It was the spring of 2008, and the Celtics were on their way to winning the city of Boston roughly its 490th pro sports title of the decade. It was during the playoffs that year that Leon Powe emerged as a player, helping knock off the Cavaliers in the second round, and scoring 21 points in Game 2 of the NBA Finals that year. Now he;s one of us. Powe comes with some risks, there's no question about that. But Erik Cassano is fired up that he's now a member of the Cavs.

I probably sat up and took notice of newest Cavalier Leon Powe at about the same time as everybody else. But maybe not in quite the same way.

It was the spring of 2008, and the Celtics were on their way to winning the city of Boston roughly its 490th pro sports title of the decade. As much as those of us in Cleveland hated to admit it, the Celtics had all the championship ingredients: A dogged defensive mentality, star-power leadership from Kevin Garnett, Ray Allen and Paul Pierce, a breakout young star in Rajon Rondo, and a deep bench led by James Posey and Eddie House.

Even so, the Celtics needed a bit more to win it all. They survived seven-game scares against the Hawks and Cavs in the first two rounds of the playoffs before dispatching the Pistons and Lakers for the right to hoist the franchise's 17th title banner.

On the fringe, creeping ever-closer to the center of the spotlight, was this kid with bum knees and the heart of a lion. Everyone will remember Leon Powe's 21-point performance in Game 2 of the NBA Finals that year as his coming-out party. But from the perspective of a Cavs fan, as my team did a good deal of bumping and grinding with Boston that season, Powe's presence was announced more like the rising Sun than a bolt of lightning.

By the time the Cavs squared off with the Celtics in the second round of the '08 playoffs, the equation seemed to come together. The name, the face, the green jersey with the number "0" planted squarely in the middle of the back. That one player that every team needs to have step up in the biggest games of the season, that one unsung hero that wasn't in the equation at the start of the journey, Boston had found him. The Celtics simply would not have won the NBA title without the contributions of Powe.

That could have been it. A lot of players catch their 15 minutes of fame and fade into obscurity. Some even get lucrative contracts before regressing to the mean. But Powe kept popping into the headlines and highlight reels. When Garnett seriously injured his knee last winter, Powe stepped up, helping to salvage a 62-win season and the second seed in the East for the Celtics. Along the way, he burned the Cavs for 20 points and 11 rebounds in an early March game.

Powe kept playing the role of extra-strength bandage until a late-season knee bruise was followed by a torn ACL -- his third -- and microfracture surgery during the playoffs. That's been the trend of Powe's career. In a lot of ways, it's probably been the trend of his life.

The details of Powe's early life, outlined in this East Bay Express article from 2003, read like the first half of a movie script: Growing up impoverished in Oakland, single mother, many siblings, had to skip school to change diapers, house burned down, family forced to live in a car, mother eventually arrested and served prison time on theft and welfare fraud charges.

There were a million ways Powe could have gone down a wrong path in life, could have ended up in and out of the penal system or worse, but his was one of a few scattered hoop dreams that came true -- Powe found a mentor in former Contra Costa College player Bernard Ward, himself trying to right his life after drug-related run-ins with the law.

Ward helped Powe set the ball rolling toward high school stardom, which led to a spot on a star-studded AAU squad that included LeBron James, which in turn helped pave the way for Powe to earn a scholarship to Cal-Berkeley.

Then Powe attains college stardom, goes to the NBA, makes millions and wins a championship, right? It could have been, because Powe had ascended from obscurity to certified prep blue-chipper by the time his senior year of high school rolled was within view. But while playing AAU ball during the spring between his junior and senior years, he tore his ACL. It would become a recurring problem. He clawed back, played his senior year and made it to Cal. Then he tore his ACL again in college, downgrading him from NBA lottery pick to second-round project.

The Nuggets drafted him in the second round in 2006 and traded his rights to Boston, where he became something of an afterthought until the Celtics traded for Garnett and Allen in the summer of 2007, launching the Celtics back onto the national stage and giving Powe the chance to play a role on a contending team.

He seized the moment, playing with as much intensity and ferocity as his body would allow. At 6'-8", he played taller than his height, blocking shots and crushing dunks. He looked like a core member of the Celtics moving forward.

From Cleveland, all I could do is wish we could get our hands on a player like that. In fact, when I first became honestly conscious of Powe, that was one of the first thoughts that entered my head. The Cavs needed a Leon

Powe
, someone with an intangible fearlessness and physical presence, someone alongside LeBron with a reputation for rising to the occasion in big games. The need became more pronounced as the
Cavs
wilted against Orlando in the Eastern Conference Finals this spring.

As the chain of events would have it, that's exactly what happened. The Cavs found a player like
Powe
. Exactly like
Powe
, in fact.

When Powe underwent a combination of ACL repair and microfracture surgery on his left knee this May, Celtics management scaled the love way back.
Powe
went from important role player to injury case with a cloudy future.
Powe
told The Plain Dealer
that he was at least looking for a one-year deal from Boston, but GM Danny
Ainge
wouldn't even commit to that degree. In July, the Celtics declined to give
Powe
a qualifying offer, making him an unrestricted free agent.

The Celtics might have been banking that interest in Powe would be minimal, and that they might be able to re-sign him at a later date if his rehab went well. But for all intents and purposes, the bridge between
Powe
and the Celtics was burned at that moment.

The Celtics, through inaction-by-design, opened the door, and Danny Ferry walked in. The Cavs aggressively recruited Powe throughout July and August, and despite overtures from other contenders,
Powe
signed a two-year deal with the
Cavs
-- with the second year being a team option.

A great many Celtics fans are upset . Powe was well-liked in Boston, and a lot of Celtics fans seem to think Powe was given a raw deal, loved then left by team management. Of course, other Boston fans seem to think they'll get along just fine after having substituted Rasheed Wallace for Powe .

Signing Powe and banking on his return to 2008-09 form is a risk on the part of the Cavs, no doubt. Powe's knees are ravaged at this point, and he's only 25. Even if Powe does come back midseason , he is still an undersized power forward who will need to fit into the Cavs ' system somehow. Powe thrived playing alongside defensive-minded center Kendrick Perkins in Boston. The Cavs ' version of Perkins is Shaq , but his game is a little different, and he takes up a lot more space in the paint.

These are the wrinkles that will need to be ironed out. For now, the Cavs are taking a minimal-risk chance on a player who deserves such a chance.

It may be months before we get a chance to see Powe in the wine and gold, but I'm honestly thrilled that Powe is coming to Cleveland. It's not just what he might bring to the table for the stretch run. It's that I'll get a chance to root for a player that I've been wanting to root for.