

Brutal weekend for Cleveland sports fans. The Buckeyes fell 28-21 on Saturday to Illinois, ending their unbeaten season and trainwrecking their national championship aspirations. Then, just as the wounds were starting to mend, the Steelers raced back from a 21-9 deficit to defeat the Browns 31-28 in Yinzer Land. Suffice it to say ... my two and a half year old learned a couple new words this weekend. Brian McPeck relives the weekend that was in Cleveland sports.



Not Yet Ready for Primetime
Encouraging?

Maybe.

But isn't anybody else sick and tired of searching for silver linings? Just a little bit?

The Browns 31-28 loss in Pittsburgh was certainly closer than the opening day debacle on the lakefront.

But the scoreboard and the standings simply don't care about improvement or moral victories. A better team beat the Browns Sunday. The Steelers trailed 21-6 at one point and showed no signs of being able to stop Derek Anderson and the Browns offense. Josh Cribbs, Braylon Edwards and Kellen Winslow made big 1st half plays to stake the Browns to their lead. Brodney Pool made a nice play and a great catch to pick off Pittsburgh QB Ben Roethlisberger and set up Edward's terrific TD catch.

But then came halftime.

Up 21-9, the Browns would not pick up another offensive first down until their final, harried drive. The Steelers adjusted at the half and came out firing on all cylinders both offensively and defensively. If not for an amazing 100yd kick return for a TD by Cribbs, the Browns may well have laid an egg on the board in the 2nd half.

This is a Browns team that is accustomed to playing from behind and not anywhere near used to playing with a lead. That showed in the 2nd half.

This is a Browns team that can't put any pressure on the QB without risking a blitz and exposing some young and injured defensive backs. And when they do bring extra defenders and pressure that leaves holes for QBs able to run and take advantage of some open space. That showed in the 2nd half.

It wasn't just the talent on the field that was outclassed on Sunday. Steelers coach Mike Tomlin maintained his poise

and made the proper adjustments at the half. Browns coach Romeo Crennel and his staff, meanwhile, did not.

Crennel and his coaching staff seemed powerless to stop Roethlisberger and the Steelers offense in the 2nd half. And Crennel also, inexplicably and inexcusably, spent two timeouts to review one play that was clearly a TD catch by Steelers TE Heath Miller. That lost timeout would loom large in the final minute of play and was directly responsible for Browns PK Phil Dawson attempting a 52yd field goal on the Browns final play. Rather than having to spike the ball to stop the clock on 3rd

down to get Dawson on the field, the Browns could have had another crack or two at advancing the ball closer to Dawson's comfortable range.

Obviously it played out a bit differently than that.

But for those of you who must have that silver lining:

The Browns did go into a hostile environment and they did give the

Steelers everything they wanted plus some. They served notice that their rise is not a fluke.

This is all part of the growing process. The Browns are like your young kids. And each can be painful to watch and live with at times. They'll do some things that make you proud as hell one minute and then they'll do something horrifically inappropriate the next time you turn round. We're sick of saying it and we're sick of reading it, but these are growing pains and they aren't going away this season. Each week they have grown,

either through actual accomplishment or in learning what it takes to improve. Sometimes that has a very hollow ring to it when the clock ticks to zero.

But sometimes that's all you have.

Straight Up Beaten Up

Out-gained, out-rushed, out-passed, out-classed and simply out-played.

That's the story of how the OSU Buckeyes lost their undefeated season, lost their national

championship hopes and lost their game to the Fighting Illini of Illinois on Saturday afternoon.

Ron Zook and Illinois came into Columbus and pretty much kicked sand in the face of the country's #1 ranked team.

Illinois answered an early TD

from OSU with one of their own. They consistently took the punches from Ohio State and came back with counter-punches of their own. They led 21-14 at the half and looked as comfortable in the Horseshoe as the Buckeye marching band.

Sophomore QB Juice Williams threw four TD passes and never made the critical mistake

that has defined his time in Champaign up to yesterday. When the Buckeyes took away his receivers he simply outran the OSU defense on multiple occasions to gain big chunks of yardage and pick up critical first downs.

Todd Boeckman was as uncomfortable as Williams was poised. He was rarely able to set and throw. Illinois defenders

got consistent pressure on Boeckman and rare was the occasion he wasn't forced to throw while his feet were moving. Uncomfortable and pressured all day, Boeckman threw three interceptions, including one in the Illinois end-zone to snuff out a promising drive, on his way to a season worst effort.

Some fans will blame Buckeye

Head Coach Jim Tressel and some will blame Boeckman. But this can be pinned squarely on the shoulders of the offensive line and on the defensive front seven. The Buckeyes were not able to keep the wolves from nipping at Boeckman's heels and the lauded OSU defense was never able to make a stop when it mattered most or to force a turnover from the Illini offense.

Sometimes it's really not the coach or the officiating. Sometimes you just get outplayed and get your ass handed to you. That's what happened yesterday.

As a result of OSU playing its worst game of the season at the worst possible time, those boorish bastards that suckle at the teat of the SEC, as well as the rest of the nation, are

vindicated in their belief that OSU was overrated and undeserving of mention in the same breath as their squads and they are safe from seeing the Buckeyes back in the national championship game come January. They're also spared from an OSU-Michigan game next Saturday that features anything but a couple decent teams playing for a Rose Bowl bid. Michigan's loss at Wisconsin on Saturday and the OSU loss later in the day

confirmed in the nation's mind that the Big10 this season isn't even the Big 2.

Still, for those of us here in Ohio who know this OSU team as a very capable football team, a Rose Bowl bid and a win over Michigan would validate the Buckeyes season. For Ohio State, the wakeup call that Illinois sent Saturday should serve them well for next

Saturday in Ann Arbor. It's Michigan week with a BCS trip to the Rose Bowl on the line. Not to mention you're coming off a game where you were just punched in the face. That should be enough to not only spark the Buckeyes but should also keep their fire burning.

Does He Drive the Bus Too?

Never been one to say, 'I told you so', but what the

hell.

The Cavaliers have pretty much given up on the charade of having Daniel Gibson and Damon Jones masquerade as point guards on this current 6 game western road trip. Instead, they have consistently put the ball in the hands of the one guy on their roster that can

both make plays and create open looks for others.

LeBron James once again is carrying the Cavaliers offense. He's doing it with a supporting cast that might not be able to beat you, me and three of our friends. And James is

doing it from what is essentially the point-forward position. He's averaging over 27ppg, he's shooting 40% from three-point range and he's dishing out over 7 assists every night he takes the floor. In short, he's playing at an MVP level and he's getting teammates open looks.

Jones and Gibson are definitely contributing. Gibson is connecting on 55% of his shots, even higher (56%) from three-point land, and is contributing 13+ppg. Jones is averaging nearly 8ppg while shooting 40% on his 3-point attempts. Together, they average just over 4 assists per game.

Interestingly, the Cavs are 2-1 on this trip without Larry Hughes. It's been a week since he "bumped his knee" in Phoenix and, sadly, the Cavs offense is much better without him in the lineup. Hughes has some talent; there is no question about that. But his game is a poor fit for this Cavalier

squad and his absence only confirms that fact.

The problem is that James is going to have keep up this pace all season and into the playoffs if the Cavs hope to have any chance to reach the postseason and advance past a round or two. Getting Hughes

and Eric Snow back is only going to curtail whatever success the offense is enjoying without them. There is a noticeable difference in pace and effectiveness when those two plodders are on the floor and the entire offense struggles. James is somewhat neutered by not having the ball and creating scoring

opportunities for himself and his shooters as he goes.

What LBJ is doing is buying the Cavs some time as well as creating some wins. But we're only 6 games into an 82 game schedule and there's no telling how much gas

LeBron will have in the tank down the road. He's a singular talent capable of taking over games against teams like Golden State and Sacramento, but he will run into a wall when facing teams that are capable of taking him out of the offense. Especially if that offense revolves around anyone other than James himself.

The Cavs are limited by a lack of talent and depth on their roster. They're getting next to nothing from Hughes, Snow and Donyell Marshall. Those three account for nearly \$24million in salaries this season and are likely unmovable in trades. We'll soon see how Head Coach Mike Brown plans to deal with the situation,

especially when Hughes and Snow are healthy enough to take the court.

If Brown has any thoughts of turning this offense back over to either of them, he may be writing his ticket out of town by penciling them into prominent roles. He has his effective point

guard. The fact that that point guard happens to be a 6'8" and 250lb forward should make no difference in his decision.

I'd Be Remiss

Happy Birthday wishes to my youngest daughter Kacie who turned 7 on Saturday. Kacie opened gifts in

front of family at
halftime of the
OSU-Illinois game. I
mention this only
because one of those
gifts was a guitar given
to her by mother-in-law.
Very thoughtful, no?
Just terrific.

Hey, maybe she'll be

the next Melissa
Etheridge....umm....Jani
s Joplin....umm....Joan
Jett...umm...damn.
Maybe she'll be the
next Jewel. She's
already a real gem.
Happy Birthday Kacie.
You can play that guitar
Monday through Friday
from 8am to 6pm.