

Since returning to the league, the Browns are 3-14 against the Steelers, 3-15 if you count the playoff loss in December 2002. They've lost eight straight games in the rivalry, many of them in humiliating fashion. Erik Cassano says that things need to change on Sunday. Things need to change because this is one of the rare times that a Browns team can actually do it. This Browns team possesses the capability to beat the Steelers.



This can't go on forever, right?

Sooner or later, the Browns have to beat the Steelers.

Heck, if the quotes floating around out there are true, even the Steelers are getting

[little annoyed](#)

[a](#)

by the non-competitive state of what was once one of the NFL's marquee rivalries.

The Browns-Steelers rivalry deserves much better than what the Browns have been able to bring to the table since 1999. Since returning to the league, the Browns are 3-14 against the Steelers, 3-15 if you count the playoff loss in December 2002. They haven't beaten the Steelers since a 33-13 fluke of a game in October 2003, losing eight straight times since.

The Steelers' wins have included three shutouts, none of them close: a 43-0 clubbing in the nationally-televised return of the Browns in '99, a 22-0 blanking that wrapped up the Three Rivers Stadium era in 2000 and a 41-0 whitewashing on Christmas Eve in 2005. The past two meetings, a 27-7 Pittsburgh win last

December and a 34-7 trouncing in this year's opener, were lopsided enough to qualify as shutouts if not for a couple of irrelevant Cleveland touchdowns.

In other words, John Cooper can gather together the tattered shreds of his record versus Michigan, and still look with disdain upon what the Browns have been able to accomplish against the Steelers the past eight years.

Things need to change on Sunday. Things need to change because this is one of the rare times that a Browns team can actually do it. This Browns team possesses the capability to beat the Steelers.

The past four years have been a procession of inept coaching, devastating injuries to key players, and above all, an endless stream of mind-numbingly bad play from the quarterback position.

For the first time since Marty Schottenheimer famously denounced playcalling as overrated, the Browns offense actually has its shit together. The line is blocking, the rushers are rushing and Derek Anderson is zipping laser beams to a group of talented receivers who make big plays.

No more do 21-6 deficits look like Mount Everest. No more does this team collapse like a house of cards at the first sign of trouble. No more are the Browns psychologically defeated the instant they run out of the tunnel.

It's time to take advantage of that fact. The Browns need to beat the Steelers this Sunday.

Don't hit me with nickel-and-dime negativity, like the reports that Eric Steinbach and Seth McKinney might have to sit this one out. Don't burden me with statistics about how our defense has the viscosity of warm

Cheez

Whiz. That shouldn't matter to a team that believes it can win. And this team does. Or it should.

The Browns have clawed their way through the wilderness of Gary Baxter and Le Charles

Bentley, of Kellen Winslow's motorcycle crash and various other woeful twists of fate that would make even the staunchest optimist begin to believe that maybe there is something to the whole Cleveland Curse thing. They somehow emerged

in 2007, after the most recent thumping at the hands of the Steelers
, to field a good football team seemingly by accident.

But whether by accident, design or divine intervention, the Browns are 5-3 and can tie Pittsburgh for the AFC North lead with a win on Sunday.

Cleveland's football team finally has a reason (many reasons, actually) to approach Sunday's contest without the usual heaping tablespoon of utter dread. They owe the fans, the city, and the history of this rivalry at least that.

One win wouldn't erase eight years of misery on Browns-Steelers Sundays. But in a region where rivals routinely get the better of our teams, it would help reduce the swelling in our bruised collective pride.

I wouldn't be asking if I didn't think this Browns team was capable of it. But they are. And now, as they have done all season, they have to go out and prove it.