

OUR CENTURY

1997

AT A GLANCE

DNA puts Sheppards back in the news

Forty-three years after it first dominated the headlines, the murder of Marilyn Sheppard was back in the news. Sam Reese Sheppard, the son of Marilyn and Dr. Sam, held a press conference with his attorney, Terry Gilbert, and Dr. Mohammed Tahir, a nationally known DNA expert.

They reported that DNA analysis of evidence collected at the time of the murder appeared to implicate window-washer Richard Eberling. DNA analysis was unknown in 1954.

They said the report also bolstered their claim that Sam Sheppard had not murdered his wife. Sheppard served 10 years in prison before the U.S. Supreme Court overturned his 1954 conviction. At his second trial in 1966, he was acquitted. He died in 1970.

Now his estate was pressing a civil suit to have him declared officially innocent, not just not guilty beyond a reasonable doubt. That would enable the estate to sue for wrongful imprisonment and collect damages, possibly in the millions of dollars.

Eberling, who was in prison for another murder, denied involvement in Marilyn's death. Prosecutors maintained that the case was too old to be revived and that the law did not give an estate the right to sue. When Common Pleas Judge Ronald Suster ruled the case could go forward, they appealed.

Meanwhile, the son had Dr. Sam's body exhumed for further tests that might help prove his innocence. It was then reburied alongside the body of Marilyn, whose family no longer objected.

The temporarily teamless Cleveland Browns organization quickly met its target for selling premium seats in a stadium yet to be built. That meant the National Football League would lend \$48 million to the project, to be repaid by an owner yet to be named.

The new occupant was expected to be an existing team, possibly the Indianapolis Colts or the Minnesota Vikings. As the year wore on, it began to look as though it would be an expansion team instead. Bernie Kosar let it be known that he wanted to be part of the ownership.

Meanwhile, the Browns Trust, in charge for the time being, kept up fan interest with a tailgate party and a flag-football game between Browns and Pittsburgh Steelers alumni.

The new stadium, originally expected to cost up to \$230 million, was now budgeted at \$247 million, but in September Mayor Michael White said it was already \$12.8 million over budget.

As for the old Stadium, it slept with the fishes. The demolition contract called for the wrecker to dump part of the debris in Lake Erie, where it could provide a protected breeding ground for fish.

The Cleveland schools were falling further behind. Gerald Henley, a member of the now-powerless school board, blamed it on the state, which had been given control by U.S. District Judge Robert Krupansky.

In August, Gov. George Voinovich signed a bill allowing the mayor to run the schools. It called for him to appoint a nine-member board from 18 candidates nominated by a panel of civic, business and education leaders. A Plain Dealer/Gordon Black Corp. poll showed Clevelanders sharply split: 51 percent said they had little or no confidence that mayoral control would be an improvement.

Meanwhile, court supervision would continue. Lawyers representing the plaintiffs in the 24-year-old desegregation suit balked at the terms of a proposed settlement.

In 1993, a consensus-building White had won a second term with only token opposition. By 1997, an abrasive White had alienated many of his supporters. Helen Smith, an 18-year councilwoman, challenged him.

Despite an underfinanced campaign, she ran a strong second in the primary, with 40 percent of the vote to White's 55 percent. He stepped up his campaigning and raised his percentage to 59 in November.

White suffered an embarrassment when it turned out the city had inadvertently transferred \$615,000 to the activist group Black on Black Crime Inc. in March. The group kept the money, spending part of it on personal items.

At his trial, the organization's president, Art McKoy, said he thought the money might have been an anonymous gift from boxer Mike Tyson or baseball player Albert Belle. Along with Chairman Abdul Rahim Ali Hasan and Black on Black member Derrick Washington, McKoy was sentenced to prison.

"Why? Why? I didn't do anything," Audrey Iacona cried as she was led from a Medina courtroom past her sobbing family. The Highland High School senior had been convicted of smothering her newborn son and hiding his body in a trash bag.

Defense witnesses maintained the baby had died of an infection. Supporters staged a candlelight vigil on the city's square to protest her eight-year sentence for involuntary manslaughter.

Mike Fratello's Cavaliers entered the last game of the season needing a victory at Gund Arena to make the playoffs. Instead, they lost, 85-81, to the Washington Bullets, leaving their season record at 42-40.

Once more, they allowed the fewest points in the league. They tied a National Basketball Association record in December by holding the Utah Jazz to 57 points. But they also set a franchise record when they scored only 59 in a March game in San Antonio. Fans grumbled that the team was dull.

Photo researcher:
David G. Jardy
Plain Dealer Library

Just out of reach

By Fred McGunagle

The Plain Dealer called it a "magical season." The magic seemed to follow Indians catcher Sandy Alomar Jr.

At midseason, he was leading the American League with a .375 batting average and a 30-game hitting streak. So when he entered the 1997 All-Star Game lineup in the sixth inning, the record Jacobs Field crowd of 44,916 gave him an ovation.

When he came to bat in the seventh with the score 2-2 and a runner on second, he got another ovation. The fans rose to their feet as he lashed a line drive toward the gap in left center field. They went wild when it carried into the bleachers to give the American League a 4-2 lead.

The crowd kept cheering as Alomar crossed the plate and headed for the dugout.

In the eighth inning, the crowd chanted, "MVP! MVP!" When the lead stood up, the writers agreed. They made Alomar the first to win the most valuable player award for an All-Star Game played in his home park.

And when on Sept. 23 the Indians clinched again — coming back from a 9-2 deficit against the Yankees — it was Alomar who singled home the winning run in the ninth inning.

This was a different team from the Indians of 1995 and 1996. It won only 86 games, 12 fewer than the Yankees and 14 fewer than Baltimore. Few gave it a chance in the playoffs.

In the opener in New York, the Indians scored five runs in the first inning. But the Yankees hit successive home runs against Orel Hershiser, Eric Plunk and Paul Assenmacher for an 8-6 win. Then 21-year-old Jarret Wright outpitched the Yankees' Andy Pettitte for a 7-5 win.

Back in Cleveland, Paul O'Neill's grand slam led the Yanks to a 6-1 win. In the eighth inning of Game 4, with the Indians four outs from elimination, Alomar hit a two-run homer to tie the game. In the ninth, Omar Vizquel singled home Marquis Grissom with the winning run.

That made Game 5 winner-take-all, with the Indians' season riding on Wright. The Indians led 4-3 in the ninth with two out and O'Neill on second. With John Adams' drum pulsing, Jose Mesa got Bernie Williams to fly out.

"People jumped, stomped and hollered," The Plain Dealer reported. "They shook hands with people they didn't know. Strangers kissed strangers. Horns blared from passing cars."

The Orioles had ended the Indians' 1996 season, and things started out the same way in Baltimore. Brady Anderson hit Ogea's first pitch for a home run and later scored on a home run by Robby Alomar, Sandy's brother. Scott Erickson baffled the Indians for a 3-0 Baltimore win.

The next night, the Orioles led 4-2 with two out in the eighth, but Grissom hit a long three-run homer to give the Tribe a 5-4 victory.

Game 3 was among the wackiest in playoff history. With the score 1-1 in the bottom of the 12th, Grissom broke for the plate on a suicide squeeze. Omar Vizquel squared to bunt — and missed, according to Umpire John Hirschbeck. The ball rolled away from catcher Lenny Webster and Grissom scored. Webster argued in vain that Vizquel had tipped it. But it was scored a passed ball and a 2-1 win for Cleveland.

The next game was tied 7-7 in the ninth with two outs when — who else? — Sandy Alomar singled home the winning run. The Orioles kept the tribe from clinching in Cleveland with a 4-2 victory in Game 5.

Back in Baltimore, Charles Nagy and the Orioles' Mike Mussina matched scoreless innings. Then, in the top of the 11th, Tony Fernandez jacked an Armando Benitez pitch into the temporary bleachers in right.

In the bottom of the inning, the Orioles had a man on with two out and a 3-2 count on Robby Alomar. He took a called third strike from Mesa and the Indians were in the World Series for the second time in three years — and

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SPORTS FINAL

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MARLINS 3 World Series '97 INDIANS 2

What a ride!



Jim Thome is comforted by Indians strength and conditioning coach Fernando Montes after the game.

'I'm crying, but they still made us proud'

By JOHN F. HAGAN

PLAIN DEALER REPORTER

Cleveland fans wearied by three weeks of grueling post-season baseball saw their Indians season come to an ex-cruciating end last night at the hands of the upstart Florida Marlins.

But the team had won a

special place in the hearts of fans who bonded with the players, labeled underdogs all through the postseason.

Few Cleveland fans cared what others thought about the team. Rather, they had stuck with their team on every pitch of every game. Last night's loss didn't change that.

"They're still my team," said James Flitsky, 25, of Macedonia. "I can't say anything bad about them. They played with all their hearts. We'll still be with them all the way."

Flitsky watched the game on the 39 televisions at Shula's Steak 2 restaurant in Independence. Lynn Cashion, 24, of Northfield, added, "I'm crying, but they still made us proud. They'll come back next year."

Amidst the jubilation at Pro Player Stadium were a handful of Indian fans who sat stunned and quiet in their right field seats as the game ended.

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The Oct. 27 front page showed Jim Thome who, like Indians' fans, needed comfort. (Photo by Scott Shaw, Plain Dealer photographer.)

the second time since 1954.

In Miami, the Florida Marlins got to Hershiser for four runs in the fourth inning and went on to a 7-4 win. The Indians came back behind Ogea. Their 6-1 win was capped by Alomar's two-run homer.

The teams returned from balmy Miami to chilly Jacobs Field. In what Hargrove called "just about the ugliest game you'll ever see," the Indians made six errors — three of them in the ninth, when the Marlins scored seven runs. The Indians scored four in their half, but fell short, 14-11.

The next night was the coldest in World Series history, at 38 degrees. But the Indians hitters were hot and Wright's fastball was blazing. The Tribe won, 10-3; Manny Ramirez and Matt Williams hit two-run homers, and Alomar drove in three runs, giving him 15 for the postseason.

In Game 5, Alomar drove in three more with a homer, and the Indians took a 4-2 lead into the sixth inning. Then Moises Alou hit a three-run homer off Hershiser. With the Marlins leading 8-7 in the ninth and a man on, Alomar had one more chance for heroics. He flew out.

Again the Indians were on the verge of elimination, and the last two games would be in Miami. The Free Clinic opened a hot line for stressed-out Clevelanders unable to take the emotional roller coaster.

Ogea came through again. He gave up one run in 5½ innings and led the attack with a double and a single. Indians relievers held on for a 4-1 win.

The season came down to one



MIKE LEVY / PLAIN DEALER PHOTOGRAPHER

The end: Craig Counsell's grounder gets by Tony Fernandez in the 11th inning.

game. Fernandez singled in two runs in the third inning. Wright left with a 2-1 lead in the seventh. The Indians were two outs from being world champions when the Marlins tied it in the ninth.

In the 11th, a single and an error by Fernandez put the Tribe in a deep hole. Nagy intentionally walked a batter to load the bases, then got a force at home for the second out.

Then Edgar Renteria bounced a

ball over Nagy's head and into center field. The ball — and the world championship — were just out of reach. The magic had ended.

One fan summed it up: "I'm crying, but they still made us proud."

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LOOKING AT A YEAR

Feb. 4: A civil jury finds O.J. Simpson liable for the deaths of his ex-wife, Nicole, and her friend Ronald Goldman. He is ordered to pay \$8.5 million in damages.

March 27: Thirty-nine members of the Heaven's Gate cult commit suicide in California.

April 13: Tiger Woods becomes the

youngest golfer ever to win the Masters tournament.

June 13: Timothy McVeigh is sentenced to death for his role in the 1995 bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City.

July 1: Hong Kong returns to Chinese rule.

July 15: Fashion designer Gianni Versace is murdered on the steps of his Miami Beach mansion. Eight days later suspect Andrew Cunanan is found dead of a suspected suicide.

Aug. 31: Britain's Princess Diana dies in an automobile crash in Paris.

Nov. 10: A Massachusetts judge re-

duces the murder conviction of British au pair Louise Woodward from murder to manslaughter, paving the way for her return to England.

Deaths: Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping, poet Allen Ginsberg, underwater explorer Jacques Cousteau, actors Jimmy Stewart and Robert Mitchum.