Nearly 20 years later, we sometimes wonder if it ever really happened. Was it a shared dream—a nightmare? A myth wrapped in a repressed memory? If you Google it, you'll find nothing; no evidence of what they did. But in our darkest hours, their voices still haunt us, and we know the truth: Jim Gray and Quinn Buckner announced Cleveland Cavalier games together. And though we survived their unholy alliance, our scars may never heal.

Prologue: What's to Say of Buckner & Gray?

Perhaps this is the entirely wrong time to be bringing this up. After all, 2011 saw the final farewells of two of Cleveland sports broadcasting's most beloved and iconic voices—Mike Hegan and the great Joe Tait (I should probably clarify that they're just retired, not dead. You could probably still call them up and talk to them if you were really jonesing to hear those "beloved and iconic" voices one more time). So no one could blame the local fanbase for feeling a little uneasy about the current transitional state of its radio and TV crews, or for being less than enthusiastic about recalling the catastrophes that can happen when suspicious outsiders are brought in to work at a regional network.

That said, I think it's long past time that we all start the healing process. We've had sixteen years to try and get the horror out of our minds—to systemically erase all mentions of it from the supposedly information-rich World Wide Web. But it just isn't healthy anymore. Jim Gray and Quinn Buckner happened. They happened! And the sooner you remember the pain and move on from it, the sooner you might be able to embrace John Michael as the not-too-shabby new voice of your basketball team.

The Scene of the Crime

So let's go back there. 1995. It was the best of the times and the worst of times. The summer brought us the greatest Indians season of our lives. The fall: the unthinkable anguish of the real

Browns' last season in Cleveland. And out of this haze came a winter of Cavs basketball—Hills, Mills, and Phills and the slow-motion Fratello approach, set against the backdrop of Gund Arena's vomit inducing pastel colors.

Most of the TV games that season aired on SportsChannel (later to become Fox Sports Ohio), with trusty play-by-play man Michael Reghi manning the microphone with good old Jim "Stick to Your Knitting" Chones. But WUAB Channel 43 also had its own 20-game package of games, and for unfathomable reasons, they weren't content to let the SportsChannel dudes do their thing for the 43 audience.

So, before the '94-'95 season, WUAB signed CBS college basketball commentator Quinn Buckner to sit alongside Reghi, supposedly providing an exciting national perspective on the upstart Cavs. It quickly became apparent, however, that Buckner was not particularly invested in the gig. Unlike Chones—who was bleeding orange and blue on the other station—Quinn called the game like a lost American tourist pushed into giving a guided tour of Paris. He forgot the names of players. He forgot the name of the team. He forgot what city he was in. Reghi, ever the pro, smoothed over the gaps in color commentary as best he could, but when the next season rolled around, it was clear that a change needed to be made.

And so, in their infinite wisdom, Channel 43 made a change. They replaced Reghi with another national fly-by-nighter--- famed NBC sideline reporter and human-troll hybrid Jim Gray. And with that, the ruinous union of Buckner and Gray was formed.

Buckner and Gray Attack!

As the '95-'96 season began, Reghi and Chones continued to offer solid insight and quality

entertainment for the Cavalier faithful on basic cable. Apart from Reghi inexplicably bestowing Terrell Brandon with the nickname “The Candy Man,” each SportsChannel broadcast saw its on-air talent perform professionally, with good humor and fine attention to detail.

By contrast, it became immediately apparent that the Jim Gray – Quinn Buckner experiment on WUAB was not only a failure, but a broadcasting abomination—a toxic audio hazard putting the ears of all unsuspecting Ohio basketball fans at risk.

Who were these announcers? Where did they come from? What in the hell were they talking about? Why did they sound so incredibly bored?

[Re-enactment of typical Gray-Buckner Cavs game]

GRAY: *And a rebound by Phills. Check that, Mills.*

BUCKNER: *Isn’t that Hill?*

GRAY: *Oh. I guess.*

BUCKNER: *I don’t blame you for not looking directly at him.*

GRAY: *He is rather unpleasant.*

BUCKNER: *You know what’s not unpleasant? My alma mater Indiana taking on Michigan this Saturday on CBS.*

GRAY: *Sounds nice. But I would suggest tuning into the NBA on NBC that day. I'll be very happy to be out of this shithole and back in New York, covering Knicks vs. Pacers.*

That's really only a mild exaggeration, too. If you saw any of the handful of games these two geniuses called together, you know it. And you've spent your life probably trying to unknow it.

Even Channel 43 figured out that they'd screwed the pooch. Not only were Gray and Buckner a horrible team with zero chemistry, but they also proved completely unreliable due to their network commitments. Of course, this was a blessing to Cavs fans, as most WUAB broadcasts wound up having to bring in Reghi, Chones, or the pair of them to fill in for an "on-assignment" Buckner and/or Gray.

The Aftermath: Picking up the Pieces

After the '95-'96 season (a decent 45-37 campaign), the Cavs included a small media-related announcement in the footnote of a summer press release. Jim Gray would not be returning as WUAB's play-by-play man for the '96-'97 season. Some would say he was fired. But in reality, the lovely and talented Mr. Gray was simply too big for the small fishbowl of Cleveland. He would go on to a financially successful—if not critically acclaimed— career with NBC and ESPN, dividing his time between bitching people out (Pete Rose) and offering his own services as a bitch (LeBron James). It could be said that Gray's involvement with "The Decision" was his revenge on Cleveland for not accepting him as the voice of the Cavs, but those that heard his play-by-play back in 1995 know that no further punishment was needed.

Meanwhile, Quinn Buckner lived to commentate another day. He did a few more WUAB games with Reghi in '96-'97 before surrendering his gig to Brad Daugherty (and later a rotation of Matt

Goukas and Austin Carr). Today, Buckner splits time with his old CBS cohort Clark Kellogg as a commentator on local Indiana Pacers TV games. Hopefully he's learned how to do his homework.

Epilogue

Looking back now from a safe distance, nobody really knows how many Cavs games Jim Gray and Quinn Buckner called together, or how much damage they truly caused (well, somebody might know, but I haven't met him). Based on the pair's spotty attendance during their year together, it may have only been ten games. Maybe five. But beyond the misery they left in their wake, Buckner and Gray also left us with a valuable lesson. A national network contract and name recognition might be fine accomplishments for a sports broadcaster, but when it comes to the grind of one team and one city's experience over the course of a season, you really want an announcer who at least sounds like they give a crap. They might also sound slightly inebriated and rely too much on corny catch phrases. And some of them might get a little overexcited about flyballs that don't even wind up reaching the warning track. But no matter what Cleveland sports announcers may come and go in the years ahead, you can rest easy knowing that you have most certainly heard the last of Buckner and Gray.

…. Or have you??!!!!