One second was all the clock had to give. LeBron didn't even need that much time. In the span of four-tenths of a second, he squared his shoulders, got himself in the air and launched the shot before Turkoglu or any other Orlando defender could put a hand in his face. Bedlam. Salvation. Strangers high-fiving one another. A wall of sound that would drown out any wails of anguish. LeBron made it so, with the biggest shot of his career to date. LeBron didn't win the series yet. But he won the series back. He won us back. In the span of one second, he made us believe again.

It was, quite literally, a cry of anguish.

Hedo Turkoglu, Orlando's starting small forward and the best clutch shooter Turkey has ever produced, had just finished off a possession that summed up Orlando's entire Game 2. He stalked the Cavs. He worked the perimeter. He probed, he prodded, he toyed with Sasha Pavlovic. The seconds slid off the clock with all the speed of cold tar.

Finally, Turkoglu made his move. He put a step on Pavlovic, drove to his left, into the lane, and when the thicket of white Cleveland jerseys became too dense, he pulled up, stretched out his 6'-10" frame and fired a 12-footer at the rim. Bingo. As if there was any doubt. 95-93, Magic, with one second left.

Myself and fellow TheClevelandFan.com writer John Hnat had been holding a two-man watch party at Buffalo Wild Wings in Rocky River, one of many we have have held this season. We've seen a lot of wins, a few losses, but nothing quite like this.
OK, actually we did. It was Game 1 Wednesday night, at the Buffalo Wild Wings in Strongsville. Rashard Lewis was the villain that night. In the final seconds of that game, everyone in the house felt the cold steel of Lewis' last-second dagger, and the cold reality of two missed chances to win afterward. But the popular mood following that game was one of clenched teeth, not despair.

Friday night, it was different. An 0-2 hole meant the death of dreams. It meant "I probably won't tune in to watch Game 3, start to finish." It meant pinning all your hopes on the miniscule chance that the Cavs could shake off back-to-back home losses and somehow win two in Orlando, where they've only won one time in three years. That's why, when
Turkoglu's
shot slipped smoothly through the net with "1.0" showing on the clock, people let out a collective shriek. Not a groan, not a yelp, a shriek of actual pain. The shriek of a desperate fan base that had passionately clung to the idea that this was the team that would finally give us the experience of winning a world championship, now smarting and trying every bit as desperately to pull back, to pack up their emotional belongings and get out of
Loudville
.

People started filing out of the restaurant with something like catatonic smirks plastered on their faces. On the TV screens, the Cavs huddled during their final timeout. You couldn't think that there was a ton to discuss in that huddle. There is one second left. There is no time for a play to develop. The ball is going to
LeBron
. Option one, get it to him cutting to basket and go for the tie. Option two, get it to him up top and hope he clears enough space to squeeze off a high, arching prayer.

John, who frequently texts during breaks in the action, received a message on his phone from frequent TCF forum poster Tom Oktavec (who some of you might know by the screen name "Hi
Oktane
"). Chalk it up to a hunch or sheer bravado, but Babe Ruth never pointed to the outfield fence with more defiance.

"LeBron is winning this game right now. Book it."

Restaurant patrons continued to gravitate toward the exit as the Cavs took their inbound formation. Mo Williams to trigger on the sideline.
LeBron
straddling the free throw line.
Turkoglu
charged with preventing a back-door cut and an alley-

oop
.

Mo took the ball from the ref, the whistle blew, and the five-second inbounds clock started. It took about a millisecond to realize that the Magic were wary of the alley-oop
to tie, and weren't going to let
LeBron
get to the hoop and airborne without encountering three-to-five blue jerseys along the way.

That's when LeBron, as all great players do at some point, made a great play that led to a greater play.

Instantly recognizing that the Magic were going to defend the inside shot, LeBron stutter-stepped a few times, then made a hard fake to the basket.
Turkoglu
didn't really bite on it, but he hesitated long enough for
LeBron
to
use
his unprecedented quickness to scoot out beyond the arc and take the inbounds pass from Williams.

One second was all the clock had to give. LeBron didn't even need that much time. In the span of four-tenths of a second, he squared his shoulders, got himself in the air and launched the shot before
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or any other Orlando defender could put a hand in his face.

Williams said the ball hung in the air long enough for him to say a prayer. For those of us watching on TV, we probably could have said the entire Rosary. One Hail Mary for Red Right 88, one Hail Mary for The Drive, one for The Fumble, one for The Shot and one for Game 7 of the '97 World Series.

The red lights illuminated the backboard frame. The clock showed "0.0" The ball came down, deflected off the inside of the rim, caromed off the other side and settled through the net.

Bedlam. Salvation. Strangers high-fiving one another. A wall of sound that would drown out any wails of anguish. LeBron made it so, with the biggest shot of his career to date.

LeBron didn't win the series yet. But he won the series back. He won *us* back. He stopped the people who were filing out of restaurants around the Cleveland area, the fans who were trudging to the exits at The Q, and made them turn around. In the span of one second, he made us believe again. If nothing else, he made us once again believe that, as long as he is on the floor, a happy ending is always possible. For a fan base as cynical as Cleveland's, sometimes maintaining belief is more than half the battle.

Postgame, TNT's broadcast crew immediately began making comparisons between LeBron's shot, and Michael Jordan's shot that slayed the Cavs 20 years ago. But more than Jordan's shot, LeBron's winner reminded me of Christian Laettner's miracle over Kentucky in 1992. Mo Williams overcome with emotion like Thomas Hill, LeBron sprinting back up the floor like Laettner, the fans celebrating deep into the night like Cameron Crazies. The raw exuberance of the celebration both on and off the court was every bit March Madness as it was NBA Playoffs.

And just like the NCAA Tournament, we get to do it all again two days later.

By the way, on the off chance that Tom is riding a Vegas hot streak, John asked him for his lucky lottery numbers:

His answer: "23, 23, 23, 23, 23 and 23."