It was on February 1, 2006 when The Cleveland Fan came to life. And today, we celebrate our third birthday. It's been a very fun ride, and seeing the growth we've seen over these last couple years has validated my belief that people in this town were looking for an alternative to some of the more historically traditional print media sources. This morning, I just take a few minutes to talk about the last three years and the growth of the site.

Three years old. My how time flies.

It seems like yesterday that I put this thing together. And these last three years have been a blur, in no doubt partly due to the fact that my wife and I have had two young kids over the same time span.

It's been a fun ride. Not always easy. Those first 6-7 months, with nothing but a couple hundred friends and family members visiting the site. Seeing no growth. Wondering if I was wasting countless hours each week on a Cleveland sports website that no one would ever visit or read.

So to sit here three years later, seeing 50,000 unique visitors grace our front page each month, accounting for close to 2,000,000 page views ... it's humbling.

There's been a couple keys to that growth. First and foremost, our writers. It's the #1 reason for our growth, and without these guys (and gals), we'd still be a blog on steroids, which is actually how I used to describe the site in the early days.

When I started this, I was pretty sure that I could put together a group of talent that could rival some of the print and online sports media options in this town. I just didn't know I'd be able to do it this quick, and with writers this good.

We have some writers that have been with us from day one (Tony Lastoria, Mitch Cyrus, Cris Sykes, Mansfield Lucas, Mike Furlan, Scott Swerbinsky, and Steve Buffum). Others I personally recruited (Hiko, John Hnat, Jesse Lamovsky, Paul Cousineau, Erik Cassano, Nick Allburn, Dan Wismar, Brian McPeek, Sam Amico and Gary Benz). And some new blood that we're now adding to the fray (Jennifer M. Blanchard, Greg Popelka, Jerry Roche, David Buona, and Tom Delaney).

Collectively, I'd take my group in a heartbeat over the crew at The Plain Dealer or any of the newspapers (and their affiliated websites). And my writers (generally) aren't forced to write on deadline, and produce the mindless garbage that deadline pieces often turn in to. We don't have to hold back and write safe neutral pieces for fear of having our press passes revoked. We don't want press passes. Let the PD guys sit in the press box, unable to cheer for hours before, during, and after the games .... only to walk away at the end of the night with a couple of watered down talking points from athletes that are only interested in giving them the bare minimum and getting them out of their hair. My writers are all people that have lived and died with the teams we cover since the day they were born. Unlike Shaw, Livingston, and a lot of the other print guys in this town, none of our writers grew up cheering for other teams before being paid to come to Cleveland and write about ours. I encourage our writers to call it like they see it and to hold nothing back. To write passionately, from the heart, and from the viewpoint of a fan, not an elitist media type.

If you want the post game quotes, the copy of the box score, the emotionless and neutral account of the game ... we're not your spot. There's plenty of places to get that drivel. If you want smart, passionate, humorous analysis of what just happpened and what it all means, we're your guys. If you want a place to vent, rejoice, or talk Cleveland sports, our message forums are the place to do it.

The other big key to our growth has been the partnership with Sportstime Ohio. It's a partnership in the sense that they run our columns on the front page of their site, and we work with STO on a host of web-related activities. STO loves our writers. We love the credibility and exposure we get from being on their front page. It's been a perfect marriage, and the guys and gals at STO .... like our guys and gals ... they're all Cleveland fans. And really great people, with a unique

opportunity in front of them here in this town.

One of my main mission statements with the site is to continue to improve the site, a little bit at a time. If it's looking for a new writer, making aesthetic improvements, or adding new features, bells, and whistles ... this is what keeps me up at night. I want nothing more than to just make this place the coolest place on the web to hang out and read and talk about Cleveland sports. I think we've done a pretty good job of that through the first three years, but there is so much more we can and will do.

As always, any comments, questions, complaints, suggestions on how we could do things better, please, do not hesitate to contact me by email at any time at rich swerb@gmail.com

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