In a little over two weeks, on February 1 2009, we will celebrate our third birthday here at TheClevelandFan.com. In that time, we've grown from what I initially called "a blog on steroids" that had a couple of hundred readers daily, to a thriving, perpetually growing, full blown Cleveland sports website that has over 50,000 readers monthly. And as we get set to head into our fourth year out on the web, I'm going to do something I've never done here before: run a contest to add a new columnist to our team. All the details are inside.

theclevelandfan.com

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In that time, we've grown from what I initially called "a blog on steroids" that had a couple of hundred readers daily, to a thriving, perpetually growing, full blown Cleveland sports website that has over 50,000 readers monthly and has our columns and columnists featured on the home page of Sportstime Ohio.com as well as on the front page of our site.

In bringing The Cleveland Fan to life back in February of 2006, my mission statement was simple: Create an alternative to the traditional media sources and a place for Cleveland sports fans to congregate to read opinion on the teams we live and die for, and also a place for fans to have intelligent discussions about those teams. The writers at The Cleveland Fan are encouraged to call it as they see it, to write from the heart, and to write from the perspective of a fan.

If you want mindless neutral ramblings written against deadline, you know where to find that.

It won't be here.

When you look at the 20+ columnists that pen for us, they've joined the TCF crew from a number of different avenues. Some of our writers have been with us from day one. Others I have personally recruited, knowing and liking their work on other sites or their personal blogs. And yet others have approached us, wanting to join the team, submitting sample work. Our whole crew, we're Cleveland fans, and have been since we've been born. These are guys I'd rather read than the paid print journalists in this town, many of whom spent their lives rooting for other teams before being paid to come to Cleveland and write about ours.

As we get set to head into our fourth year out on the web, I'm going to do something I've never done here before: run a contest to add a new columnist to our team.

The rules are pretty loose. Today is Sunday, January 18th. For the next week and a half, I will be accepting contest column submissions from anyone who wants to throw their hat in the ring. I am asking for two column submissions from each entrant over these next two weeks. They can be about anything Cleveland sports related. Current or historical pieces on the Cavs, Browns, or Indians. There is no timetable to when I need the first and second submissions, other than the fact that I need both columns by 8 AM on Tuesday, January 27th. There are no column length requirements, noting only that columns can't be too short, and that longer does not always equal better.

Columns should be created as Word documents, and emailed to me at richswerb@gmail.com
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I will be leaning on a number of people to help me make the decision on our winner. All columns will be posted in our message forums in a thread that will be stickied to the top of each of our 18 message forums, where I will solicit feedback and opinions from the thousands of people that spend their days talking sports in there. From there, with the help of a panel of my inner circle of writers and other people that work closely with me on the site, we will choose three entrants as our semi-finalists. Those three people will all submit one more column. Then ... the panel and I will choose our new writer.

Couple disclaimers.

One, I try and start our columnists out at about a column a week, and ask for at least that much from them on a go forward basis. If you are not prepared to commit to 4-5 columns a month for the long haul, it makes no sense to enter. I want people that are interested in writing for us for the long term.

Two, while I ideally would like to add someone that can write about all three professional sports teams here in Cleveland (we're covered on the Buckeyes with Jesse, Dan, and Furls) .... it is by no means a prerequisite. I'd much rather add one person that writes really well about only one of the teams than someone who is an average writer on all three teams.

Lastly, you need not live here in Northeast Ohio to apply, nor are there any age requirements. Buff lives in Austin, Mitch lives in North Carolina. Wonder Boy Nick Allburn is 22, and we have a handful of writers in their fifties. Also, if there are any personal or professional reasons that you prefer not to write under your real name, writing under a pen name is fine as well.

To recap ... two column submissions in Word docs about Cleveland sports, submitted to richswerb@gmail.com by Tuesday, January 27th. For a chance to join our team as a columnist, and have thousands of people reading your work each week. If anyone has any more specific questions, send them over on e-mail.