

OUR CENTURY

1972

AT A GLANCE



New Indians owner Nick Mileti is flanked by Tribe great Rocky Colavito, left, and Manager Ken Aspromonte.

Nick Mileti buys the Indians

Lakewood lawyer Nick Mileti zoomed onto the Cleveland sports scene in 1968 when he bought the Arena and the American Hockey League Barons. In 1970, he got an expansion franchise from the National Basketball Association and started the Cavaliers. In 1971, he announced plans for the 20,000-seat Coliseum in Richfield Township.

In February 1972, Mileti shocked everybody by becoming the owner of the Indians as well. As usual, little of his own money was involved; other investors included Alva "Ted" Bonda and Howard Metzenbaum.

Among the most shocked Clevelanders was George Steinbrenner of the American Shipbuilding Corp., who thought he had a deal to buy the Indians. Instead, Steinbrenner bought the New York Yankees the next year.

The Indians' previous owner, Vernon Stouffer, had run into financial reverses. After he merged his Stouffer Food Corp. into Litton Industries in 1967, Litton stock fell drastically. Stouffer severely cut the Indians' farm teams and scouting system, prompting the resignation of Vice President Hank Peters.

Stouffer also agreed to play at least 30 home games a season in New Orleans. Mileti canceled that plan and announced that the team would stay in Cleveland "forever."

Mileti's wheeling and dealing was far from over. He applied for a franchise in the National Hockey League. Turned down, he bought a franchise in the newly formed World Hockey Association, named it the Crusaders and signed several NHL stars, including Gerry Cheevers, star goalie of the NHL champion Boston Bruins. Mileti said both the Crusaders and the AHL Barons would play in the Arena in 1972 and move to the Coliseum when it opened in 1974.

The Cavs signed Austin Carr of Notre Dame in the NBA draft and picked up future Hall of Fame guard Lenny Wilkens. They improved to 23-69 in their second season.

The Barons played .500 hockey and lost to the Baltimore Clippers in the first round of the Calder Cup playoffs. When the new season started, fans deserted them for the Crusaders, who were building a winning record in the "major league."

A new owner and a new manager, Ken Aspromonte, couldn't stop the Indians from registering their fourth straight losing season. The team batted only .234. But Gaylord Perry, picked up in a trade for Sam McDowell, pitched 29 complete games en route to a 24-16 record and a 1.92 earned run average. That won him the American League Cy Young Award.

Mike Phipps, obtained in a 1971 trade for Paul Warfield, was the Browns' starting quarterback. The team had a chance to make the playoffs going into the final game against the undefeated Miami Dolphins. The Browns led, 14-13, halfway through the fourth quarter, but Dolphins quarterback Earl Morrall staged an 80-yard drive for a 20-14 victory. The Dolphins then won three playoff games, making them the first team with a perfect season record since the 1948 Browns went 15-0 in the All America Conference.

Clevelanders were excited about the Gateway project planned for E. 9th St. This Gateway was to be at the north end of the street. Norcom, the Northern Ohio Development Corp., planned a \$36 million development including a motel, garage, luxury apartments and the Great Lakes Gateway Exposition Center. Mayor Ralph Perk urged Mileti to build his Coliseum in Gateway instead of Summit County.

Once more, bullets were fired at demonstrating Kent State University students in May. This time, at least, they were wooden bullets. Police used them and tear gas to disperse 200 students who had left a peaceful anti-war demonstration on campus and marched into downtown to continue protesting. This time no one was seriously hurt.

The Plain Dealer carried a series by author John Philip Cohane called "Wither America?" He wrote "Something has gone terribly wrong with the present." He added: "Perhaps we are going to have to stop letting the front runners — the protesters, the young, the impoverished, the teachers, the outraged commentators, the blacks — fight alone the battle we should be fighting ourselves. Above all, as a nation we must stop telling lies, to others and to ourselves."

Len Toma may or may not have been taking that advice at his Maple Heights High School commencement. He ripped off his short-haired wig and let his long hair flow beneath his mortarboard, a violation of the dress code. When it came time for his diploma, school officials skipped his name. Later they chided him for disrupting the dignity of the ceremony, but said he could pick up his diploma at the school office.

By Fred McGunagle

Ralph Perk shook the hand of the last well-wisher at his inauguration. Then he walked into the mayor's office to face the greatest financial crisis since the Depression.

Despite the layoff of hundreds of city workers by Carl Stokes, early estimates were that Cleveland faced a deficit of \$24 million in 1972 and would need to lay off as many as 1,000 more. Unionized workers were clamoring for raises, which had been held up by Stokes.

Perk, however, had run a "frugality" campaign. Now he briefly floated a proposal to pay workers in scrip, as had been done in the 1930s. He took a 10 percent cut in his \$35,000 salary and ordered his directors and commissioners to do the same. He promised to get rid of "drones" on the payroll.

But he repeated his campaign pledge to avoid a tax increase. "It will be a difficult job, but I intend to do it," he said. "Don't ask me how. At this point, I'm looking for a miracle man to do it."

While employees waited for the budget, Perk left on a trade mission, which was really a grand tour of Europe. He addressed a meeting of mayors in Milan, handed out keys to the city of Cleveland to mayors of 16 cities and got Pope Paul VI to promise to pray for Cleveland. On his return, he announced, "Cleveland is the greatest place in the world to live."

Perk cut the payroll 10 percent by giving workers an unpaid day off every two weeks. In February, 700 refuse collectors struck, leaving 2,800 tons of garbage on the streets until a court ordered them back to work after two days. The Court of Appeals scheduled a rare Sunday session to work out a compromise that forestalled a strike by the safety forces.

Meanwhile, Perk tried to fire Stokes holdovers who were blocking his plans on the Transit Board, Model Cities Board and Civil Service Commission. He canceled the Indians' Stadium contract when he couldn't get an agreement on rent from Nick Mileti.

To help the city bring in conventions, he proposed buying the hulk of a cruise ship and converting it into a floating hotel. He was rebuffed by the federal government in his attempt to classify Poles, Lithuanians and other ethnics as minorities. He held the first annual Easter Sunday Ball with nine bands, and sang "Sweet 16" to a crowd of 10,000 celebrators.

In June, Perk settled a suit that had been brought by the Ohio Water Pollution Board and a group of suburbs in 1969. Common Pleas Judge George McMonagle had banned new sewer connections until the city improved its control of water pollution. The

agreement transferred city sewage plants and sewers in 37 suburbs to a regional board. In return, Cleveland received \$35 million from bonds to be paid off by water users. Stokes had fought the transfer; Perk called it "the greatest victory for the city in 20 years."

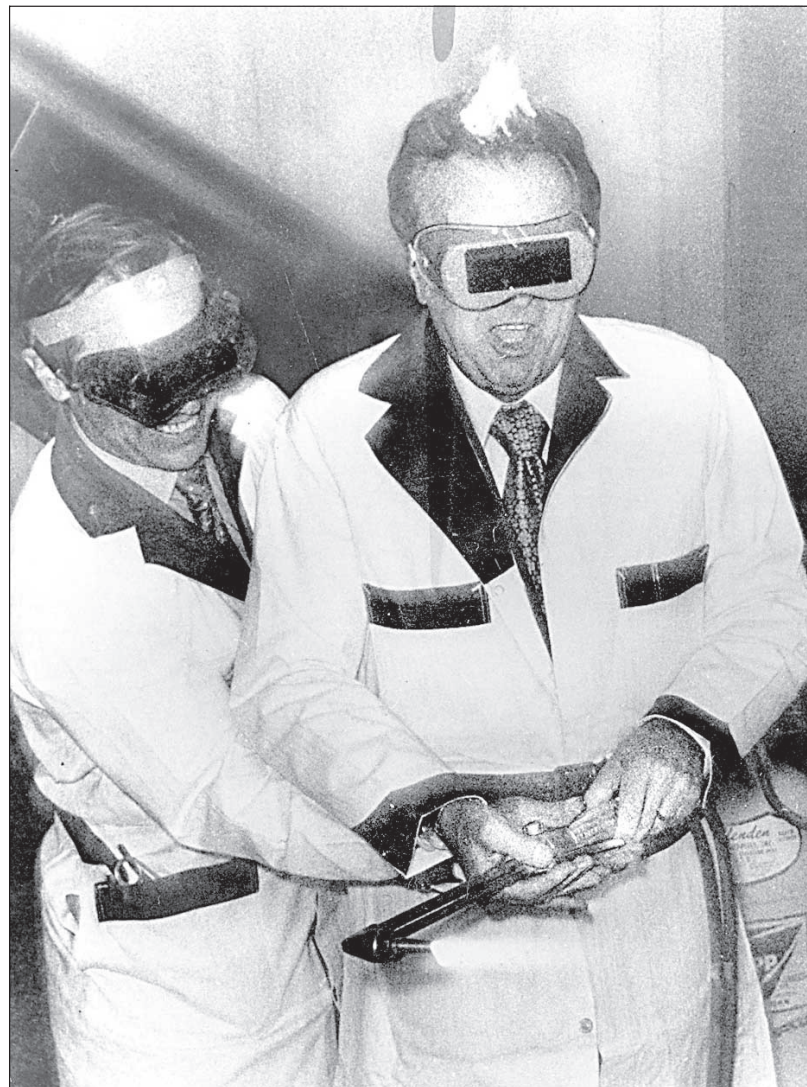
In September, the financial problems reached a climax. The safety forces won a court ruling that the extra days off were a violation of their union contracts. City officials said the ruling meant 1,400 more employees faced layoffs, including 400 police officers and firefighters.

Refuse collectors struck again and were ordered back to work again. Then the 3,600 members of the American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees struck on Sept. 25. Days off were canceled for police, and 32 patrol cars were taken from regular assignments to protect public buildings.

The Operating Engineers voted to walk out, threatening operation of water and sewer plants, but a last-minute settlement averted the strike. The city and AFSCME negotiated for 32 continuous hours in the courtroom of Common Pleas Judge Frank Celebrezze. After nine days, the unions agreed to a 5.5-percent raise to be paid retroactively on June 1, 1973, and June 1, 1974. Perk said he hoped to get the money from federal revenue-sharing.

The most memorable event of Perk's year occurred on Oct. 16 when he opened the Materials Engineering Congress by cutting a metal ribbon with a welding torch. The picture of his flaming hair made front pages around the nation.

McGunagle is a Cleveland freelance writer.



PLAIN DEALER FILE PHOTOS

Mayor Ralph Perk's hair catches on fire.



A strike left 2,800 tons of uncollected garbage on the streets.



Dennis Kucinich was ostracized by the Democrats for his support of Republican Ralph Perk.



Pope Paul VI receives a key to the city from the Perks.

Huge snafu leaves voters down for the count

Thousands of Cuyahoga County voters arrived at the polls for the May 3 presidential primary to find workers didn't have keys to the voting place. Many who got in found voting machines that did not work or were still programmed for the 1971 Ralph Perk-Carl Stokes mayoral election.

One voter received a postcard directing him to a polling place that turned out to be a gas station. The attendant was as surprised as he was. Ohio Secretary of State Ted W. Brown called the county vote "the worst foul-up I've ever seen in an election in the United States, except for the fraud in Cook County."

U.S. District Judge Frank Battisti ordered the polls kept open until midnight, but many people still were unable to vote. Battisti then ordered a new election the following Tuesday in 34 precincts. It went smoothly, but some workers sent ballots to the wrong place to be counted.

When the count was finally com-

pleted, Hubert Humphrey had outscored George McGovern in Ohio for Democratic convention delegates. Dennis Kucinich — ostracized by his party for backing Perk for mayor — had won the Democratic nomination for Congress in District 23.

It turned out that the vote board had awarded no-bid contracts to politically connected firms, given patronage jobs to unqualified workers and spurned an offer of help from the voting machine manufacturer. Election Director Joseph Cipollone resigned and was replaced by Cleveland City Councilman Virgil Brown.

There were no problems in November. Richard Nixon won normally Democratic Cuyahoga County by 13,000 votes on his way to a landslide over McGovern. Ohio voters refused, 2-1, to repeal the state income tax. Dennis Kucinich fell 5,000 votes short of upsetting U.S. Rep. William Minshall, but vowed to keep trying.

— Fred McGunagle

LOOKING AT A YEAR

Feb. 21: President Richard Nixon makes his historic visit to China.

Mar. 24: Britain imposes direct rule on Northern Ireland.

May 16: Alabama Gov. George Wallace is shot by Arthur Bremer while campaigning for president in Laurel, Md. The shooting paralyzes Wallace from the waist down.

May 22: Nixon arrives in Moscow, and the first visit by a U.S. president culminates in a strategic arms agreement.

June 17: Five men are caught burglarizing the Democratic National Committee offices in the Watergate apartment complex in Washington.

Sept. 3: Bobby Fisher wins the world chess championship.

Sept. 4: U.S. swimmer Mark Spitz wins a record seven gold medals at the Olympic Games in Munich.

Sept. 8: Arab terrorists massacre 11 Israeli athletes at the Olympics.

Nov. 8: Nixon is re-elected in a

landslide over Democrat George McGovern.

Born: Ryan White, Oscar De La Hoya, Shaquille O'Neal.

Died: Harry Truman, J. Edgar Hoover, Jackie Robinson, Roberto Clemente, Adam Clayton Powell, Maurice Chevalier, Mahalia Jackson.