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By Amy Eddings

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Today is the first day of the rest of Cleveland's life.

Well, actually, Monday was, if I set my wordplay aside.

Monday was the day after LeBron James and the Cleveland Cavaliers ended the city's title drought by winning the National Basketball Association's championship, beating the defending champions, the Golden State Warriors, 93-89.

Before the Cavs' improbable comeback from a 3-1 series hole, before their game seven victory against the record-setting Warriors on Sunday night in Oakland, Cleveland hadn't seen a title since 1964, when the Browns won the NFL Championship Game.

We all know this. The decades of heartache and of missed opportunities with the Cavs, the Indians and the Browns are a key part of Cleveland's hang-dog, runner-up, Rust Belt, Mistake on the Lake image. It's the mystique — or, perhaps, curse — I was steeped in as a native Clevelander, born and raised in a city suburb during the 1970s, those bad, hard days of steel mill closures and white flight from the city's urban core, of a dead Lake Erie and a burning Cuyahoga River.

When I moved to New York City, the cultural/media/advertising/theatrical/financial/chutzpa capital of the world, I brought Cleveland's bruised ego with me. I thrilled at the sight of T-shirts that read, "Welcome to New York. Now Go Home." My new city's arrogance was like a salve.

Now, no salve is necessary.

It's been strange to see the change that's come over the Cleveland I had left behind. The Republican National Convention's spotlight. The new bars and restaurants in once-shuttered buildings in Ohio City. Twenty-somethings filling up new apartment complexes downtown.

So, what's Cleveland's story now? What's Day One like for the rest of its life as a championship basketball city? How do you change an entrenched image of being second-rate when you're No. 1?

I think of the rental car company Avis, which embraced its perennial, second-place status behind market leader Hertz and turned it into a famous ad campaign: "We Try Harder."

Within a year of launching the campaign in 1962, Avis went from losing \$3.2 million to earning \$1.2 million, its first profit in 13 years.

Avis never did catch up to Hertz. Both are now behind Enterprise in the car rental business. And, 50 years after "We Try Harder," Avis dropped the tag line from its ads.

But what if it had overtaken Hertz? What if Avis, like Cleveland, had found itself sitting, with King James, at No. 1?

It would have needed a new tag line, for sure.

And so will Cleveland. A new tag line and a new image, one to live into instead of up to.

I called several ad agencies in Cleveland seeking help. No one was around.

"They're out watching the parade," said one weary-sounding secretary.

But Dick Maggiore was in. He's the president and CEO of the ad firm Innis Maggiore, based in Canton, about an hour's drive from the mayhem that was unfolding Wednesday as an estimated 800,000 people celebrated the Cavs and Cleveland's victory in Public Square.

"Here in Northeast Ohio, we've been in need of cognitive therapy," he told me. "This is just what the doctor ordered. This enthusiasm can be the catalyst to the reinvigoration of our collective community of Cleveland, Youngstown, Akron, Canton."

I asked him if Cleveland's image of itself is changing. He said it has, and that it's been in the works for several years.

"I think the big difference is that instead of believing that we CAN be a winner, we believe we ARE a winner," he said.

I asked the ad man to come up with a new tagline for Cleveland, one that no longer needs to look outside itself for inspiration, like the much-derided "New York's the Big Apple but Cleveland's a Plum" effort. One that, ideally, stops dwelling on the slights and the failures, the way "Cleveland: You Gotta Be Tough" did.

He and his team responded 40 minutes later, via e-mail, with “Earthquake on the Lake,” “It’s Our Time,” and “CLElieve,” a clever play on “Believeland,” seen on the T-shirts of legions of Cavs fans.

My favorite: “Witness gritness.”

“An epic accomplishment deserves its own word, so we coined one,” wrote Innis Maggiore’s public relations manager, Jack Wollitz, in the e-mail.

An epic, come-from-behind victory, for the Cavs and for Cleveland. I’m glad 800,000 people cared enough to set aside concerns about parking and traffic and crowds to go downtown and celebrate. It’s what you do when you’re proud, when it’s no longer necessary to just Try Harder. It’s a great way to start that First Day of the Rest of Your Life.

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