This is one installment in a team effort by The Cleveland Fan, highlighting the top local sports figures by jersey number. Please weigh in with your thoughts, in the Forum. As David Letterman would say, "For entertainment purposes only; please, no wagering."

Three is a magic number,
Yes it is, it's a magic number.
Somewhere in the ancient, mystic trinity
You get three as a magic number.

So says Schoolhouse Rock , and/or Blind Melon , anyway. Unlike a lot of the numbers that we're going to cover over the next few days, weeks, and months, some infamy exists with the #3 on the global scene, on top of being notorious in Cleveland sports history.

Babe Ruth is very likely the first name that comes to mind when you think of who has worn the number, historically in any sport.

Like Ruth, the best Cleveland athlete to wear the number is Earl Averill who played in an era that most of us who opine on this World Wide Web deal wouldn't have seen if we were born twenty years earlier than we were.

In a more contemporary age, call it the era of color TV, the most famous 3 didn't find its way to a jersey, but to the side of a car.

With respect due Hélio Castroneves, that car belonged to Dale Earnhardt, but forget Earnhardt.

While you're at it, forget Drazen Petrovic, Evan Longoria, Dale Murphy, Allen Iverson, John Starks, and even Harmon Killebrew.

You stopped by for Cleveland sports, and Cleveland sports you shall receive.

Our runaway winner here is obvious to anyone that's been to an Indians game in the past 38 years, be it at Municipal Stadium or Jacobs/Progressive Field, where Earl Averill's number has been on display and off-limits to every Cleveland Indian since 1975.

Additionally, Howard "Earl" Averill was inducted into the Hall of Fame in '75.

Averill broke into the big leagues with the Tribe on April 16, 1929, at the age of 26. And, he started his career with a bang, a first inning homerun off of Detroit's Earl Whitehill on Opening Day at League Park, while wearing the #5, only for his rookie season.

It was the first of 226 long balls that Averill would hit in an Indians uniform, and he was the first player in Major League history to homer in his first career at-bat.

He switched to 3 for the 1930 season, and wore it until he was traded to Detroit for Harry Eisenstat and cash on June 14, 1939.

The Indians never won a title, or finished higher than 3rd in any of Averill's 11 seasons with the team. However, they finished under .500 just once, a 75 win, 76 loss season in 1933. Averill had a down year at the plate, hitting just .301 and being named to the first ever All-Star Game.

Averill notched an RBI in the inaugural Mid-Summer Classic, a 4-2 win for the American League at Comiskey Park.

Earl appeared in the first six All-Star games, effectively every year that the game existed while he wore an Indians cap.

Calling a .301 season batting average a down year is no joke, when speaking of the Snohomish, Washington native. He dipped below .300 just twice; he hit .288 at the age of 33 and .299 at the age of 35. In an era where being a legend in the American League was tough sledding; he was routinely in the Top 10 in Runs, Hits, RBI, and Homeruns. He was in the Top 4 of the MVP voting three times.

He was also a staple in center field, often leading the league in games played. You name the category, and Averill dominated it from his position.

He led the AL in putouts as a rookie, then again in 1934, and remained in the Top 5 until 1938.

For five of his first six season as the Indians everyday center fielder, no American League outfielder committed fewer errors than Averill.

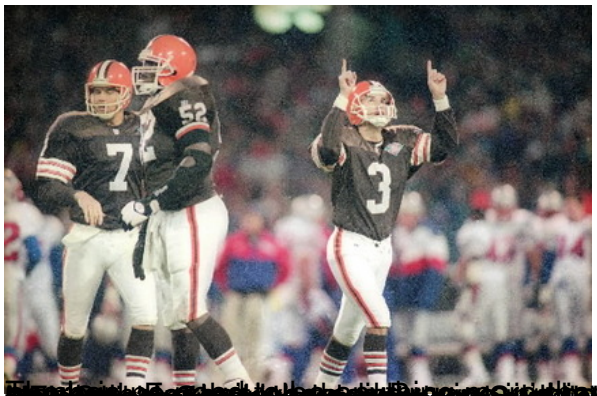
These types of stats were lost on the BBWA when it came to Hall of Fame voting, so Averill was denied his place in Cooperstown until the Veteran's committee put him in at the age of 73.

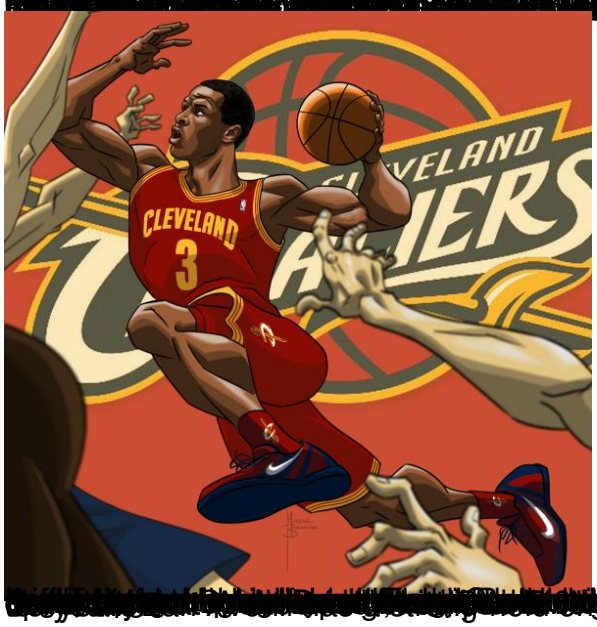
The former player, once known as "The Rock", wasn't thrilled with how long he was snubbed by Cooperstown. Having to wait 34 years after his retirement brought an elderly Averill to the Hall with a chip on chip on his shoulder, and it was revealed that man who carried his bat in a gun case during for an old-timers game had made arrangements for his heirs not to accept any acknowledgement by the Hall of Fame, had he been honored posthumously. He had a case, considering the era he played in, having averaged about 20 HR and 100 RBI in decade of service to the Indians, while maintaining a .322 batting average.

"Had I been elected after my death, I had made arrangements that my name never be placed in the Hall of Fame."

Averill did play in a World Series for Detroit in 1940, a forgettable three plate appearances, but the Tigers lost to Cincinnati in 7 games. He played in 1941 for the Boston Braves of the National League, but it was also forgettable. After being traded away from the Tribe, he never wore the #3 again.

Honorable Mentions

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