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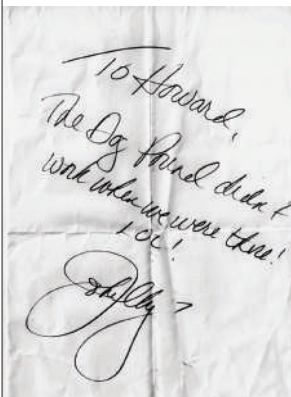
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AN
EXCLUSIVE
ONE-ON-ONE
WITH
STAN LEE



7 Ain't Lucky for Me



Just look at this picture. I mean, come on. Sure, it's been 23 years since number 7 drove down the field on that freezing January afternoon in less time than it took to eat a stadium hot dog and chug a Black Label beer, all while crushing the hopes and spirits of an entire city. But dissing the Dog Pound and laughing about it (out loud, no less), even after all those years? It just makes my blood boil. I mean, COME ON! ¶ If you are a Clevelander, were

a Clevelander or ever watch Cleveland sporting events on national TV, then despite not knowing who "Howard" is in this scribbling, you already know exactly what this message means. You know it because you live with this memory, reference this memory often or are reminded of this memory every time a Cleveland team loses on national TV. But for those of you who have chosen to ignore one of the greatest (and most heartbreaking) moments in the history of professional athletics — and for those of you who just can't compel yourself to watch the footage on NFL Films — let me explain the context of this note; let me explain what the Dog Pound is, why it didn't work and where "there" is; and let me clear up how this message made it into Howard's hands, whoever he is.

First, the "what." The Dog Pound [locally referred to as the Dawg Pound] was one of the

greatest home-field advantages in the NFL. Located behind the east end zone of Cleveland Municipal Stadium, this bleacher section was known for housing some of the rowdiest (and most feared) fans in football. Beyond bringing in, eating and throwing Milk-Bone dog biscuits at the opposing team, the Pound was best known for producing an absolutely deafening noise that worked on the mechanics of any visiting team in favor of the Cleveland Browns' defense. The Pound and its eardrum-busting ruckus has been a game changer many, many times.

It is still hard to figure out why it didn't work on one day in particular: Jan. 11, 1987. This was the day that the visiting Denver Broncos were "there," at Cleveland Municipal Stadium, for the 1986-'87 AFC Championship Game. The Browns clung to a 20-13 lead with only 5:34 remaining on the clock. The Broncos were on their own two-yard line and had to drive 98 yards, into the Dog Pound. Everyone thought the game was over. The Browns' defense had shut the Broncos

down all day, and the entire stadium was on its feet, yelling so loud that the noise could be heard across Lake Erie into Canada. But then number 7 took the field.

Despite the season-ending resignation on all the Broncos' faces, John Elway, the vaunted number 7, was poised, confident and collected. He marched his offense right down the field, into the biting cold and into the teeth of the Dog Pound. If ever they needed to make a difference, it was right there, right then. But after Elway threw a game-tying touchdown pass, the Dog Pound put their tails between their legs and slunk off into what turned out to be a generation of disappointing finishes and unrealized dreams, too stunned to make a difference in overtime. Number 7 executed what would forever be recognized in sports history books as The Drive. I've never seen such dejected faces as those of the fans exiting the Dog Pound on that January day in 1987.

At least The Drive didn't make NFL Films president Steve Sabol's top-five most memorable moments caught

on film (page 20). Personally, I have The Drive as the No. 1 moment in NFL history, but since Sabol doesn't, I was one step closer to putting the past behind me. And then this note surfaced.

Which brings us to Howard. Born and raised in Cleveland, Howard is the world's biggest Browns fan. He grew up going to Cleveland Municipal Stadium and braving the bitter winters his whole life. When I was born, Howard, or "Dad," as I call him, turned these Sunday pilgrimages into a family tradition. He still recounts that heartbreaking moment with his golfing buddies — much to their annoyance, I'm sure — since spoofing Elway and calling him names is also a family tradition.

As fate would have it, one of Dad's buddies knows John Elway, and he relayed the strong sentiment to number 7. On the tee box the other day, Dad's buddy produced this note. So much for out of sight, out of mind.

Adam Pitluk
Editor



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