Remember the last time you were wrong?

I don't mean "Whoops-what-I-meant-was" wrong. I mean "I-really-thought-Millard Fillmore-was-the-first-president" wrong.

So wrong you actually wince as the words leave your mouth. So wrong that when you think back at the vastness of your wrongness, you feel physical pain.

Twenty-five years ago this week, *Sports Illustrated* reached a new level of wrongness - a level of wrongness it had never reached before and has never come close to reaching since. A level of wrongness so deep and so dark you'd get the bends if you tried to emerge from it too quickly.

And unfortunately, it took Cleveland along for the ride.

No doubt you remember where you were and what you felt the first time you saw it. Whether pushing a wobbly shopping cart down a grocery store aisle or standing slack-jawed at your

mailbox, it turned your life upside-down.

Even today, when you look at the April 6, 1987, cover of *Sports Illustrated*, despite all the wisdom and cynicism you've accrued in the last quarter-century, you can't help but smile.

Then and now, it's surreal, almost science fiction-y. It looks like a prop from *Major League* (which at the time was still two years away from hitting theaters).

There's Cory Snyder and Joe Carter beaming off the cover, bats raised and ready to rip a pissline to left center. Behind them is the infamous Chief Wahoo logo - just added to the Indians' caps the year before - and beneath it all, a deck of magical words:

Indian Uprising

Believe it! Cleveland is the best team in the American League

With the Indians coming off their first mildly promising season since Vietnam, SI picked them to win 94 games, hold off Toronto and the Yankees in a tight race for the AL East crown, and defeat Texas in the ALCS to make it to the World Series. In their power rankings of the 26 teams, Sports Illustrated put the Indians third - 13 spots ahead of the Minnesota Twins, who wound up actually winning the World Series that year.

Which leads us to the question we've been asking since the summer of '87: exactly what was *S ports Illustrated*
smoking?

In some ways, you can see where they were coming from. Going into 1987, the Indians possessed several of the magnetic qualities that harden the nipples of prognosticators. They were surprisingly good in 1986, winning 84 games and staying in contention for much of the season. The entire core of that team was coming back, and most of the important components

were young and just about to enter their prime.

More importantly, picking the red-headed stepchild of baseball to make it to the World Series was Bates Motel-crazy, which *Sports Illustrated* had to know.

But crazy gets attention. And attention sells magazines.

While we may have thought SI went a little overboard (remember, this was the same week Keith Smart hit a dramatic shot to give Indiana and Bobby Knight the national championship in college basketball), we were comforted by its recent track record.

In its NFL preview issue the previous fall, *Sports Illustrated* correctly forecasted the upcoming Super Bowl: Denver against the New York Giants. Its baseball preview issue the year before featured Wade Boggs on the cover, and six months later, Boggs and his Boston Red Sox wound up in the World Series. And for what it's worth, a young, thin, clearly-not-on-steroids Mark McGwire appeared on the baseball preview issue in 1988 and his Oakland Athletics went on to win the first of three consecutive pennants.

In the late 1980s, the soothsayers at *Sports Illustrated* were on a roll. And here they were declaring the Indians the best team in the American League. Who, by God, were *we* to question their judgment?

Turns out, it was almost a good call. And by "almost," I mean "nowhere close to."

Just like Oliver North, the Indians did indeed make history in 1987. Not by winning the pennant or by selling weapons to Iran, but by becoming the first - and still only - team to sandwich a winning season between two 100-loss campaigns. (Which, if you think about it, is actually far more impressive and noteworthy than just being consistently bad or consistently good.)

So where did SI go wrong? More importantly, how can we learn from their mistakes to prevent ourselves from being crushed by our own faulty expectations in the future?

In retrospect, here's what *Sports Illustrated* should have known before coming down the mountain with an "Indian Uprising":

Never put a career .247 hitter on your cover.

Cory Snyder was a good kid with a great smile. He played in the Olympics and had a bazooka for a throwing arm.

He'd had a solid rookie year in 1986 (.272, 24 HR, 69 RBI) and there were high expectations for him. Enter *Sports Illustrated* to harsh the buzz.

Yes, Snyder pounded 33 homers to lead the team in '87, but his batting average dropped almost 40 points and he struck out a whopping 166 times. And things only got worse from there. By 1991, he was gone, traded away for a leaf blower and a can of Dr. Pepper.

Had SI not sauntered in and recklessly taken Cory Snyder's picture like a drunk girl at a frat party, his No. 28 would probably be hanging on the right-field pillars at Progressive Field today.

OK, probably not. But still...

Never sell stereotypical imagery for $2.25 a copy.

By 1987, the Indians were already tightroping that fine line between good old-fashioned ignorance and overt xenophobia. And while Chief Wahoo remains one of the most recognizable logos in sports, to put it slap-bang right on the cover of perhaps the most popular magazine in America, in retrospect, was like giving the finger to six trillion Native Americans who didn't need another reason to hate us.

There's karma to consider. And if you don't believe in that, there's being-a-jackass.

Never pick a team to reach the World Series with two pitchers in its starting rotation over the age of 43.

Some looked at the Indians' cadre of starting pitchers and saw two future Hall of Famers. Others saw two washed-up old guys who used to be good getting starts because the Indians had no better options.

Put together, Phil Niekro and Steve Carlton won 647 games in their fabulous careers. In the summer of 1987, they went a combined 12-20 with ERAs of 5.89 and 5.37, respectively. And they were actually two of the better guys on that staff.

Never pick a team that finished fourth in its division one year to win the division the next (unless there's a three-way plane crash in the offseason).

As much fun as 1986 was for the Indians, they still were out of contention by mid-August, finishing 11 games out of first behind Boston, New York, and Detroit.

Even if the Indians did prove to be just as good or better in 1987, what exactly did *Sports Illustrated*
think was going to happen to those other three teams that were better than them the year before?

Never pick a team with the third-worst pitching staff in baseball to win the pennant.

SI correctly deduced the Indians could hit. But even when winning in 1986, they had trouble getting people out. And it only got worse.

Somehow the ’86 Tribe posted a winning record despite the pitching staff compiling a shaky 4.58 overall ERA, topped only by 23 of the other 25 teams in baseball. Expecting them to win more games with even less pitching the following year (or, perhaps, simply ignoring the role of pitching in baseball) was utterly silly.

Never pick a Cleveland team to win anything.

That sounds more negative than it should. But let’s not pussyfoot around the topic - it’s been long enough since a Cleveland team won a title, longer still since a Cleveland team was predicted to win a title and then went ahead and did it.

That's not to say a Cleveland team will never win a title. Rather that a Cleveland team will never win a title *when somebody expects them to*.

Proving the point, there have more more than a handful of bold predictions - some by *Sports Illustrated*
- that announced this was the year Cleveland would finally get its just rewards. Every one of those seasons has ended as a complete Exxon Valdez. And - thanks to the lofty expectations stapled on before it started - has left scars that even time will not heal.

To their credit, the 1987 Indians didn't waste any time disabusing us of the notion that they would be leading an uprising of any kind. They lost 10 of their first 11, including a mind-numbing loss in the home opener in which they gave up 12 runs, blew a two-run lead in the eighth, and lost before 64,000 overly enthusiastic fans who cheered themselves up by jamming to Cutting Crew and George Michael on the drive home.

The Indians came nowhere near matching the hot hitting of the year before (dropping from first in the AL in runs scored to 12th) and the pitching staff proved to be literally the worst in team history (with a pornographic 5.28 team ERA and not a single pitcher notching more than seven wins).

Two weeks into the season, they were 10 games out of first and had 56 losses by the All-Star break. They then spent the rest of the summer watching the mediocre Tigers - who'd finished just a smidge ahead of the Indians the year before - roar out of nowhere to win 98 games and the division.

But who remembers the '87 Tigers? Thanks to *Sports Illustrated*, the '87 Tribe is the Cleveland team that will forever live in infamy. And that cover remains SI's scarlet letter.

At the time, It made for a great story. It was cute. It was refreshing. It got everybody - not just Cleveland - excited about a baseball season in which literally anything seemed possible.

For as much as we roll our eyes and shake our heads looking back on it, we all have a copy buried in a box somewhere down the basement.

And it seems this time of year we tend to look back and smile nostalgically at the memory: the Indian Uprising that lasted less than a week, but has lived on for 25 years.

Follow @jknightwriter