

We Could All Learn a Thing or Two From Fans of Lousy Sports Teams

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When I attended a Washington Wizards open practice at D.C.'s Capital One Arena earlier this month, the focus was more on spectator entertainment than *Rocky*-style workouts. The season opener was a week away, and the players ran drills at half speed and engaged in silly skills competitions for fans, including a basketball version of Connect Four. But as a lifelong Wiz devotee, I was having an awestruck, love-you-man moment. Here I was [posing for a photo](#) with Phil *freakin* Chenier. Franchise royalty. My childhood idol. Back in the 1970s, when Chenier was draining jumpers and sporting a Richard Pryor mustache, the team routinely chased titles. These days? Not so much.

Being an NBA fan who loves the Wizards is a little like being a foodie who adores turnips: It just doesn't make sense. Since the 2000–01 season, only the Knicks and Timberwolves have [lost more games](#). The franchise last advanced beyond the second round of the playoffs in 1979 (back when they were called the Bullets), and they've missed the playoffs [16 of the past 25 years](#). We fans have endured 40-plus years of frustration and disappointment, mainly from the typical issues—bad defense, bad draft picks, bad trades—but sometimes from ... weirder ones: One All-Star player was charged with a gun felony *involving a teammate*, and another was once suspended without pay for being overweight. It's all [#SoWizards](#), to use a Twitter hashtag.

And yet, I made it out to the open practice with a few hundred fans on a Tuesday night, wearing a Wizards T-shirt and feeling the faint, irrational warmth of preseason hope. Anyone can root for a winner. That's easy. Last season, the NFL teams with the [top-selling merchandise](#) were the Cowboys, 49ers, Patriots, Steelers, and Chiefs. Each team finished with a winning record. In Philadelphia, the currently undefeated Eagles and the World Series-bound Phillies have generated a [20 percent or more increase](#) in business for local restaurants, sports bars, and memorabilia stores.

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