



## NORMAN EINSTEIN'S SPORTS & ROCKET SCIENCE MONTHLY

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NORMAN EINSTEIN'S 1: JUNE 2009 WE ARE THE NORMAN EINSTEINS BY CIAN O'DAY  
 REVOLT OF ORLANDO: REALITY'S REMIX BY JAKE LEMKOWITZ  
 FITTED FOR THE CITY BY CIAN O'DAY  
 LONG PLAYER: PERFECT PLAYOFF BASKETBALL  
 SOUNDTRACK BY JOEY LITMAN

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### NBA Playoffs X French Renaissance Painting?

No doubt, echoes of Anne-Louis Girodet's *Revolt Of Cairo* reverberated throughout this year's Eastern Conference Finals. The best of seven series between the Orlando Magic and the Cleveland Cavaliers was a clash of ideologies before a single basket scored. Even though Orlando presented serious matchup problems for Cleveland, with the exception of Sir Charles, every so-called expert from the *LA Times* to the *Daily News* picked Cleveland to win easily. The Vegas line had the Cavs taking the series at -850, reflecting the fanatic national obsession with an ultimate LeBron versus Kobe showdown.

Even people who otherwise cared nothing for basketball were excited by the idea. Why?

For the same reason that last year's collective wish was a Celtics versus Lakers Finals: the popular imagination is goddamn unimaginative.

Casual fans demand their Playoff basketball imbued with classical themes: a trite sense of timelessness, storied rivalries, clashes of titans, slow-motion replays. Aesthetically, Orlando

is disconnected from all this historical mythology. Their uniforms still scream *expansion team*. Their coach looks like a used car salesman.

On the other side of the court, LeBron attached the Cavs to a nonstop stream of Jordan allusions, *SportsCenter* special reports, and general James/Bryant hype.

There was a moment when I thought a face-off between Cleveland and Los Angeles would be the greatest thing to happen to the sport in years. But, the longer the playoffs went on, the clearer it became that rooting for LJ to make the Finals really meant rooting for Vitamin Water, Nike, ESPN, and State Farm. Based on the fact that the mainstream sports media began blowing up a hypothetical Kobe/Bron series literally weeks before it was a feasible possibility, there is no way that it would have been reported on honestly. Cheering for the Magic became a form of resistance against hyper cross-sponsorship and prepackaged sports drama.

The depiction of the battle in Girodet's *Revolt Of Cairo* presents an interesting parallel. The painting was commissioned by Napoleon's First Empire to commemorate France's brief occupation of Egypt. But *Revolt Of Cairo* is a subversive work, it might be considered a form of protest. You go in thinking that the artist is rooting for his patrons, the colonial Europeans, and against the Muslim natives.

But as art historian Darcy Grigsby points out in *Extremities: Painting Empire In Post-Revolutionary France*, Girodet is actually more sympathetic in his depiction of the Arabs. Their expressions are displayed clearly, while the main French protagonist's face is concealed in shadow.

"In Girodet's painting of colonial warfare," Grigsby writes, "it is the insurgents not the French colonizers who are aligned with the classical narratives of passion, loyalty, and courage so revered within the French tradition."

Grigsby goes on to extensively point out for many pages how homoerotic the painting is. Dead bodies luxuriate in casual erotic poses, even that decapitated European head grins with sensual pleasure.

Napoleon wanted a painting full of clear-cut heroes and villains, a mythic clash of civilizations. But the result was something weird and morally ambiguous and therefore closer to reality.

The same is true for the results of these Eastern Conference Finals. The results may disappoint the powers-that-be and people of Cleveland. But for the rest of us, especially those who care more about basketball games than shoe commercials, Orlando's 4-2 victory made this battle real.

Behold the Remix:



[Jake specializes in finding the unseen forces of basketball in art and photos at [Bread City Basketball](#). Recently a Master of Fine Arts, be prepared for when he trades the "Fine Arts" part in for "the Universe."]

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