You could make the argument that 2010 was one of – if not *the* worst sports year in Cleveland history.

While the departure of LeBron™ was certainly the scrotum-twisting centerpiece of the calendar and likely the one and only thing Clevelanders will remember about 2010 years down the line, The Decision (term used with permission of ESPN, the Worldwide Dealer in Sports) alone doesn't set 2010 apart as the Great Depression-in-a-Can that it truly was.

There were the Indians doing everything they could to make Cleveland believe it actually never

had a professional baseball team. There were the Cavs going “Black Sox” against Boston in the playoffs. And there were the Browns starting the season with expectations so low we would have been thrilled if they won three games – then winning five yet still somehow colossally disappointing us.

But let us not follow the siren song of debating the worst years in Cleveland sports history. Instead, let’s flip it over and talk about the greatest.

(Spoiler alert: it’s probably not what you think.)

There are lots of candidates, though most of them occurred when our grandfathers were interested in sex. Certainly 1948 comes to mind, with the Tribe winning the World Series and the Browns and Barons following suit with AAFC and AHL titles. Take away a 96-hour stretch by the Indians that fall and 1954 would certainly warrant discussion.

The pickings get a little slimmer in the “Cavs/AFC/Designated Hitter” era, but solid candidates are 1976 and 1994, when all three Cleveland teams posted winning records, and of course 2007, when LeBron™ made it to the NBA Finals, the Indians secured a trip to the World Series (then decided they’d rather just hang out at home and get some shit done around the house), and Derek Anderson didn’t suck.

Like a cereal variety pack filled with Cocoa Puffs, Foot Loops, and Trix instead of that Special K and Bran Flake silage, there are no bad choices.

But there is one year that stands out above the rest. It was a year in which the stars aligned above the Terminal Tower and tiny little angels that look like Dakota Fanning popped out of Lake Erie like heavenly Tiddlywinks and hovered over Cleveland playing golden harps and singing songs so pure and beautiful that those who heard them urinated butterscotch for months afterward.

This was the year of our Lord, 1986.

2011 marks the silver anniversary of that sacrosanct year and, with things looking shittier than ever on the Cleveland sports scene just now, we should put every ounce of our passion for all things Cleveland into celebrating a year in which seemingly everything went right, on and off the field. For we may never again see a year quite like that one.

Compared to today, 1986 is like Superman visiting Bizarro World. The Browns drafted well. The Indians hit. The Cavs acquired all the pieces of a championship-caliber team in one incredible day.

True, no Cleveland team won a world title in 1986, which at first flush, would put it behind 1920, 1948, or essentially any year in the 1950s. I argue that while a world championship certainly would forever etch any given year in glory, it doesn't automatically entitle it to a first-round bye past any year in which a championship was not gleaned.

So, as noted, since 1986 didn't technically catch the Snitch, what the hell makes it so special?

In a word, everything.

In retrospect, 1986 was a hallmark year for each of Cleveland's three professional sports franchises, as well as its lone major college program, which, prior to 1986 most Clevelanders didn't even realize existed.

Coming off a 100-loss campaign and not having posted a winning record in a regulation season in seven years, the '86 Tribe was a delightful surprise, winning 84 games and giving fans a reason not to be embarrassed for much of the summer. More importantly, upstairs there was a new man in charge and a template for success had been established, one that would ultimately lead to a new ballpark and five consecutive division titles.

On paper the Cavaliers straddled between two unremarkable seasons (29-53 in 1985-86 and 31-51 in 1986-87). They once again fired an unsuccessful coach and decided to blow up the front office. But in a brief period that June they flushed away nearly a decade of poor decisions and front-office idiocy by establishing sound leadership on and off the court that literally salvaged the franchise and set it forth into a decade-long perch of respectability.

And of course, there were the 1986 Browns, the highlight of the calendar year. They transformed from an 8-8 team that stumbled backward into an essentially undeserved playoff berth the year before into an NFL powerhouse, winning eight of their last nine games to finish 12-4 and roar to a division title and the best overall record in the conference. It was the year Bernie Kosar permanently etched his legend in Cleveland history – if for no other reason than inspiring the year's anthem, "Bernie, Bernie." Yes, things ended poorly with The Drive (though technically that was 1987 – wink/nudge), but are we really in a position now to start nitpicking over the value of a 12-4 season? And not just any 12-4 season. It included three thrilling overtime wins, an aerial circus on *Monday Night Football*, a jugular-shredding blowout over obnoxious Sam Wyche and his lippy Bengals, and – sweet Mother of Christ – a victory in Three Rivers Stadium.

(And perhaps connecting the magic of '86 to the current day, two days before that magnificent Browns' season began, somewhere deep in the heart of Texas, Colt McCoy was born. Three months after that, Peyton Hillis blasted through his mother's uterus and hurdled into the world – though, it's worth noting, he fumbled the placenta.)

And flying in from off the radar was the Cleveland State men's basketball team, which not only captured a conference title and earned its first bid to the NCAA tournament, but captured the imagination of the city and the nation with an improbable run to the Sweet Sixteen.

A quarter-century has passed, and things have never been that good. There have been marvelous individual seasons and years in which a few components were firing at the same time, but never a year in which the cherry symbols aligned like they did in the slot-machine jackpot of 1986.

Over the next 12 months, we'll delve further into that wonderful year, examining what and who made it special and why it still resonates 25 years later.

It seems silly to look back longingly at the Cold War, Boy George, S&L scandal-filled 1980s as a simpler, more innocent time, but in this context, that's precisely what it was. Our permanent state of bitterness toward sports didn't yet exist. Paranoia and panic weren't automatic responses to any bit of bad news. Our teams were respected, even feared. They won more than they lost, often pulling victory out of certain defeat. Their big decisions paid off. And, above all, they were fun to watch.

The end result was simple. For that one year, you had no choice but to be proud you were from Cleveland and that saccharine t-shirt slogan "Too Tough to die" actually rang true.

That alone makes 1986 downright electric, even 25 years later.