If the Cavaliers win the NBA title this June, and newly-signed forward Joe Smith plays an important role in breaking Cleveland's 45-year title drought, we might have to revise our whole perception of Cleveland sports. Those of us under the age of 40 have been raised to believe that random good luck simply does not happen to Cleveland sports teams. In Erik's latest, he says that may be starting to change.

If the Cavaliers win the NBA title this June, and newly-signed forward Joe Smith plays an important role in breaking Cleveland's 45-year title drought, we might have to revise our whole perception of Cleveland sports.

Those of us under the age of 40 have been raised to believe that random good luck simply does not happen to Cleveland sports teams. Sure, the ping-pong balls of the 2003 NBA draft lottery delivered LeBron James to us, but it took a 17-65 season to tie the Nuggets for the highest number of ping-pong balls in the NBA's lottery machine that year.

Former GM Jim Paxson put a lot of work into making the Cavs bad enough to have a shot at LeBron, and believe it or not, much of it was by design as he pawned off Lamond Murray, Wesley Person and Andre Miller in salary dumps. In short, landing LeBron was ultimately a game of chance, but the pre-lottery maneuvering was far from an uncalculated move on the part of the Cavs.

Fast-forward five and a half years, and LeBron has formed the backbone of an elite team. It was a bumpy road at times, as LeBron pulled the team to their first NBA Finals berth in 2007, only to have the team imploded and rebuilt midway

through the following season, as GM Danny Ferry assessed his team and came to the accurate conclusion that, as constructed prior to the 2008 trade deadline, the team couldn't win an NBA title.

We know the story by now. Ferry jettisoned nearly half the roster in a transformational three-way trade with Chicago and Seattle. Among the players acquired was Smith, a veteran forward known to history as the player who never really lived up to the billing of the No. 1 pick of the 1995 NBA draft, but a player known in NBA locker rooms and front offices as a hard worker and excellent teammate.

While Zydrunas Ilgauskas and Ben Wallace nursed bad backs through last year's playoffs, it was Smith who stepped up against the Wizards and Celtics, becoming arguably the Cavs' most reliable big man. He helped give the Cavs a puncher's chance against the Celtics juggernaut, but the upset big came up about two minutes too short in Game 7, and the Cavs' season ended on a cloudy day in May.

From that point, Smith moved into the final year of his deal and went from valuable bench contributor to valuable expiring contract. When Ferry had the chance to add a frontline starting point guard in Mo Williams, he reluctantly parted with Smith as part of the three-way trade, sending him to the Oklahoma City Thunder. It was the only real drawback to what was otherwise a heist of a trade for the Cavs.

The absence of Smith hasn't prevented the Cavs from attaining the best record in the Eastern Conference and securing a playoff berth more than two weeks before the vernal equinox, but the consensus among the fans and media (and we'd assume the big thinkers in the Cavs front office) was that the Cavs lacked veteran big man depth. Rookies J.J. Hickson and Darnell Jackson have showed promise, but playing unpolished rookies big minutes in the playoffs is a fool's bet.

Having traded Smith after July 1 of last year, the Cavs couldn't reacquire Smith via trade during this season per NBA rules. But the idea of reacquiring Smith via a buyout was likely always in the back of Ferry's mind.

This is where the random luck comes in, because there were so many ways in which the reunion of Smith and the Cavs could have been thwarted. Yet the pieces, many of which weren't under the control of Ferry or the Cavs, still fell into

place.

Here is some of what it took to bring Smith back to Cleveland:

Ferry stood pat at the trade deadline.

Obviously, this was under Ferry's control. Ferry could have made a trade prior to the NBA trade deadline, using Wally Szczerbiak's expiring contract to add a major piece. But in the end, Ferry decided he didn't want to alter the roster to that degree.

After watching Shaq storm through Florida like General Sherman marching to the sea this past week, running smack on Stan Van Gundy and Dwight Howard in Orlando and giving Dwyane Wade the full Kobe Bryant treatment in Miami, it almost makes you glad that Ferry passed on the chance to bring Shaq and his perpetual sideshows aboard. Almost.

Tyson Chandler's ankle didn't pass a physical.

On Feb. 17, the Hornets sent Chandler to the Thunder in exchange for Smith and Chris Wilcox. But the Thunder's bigwigs didn't like what they saw when their doctors examined Chandler's ankle, and the trade was rescinded on Feb. 18, sending Smith and Wilcox back to Oklahoma City.

A buyout wouldn't have happened with the Hornets, a playoff team that was looking for veteran frontcourt help. But thanks to Chandler's bum ankle and the Thunder's skittish reaction to it, Smith was returned to the bottom-feeding Thunder and the buyout speculation could resume.

Danny Ainge might have panicked.

Think NBA GMs are always cool, calculating life forms who never feel any pressure from outside sources? Celtics head of basketball operations Danny Ainge is here to dispel that myth right now.

After months and months of hearing media members across New England and the nation talk repeately about how the Celtics needed more bench depth the way a man stranded in the Sahara needs water, Ainge seemed to get a bit hasty in the days after the trade deadline.

Saddled with no real tradeable assets, Ainge needed to add pieces via free agency. If Ainge had waited until March 1, Smith could have been a very real possibility for the Celtics. The Celtics have the hardware to prove that they can give an aging veteran a legitimate shot at a ring. The Celtics also have Kevin Garnett, a close friend of Smith's dating to their days with the Timberwolves. Both of those facts could have trumped the Cavs' ability to offer a couple million more in salary.

But lucky for the Cavs, Ainge didn't wait on Smith. He quickly snatched up Mikki Moore and Stephon Marbury. Moore is a seven-footer and has a reputation as a pest, but his skill set is more limited than Smith's. Marbury hadn't played in an NBA game since last season, and even at his best, he usually needs a lot of playing time, touches and shots to make an impact.

It would appear that at this point, Smith has more ability than Moore or Marbury to add quality depth to a contender's bench. Ainge might very well have gone with the quickest fix instead of the best choice, and Ferry's team might now reap the benefits of Ainge's decision.

Ben Wallace broke his leg.

How is this a stroke of good luck? It's doubtful Smith, at 33 and with some gas left in the tank, would have joined a contender to play the role of window dressing. Like any veteran player, he wanted to be put to work.

The prospect of joining the Cavs to fight with J.J. Hickson for minutes behind Ilgauskas, Wallace and Anderson Varejao probably wouldn't have appealed to him. But with Wallace on the shelf for the next few weeks, Smith knew he'd have a chance to come to the Cavs and draw significant minutes right away.

If Wallace can return to the starting lineup before the end of the regular season with no ill effects from his injury, it might have been the best kind of bad break a team can hope for.

The Cavs have laid the groundwork with their play.

In years past, it was the Lakers, Celtics, Spurs and Pistons snatching up the veteran players looking for a shot at a ring. Six years ago, the Lakers grabbed Karl Malone and Gary Payton at cut-rate prices. The Celtics snagged James

Posey, P.J. Brown and Sam Cassell for pennies on the dollar last year, and all played significant roles in returning Boston to the top of the NBA.

The Cavs just didn't have that kind of reputation. But now Smith's return might have changed some of that. The Cavs have played so well this year, a veteran player like Smith is willing to come here during the middle of the season, of his own accord, to try to win a title here.

Maybe playing here a year ago helped increase Smith's comfort level with returning, but the bottom line is he wouldn't have agreed to come back to Cleveland if he didn't think the Cavs offered him a real shot at a title.

You have to win in order to lure players who can help you win. And now, thanks to some random luck, some foresight from Ferry and elite-level play from the Cavs all season, they have another player who can help them win.