Since Cavalier fans have “all together” shifted their attention to the Celtics this week, it might seem a tad pointless and maybe even classless to waste any further time kicking the corpse of the Chicago Bulls. Then again, for those who still recall the heartache of five playoff series defeats a generation ago, the poetic justice in Cleveland’s script-flipping beat-down of Chicago seems likes it’s worthy of at least a little more reveling— if nothing but for the weary soul of Craig Ehlo.

Part I: Embarrassed by His Airness

LeBron James was eight years old when the Lenny Wilkens era of Cavs basketball reached its final chapter. The 1992-1993 squad—led by the “Big 3” of Brad Daugherty, Mark Price, and Larry Nance—finished the season with 54 wins, and they marched into the postseason with the goal of avenging the previous year’s 4-2 series loss in the Eastern Conference Finals. The victors in that matchup, of course, had been the now two-time defending champion Chicago Bulls, whose 57 regular season wins in ’92-’93 had them favored to make it a “three-peat” (a term that was basically invented for them).

Chicago, incidentally, was led by its own power trio of Scottie Pippen, Horace Grant, and future Birmingham Barons outfielder Mike Jordan. And in a first round series with the Hawks, they yawned their way to a 3-game sweep, setting up yet another showdown with their Central Division rivals/punching bags, the Cleveland Cavaliers.

The only trouble was, the Cavs themselves nearly missed the engagement, as they were pushed to a full five games by Drazen Petrovic and a tough-willed New Jersey Nets club. The good news was, Cleveland pulled out the series. The bad news: they only had one day of rest before traveling to Chicago for Game 1 against a rested Jordan and Co.

By now, four years has passed since His Airness has permanently video-posterized Mr. Ehlo at the Richfield Coliseum. Back then, the Bulls' ousting of the Cavs had been an upset. Now, it was an annual spring tradition like the return of the cherry blossoms or the Indians falling out of contention. This fact, combined with the extra toll of the Nets series on an already stamina-challenged starting line-up, had Cleveland looking like Chihuahua caliber underdogs. Still, Wilkens' team wasn't backing down. They had taken Chicago to six games a year earlier, and they just needed to take the next, long-awaited step.

Obviously, we all know how things played out from here. Even if the specifics are a little hazy after 17 years, it's safe to presume that Michael Jordan's third championship run did not include any shocking second round eliminations at the hands of Jay Guidinger and the pesky Cavs. What is worth remembering, though, is the way Cleveland lost those games— or the way they lost most of their battles with the '90s Bulls, for that matter. It was a rare day when the likes of Price, Daugherty, Nance, and yes, even Ehlo, would be out-hustled, out-strategized, or overwhelmed. Those great Cavs teams were, instead, victims of a one-man basketball phenomenon outside their or anyone else's control— film actor Mike Jordan (*Space Jam*).

At the time, in Northeast Ohio anyway, Jordan's greatness was a well from which only frustration and misery flowed. What we didn't know at the time, however, was that somewhere in Akron, a little boy named LeBron was taking notes on his idol's domination of his hometown team. And as a result, many years later, karma would eventually bring balance back to the basketball universe.

Part II: Turning the Tables – Jordan vs James

On May 11, 1993, Chicago beat the Cavs in Game 1 of the Eastern Conference Semifinals at Chicago Stadium, 91-84. Cleveland outshot the Bulls from the field (49% to 48%), and they hit five 3-pointers to the Bulls' zero. Price dropped in 17, Daugherty added 15 and 6 assists, and Gerald Wilkins led the way with 19 points off the bench. The defense shut down the Bulls frontcourt, holding Pippen to 9 points and Grant to just 6 point and 7 boards. Amateur golfer Mike Jordan, however, went 16 of 30 from the field and added 11 more at the line for a 43-point evening, leaving few doubts as to the series' course from that point on. Under normal circumstances, the Cavs' high-octane offense and scrappy D would give them better than a fighting chance. Against #23, it would never be enough. Chicago had a nuclear warhead it could aim at its opponents at any given time, making all forms of retaliation useless and downright silly.

On April 17, 2010, Cleveland beat the Bulls in game 1 of the Eastern Conference quarterfinals at the Q, 96-83. Derrick Rose scored 28 and helped Chicago mount a commendable second half run, but the Bulls had no answer for #23. LeBron James went for 24, 6, and 5 while drawing Chicago into nonstop defensive quandaries. Take him one-on-one, you're toast. Double him, and Mo Williams is more wide open than Jordan's wallet at the roulette table.

May 13, 1993. For Game 2, Lenny Wilkens attempted the one logical approach at his disposal: isolate the nuke. Ehlo, Mike Sanders, and Gerald Wilkins swarmed the Gatorade enthusiast, flailing around in front of him, hacking him, snapping his wagging tongue back into his cake hole. On paper, it worked. MJ only managed 18 points. Unfortunately, he got his teammates involved this time, as Pippen and Grant tallied 39 between them, and 12 year-old B.J. Armstrong tossed in 14. With Jordan seemingly held in check, the Bulls actually won with greater ease, 105-84.

April 19, 2010. Back in present day, the Cavaliers really had no business taking Game 2 from the Bulls. Was it in Cleveland? Yes. Were the Cavs huge favorites? Yes. Did they shoot 63%? Yes. And yet, somehow, the Bulls seemed to want it more. They got after the loose balls; Joakim Noah transformed into some sort of freakish Horace Grant-Dennis Rodman-Miss Sweden hybrid; and Rose continued to come up clutch. It was enough to draw the game even after 3 quarters. Then Cleveland deployed its nuke and erased any drama from the proceedings, 112-102. James managed 40, 8 and 8, drawing fouls whenever he left his feet and leaving the Bulls shaking their heads in disgust.

May 15, 1993: Game 3 (Wow, no week-long layoffs between venue shifts in the playoffs back then!). With the action moving over to the friendly confines of the Coliseum, the Cavs bore down to make their comeback push. Wilkens installed the unrelated Wilkins into the starting line-up for

Sanders, and he responded with 16 points and 5 rebounds. Larry Nance snapped out of his funk and dropped a team high 24 while shutting down Grant. Daugherty and Price added 16 and 18 respectively. But as was the motif in these contests, it was all for not. Despite suffering from a much publicized injured wrist, Mike Jordan (later known as the fat guy on the Washington Wizards) took over the game in the home stretch, going for 32, 6, and 5. Wingman Pippen added 28 of his own, and Chicago went up 3-0 with a 96-90 road win. The window of opportunity for Wilkens' excellent also-rans was now only open enough for a fruit roll-up to slide through. Incidentally, fruit roll-ups were very popular in 1993.

April 25, 2010. After winning Game 3, 108-106, behind a ridiculous shooting night from Kirk Hinrich, the Bulls are suddenly breathing again. If not for James going off for 39-10-8, Chicago would have taken that game with relative ease. Now, at least, they have some new-found confidence heading into Game 4 at home. Some Chicagoans are whispering about Derrick Rose showing the icy veins and big shot potential they once saw in a certain Wheaties box model. Plus, Noah is channeling all his seething Cleveland hatred into some insane numbers. Yes, this could be the day that Chicago returns to promi—oops, the Cavs just won by 23. LeBron James apparently wasn't too concerned about things, as he went triple-doubling to the tune of 37, 12, and 12.

May 17, 1993. With their playoff lives on the line, Cleveland stayed true to their fighting spirit in Game 4—Lenny Wilkens' final game at the Cavalier helm. This time, Daugherty stepped up in huge fashion with a downright Noah-like 25 points, 13 boards, and 3 blocks. Gerald Wilkins fought MJ tooth and nail, scoring 22 of his own. And a young, fresh-legged Terrell Brandon posted 11 points off the bench for a worn down Price. On the other side, fans prayed that Jordan's tender wrist could be an X factor, and for a while, it looked like it might be. Perhaps smelling blood, Cleveland jumped out to a good lead in the first half and maintained a slim edge late in the fourth quarter, with the Richfield faithful mercilessly booing #23 every time he touched the ball. Then, with the score tied 101-101, Charlie Sheen's Hanes-buddy Mike Jordan drained a mid-air, top-of-the-key jumper as the buzzer sounded (the less celebrated "The Shot 2") to pound the final nail in the Cavalier coffin. Many fans questioned whether Jordan's wrist had really been injured at all. Either way, Baldie won another title, while it would be 13 years before Cleveland would escape the first round of the playoffs again.

April 27, 2010: Obviously, Rose and Noah are not Jordan and Pippen. Nor is a first round win over a .500 team equivalent to five consecutive postseason smackdowns of a team with championship aspirations. So, this is not a matter of revenge really. What it is, however, is a true turning of the tables. In Game 5, Chicago was faced with an eerily similar helplessness to the kind we came to know so well as Cavs fans in the early '90s. No matter how good their game plan was or who stepped up to stuff the stat sheet, their fate was already sealed. It only seems appropriate that James, like his idol two decades earlier, came into this close-out game

favoring his right arm (elbow instead of wrist, but who cares really?). Advantage Bulls? Hardly. Instead, old school Cavs fans were treated to the catharsis of a first-ever playoff elimination of Chicago. James, in true Jordan fashion, held the opposition hostage with one arm tied behind his back. With the Bulls looking to “isolate the nuke” as Cleveland once had, LBJ let his supporting cast drain the open jumpers that were created as a result. And when a gutsy Derrick Rose failed to get a foul call on one end of the floor, James immediately got his own whistle And-1 on the other end. Once upon time, that kind of injustice was maddening. Now, we embrace it as our new reality in Cleveland. A 96-94 victory and a 4-1 series win. And maybe a good night’s sleep for Craig Ehlo and the other Cavs who never overcame the LeBron James-like dominance of the “other #23,” Mike Jordan (Ballpark Frank aficionado).