



THE FIVE SADDEST SPORTS CITIES

by Noah Cutting

Photo via WCPO



If you're a diehard sports fan, it can be difficult to think of a particular city without that city's sports teams coming to mind. The Yankees are tied to the identity of New York City. The sunny shores of L.A. brings the Dodgers and Lakers to mind. It's hard not to think of the frozen tundras of Green Bay and Buffalo without remembering the Packers and Bills. For cities that have multiple teams, it's rare to have all of those teams succeed or fail at the same time, but some fanbases are far more tortured than others. Here, I will rank the five sports fanbases that have it the worst.

A couple of disclaimers: I only considered cities that have had multiple sports teams for the majority of their history. For example, Utah Jazz fans have had plenty to groan about after having their hearts ripped out by Michael Jordan in the NBA Finals twice and losing out on the chance to draft Cooper Flagg despite having the worst record in this year's draft lottery. However, they won't be on this list, since the Jazz have been the only team in Salt Lake City until last year when the NHL's Utah Mammoth arrived. Also, I only accounted for the success or failure of a city's NFL, MLB, NBA, and NHL teams (MLS, WNBA, or other leagues not in the "Big 4" were not considered).

#5 Atlanta

It is entirely possible that for generations, no one will be able to think about the Atlanta Falcons without thinking of their infamous "28-3" collapse in Super Bowl LI against the Patriots. Arguably the most painful and shocking loss in the history of the NFL, the Falcons held a 28-3 lead with 2 minutes left in the 3rd quarter before allowing 25 consecutive points to the Patriots, sending the game to overtime. Once the Patriots won the coin toss for overtime, it was completely predictable when Tom Brady led New England down the field to score and win his 5th Super Bowl championship. That loss alone would be a lifetime's worth of suffering for most fans, but the rest of the Falcons' history is similarly tortured. The team hasn't won a championship in their 60 year history and has made the playoffs just 14 times.

The NBA's Atlanta Hawks moved to Georgia's capital city in 1968 and that franchise hasn't won a title since 1958 when they were still based in St. Louis. In recent history, the Hawks had competitive teams and made the playoffs each year from 2008 through 2017, including a team with the best record in the Eastern Conference. But the team was plagued by frequent 1st round losses during that stretch, and when they did manage to advance, LeBron James' Cavaliers were often waiting for them, with Cleveland eliminating Atlanta three times. Trae Young led the team to the 2021 Eastern Conference Final, leading many to believe that the Hawks were on their way to consistent contention. But the team has taken a sizable step back since then; they have not made the playoffs since 2023, and Young has recently moved on to Washington.



#4 Minneapolis/St. Paul

There are twelve U.S. cities that currently have teams in all four of the U.S. major sports leagues. Eleven of those cities have gotten to celebrate at least one of their sports teams winning a championship since 2008. And then there's the Twin Cities, who have not had anything to celebrate with their four major sports teams since the Minnesota Twins won the World Series back in 1991.

Minnesota's teams have had plenty of postseason opportunities and regular season success, which makes the championship drought even more frustrating. The Vikings have the 7th highest winning percentage in the NFL all-time, the highest of any team that has never won the Super Bowl. The team has made the playoffs 32 times since 1968, but whether it was Brett Favre's shocking interception vs. the Saints in the 2009 NFC Championship game or Blair Walsh's game-losing, missed 27-yard field goal vs. the Seahawks in 2015, the Vikings continually seem to find heartbreaking ways to lose in the playoffs.

As mentioned previously, the Twins delivered Minneapolis their last championship with a World Series title in 1991. But after that success, the team didn't make the playoffs again until 2002, where they won their first round series before falling to the eventual World Series winners, the Angels, in the ALCS. That series loss turned out to be the start of a historic run of postseason futility as the team didn't win another postseason series until 2023. That stretch included a historic 18-game postseason losing streak, the longest in MLB history. While the Twins typically put a decent-to-good team on the field, they have rarely been one of the top contenders in the league and it is difficult to see them making a title run soon, particularly after trading away 10 players at the 2025 MLB trade deadline and looking likely to sell off further players in the upcoming season.

The NBA's Timberwolves have been around since the 1989-90 season. Like most expansion teams, they struggled for their first several seasons, but the arrival of Hall-of-Famer Kevin Garnett in '95-96 helped the team to a run of eight consecutive playoff appearances. Unfortunately, the team was eliminated in the first round in every year until the 2003-04 season when they made a run to the Western Conference Finals. The team came up short against the Lakers that season and it was a long wait for another postseason opportunity, with Minnesota not seeing the playoffs again until 2017-18. The arrival of Anthony Edwards in recent years has helped the Wolves return to perennial playoff contention and he may be the best hope of bringing the city a title in the near future.

The Minnesota Wild found quick success when they made a run to the conference finals in just their third season. The team has continued to be successful since; they have made the playoffs 14 out of their 24 seasons in existence. But like the other teams in their city, it's been failure after failure in the playoffs, with the team losing in the first round in 11 of their 14 appearances.

It is far preferable to cheer for teams that consistently have successful regular seasons and come up short in the playoffs rather than teams who are consistently bad and have little hope of contending. But at some point, every fan wants to see their team take home the ultimate prize, and the teams of Minneapolis have constantly come up short.



Photo via YouTube

#3 Phoenix

Fans in the desert have had it rough for much of their sports history as well. The Arizona Cardinals haven't won a championship in the Super Bowl era and haven't won any titles since 1947 when the team was based in Chicago. The team has only made 11 playoff appearances since 1947. Arizona did manage to make it to Super Bowl XLIII in 2009 but suffered a devastating loss to the Steelers thanks to Santonio Holmes' game-winning, toe-tapping touchdown with 35 seconds left. The team made a run to the NFC Championship game in 2015 with Carson Palmer at QB but were embarrassed 49-15 by Carolina. The team had future Hall-of-Fame wide receiver Larry Fitzgerald for 17 seasons and was only able to make the postseason 5 times in that span. In the recent Kyler Murray era, the team has largely been mired in mediocrity and it doesn't look like they will be title contenders any time soon.

The Arizona Diamondbacks delivered Phoenix their only championship to this point in the 2001 World Series when Luis Gonzalez stunned Mariano Rivera and the Yankees with a walk-off hit in Game 7, capping off one of the greatest World Series ever. The D-backs came into MLB as an expansion team in 1998 and have made the playoffs just 7 of 27 years since then. Still, the fact that the team has a championship means they are the most successful of Phoenix's teams and the team has been in contention the past couple of years, including a surprise run to the World Series in 2023.

The Phoenix Suns have been in existence for 57 years and have never won the NBA title. It's not for lack of regular season success, however. The team has the 5th best winning percentage in NBA history and 13 Hall-of-Famers have played for the team over the years, including Charles Barkley and Steve Nash. The team has made the NBA Finals three times, but has come up short each time, most recently in 2021. That 2021 team looked like strong contenders going forward, but after a 2nd round elimination in 2022, the team foolishly traded much of their young depth for aging veterans in Bradley Beal and Kevin Durant. Predictably the team got worse, and they didn't even make the play-in tournament in 2025. Durant and Beal are no longer with the team and while Phoenix was able to get some decent value back by trading Durant, they still face an uphill climb to be title contenders in the near future.

Until 2024, Phoenix had a team in each of the four major sports. Although, calling the Arizona Coyotes a hockey team is a bit generous. The team made the playoffs just 9 seasons out of 27 in Arizona and were eliminated in the 1st round in eight of those appearances. After years of incompetent ownership, repeated failures to acquire a new arena to play in and playing in a 5,000 seat college arena for years as a result, the NHL finally forced team owner Alex Meruelo to sell and the team relocated to Utah after the 2023-24 season.

The NBA's Timberwolves have been around since the 1989-90 season. Like most expansion teams, they struggled for their first several seasons, but the arrival of Hall-of-Famer Kevin Garnett in '95-96 helped the team to a run of eight consecutive playoff appearances. Unfortunately, the team was eliminated in the first round in every year until the 2003-04 season when they made a run to the Western Conference Finals. The team came up short against the Lakers that season and it was a long wait for another postseason opportunity, with Minnesota not seeing the playoffs again until 2017-18. The arrival of Anthony Edwards in recent years has helped the Wolves return to perennial playoff contention and he may be the best hope of bringing the city a title in the near future.

#2 Buffalo

The Buffalo Bills have been around since 1960, the Buffalo Sabres have been around since 1970, and in all of that time, neither team has been able to bring Western New York a championship. In the case of the Bills, it's not for lack of trying. Led by Hall-of-Famers Jim Kelly, Thurman Thomas, and Andre Reed, the team made it to four straight Super Bowls from 1990-1993. But Buffalo found a way to do something that no other franchise in sports history has done and that's lose four consecutive championship games/series. It started with the infamous "Wide Right" missed field goal in Super Bowl XXV against the Giants, where kicker Scott Norwood missed what would have been the game-winning field goal as time expired. That turned out to be the closest the Bills would get to a title as the team lost the next three Super Bowls by multiple scores, including a 52-17 embarrassment at the hands of the Cowboys in 1992. They haven't been back to the Big Game since. In recent years, Buffalo has returned to championship contention thanks to NFL MVP QB Josh Allen. Unfortunately, the Bills play in the same conference as another guy named Patrick Mahomes, who continually finds ways to end Buffalo's season in heartbreaking ways. The Bills are 0-4 vs. Mahomes and the Chiefs in the postseason and couldn't take advantage of Kansas City missing the playoffs in 2025 by falling in the divisional round. They can only hope that 2026 will be their year to finally get back to the Super Bowl.

The Buffalo Sabres have been a mildly successful franchise for much of their existence, making the playoffs 29 times in their 55-year history. But the team is currently stuck in the longest playoff drought in the four major sports, finishing out of the postseason for 14 straight years. The team hasn't won a playoff series since 2007. Buffalo has made two appearances in the Stanley Cup Finals, losing both of them, including a crushing and controversial triple-overtime loss to the Dallas Stars in 1999. The team has gone through rebuild after rebuild in recent years, but can never seem to get it right. Despite having talented players such as Ryan O'Reilly and Sam Reinhart go on to win championships with other teams, Buffalo has had no such success. This looks to finally be the year the playoff drought ends with the Sabres currently leading the Atlantic Division as of this writing and looking like they may finally have the pieces to make a playoff run. Buffalo fans hope that the season won't come to another disappointing end.

#1 Cleveland

Some have called the Cleveland Browns a “Factory of Sadness” due to their incompetent organization and constant failure to put a competitive football team on the field in recent years and that’s not a bad description of Cleveland sports as a whole. The city holds the record for the longest championship drought in American professional sports at 52 years, with the Browns, Indians/Guardians, and Cavaliers combining to win zero championships from 1964 to 2016. It is only thanks to LeBron James and Kyrie Irving leading the Cavs back from a 3-1 series deficit to defeat the 73-win Golden State Warriors in the 2016 NBA Finals that has stopped the drought from going on even longer.

The Browns were quite successful early on in their history, advancing to 7 NFL championship games in 8 years in the pre-Super Bowl era from 1950-1957, and winning 3 titles. The legendary Jim Brown led Cleveland to another NFL championship in 1964, the Browns’ last title win. The team fell to the Packers in the 1965 championship game, the last to be played before the advent of the Super Bowl, and Cleveland has never made it back to an NFL title game since. Despite continuing to be competitive through the rest of the 1960s and into the 70s, along with a very successful run in the 80s, the Browns continually broke their fans’ hearts in the postseason and eventually the team moved out of Cleveland altogether, with the franchise relocating to Baltimore in 1996. Football returned to Cleveland in 1999 thanks to a new expansion team, but since then, the Browns have made the playoffs just 3 times in 27 seasons and haven’t made it past the divisional round. They had just the 2nd 0-16 season in NFL history during 2017. One stat sums up Cleveland’s misery more than any other: the team has started an unbelievable 42 quarterbacks in 27 seasons since 1999. There could be pages and pages written on the incompetence of the entire Browns organization, from ownership to the front office, from coaching to the Baker Mayfield and DeShaun Watson debacle, but I’ll refrain from going any further or this article will be way too long.

Of course, Cleveland also has two other teams that also have tortured histories. The Cleveland Indians/Guardians have the longest active championship drought in baseball and haven’t won the World Series since 1948. The team had virtually no success from the 60s through the 80s, a period which included infamous moments such as Ten-Cent Beer Night (if you know, you know). The team lost World Series in 1995, 1997, and 2016, with the ‘97 and ‘16 losses being particularly crushing. In ‘97, the Indians blew a 9th inning lead in Game 7 of the series and went on to lose the game in extra innings. In 2016, Cleveland matched up against the Cubs in the World Series and held a 3-1 series lead before losing 3 straight games, including another crushing extra-inning Game 7 loss. The team has had playoff success in recent years, but haven’t been back to the World Series, and ownership seems unwilling to spend the money that is needed to build a true contender.

The Cleveland Cavaliers have been fairly successful for much of their history, with 25 playoff berths in their 55 seasons and the city’s lone title since 1964, as previously mentioned. LeBron James’ two separate stints with the Cavs proved to be very successful, with the team advancing to five NBA Finals and winning the NBA title in 2016. Unfortunately, the team continually ran into the Golden State Warriors’ dynasty in the Finals and was not able to bring home any more championships. Recent Donovan Mitchell-led teams have had regular season success but haven’t advanced beyond the 2nd round.

Just the fact that Cleveland fans have to deal with the Browns might be enough to vault this city to the top of the list, but when combined with 2 other teams who have had plenty of failures in the regular season along with crushing losses in championship games/series, it’s clear which fanbase in America has it the worst. Clevelanders are certainly thankful to have Ohio State football to cheer for.



Photo via ESPN