

Stuck at the Kids' Table

Written by {ga=riverburns}

Sunday, November 25 2012 2:00 PM - Last Updated Sunday, November 25 2012 12:32 PM



The clock is probably ticking on those leftovers. They say you've got two hours to refrigerate it, and just four days to eat it. It doesn't matter how much there is, it sure would be a shame to have to throw any of those leftovers out, but there's something worse than wasting leftovers, and that's being left out.

Adults do it to their peers; children do it to each other at school and adults do it to their own children at the holidays.

Good God, there's nothing worse than being stuck at the kids' table when you're sophisticated enough to hang with the adults.

It's the ultimate segregation of the generations; it feels like incarceration, especially when you have kids' table seniority. That's right about when you realize that you don't belong there; that the get-together is better served with you mingling amongst the adults, but you don't rate.

It's a clear case of age discrimination, but who are you going to present your case to?

You're just stuck.

Sports fans will try to trap you at the kids' table if you display any loyalty to a team that doesn't have a track record that puts them in consideration for "Game of the Week" status on a regular basis.

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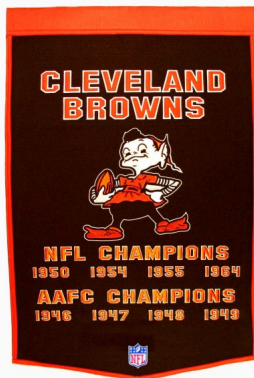
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It's as if I can't speak to the filthiness of Michigan baseball during the Fab Five era because Ohio State got caught up in something that could loosely be described as a "scandal" two decades later.

I also happen to be a fan of the Cleveland Browns, which apparently voids and nullifies any and all opinions I have on the NFL. While it's true that I might contaminate any aspiration of objectivity with the Browns or Steelers by watching the Browns so intimately, and allowing the team from Western Pennsylvania to frustrate me so much, I don't see why I can't have an original thought about the Bears, or the Saints. What is it about liking a team that happens to be led by Pat Shurmur that says my opinion on Lovie Smith, Ken Whisenhunt, or Norv Turner is out of line?

Savvy drafting, salary-cap management, the playoffs, and the Super Bowl are all off-limits because these are all basically foreign concepts to my favorite team.



If I don't like your team's quarterback, maybe I should keep my mouth shut until my team finds one. If I don't approve of a professional athlete getting a DUI, maybe I should worry about the person that Donte Stallworth killed (because I obviously co-signed on that one, being a Browns fan and all) before chiming in with a humane opinion on the subject. If your team failed, at least they aren't the stinking Browns.

And, if your team benefited or got screwed by a questionable call, perhaps my team should win a game, or make the playoffs every now and again, before I weigh-in.

In the water-cooler, pub, and cyber-world of NFL Roundtables, I'm stuck at the damn kids' table.

You see, the Browns were crowned Champions of whatever league they were playing in eight times; half of those titles came in the only four years that the All-American Football Conference existed, the other half came in what was then, and is now, known as the National Football League. All of those Championships occurred well before my birth in 1978, which wouldn't be a

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big deal if they were called "Super Bowls". But, because they weren't Super Bowls, they don't count and I'm a loser that's never won anything.

So goes the word of the Pittsburgh Steelers fan.

Now, I do know a handful of people that are actually from the geographical area that I would describe as "near-Pittsburgh", but that handful is but a small percentage of the group that we've come to know as Steelers fans. People in Western PA, West Virginia, and even some outlying areas in Eastern Ohio can justify rooting for the Browns former rival in the same way that people in Lake, Summit, and Lorain counties are naturally fans of the Orange and Brown.

As for the rest, I just roll my eyes and shake my head in disgust at their poor life choice, most especially those in the part of Northeast Ohio that I would classify as Greater Cleveland.

You simply don't root for the city's rival.

That's what is difficult about all of this; from the kids' table, I see a rivalry. I hear enough of the scuttlebutt from the grown-ups to know that the Browns-Steelers rivalry that I used to know has gone the way of my belief in the tooth fairy.

People like me tend to respect anyone and everyone that acknowledges such a thing ever existed, as if the Browns bitterness for the Steelers ever reciprocated.

We don't like when NBC, CBS, and ESPN tells us that the Ravens have taken our spot in the conversation, even though we know deep-down that it's so true.

It's more than just being on the wrong end of an ass-kicking; that we can handle. Like children, we don't matter.

Regardless of our opinion, we might as well be the kid from Jerry Maguire, just spouting off random facts and being generally annoying.

I'm old enough to remember that the Steelers beat the Browns in Pittsburgh for sixteen straight years, but that level of one-sidedness didn't mean it ceased to be a rivalry.

Two of those games in Pittsburgh went to OT, and eight of them were lost by less than seven points; in fact, Cleveland was 10-6 on the home half of the series during that span, but it doesn't matter.

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All anyone hears from the ignorant Browns fan is, "D'you know that bees and dogs can smell fear?", or, "D'you know that my next door neighbor has three rabbits?" It has gotten so bad that some of our own are turning on us.

Sure, our claims on the extremely subjective title of Best Fans could certainly be called into question for a number of reasons, but unless you root for the Jacksonville Jaguars or Arizona Cardinals, you should most definitely raise your hand and volunteers your team as the one with the best fans.

Our own media has shot this down with statistics, not to mention a narrative of the scene at a home game with Buffalo this season.

When you sit at the kids' table, there's always an adult around to make sure we're eating our veggies.

When children do wrong, they probably can't sit there and speak of everything they've done right to counter the notion that they're "always misbehaving", unless they happen to be a particularly evil seed. As I sit within earshot and plain sight of my guardians at the coveted regular table, I know that I'm that bad seed.

If you've got a minute, literally a minute, I can tell you about all the times that Pittsburgh didn't get the best of the Browns in their expansion era.



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They won in 1999 on a Phil Dawson kick as time ran out at Three Rivers; it was their second and final victory of the season. In 2000, the Browns were victorious at home when the Steelers were unable to line up for a field goal as the final seconds ticked off the clock.

In 2003, in front of a prime time audience on ESPN, Tim Couch worked the Steelers as if he were the second coming of Montana; the Browns have yet to win at Heinz Field since that night.

Finally, on a Thursday night in 2009, one of the coldest in NFL history, the Browns sacked Ben Roethlisberger seven times and won 13-6 in Cleveland.

Is my minute up yet, because that's the whole story of how the Browns aren't completely owned by Pittsburgh?

It's more than just Pittsburgh. There are some fans that just watch the Browns and no one else; when the game is over, they're at peace with whatever happened until next week.

They don't listen to Rizzo or Dustin Fox break down the performance, or read what Grossi or Mary Kay have to say about the past or the future, and they sure as hell don't Tweet, gamble, or play Fantasy Football.

Those fans are fine; in fact, I'm glad to have them, but they aren't the ones that have any place formulating opinions on the general news around the league.

However, a lot of us do have interest in the other things going on around the NFL, even if it's just things that may indirectly affect our beloved Browns, or we're just trying to enjoy the other games that Channels 8 and 19 think we'd like to see.

We have to keep it ourselves though. We know the Eagles are a mess; you don't need Sunday Ticket or a key to NFL Films to understand that, but bite your tongue because you root for a team that lost to them, eleven weeks ago. Cincinnati didn't have an indoor practice facility until about two years ago and Marvin Lewis is questionable, at best, as a Head Coach, but the Browns lost to them in Week 2....and, didn't the Browns have an issue with staph in Berea recently?

Maybe we can talk about Phillip Rivers and Norv Turner; after all, the Browns beat them 7-6.

We saw that one with our own eyes.

Not so fast, it was an ugly game, so it doesn't count.

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What's that, Browns fan? Norv Turner should be fired? Yeah, and Pat Shurmur must be the second coming of Lombardi or Coryell.

When was the last time the Browns were in the playoffs, I forgot?

In other words, grown folks are talking about grown folks business.

Drink your Shirley Temple, and shut your pre-pubescent face.



And, it goes on and on and on. What can we do? Short of going out and buying a Yankees hat, a #6 Miami Heat jersey, and looking for distant relatives with ties to the Allegheny region on ancestry.com, all we can do is wait. We

wait for our team to get better, and hope the next fourteen years are better than the last fourteen.

In the meantime, we call the radio and bitch.

We log on to Facebook and Twitter, and we bitch.

We call our friend and loved ones to bitch some more.

When a seed is planted that suggests one of our rivals has a player that may have committed heinous crimes, we hope that they really did some terrible things and have to face real-life

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consequences. This is equivalent for hoping an aging loved one kicks the bucket to free up a seat the big table with the adults. It just isn't nice, but we are genuinely disappointed when things don't come to fruition, and no one is charged with rape or murder.

Like your Great Uncle who smells like spoiled milk and can only consume mashed potatoes through a straw, the acquitted criminals play a starring role every Sunday.

One day, Browns fans may even get there, to a reality where have double digits in the loss column isn't assumed every year. Our press conferences won't be compared to any form of arson and our friends around the country won't be aggravated if the networks throw Cleveland a bone with the prime time slots. We'll sit at the table like we belong, not as fish out of water a la 2002 or 2007, but we'll break bread as peers with friends and strangers that have Broncos or Packers affiliation.

If we point out that the Steelers are at a disadvantage playing at Denver because Ryan Clark makes a difference, well, people will still belittle us, but not because we don't matter.



What's lost in reaching our destination at the big table, or what will probably be lost, is that it isn't a big deal once you get there. Cloth napkins are nicer than paper, but we weren't solely bothered by that at all. Yeah, so we're drinking from real glassware versus paper cups, and that's cool, but we're still bored by the conversation.

We still don't love the green bean casserole, but we do like that we can load up on meat and potatoes here.

If we aren't eating prime rib, we aren't satisfied on the whole, even if we are better off than we were when our plates had faded pictures of characters from The Land Before Time on them.

In this context, the prime rib is obviously the Super Bowl, and only the juggernauts get to eat prime rib all of the time. One day, we'll get there, but we know that day isn't going to be today. Just like the adults, we put on our team colors and unconditionally love everything about them.

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We may be capable of saying and writing the same things that they are, but people might listen when they speak because they are sitting real chairs.

We're surrounded by high chairs and booster seats, sitting on a Sit N' Spin, wondering what it will take to upgrade our status.

A win or a series of Browns victories over the Steelers would be a good start. Until that happens, let's take advantage of these lids on our cups that prevent spills.

What we have to see at Cleveland Browns Stadium already makes enough of a mess.