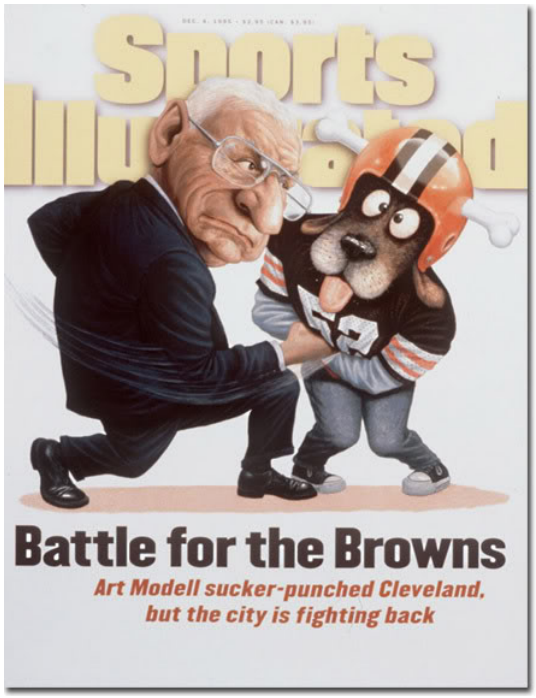
In case you missed it, the Plain Dealer ran one of the more ridiculous columns I've ever seen in my life this past Friday when Michigan native and Dallas transplant Jodie Valade compiled a list of her 15 biggest villains in Cleveland sports history. The list (which is linked inside) is an absolute joke, and further evidence of just how out of touch the Plain Dealer is with the majority of sports fans in this town. In Gary's latest, he exposes the list and says that it's pieces like this that help explain why the PD continues to lose thousands of subscribers year over year.



It’s hardly a State secret that Cleveland sports are cursed. Pick a sport, pick a season and whatever good might have occurred is usually offset by something far more insidious.

And while Cleveland fans have had their fill of any number of players and teams over the years that have contributed to the massive inferiority complex that envelops this community like a plague, they’ve also had their fill of any number of outsiders reminding them of their misery. It’s one thing to criticize your spouse. It’s a whole other matter to have someone to take a shot at her, too.

But that’s exactly what Cleveland fans got Friday morning from carpetbagging Plain Dealer reporter Jodie Valade, a Michigan native who has spent most of her professional life in Dallas, when she compiled her list of the 15 or so villains who supposedly have haunted Cleveland sports.

The list was a good premise. That's why the ClevelandFan.com did something similar and much better a few months ago. Maybe she should have checked, first. The problem with Valade's effort is that it so lacking in basic credibility that it's hard to take it seriously. Another effort like that and she may actually replace Bill Livingston on another list Cleveland fans maintain: least liked Cleveland transplants.

Valade, apparently in trying to establish her street cred, leads off with the name Carl Mays as the number one villain. Really? If Valade had conducted a quiz of 100 random Cleveland sports fans in any sports bar in any part of the city, county or state, not one would have named Carl Mays as a Cleveland sports villain, let alone number one. Maybe Valade should have asked.

The fact that Mays' "crime," the unfortunate beaning of Indians' shortstop Ray Chapman, happened 87 years ago is not a memory that very many living Cleveland sports fans actually have, which would seem like somewhat of a prerequisite to any such list. That may seem like an odd way of looking at things because, for example, some of the world's greatest villains have long since passed on and yet are remembered vividly. But that's the key. The villain has to be remembered, preserved by history in a way that still burns freshly in the minds of the general populace.

Not only is Carl Mays generally not remembered, neither is Chapman. He was a good shortstop on a good Indians team in 1920 and his accidental death in August of that season at the hands of a Mays spitball was tragic, to be sure, but other than that it's not as if his career was all that memorable to most Indians fans. It may be that Chapman would have gone on to real greatness, we'll never know. More likely is that Indians fans remember his replacement, Joe Sewell, much better because Sewell played most of his career in Cleveland and eventually became a Hall of Famer.

To portray Mays in that context as a villain, indeed Cleveland's number one sports villain, is ridiculous. In fact, if Valade was going to use unintended tragedy as the barometer, a much better pick would have been Gil McDougald, whose line drive hit Herb Score in the face, essentially ending Score's career. But McDougald doesn't even make the list, despite the fact that he is a name many more Cleveland fans remember. Although Score technically was in the league for five more seasons after his injury, he only really pitched two of those seasons, mostly ineffectively. McDougald's unintended blast snuffed out the promising career of the next great Cleveland pitcher, someone who had been Rookie of the Year in 1955.

Which takes us right back to where we started, naming the number one Cleveland sports villain. If Valade had any feel whatsoever for Cleveland sports and its fans, she would know that hands down and forevermore the number one villain is Art Modell. Laughably, he's number two on Valade's list.

Most old time Browns fans didn't like Modell when he fired Paul Brown, one of the greatest coaches in the history of the sport. They were right. But that act was a mere precursor when Modell more than permanently cemented his position as the most evil person ever in Cleveland sports by cutting the legs out from every Browns fan by moving the team to Baltimore. Financially destitute and morally bankrupt, Modell nevertheless had the last best chance to avoid his own negligence by doing the right thing and selling the team so that it could remain in Cleveland. Instead he whined about having no other choice, took Baltimore's blood money and ran like a coward.

But karma eventually caught up with Modell in a multitude of ways, most notably when he and is idiot son David ran the Baltimore franchise into the ground and he ended up having to sell anyway. Thankfully and with due justice, he now finds himself a pathetic outsider, nearly alone and without the audience and adoration he so craved. It couldn't have happened to a better guy.

The Modell placement was hardly Valade's only mistake. Well down on her list but no one else's are the twin terrors, Michael Jordan and John Elway. Put it this way: when you're place is Cleveland sports lore is secured through phrases like "the Shot" or "the Drive" you're pretty darn high on the list of villains. But if Valade thinks that Bill Cowher, Bill Belichick, Jose Mesa and Frank Lane place ahead of Jordan or Elway, then Valade needs to quit reading from the Livingston's Big Book of Sports.

Mesa isn't so much a villain as a choker. There's a difference. It's not as if he deliberately failed to convert the save in the seventh game of the 1997 World Series. Mesa was a player of somewhat questionable character to begin with and it finally caught up with him when he was tested most. That may make him a permanent member of the Cleveland Hall of Shame, his failure one of the all time great disappointments, but it doesn't make him a villain. Besides, it's not as if he went on to further greatness anyway, which also somewhat a prerequisite for a decent villain.

As for Cowher, how he makes the list at all is a mystery. As Valade notes, Cowher practically begged the Browns to hire him. It was Modell, as dumb as he was evil, who turned him down. What was Cowher supposed to do, quit the sport? The fact that Cowher went on to success in Pittsburgh doesn't make him a villain. Rather, it is but another example of Modell's bad karma biting Clevelanders in the backside.

Belichick, on the other hand, probably does deserve a place on the list but not for the reasons cited by Valade, who mostly gets the history wrong. She suggests that Belichick deserves his status because he was a lousy coach here and great in New England and also because he "benched" Bernie Kosar. The fact that Belichick has gone on to greatness is, again, more Modell bad karma than anything else. Besides, though he deliberately alienated the fans and the media alike, Modell was in the process of moving the team anyway. And for the record, Belichick didn't just bench Kosar. He cut him—out of spite. Remember, the Browns were leading the division at the time and the only healthy quarterback on

the roster then was Todd Philcox. Valade should have dug deeper.

In that sense, Belichick was even more of a villain than Frank Lane, also on her list, who traded another favorite son, Rocky Colavito. At least Lane arguably got value in return in the form of Harvey Kuenn, who hit .358 in 1959 and .308 in his one year with Cleveland. Belichick got nothing in return except his just desserts when Kosar was immediately picked up by the Dallas Cowboys and subbed for an injured Troy Aikman in the NFC Championship game, helping seal the win that allowed the Cowboys to advance and win the Super Bowl. Meanwhile, the Browns fell to 7-9 and missed the playoffs.

Valade puts Manny Ramirez, Jim Thome and Albert Belle on the list for ostensibly the same reason—greed. Each may be a villain to some but the truth is that most Cleveland fans put in exactly the same position would have done exactly the same thing. Not one of these players was a native Clevelander in the first place and while the Indians nurtured and helped develop each into the player he eventually became, the fact that each turned down less money in Cleveland hardly shocks the conscious. If you need a villain in that scenario, put it on the Dolans, though that's an incomplete view as well. Under Valade's logic, if the Indians can't/don't resign C.C. Sabathia, will we have to add him to the list as well?

Carlos Boozer, who is last on here list, is a different story. Greed is at the core, too, but it was the manner in which he pursued that greed that caused him to earn his status. Through outright deception, he manipulated his way out of Cleveland so he could grab more money from the Utah Jazz. That puts him on much different footing than the various athletes who have played out their contractual commitments to Cleveland teams and went on to greater riches elsewhere.

Rasheed Wallace? What makes him a villain, the fact that he's a loudmouth? It's

not like he's tormented Cleveland fans in any substantial way. Sure, there was the elbow to the head of Zydrunas Ilgauskas in the 2006 playoffs, but it was hardly a difference maker. If Valade had a better feel for Cleveland sports, she would know that two other Pistons rank much higher on the most hated list: Rick Mahorn and Bill Laimbeer. Mahorn threw a vicious elbow to the head of Mark Price in a game in 1989 that put Price on the sidelines with a concussion. It made Wallace's cheap shot look like a love tap in comparison. As for Laimbeer, he wasn't so much a villain as a complainer, but he was hated in ways far greater than Wallace.

Valade, pandering and running out of steam by this point, throws in the ubiquitous "any New York Yankee, Pittsburgh Steeler or Michigan Wolverine." What Valade doesn't get is that it's not necessarily the players on those teams that were villains so much as the mere existence of those teams. Too many times the Yankees and the Steelers, in particular, have rained on Cleveland's parade. As for the Wolverines, I'd buy that reference if Valade had narrowed it to those Clevelanders, like John Kolesar and Desmond Howard, who betrayed their home state and this area to play for Michigan. In each case, they came back to stick it to the Buckeyes.

In the end, Valade's column is not necessarily of any great consequence, except as an unintentionally amusing and slightly insulting affront to actual Cleveland fans. In actuality, it reads like a semi-desperate plea to look more like a native and less like a tourist. But that status is earned, not bestowed, just ask Livingston. And still the Plain Dealer wonders why they are losing readers?