Our resident historian here on the site, Jesse Lamovsky is our go to guy anytime we want to take a look back in the time at anything related to the history of Cleveland sports. The guy is like a walking talking Cleveland sports encyclopedia, has published a book, and is working on his second now. We asked Jess to take a look back at the worst years ever for Cleveland sports fans. The other day we relived the horror of 1991. And today, Jesse takes a look at 1974.

The early '70s were far from vintage years for Cleveland, Ohio. The manufacturing base and population continued to drain away, the crime rate continued to rise, Mayor Ralph Perk (as well as his combustible hair, and his bowling wife) continued to serve as the butt of nationwide jokes, and the city continued to build on the Mistake-on-the-Lake reputation that would make it a staple of Johnny Carson's opening monologues. In those trying times, the beleaguered people of Cleveland turned to their teams for solace… and found none.

Browns: 4-10, 4th AFC Central

For the Browns, years of bad drafts and worse trades finally came to bitter fruition on the football field. Cleveland started the '74 season 1-5, including a pair of losses to the Bengals (the first time the Browns had been swept by Cincinnati) and never recovered. They limped to a 4-10

record, the first losing season since 1956 and only the second in club history. They also finished in last place for the first time ever. Mike Phipps had a horrible year, completing less than 46 percent of his passes and throwing 17 interceptions, and late in the season, third-year quarterback Brian Sipe made his first start. The defense also surrendered a league-high 344 points. Head coach Nick Skorich, one of the architects of the team's decline from establishment league power to perennial also-ran, was fired at the end of the season.

Making matters worse, the Steelers won their first Super Bowl in 1974. One of their defensive leaders was rookie linebacker Jack Lambert, who grew up a fervent Browns fan in Mantua, went to Kent State, but was passed over by the Browns in the '74 Draft. Lambert was the symbol of the reversal of fortune between the two franchises that took place in the early '70s and has never been fully restored to its former, proper equilibrium (that is, with the Browns as a dominant force and the Steelers as a two-bit grocery operation that annually sucks dry the confluence of the Three Rivers).

Cavaliers: 29-53, 4th Central

Bill Fitch's Cavaliers, still in expansion mode, continued to struggle in their final season at the dilapidated Cleveland Arena. In fact, their record in 1973-74 was worse than the previous year, when they won a then-club record 32 games. Austin

Carr's 21.9 points per game wasn't enough to keep the team from getting off to a 4-15 start, and the Cavaliers would spend the season firmly ensconced in last place in the Central, finishing 18 games in arrears of the division-champion Capitol Bullets.

The Cavaliers had few witnesses to their travails. An average of just over 4,000 paying customers per night braved the decaying neighborhood around the Arena during the 1973-74 season. The following year, with the team playing in the new Richfield Coliseum, attendance doubled, as fans were drawn by the luxurious new building and also by a much-improved Cavaliers team that won 40 games and challenged for a playoff spot until the final day of the season.

Indians: 77-85, 4th AL East

After a 5-11 start, the Indians got hot behind the pitching of Gaylord and Jim Perry and power from George Hendrick and Charlie Spikes (.271-22-80),

having the best season of his disappointing career. As late as July 7, they were ten games over .500 and in first place in the American League East, a game-and-a-half ahead of Boston. Despite a forfeit (the Ten-Cent Beer Night fiasco in early June) the Tribe in the first week of July had the best record in the American League. This was heady stuff for a club that was used to being an afterthought by the time the weather got hot.

On August 6, the Indians were still 57-50, just two games out, but then they began to slump in earnest. A 4-13 stretch put them under .500, and from there, the club existed only on the periphery of the AL East race. In early September, with the Tribe still only five games back of first-place New York, the club acquired Frank Robinson in a waiver deal with the Angels. Robinson's arrival almost immediately undercut the authority of manager Ken Aspromonte- GM Phil Seghi's desire to see Robinson eventually take the job was an open secret- and re-ignited an enthusiastic and wholly mutual animosity between

Robinson and Gaylord Perry that went back to the pair's days in the National League. The Indians, victimized by the tensions in the clubhouse and by an offense that was shut out nine times in the final month-and-a-half of the season, lost 15 of their last 21 and skidded home a distant fourth.

Silver Linings of '74

- On July 19, the Tribe's Dick Bosman no-hit the World Champion Oakland A's 4-0 at the Stadium. He should have had a perfect game; Oakland's lone base-runner reached in the fourth inning when Bosman himself threw a Sal Bando come-backer into right field.
- Gaylord Perry went 21-13 with a 2.51 ERA, the last time an Indians pitcher won twenty. He also threw *28* complete games.
- On October 26, a Frank Sinatra concert

marked the official opening of the Richfield Coliseum, the palace set down among the woods, hills, and hamlets of northern Summit County. The Big House on the Prairie would serve as the home of the Cavaliers for twenty seasons.

- Greg Pruitt made his first appearances in the Pro Bowl, amassing 1,769 total yards as a runner, receiver, and return man. Defensive tackle Jerry Sherk recorded ten sacks and made his second Pro Bowl trip as well.