Now that the kingdom of dairy products has blessedly vanquished the empire of raw evil and permitted Cleveland fans to savor just one Captain Crunch-pellet of justice, let's talk misery. More appropriately, measuring misery.

Sometime during the 1960s, squinting through clouds of pot smoke while taking a break from having sex in the mud with any hot hippie girl he happened to meet (for this is what often happened in the '60s), economist Arthur Okun had his secretary get him a scotch on the rocks and created a crackerjack way of quantifying how much the nation's economy was struggling.

Though it was cooked up by an economist on the government payroll, it's surprisingly easy to understand: just take the current U.S. unemployment rate and add it to the current rate of inflation. Now known as the Reese's Peanut Butter Cup of economics, it's so simple it's hard to believe nobody thought of it before.

But what truly makes it poetry is the downright darling name Okun gave his equation. He called

it the “Misery Index.”

For example, in 2000, the unemployment rate was 3.97% and the inflation rate was 3.38%. Put them together and you get a Misery Index of (drumroll and blast of trumpets) 7.35. Compare that to 2010’s 11.29 (9.64% unemployment and 1.64% inflation) and clearly, you’d be more justified in killing yourself today than you would have been 10 years ago.

Well, if somebody could do it for something as inherently unentertaining as measuring the skin tone of the economy, then somebody should be able to do it for comparing the abject frustration and incompetence caused by professional sports franchises, right?

The Geeky Stuff

To their credit, many have tried, some even borrowing the “Misery Index” term. But rather than sticking to numbers and facts – a lá the actual Misery Index – most wind up skewing their results by factoring in opinion and/or emotion and/or wind chill factor and/or bra cup size by creating willy-nilly categories and “rating” cities and/or teams on a scale.

Though this method may make for some peppery discussions and endless debate, it doesn’t serve as a true benchmark. Doing it in this fashion is like lowering the nation’s Misery Index in the early 1960s because JFK was handsome or raising it in the mid-1970s because Gerald Ford fell down a lot.

Like the actual Misery Index, it should be kept simple – ideally just focusing on two factors: how long since a city (or perhaps more appropriately, a “market”) has won a world title and how successful that city’s teams have been over time.

Just like when agreeing to go to the men’s room with Ben Roethlisberger, step one is to lay the parameters.

Judging on cultural importance and historical significance, it only makes sense to limit the gauge to teams from the NFL, NBA, NHL, and MLB. Perhaps someday it would be appropriate to include current “fringe” leagues such as the WNBA or MLS, but to do so now would be to equate the Columbus Crew’s 2009 MLS title with the Big Red Machine winning the World Series in 1975. (One could also argue that any market that claims a WNBA or MLS team already has enough misery on its hands and consequently has no motivation to try to quantify it.)

Next, you set your timeline, which, for continuity’s sake, begins for each league with the season it began playing an official championship game/series (MLB: 1903, NHL: 1917, NFL: 1933, NBA: 1946). Since there was no World Series (and thus no true champion) in 1904 and the Fall Classic wasn’t established for good until 1905, we’ll eliminate 1904 from consideration. Conversely, since a postseason and World Series were very much established by 1994, the majority of the regular season was played, and all fans were both surprised and crushed by the sudden cancellation of the last two months of the regular season and postseason, the 1994 season does count toward the tally. (This is, after all, leading toward a method of measuring misery.)

The opposite line of thinking is appropriate for the NHL strike that completely obliterated the 2004-05 season. Since not only was there no postseason, but also not a single regular-season game was played, it isn't counted toward any of the teams' tallies. (Feel free to dispute this judgment call if you like, but since I hated writing the last two paragraphs about as much as you hated reading them, I'm going to quickly and gracefully move on.)

Who and How

With the timeline parameters set, now it became clear which teams and cities would qualify for inclusion in the Sports Misery Index rankings: put simply, any city that was home to a team that played in any of the big four leagues at any point after the dawn of their "modern" eras. Put them all together and you get 62 ponies in the stable.

Of course, this leads to the inclusion of several cities in the index rankings that really don't seem to belong. For example, an NFL team called the Spartans played in Portsmouth, Ohio, in the 1933 season. The following year, they moved to Detroit and became the Lions. But since the Portsmouth Spartans played that one season in the NFL's modern era and theoretically could have been crowned champions by the modern standard, Portsmouth, Ohio, (current population: 20,000) is included with New York, Boston, Chicago, and Los Angeles in the Sports Misery Index standings. Similar scenarios hold true for Anderson, Indiana; Sheboygan, Wisconsin; Waterloo, Iowa; and Providence, Rhode Island – all of which were home to an NBA team in the league's infancy that could well have been crowned NBA champion.

A trap others have fallen into is to measure the duration between titles in terms of years. The

more accurate formula is to measure by “seasons.”

For instance, the city of Minneapolis (or rather, the Minneapolis/St. Paul market) won its last world title in 1991 when the Twins triumphed in the World Series. In terms of years, right now the duration of Minnesota’s drought would measure at 19 going on 20. In terms of the Twins alone, that would be an accurate measure. But Minneapolis also has the Vikings, the Timberwolves, and the Wild – none of whom have won a championship in the interim. Since the Twins’ title, the Vikings have played 20 seasons, the Timberwolves have played 19, and the Wild has played nine. Plus, the NHL North Stars’ final two seasons in Minnesota fell in this bracket. Put them all together with the Twins’ 19 title-less seasons since ’91 and you get a tally of 69 consecutive seasons that Minneapolis has endured without any of its teams capturing a championship.

This helps define the amount of suffering a city with multiple sports teams endures compared to a city with fewer teams, like, say, Salt Lake City or Portland. The Trail Blazers are the only show in town in Portland and captured their only title in 1977 – 34 years ago. So in terms of years, the city of Portland has waited longer for a title than Minneapolis. But with more teams, Minneapolis has endured more failure in a condensed period of time, therefore its – let’s call it “Drought Factor” – is higher.

Salt Lake City brings up another interesting angle. The Utah Jazz – the town’s only team – has never won a championship. Yet Salt Lake’s Drought Factor is lower than Portland’s, even though Portland actually has a title to its name, because the Blazers’ title came before the Jazz moved from New Orleans to Utah. Put simply, a city doesn’t get bonus points for never having won a title. While this may seem unfair to a town like San Diego, which has had teams since the 1960s and never won a championship in anything, it balances out when you consider the myriad of cities that have landed expansion teams in various sports in the last 10-20 years (ex: Memphis, Jacksonville, Columbus, San Jose, Nashville).

What you do get in places such as these, however, is a perfect score in the second element that compiles the Sports Misery Index: Non-Title Percentage (NTP). Since Salt Lake City has never won a title in the 31 seasons it has been home to the Jazz, it scores an NTP of 100: Number of title-less seasons/Number of total seasons

Therefore, when you take Salt Lake's NTP (100) and add it to its Drought Factor (31), you get a Sports Misery Index of 131.

By contrast, once you take Portland's NTP (97.5: 39 title-less seasons/40 total seasons) and add it to its Drought Factor (33), you get a Sports Misery Index of 130.5 – slightly lower than Salt Lake City's. Therefore, even though Portland has waited longer than Salt Lake for a title, by virtue of the Blazers winning one title in contrast to the Jazz never winning, Salt Lake City ranks just a bit higher in terms of sports misery than Portland. Hey – congratulations, Salt Lake!

Naturally, when a team wins a title, its city's Drought Factor drops to zero and its NTP drops a few percentage points – depending on how many seasons that city has had in its sports history. For instance, once the Packers won the Super Bowl on Sunday, Milwaukee's Sports Misery Index went from 132.78 to 93.26, dropping from 16th in the rankings to 61st.

Just the Facts

Of course, by sticking solely to numerical data, you eliminate horrific twists of fate from consideration. Cleveland's Sports Misery Index isn't any worse for The Drive or The Fumble, just as Bill Buckner or Bucky Dent don't affect Boston's and the whole wacky-ass Steve Bartman incident has no impact on Chicago's. While this may take some fun out of the process, it strips away some of the sheen painted on certain cities and teams by the media.

Boston is a perfect example. It's difficult to feel sorry for a city that won a total of 23 world titles in the 86-year gap between Red Sox championships. While Red Sox fans certainly suffered over that period, the city of Boston as a whole thrived in the sports world. Chicago falls into the same category. True, it's been more than a century since the Cubs won a World Series. But since that fateful autumn of 1908, the city of Chicago has rung up 20 world championships – an average of one roughly every five years.

So where does that put Cleveland? No surprise – we top the list, thanks almost entirely to a whopping Drought Factor of 131. (The next highest is San Diego's 97).

CLEVELAND

Drought Factor: 131

Last world title: Browns 1964

Since then: Indians (46 seasons) + Browns (43 seasons) + Cavs (40 seasons) + Barons (2 seasons)* = 131 seasons

**These are the short-lived NHL Barons of 1976-1978, not the AHL Barons of 1937-1972*

Non-Title Percentage: 96.77

[7 total world titles; 210 title-less seasons/217 total seasons]

Sports Misery Index: 227.77

Not only does this put Cleveland atop the Sports Misery Index rankings, but nobody else is close enough to smell our pierogies. Here's the top (or bottom, depending on your view of the world) 10:

10. DALLAS (140.62)

95.62 + 45

9. VANCOUVER (145)

100 + 45

8. KANSAS CITY□□□□□ (149.26)

98.26 + 51

7. ATLANTA□□□□□□□□□□□□□□ (155.33)

99.33 + 56

6. WASHINGTON□□□□□ (158.9)

96.90 + 62

5. MINNEAPOLIS□□□□□ (164.83)

95.83 + 69

4. BUFFALO□ □□□□□□□□□□□ (192)

100 + 92

3. SEATTLE□□ □□□□□□□□□□□ (192.1)

99.10 + 93

2. SAN DIEGO (197)

100 + 97

1. CLEVELAND (227.77)

96.77 + 131

Please note, ESPN, no Boston or Chicago in sight. Conversely, let's look at the bottom (or top) 10 members of the Sports Misery Index rankings:

53. NEW YORK (100.4)

91.40 + 9

54. NEW ORLEANS (100.25)

98.25 + 2

55. PITTSBURGH (99.01)

94.01 + 5

56. CHICAGO (97.92)

94.92 + 3

57. SAN FRANCISCO (96.68)

95.68 + 1

58. RALEIGH (95.67)

91.67 + 4

59. LOS ANGELES (95.64)

93.64 + 2

60. *ROCHESTER (94.89)

88.89 + 6

61. MILWAUKEE□□□□□□ (93.26)

93.26 + 0

62. SAN ANTONIO□□ (91.23)

88.23 + 3

**Currently has no teams in any of the four major sports leagues*

To put the lower scores into some context, if a city that has never had a team before gets a brand-new team and it plays one season without winning a title, that city would score a 101. All of the bottom 10 have endured less misery than this hypothetical newcomer.

Obviously, the majority of these bottom 10 cities have captured a title at some point in the last two to three years. The two that jump out at you like one of those pretty-boy werewolves in the Twilight movies are Rochester and San Antonio. Though it currently has no teams in any of the big four leagues, Rochester had a nice little run in the 1950s with the NBA's Royals (now the Sacramento Kings), who only played six seasons in upstate New York but managed to win a title in that small sliver of upsettingly tiny shorts-era basketball.

The other surprise is the least miserable sports city: San Antonio, which has been remarkably efficient in bagging both championships and rodeos. The Spurs are the only team the city has ever had, and to date they've won four NBA titles in 34 chances – a Title Percentage of 11.77%. Only two other cities can top that, both hockey towns: Edmonton (16.67%) and Montreal (18.89%). But both get passed by San Antonio in the overall rankings due to the two decades both have endured without winning a title.

For what it's worth, Cleveland's Title Percentage is 3.23%, ranking it 27th among the 62 cities in the rankings – though, it's worth noting, Cleveland's tally is higher than Cincinnati's 2.99%. (And considering 24 of the 62 cities have never won a single title, therefore boasting a Title Percentage of 0%, 3.23% doesn't seem as horrible as it sounds.)

The Point

Admittedly, we didn't really learn anything we didn't already know through this entire process. But I'm of the opinion that once you come to the realization of whom and what you are, you should embrace it rather than deny it.

Cleveland owns sports misery the way Google owns the internet – yet I'm not at all ashamed of it. It hurts, obviously, and I wish it weren't so, but knowing this – more importantly, accepting this – further defines Cleveland as one of the most unique and well-defined cities in America. Any pock-cheeked putz can root for teams from a city that wins all the time. To hook your emotional trailer to Cleveland's teams is to remain faithful to your wife forever, to care for your elderly mother, and to embody every morsel of goodness the human race is capable of.

Friedrich Nietsche, 19th-century German philosopher and longtime Indians fan, put it into words that have a beat and you can dance to: whatever doesn't kill you makes you stronger.

With guys like Nietsche defining us and mathematical data like the Sports Misery Index further illustrating our town's undying dedication to our usually flailing sports teams, we send out a signal loud and clear upon one of those interstellar transmitters NASA uses to beam Beatles songs to Alpha Centauri:

Cleveland is far from dead and therefore, by definition, is pretty fucking strong.