



No one understands better than a Cleveland Browns fan the need, the longing desire, the unattainable dream, to change the narrative of this moribund franchise. As usual, that will have to wait for at least another year as the Browns finished off their latest crash into the concrete wall that is the Pittsburgh Steelers in their usual spectacularly awful fashion, losing this time by the rather generic score of 27-11 and coming out with the usual bloody nose and busted lip.

There's a perverse comfort in the numbing sameness that the Browns are on a week by week, year by year basis but it isn't the same as actual comfort. That comes, if at all, when someone in charge does something about not just the talent level in this organization but its heart. There is none. There's just a sinkhole, ever expanding, ever widening that no one yet has found a way to fill. It's why there is no reservoir of emotion to call upon when needed. There's just an eternal canyon in this franchise filled at best with the depressing detritus of 14 years of abject futility in the form of owners, coaches, and players come and gone. Happy Thanksgiving, everybody!

There are no words left, really, to describe another Steelers victory over the Browns. How does one exactly go about explaining the same loss in a different way? Let me try anyway.

In the 30 games these teams have played against each other in the Browns 2.0 era, the Steelers own a 25-5 record and have won 14 of the last 15, which covers nearly 8 years of abject ass kicking. You can't have a rivalry if one team won't participate.

Let's try again.

The Steelers dominated the Browns once again Sunday. That's not news. It's also not news that the Steelers did so by dominating in the manner that speaks to the essence of the divide between these teams. The Steelers, struggling in ways that an aging great franchise occasionally does, showed that when necessary it can still play with more purpose, more physicality and more heart than these Browns have ever showed. It's still hard to find the right tone.

Ok, focus. Screw it. The Browns did what the Browns do which is lose to the Steelers. The details aren't particularly important but here are a few.

First in assessing the team's performance Sunday consider giving a pass to Josh Gordon on given that he did tied a franchise record for catches in one game, 14, and set another for yards, 237. That's nice, it really is. Not to diminish Gordon's contribution though, the context is important. The overwhelming bulk of those yards came long after the Browns and the cold, brave fans had surrendered any hope of making the game competitive. Still since something should be celebrated once in awhile, let's at least consider that a sober Gordon is a talent to be reckoned with. I'd put even money that his first call after the game was to his agent asking exactly when he'd be a free agent so he could go to a team that plays on prime time more than once every two or three years. Otherwise he has no Pro Bowls in his future.

So with Gordon as the notable exception, let no one rejoice in the mess that the Browns have now put on full display these last two weeks against division opponents. From opening bell Sunday until the final gun came, mercifully, 4 hours later there was not one thought one could have gleaned about a positive future for this team.

Those looking to the defense as a source of burgeoning pride, look somewhere else. For much of the season, it had been stout. The last two weeks, when the season was at its tipping point, it failed. Sunday the Steelers were able to do if not everything it wanted, then most of it anyway. True the box score suggests something different. For example, the Steelers had 85 yards rushing on 34 attempts, which is pretty much where the defense has held most teams this year. They also had only 217 passing yards. That's a pretty low total overall and generally is a hook to hang on to. It's just that sometimes statistics don't tell the whole story.

The Steelers came out in a no huddle offense, which strangely seemed to catch the Browns' defense off guard. Running back Le'Veon Bell wasn't necessarily doing any significant damage early but certainly the threat of him seemed to likewise keep the defense off balance. That gave Ben Roethlisberger enough time to pick and poke at the rest of the defense as if he was carrying a long pole and checking the depths of a pond nearby. There were little flicks of passes here, an occasional run, and then a deep ball. Eventually that led to the Roethlisberger to Antonio Brown 41 yard touchdown that more than anything seemed to put the team, not just the defense, in a funk as if they had already surrendered to the cold and accepted that it would be a long, miserable day.

The Browns' offense was its typical messy self. There was no running game to speak of even when one ignores the 21 yards debited for the 3 sacks. The Steelers' Bell had "only" 80 yards total but the Browns collectively had 76, not including the lost yardage on sacks. To put a finer point on it running back Chris Ogbonnaya had a fumble for the second straight week that set up the Steelers' second field goal.

The passing attack was disjointed until, again, garbage time. Prior to that, Jason Campbell gave what Jason Campbell has, twice. Knocked out early for one play, Campbell left the second time after a shiv to the chin which led to another turnover. It caused a concussion for Campbell and a headache for the fans who wanted to see Brandon Weeden about as much as they wanted to see an oral surgeon. Out came Brandon Weeden, nonetheless, as there are no other alternatives on the roster.

A chorus of boos greeted Weeden unceremoniously. He probably took it personally but shouldn't. The fans understand Weeden's significant limitations as much as they detest the idea of watching a movie again that they didn't much like the two or three other times they sat through. And just like a movie on continuous loop this one turned out like every previous viewing. Weeden gave what he had, which was a pick 6 interception and then, later, a 1 yard touchdown pass to Gordon. Truthfully, he did nothing of note on either side of the ledger, the pick 6 was as irrelevant to the final outcome as the touchdown pass. His crowning achievement, such as it was, was his steadfast reliance on bolstering Gordon's stats. Before that, Weeden was his usual ineffective self leading a team that simply doesn't believe in him.

The players who claimed disappointment afterward about the fans booing Weeden probably shouldn't be so snippy. They see first hand what Weeden has and hasn't done and they play accordingly. Fan reaction to that can't be unexpected. It's also not like these same players have done much the last few weeks either. When it comes to Weeden on Sunday, the best that can be said and all that really should be said is that his ineffectiveness wasn't particularly contributable to the defeat nor notable from that of all his predecessors, the vanquished dozens of quarterbacks before him who have likewise failed to stand up to the Steelers in any meaningful fashion. Numbing sameness indeed!

It might be nice if one of these Browns-Steelers games was closely contested and perhaps the one in two weeks will be. But even if a victory does come in Pittsburgh it will be too late to be meaningful. The Steelers are hanging by a thread anyway having started the season 0-4 and may be out of that thread by the time they meet the Browns again. If not, then soon anyway.

The Browns on the other hand started the season with few threads and surrendered all they had, obviously, a week ago against the Bengals. This Steelers game was for pride and perhaps that's why a loss seemingly like all the rest still hurts more than it should.

There's still several weeks left in the season that the front office gave up on weeks ago. All of this makes for another cold depressing march, especially for the faithful who cared to purchase season tickets in the eternal hope that the tag line that comes with the solicitation for such tickets, "season ticket holders have priority for playoff tickets," will for once not be another empty promise. Not this year and maybe not ever.

This Browns franchise isn't UPS or FedEx. It's not even the USPS. Deadline or obligation be damned. It doesn't ever deliver.