It's March Madness time baby. And with Cleveland State set to take on Wake Forest Friday night, it's time to take a look back at the 1986 CSU squad ... the team that made the term "Cinderella" fashionable.

Kevin Mackey was a Central Casting gym rat. Short, rumpled, and with Beantown in his voice, he had been an assistant coach and top recruiter who brought stars like John Bagley and Michael Adams to Tom Davis's powerful Boston College teams in the early '80s. Moving to Cleveland State, a program that had never sniffed March's glory, Mackey recruited unheralded, hungry athletes to play the game his way, with an aggressive, full-court defense that forced opponents into turnovers and ill-advised shots. Mackey called his team's frenetic style the "Run 'n Stun". In 1985-86, led by forward Clinton Smith, swingman Clinton Ransey, and guard Ken "Mouse" McFadden, the Vikings ran 'n stunned their way to a 27-3 record and the championship of the Association of Mid-Continent Universities.

The Vikings weren't assured of a spot in the Big Dance, however, since the AMCU-8 (which Mackey joked was the only conference named after a motor oil) didn't own an automatic bid for its champion. But the selection committee saw it in its heart to bestow an at-large bid on the Vikings, slotting them as the fourteenth seed in the East Regional and sending them to Syracuse's Carrier Dome, which held approximately eleven times as many spectators as CSU's 3,000-seat Woodling Gym. Third-seeded Indiana, the flagship program of the Big Ten, would be the first-round opponent.

(As it happened, Cleveland State's first and only NCAA appearance took place in the same year as that of the University of Akron. The Zips, coached by Bob Huggins, won the 1986 Ohio Valley Conference tournament title and went to Minneapolis as the fifteenth seed in the Midwest, Akron took on second-seeded Michigan and gave them a stiff test, leading at halftime before falling to Roy Tarpley and the Wolverines, 70-64.)

The environment and the opponent didn't intimidate the Vikings, who were used to playing good competition in hostile conditions. They had beaten DePaul (the twelfth seed in the East) at the Rosemont Horizon, taken NIT-bound Ohio State down to the wire in Columbus, and were tied at halftime with Big Ten Champion Michigan at Crisler Arena before losing by twenty. In addition, the AMCU-8 was a pretty fair small conference: Charlie Spoonhour's Southwest Missouri State team would upset Clemson in the Tournament the following year. The Vikings were confident almost to the point of cockiness as they approached their first-round game.

Indiana coach Bob Knight was leery of the match-up going in. His team was coming being routed at Michigan in a game that decided the Big 10 title, and the focus of the Hoosiers was in question going into the Tournament. Privately the General assured confidants that the Hoosiers could win the East, but prefaced those remarks with… *if we beat Cleveland State*. In practices prior to the game, he tried to prepare his players for CSU's 94-foot, pressuring style- a much different animal than they faced in the methodical Big Ten.

It didn't matter. Almost from the opening tip, Cleveland State took the lead and maintained it, riding the hot shooting of Ransey and center Eric Mudd and holding its own on the boards with the taller Hoosiers. Although the game stayed close, the Vikings stayed in control throughout a fast-paced first half, taking a 45-41 lead into the locker room.

The second half was more of the same- Cleveland State tenaciously holding on to its advantage and countering every Hoosier run with a surge generated by the defensive pressure. Down the stretch, Indiana had no answers for Clinton Ransey, who led all scorers with 27 points. The Hoosiers shot 54%, Steve Alford scored 24 points, but it wasn't enough. The final score was Cleveland State 83, Indiana 79. The Vikings shot 58%, forced fifteen Hoosier turnovers, collected six steals, and saw ten players score in what was by a few hours the first-ever win by a fourteenth seed in the NCAA Tournament. (Arkansas Little Rock, the #14 in the Midwest, upended Notre Dame later that day.)

The second-round match-up with Atlantic Ten Champion St. Joseph's, the sixth seed, was the Mouse McFadden Show. Going over and around the Hawks, McFadden poured in 23 points on ten-of-fifteen shooting and outplayed St. Joseph's star guard Maurice Martin, an eventual NBA first-round pick, who committed five turnovers and played just 24 minutes while battling foul trouble. CSU's active defenders harassed St. Joe's into 18 turnovers and 11 steals and won the rebounding battle, 39-33. After battling to a halftime tie, Kevin Mackey's team used its pressure to break free in the second half and win going away, 75-69. Cleveland State was off to the Sweet Sixteen in East Rutherford, New Jersey, where they would take on that other noted basketball power- the United States Naval Academy Midshipmen.

Cleveland State vs. Navy. It might still be the most unlikely Sweet 16 match-up since the start of the 64-team bracket. The meeting came about largely because of two men: Kevin Mackey, and a young center that enrolled at Annapolis at 6'7" and then hit one of basketball's most important late growth spurts. By 1986, David Robinson was a junior, 7-foot-1, and by consensus the best center in college basketball. Navy, long a pop-gun fleet on the hardwood, now had itself a dreadnaught in the middle, one that could sink any team in the field.

Landing a seventh seed as a service academy and a member of the Colonial League was impressive in itself, but Navy was just getting started. In the first

round, the Admiral's 30 points, 12 rebounds, and five blocks paced an 87-68 demolition of Tulsa. Robinson's masterpiece came in the second-round tilt with favored Syracuse, playing at home in the Carrier Dome. Brutally, lethally efficient, he scored 35 points while taking just 13 shots, hit 21 free throws, yanked down eleven rebounds, blocked seven shots, picked off three steals, and demolished Syracuse's Rony Seikaly, fouling him out with four points. Navy exploded for 65 second-half points to send the Orangemen home, at home, 97-85.

There is no more naturally charismatic figure in basketball than a great big man, and the Admiral was the cynosure of all eyes as Duke, Navy, DePaul, and CSU gathered in the swamps of Jersey to decide the Regional title. But the Naval Academy wasn't quite a one-man show. It was more a troika- Robinson, forward Vernon Butler, and guard Kylor Whitaker had accounted for nearly 75% of the team's scoring thus far in the Tournament. Cleveland State would have to account for all three scorers to win- but the key was Robinson.

And early in the game, Robinson was unstoppable. Scoring and rebounding at will, piling up shot-blocks, and intimidating the smaller Vikings inside, the Admiral led his team to a big lead right out of the blocks. Only by the hardest did Cleveland State withstand Navy's opening surge and remain within contact of the Middies. Eventually the Vikings began to slowly cut into the lead. At halftime Cleveland State trailed, 39-30.

Paced by Mouse McFadden, who scored all of his 16 points after the break, Cleveland State's resurgence continued in the second half. The Viking pressure was beginning to define the game, as the turnovers for Navy piled up. With nine minutes left, the Vikings finally took the lead. After almost being overwhelmed early, the Run 'n Stun had asserted itself, and suddenly a most improbable East Regional Final between Number One-ranked Duke and Cleveland State looked very probable indeed.

At this point, the swarming Vikings had almost neutralized David Robinson offensively. While his usual monster force defensively and on the glass, the Admiral only had nine points midway through the second half, and although the Middies were getting solid contributions from Butler and Whitaker (who combined for 39), they needed a lot more from their big man if they were to escape the harrowing predicament they now faced.

They got it. With renewed purpose, Navy began to force the ball down to Robinson on the blocks, and when the Admiral went to work, the Vikings had no one to stop him. Cleveland State still led 70-69 late, but when Robinson tipped in a Navy miss with six seconds left, it was over. Navy, with the Admiral scoring 13 of its last 17 points, had won, 71-70. Robinson poured in 22 points to go with 14 rebounds and a tournament-record nine blocks; Vernon Butler scored 16; Kylor Whitaker went for 23 points and 10 assists. Cleveland State got 16 from McFadden, 16 from Clinton Smith, and a double-double (11 points, 11 boards) from Eric Mudd. The Mouse would be named to the All-East Regional team, cementing a place for the New York City playground sensation as one of the legends of the Big Dance.

Kevin Mackey had visions of Cleveland State as a program with the stature of DePaul, Louisville, Marquette, and the other great urban hoop powers- a player at the national level. His dream stands in the form of the 13,000-seat Convocation Center, completed in 1991 to house just such a prestigious program. But Mackey wasn’t around to see it. After leading the Vikings to a pair of NIT appearances following the Sweet Sixteen run, he was arrested outside a Cleveland crack house in July of 1990 and was fired shortly thereafter. His dream of a CSU that could consistently compete at an elite level never materialized. The run of 1986 remains the only Tournament appearance in school history. To this day, Mouse McFadden, the Run ‘n Stun and the conquest of Bobby Knight’s Hoosiers are the prototype of that enduring element of the modern Tournament- the tiny school that jumps out of the bottom of the bracket and shocks the world.