



The Cleveland Browns lost last Sunday, and this is a bad thing. We want to see the Browns win on Sundays so we can feel vindicated investing not only the three hours spent watching the game, but all the hours spent watching training camp practices and preseason games and reading about who the new gunner will be on punt coverage and all the other minutiae involved in religiously following an NFL team. When the Browns lose it makes us feel...whatever the opposite of vindicated is.

I'm also cognizant of the fact that the Browns losing this past Sunday will help them acquire a higher draft pick than if they had won, and that selecting higher in the draft will probably help the team more in the long run than beating the Jets would have.

Welcome to the wonderful world of Fantanking, where fans all around the league get to wrestle with the idea that their team has reached the point of no return, the point of the season where their team is better off losing games than winning them.

The idea of fantanking was brought to the forefront for me when I read [this piece](#) from Deadspin's Drew Magary (probably better known for his GQ profile of [Jesus' cranky uncle](#)

). His overarching point is that under no circumstance does it make sense to root for your team to lose, as that is the antithesis of what it means to be a fan. I can't argue against that premise;

or more accurately, I don't think I WANT to argue with that premise. I want to think that I am always rooting for the team in the orange hats to win when I watch the Browns play.

Problem is, I don't know if that's always the case, at least for me. I struggle sometimes to reconcile my desire to see the Browns win on Sunday with the knowledge that they are probably hurting their long-term outlook in the process.

There are a couple questions I try to work through when it comes to fantanking, the foremost one being: what constitutes a successful season in the NFL? Is 8-8 a successful season? Clearly expectations play a huge role in defining success; an 8-8 record would have been a massive disappointment for, say, the Denver Broncos. But for the Browns, an 8-8 record this season would have been a success considering they lost double-digit games each of the past five seasons and an 8-8 record would have kept them in the playoff hunt through Week 17.

That being said, the Browns certainly did reach that point of no return, where the playoffs are all but out of reach and vestiges of the draft begin to enter fans' minds. For the Browns, that point came after they blew the Jacksonville game, where they were unable to spare fans the ignominy of having their team get beat by Chad Freakin' Henne. That's the point where everyone knew with certainty that the 2013 season would be a lost one (although I suppose the Browns could have won out and finished at that magical 8-8 mark, which is part of the reason I'm struggling with this to begin with).

All of that leads to my next question: what is the marginal benefit of winning a game versus losing it? I'm of the opinion that it ultimately does not matter whether the Browns finish 4-12 or 5-11 or 2-14 or 6-10; those are all shitty seasons.

Or, to think about it another way, what kind of fond memories can one take from a 5-11 season? Let's take a look at the Mangini Era. The Browns had two of their more exciting wins in recent memory during [Mangini's second season](#), when they took down the [Saints](#) and the [Patriots](#) in back-to-back games (with a bye week in between). I do have fond memories from those games; the sight of David Bowens running two interceptions back for touchdowns against the Saints won't be something I soon forget. But as fun as those games were, my overarching takeaway from that season was that the team played terribly far more often than they played well.

Those two wins got the Browns to 3-5 that season. They went on to lose their next two games and their last four overall to finish the season at 5-11, giving them the sixth pick in the 2011 draft, a spot they traded out of so they could select Phil Taylor twenty-first overall and eventually draft Brandon Weeden the following year. The first pick in the 2011 draft was Cam Newton.

This isn't to say the Browns should lose all their games or that teams can only become good after having the number one overall pick. Eventually you have to draft good players, and there are plenty of good players that can be drafted sixth or twenty-first overall. But it is true that the Browns have been hurt by never being quite bad enough, by always finishing at 4-12 or 5-11, never low enough to get that top pick and get that franchise quarterback.

Would I trade the memories of beating Drew Brees and Tom Brady in consecutive games during a 5-11 season to have Cam Newton as the quarterback? I would, but it's never that simple. The prior year the Browns won their last four games after starting 1-11 to finish 5-11. The prize for being the worst team in the NFL that season? Sam Bradford.

So there's obviously some luck involved; the right player has to be available and the proper management must be in place to know whom the right player is to pick. But it's still better to be picking higher than lower in the draft. Is that worth losing out on the memories of out-of-nowhere upset victories? I'm honestly not sure.

The Browns play again this Sunday in Pittsburgh, and I know they again will be playing with only fond memories of a lost season to gain and draft position to lose.

Do I want the Browns to win on Sunday? My answer is still yes. I just don't know if I believe myself.

Jeremy Klein is an unabashed Cleveland Sports fan who thinks now is a great time to start following the Premier League if you haven't already. In a league typically dominated by Manchester United and Chelsea, [several teams](#) can realistically win the title this season, a rarity in European club soccer. You can follow him on Twitter

[@PapaBearJere](#)

Read More From Jeremy Klein:

[Cleveland Indians: Evaluating The Rest Of The Free Agent Starting Pitchers](#)

[Cleveland Cavaliers And David Murphy Notes](#)

[Drew Stubbs, Ryan Raburn, And The Indians' Right Field Situation](#)