The golden boy. The face of the franchise. In Cleveland, even this sort of idyllic archetype is really just a sitting duck—susceptible to a miserable fate somewhere between the extremes of "burning out" and "fading away." At just 31, Grady Sizemore finds himself in that wicked limbo; his career as a Cleveland Indian over, and his baseball future shrouded in doubt. The road from budding superstardom to career retrospectives shouldn't be this short. But we've seen it all before.

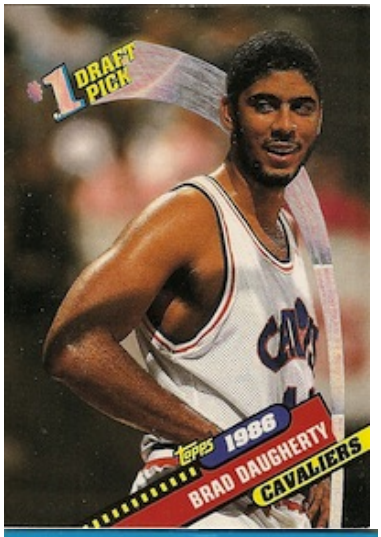
The Center and the Center Fielder

Grady Sizemore and former Cavaliers big man Brad Daugherty both made their pro debuts at the age of 21 and played their final games (at least for now in Sizemore's case) at 28. That's eight seasons a piece in a Cleveland uniform—following remarkably similar career trajectories that carried the eventual fates of their respective franchises right along with them.

Of course, it wasn't Father Time, or "diminishing skills," or any easily identifiable on-field tragedy that pushed these popular stars out of the limelight. It was the slow, gradual betrayal of their own bodies—the same muscle and bone that they'd each spent their lives crafting into machines of their trade. Once the pictures of durability, Sizemore and Daugherty wound up as Cleveland's unlikely poster children for how fleeting athletic success can be—and how damaging the loss of a central star can prove for a team.

The Bright Beginnings

For his part, Daugherty certainly came to town with the higher expectations of the two. While Sizemore was a former third round pick and a toss-in of sorts in the unpopular 2002 trade of Bartolo Colon to Montreal, Daugherty garnered instant name recognition when he became not just the Cavs' first pick in the 1986 NBA Draft, but the #1 selection over all. He was a legit, broad-shouldered 7-footer, and his feathery touch and wide array of post moves came with the UNC/Dean Smith stamp of approval. For a Cavs team that had gone just 29-53 a year earlier, Brad was now "The Man."



As it happens, this was the same miraculous draft in which Cleveland also added future all-stars Ron Harper and Mark Price. Nonetheless, it was well understood that Daugherty would be the instant difference maker and the focal point of any future playoff runs the team hoped to enjoy. And true to form, he didn't disappoint. The Cavs improved to 31 wins in 1986/87, then 42 wins

in 87/88, with Daugherty averaging 16 and 19 points per game, respectively. By age 22, he was already an All-Star and widely regarded as one of the elite centers in the league.

At the exact same age, Grady Sizemore rapidly entered similar conversations about his sport's finest young center fielders. After a cup of coffee with the Tribe in 2004, Sizemore took over center for good in 2005, and as no coincidence, the rebuilding Indians started turning the corner, as well. Appearing in 158 games, Grady hit .289, cracked 22 homers, drove in 81, and stole 22 bases. The Indians won 93 games, narrowly missing the postseason.

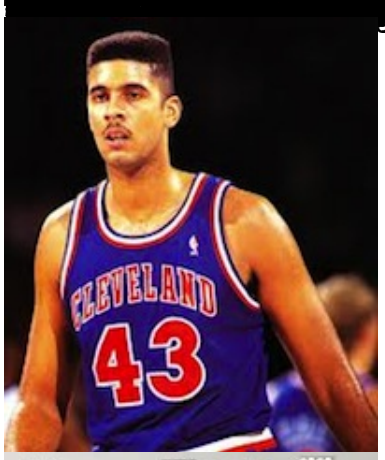
If Daugherty had Price, Harper, and Hot Rod Williams to grow with, Sizemore seemed to have some impressive young running mates of his own in Victor Martinez, CC Sabathia, and Travis Hafner. The sky was legitimately the limit.

Peak of Their Powers

The Cavaliers finally put it all together in the 1988/1989 season, winning a then franchise-record 57 games. Daugherty again was the model of consistency, appearing in at least 78 games for the third straight year, and averaging 19 points and 9 rebounds. Unfortunately, Michael Jordan's now eponymous "Shot" cut Cleveland's postseason short. And a year later—at just 24—Daugherty found himself on the injured list for the first time. All told, the Cavs' postman missed 41 games in the '89/'90 season recovering from nagging back problems. To his credit, though, it once seemed like nothing more than a brief setback.

Over the next three years, Brad played through the pain and actually took his game to another level, appearing in at least 70 games each season while averaging 21 points and 10 boards. The high point was 1992, when Daugherty—fresh off another All-Star season—helped lead the Cavs all the way to the Eastern Conference Finals. Again, Brad's former North Carolina teammate Michael Jordan was there to ruin the party, as he would a year later, as well. But at just 27, Daugherty still had plenty of reasons for optimism. Word was His Airness was leaving the Bulls to play baseball, opening the door for the Cavaliers to finally take their next step. Daugherty had his opportunity... and time on his side.

[redacted]



[redacted]