any draft picks, for that matter). They added to their core rather than subtracting from it.

5. The Cavs still have enough ammunition to make another deal later in the season. True, the Cavs did give up two players in the final year of their contracts,

but they still have their two big expiring deals (Wally Szczerbiak's $13 million and Eric Snow's $7.3 million) available to dangle as carrots at the trading deadline, when many teams have decided to shed talented but expensive stars. The Williams trade still leaves Ferry with the assets to be a major player this February.

6. The Cavs did not take on any additional salary commitments for the 2008-09 season. Williams will make $8.35 million this season; however, that is less than the combined $9.25 million that Smith and Jones will collect. Figuring that the Cavs will sign a minimum-salary-level player to fill the second roster slot, the overall salaries will probably be a wash; but that is much better than taking on additional salary, especially because the Cavs will almost certainly be in the land of the luxury tax this year.

As you can see, there is a one hundred percent chance that this trade will be a godsend for the ... oh wait, this is still Cleveland. Even more than weak "Cleveland, woe is us" jokes, simple fairness suggests we take a quick glimpse at how the trade could backfire:

1. Williams' offense is his defense. Opposing point guards did quite well against Williams this past season, only reinforcing Mo's reputation as a sieve on defense. He is "only" 6-foot-1, which is shorter than what Coach Mike Brown usually prefers from his perimeter players. Williams has probably never had to play the kind of defense that Coach Brown will demand from him, and we can only hope that he will be able to raise his defensive game several notches (to "adequate") in the Cavs' defense-oriented system.

2. Williams takes the Will Rogers approach to shooting. The common perception is that Mo is a shoot-first, pass-second point guard, and one who needs to have the ball to be effective. As you are probably aware, the Cavs already have a guy who handles the ball most of the time. Will Williams be able to thrive when he plays off the ball? And will he simply jack up shots (a frequent criticism of him by Bucks fans) when he does get his hands on the rock? (One statistic that argues against this position: Williams' 13.9 shots per game last

season was 1.5 *less* than the 15.4 he posted in 2006-07.)

3. It's never a good sign when you are on a first-name basis with the team doctor. 58. 68. 66. Those aren't uniform numbers for a defensive front seven; they are the number of games Williams has played in the past three seasons. Williams' hard-driving style and relatively delicate physique recall a certain recent Cavalier who loved strippers - and one who will not have statues raised in his honor outside The Q any time soon.

4. That cap flexibility the Cavs had beyond 2010? It's disappearing. The real reason Milwaukee made this deal? It has to do with that $34 million that Williams is owed over the next four seasons (not to mention an $8.5 million player option in 2012-13). Heading into this offseason, the Cavs had no salary commitments past the 2009-10 campaign. The re-signing of Gibson, and now the trade for Williams, have changed that (as will the likely signing of West to an extension). This fact does not in any way change the Cavs' ability to retain LeBron James when he becomes a free agent in 2010; the Cavs can go over the cap to retain their superstar. But it does lessen the possibility of acquiring another star via free agency when that offseason gets here.

5. The front court just got a lot thinner. The departure of Smith means that the Cavs' big men are Zydrunas Ilgauskas, Ben Wallace, Varejao, and rookies Jackson and Hickson. Gulp. And Ilgauskas and Wallace both have bad backs, and Varejao has missed significant playing time due to injuries over his career. Double gulp. (Methinks that the Cavs will try to sign Generic Veteran Big Man to soak up 10-15 minutes per night, and to step in if one of those regulars does succumb to an injury.)

Is this trade absolutely guaranteed to work out for the Cavs? Of course not. Trades like that do not get made. But the Cavs are a better team today than they

were yesterday. And they still have the capability to get even better if necessary. For now, we can be happy that the Cavs are now a better team ... and that it's some other team's fans who are asking "... and who else?"