Jim Paxson was not a popular man during his time with the Cavaliers, and was the butt of alot of jokes amongst Cleveland sports fans. In his latest, Erik Cassano looks at the Paxson era, and argues that alot of the moves he made helped set this next regime up for success. And that the words "Jim Paxson" shouldn't just be relegated to being the punch lines of jokes.

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With Friday's trade of Luke Jackson, one of the final pieces of Jim Paxson's Cavaliers was trimmed from the roster.

Paxson's last first round pick went the way of all the other first-rounders not named LeBron James. Jackson spent the majority of his time with the Cavs injured, unhappy or glued to the bench. Reports today said he had been pining for a trade for more than a year.

Jackson is Paxson's last brushstroke in a legacy of draft-day failure that created a hole the Cavs are still trying to completely climb out of, even with the presence of LeBron.

When Paxson was finally fired in May 2005, we easily saw it coming. Some of us thought it was overdue.

But his drafts, his coaching hires, his role in botching the contract of Carlos Boozer, it doesn't all add up to the sum of Paxson's tenure.

Many of the reasons Danny Ferry is enjoying initial success as the Cavs GM is because of what Paxson did before him. And for that, Paxson deserves to be viewed as more than just another pair of bad hands that mishandled the Cavs like so many before.

Don't get me wrong, the Cavs are most definitely in better hands now. But if Paxson understood one thing, it was that NBA teams need financial flexibility.

His moves (or non-moves) are a big reason Ferry has been able to build a competent roster

around LeBron, a starting point to arrive, maybe someday, at a championship.

It started in 2000, when Paxson was able to dump Shawn Kemp's massive contract. You might poke fun at the fact that one of Paxson's greatest triumphs was getting rid of a player, but that $100 million contract Kemp signed after coming over from Seattle in a Wayne Embry-engineered trade could have saddled the Cavs for years with an overweight, unmotivated shell of a player.

It could very easily have been the worst contract in Cavs history. Instead, Paxson was able to push Kemp off the team's chest for expiring contracts.

In the summer of 2002, Andre Miller was the team's best player. He wanted a maximum contract, or he'd bolt town as a free agent the following summer. Paxson could have grasped at straws. He could have appeased Miller with a max deal, keeping the closest thing to a good player the Cavs had.

Instead, he went out on a limb and dealt Miller to the Clippers for Darius Miles. It wasn't so much that they got Miles, a career underachiever who desperately needed to play college ball, it was that Paxson didn't cave to Miller's demands. He kept the big picture in mind.

History has proven Paxson right. Miller, while a solid point guard and certainly better than anyone the Cavs have at the moment, is far from a max-deal type of player. The Nuggets, at times, appear to be less than satisfied with their investment in Miller.

Isiah Thomas could learn a thing or two from that approach as he continues to run the Knicks into the ground.

Prior to that 2002-03 season, Paxson unloaded the cumbersome deals of Wesley Person and Lamond Murray, looking ahead to coming summers with cap room. Eventually, with the departure of Carlos Boozer and the expiration of Zydrunas Ilgauskas' last contract, Paxson left Ferry with $28 million to spend in the summer of 2005.

On the heels of the Boozer debacle, in which Paxson and owner Gordon Gund can only be accused of being too trusting, Paxson had arguably his finest strategic moment as Cavs' GM.

With the franchise reeling from Boozer's shocking departure and every reason to throw in the towel, Paxson took his obvious anger and focused it on his work. Several days after acquiring Eric Snow from the 76ers, he authored a brilliant trade that could help the Cavs for years to come.

Winning the 2003 draft lottery might have been Paxson's finest moment at a GM, but trading bench big Tony Battie and a pair of second-rounders to the Magic for Drew Gooden and Anderson Varejao was Paxson's greatest move, some karmic payback for trusting a player who went back on his word.

Armed with LeBron, Gooden, Varejao and $28 million in cap room, Ferry was able to hit the

ground running in his first months as Cleveland's GM.

Ferry made the moves that put the Cavs in the playoffs for the first time in eight years, but Paxson made the moves that set Ferry up.

Jackson is gone. Sasha Pavlovic might be next. Slowly, Paxson's signature appears to be getting erased from the face of the Cavs. But, in a very real way, it isn't.

Early returns say Ferry is doing a better overall job as GM, but every time Gooden snaps off a rebound and Varejao takes a charge, every time Larry Hughes sinks a bucket, Donyell Marshall sinks a three-ball and Damon Jones nails a game-winner, Paxson is at least indirectly responsible.

Nobody will confuse Paxson with Red Auerbach, or even John Paxson, his older brother whom he now serves under in the Bulls front office. But Paxson deserves better than to have his name spat out when mentioned in Cleveland circles.