

Yes, kids, the Preseason does matter.



A View From The Cheap Seats

Week 1 - Cleveland vs. Dallas

Well, at least we expected it.

At least those of us that live in a little place I like to call *Reality*.

Yes, kids, the Preseason *does* matter. If you paid attention to the Preseason, and believed the lessons it taught you, then you were ready for this pounding because you knew the Browns themselves were *not* ready. The injuries, the lack of reps by 1st Teamers, the lack of playing time, the lack of cohesion, the confusion - it was evident that this team was not ready to tangle with a Superbowl contender.

Here's the good news:

1. Eventually, the Browns *will* be ready to play.
2. The Cowboys are probably the best team the Browns will have to play all year.
3. The Browns got their asses kicked in the season opener last year, and then came back and had a pretty good season.
4. Other teams looked worse, so at least they're not the ugliest girl at the ball.

And the bad news?

1. The Steelers and their legions of unwashed rag-waving fans are coming to town, and they *ARE* ready.

Obviously, a win against the Hated Ones from that dismal city on the shores of a few muddy rivers would completely and instantly wash away the bitter taste of yet another Opening Day blowout. If asked to choose which game they'd rather win, 9 out of 10 Clevelandites responded "Pittsburgh";.

In a rare act of optimism, I will state that I am not too worried about the Dallas loss. It's the first game of the year, and Romeo never seems to have his teams ready for the start of the season (and, yes, I agree that this is not a good thing and I will discuss this later).

I also believe that the Browns will improve rapidly, that they will play much better against the Steelers, that the game will be much closer, and that Cleveland has a chance for victory.

Will they win? Well... the Browns seem to have this eensy-weensy image problem as far as Pittsburgh is concerned. The Steelers are in their heads. They either get blown out, or blow a game they should have won.

My head tells me the latter example will be the instance this week. But my heart... actually, it says the same thing.

Still, a close game would be a blessing compared to the yawn-fest that occurred vs. the Cowboys. And, who knows? Maybe the Browns accidentally win it.

Pregame

I threw my back out last week, and re-tweaked it on Saturday. When I woke up on Sunday morning, that sucker was spasm-ing like a crack addict in detox.

I could barely stand.

So I popped a few muscle relaxers, some pain killers, and a bloody mary (for emphasis), then laid down on the floor in front of the TV with a heating pad secured to my back and the remote control secured to my hand.

By the time the Browns game rolled around, I was in an apathetic haze, tired, pained, and fully expecting a disheartening loss. Needless to say, this was the least excited I've ever been for a Browns Opening Day Game. Ever. By far.

At least I was numb as I monitored the speed of the Browns pass rush by the sun dial I have on my end table. I didn't even yell at the TV (which is unheard of)... well, at least not until that useless Field Goal in the 4th Quarter.

Then the meds instantly wore off, the pain went away, and all I knew was fury.

First Quarter

The Browns received the ball first, and, after a well constructed screen to Jamal Lewis for 14, it looked like they were up for a solid drive. But, on 3rd and 1 from the DAL 45, Derek Anderson fumbled the snap, and that was it.

Personally, I felt that failed conversion was the game. It may sound loco, but that's how I felt. When playing a superior foe, the underdog team cannot miss an opportunity.

That was their chance to jump on top early and maybe hang with the big boys.

'Twas not to be.

Sure enough, the Cowboys went down the field like a hot knife through margarine. The Browns were unable to get any pressure on Tony Romo with a standard rush, so they blitzed.

The blitzes didn't get there either.

Romo had time to hum the entirety of *Stairway to Heaven* to himself before throwing, before finding Jason Witten wide open.

Without pressure, Linebackers cannot guard Jason Witten.

Especially not our LB's.

It didn't take long for Marion Barber to plunge in from the 1 yard line.... **Cowboys 7, Browns 0.**

There was a common theme on the next drive; intermediate completion to Kellen Winslow, drop on a long ball by Braylon Edwards. The first drop would've been a tough catch up the sideline, but I count it as a drop because, well, Braylon's drops annoy me and he does it all the time.

The second drop was on a deep ball up the middle that would've been a sure TD, but Braylon butchered it like a prize hog.

He said the sun was in his eyes... bzzzzzt!

Two drops for you, Mr. Edwards!

His tribute to Travis Wilson, perhaps.

The drive would've been killed when Anderson got his ball batted down by heavy pressure on 3rd and 6, but Dallas bailed him out with a nice Hands to the Face penalty.

After converting a nice 3rd Down pass (on a rollout) to Steve Heiden, the Quarter ended with the Browns 2nd and 4 at the DAL 9.

End of 1st: Cowboys 7, Browns 0.

Second Quarter

Jason Wright ran it to the 4 for 1st and Goal, but the drive almost got stymied there. Fortunately, on 3rd and Goal from the 3, Adam Jones tackled Braylon as he went for the ball, which is considered a no-no, and the Browns got a bonus 1st Down.

2 plays later, Anderson, rolling to his right again, hit Winslow for the Touch.

Browns 7, Cowboys 7.

And just when you thought the Browns were back in it... The Browns, well rested and ready to prove themselves, let the Cowboys go 69 yards in 4 plays. Mike Adams had poor coverage on Patrick Crayton for 18. D'Qwell Jackson was unblocked, but just stood there, not filling the huge gap that Barber ran through for 23.

Then Brandon McDonald let Terrell Owens get behind him for an easy 35 yard TD catch.

Man, this new Defense was awesome!

Cowboys 14, Browns 7.

Next, Lewis finally had a good run, although the hamstring seemed to hamper him a little, and the Run Blocking was depressingly mediocre. But, on 3rd and Short,

the ball was dropped by - guess who? - yep... Braylon!

The Cowboys got the ball again, and Pam Oliver reported that, on the Browns sidelines, D'Qwell had ordered the Defensive Backs to "stop somebody";. Heal thyself, Dr. Jackson. Like you did anything but suck all day. But, apparently, someone was

listening to DQ, because, on 3
rd

Down, Romo dropped back, had more than enough time to quilt a blanket big enough to cover Nebraska before he threw it (I mean, it was ludicrous), but Brandon McDonald flew up to knock down the pass.

Shockingly, the Browns had forced a punt.

Here's how the Browns O responded: Illegal Shift, Anderson got hit as he threw and the ball fell harmlessly incomplete, Braylon dropped easy #4 (which didn't really matter since he was also guilty of an Illegal Shift), and then DA almost threw a pick. I started wondering what was on other channels.

Then Dallas did what good teams do. With just over 6 minutes left in the Half, they marched the field, killed the clock, and killed the Browns.

Trying desperately to hold on, the Browns had Dallas in 3
rd
and 8.

And they actually got some pressure on Romo, so he was forced to dump it off to Barber about 5 yards short of the 1
st

But D'Qwell totally whiffed on his "tackle" attempt, Barber spun around, and viola!

We have a 1
st
Down.

Romo was finally sacked by Robaire Smith, but Brandon McD got the Hands to the Face penalty to kill it. On the next play, Andra Davis made a nice play, stepping in front of the Romo pass, but dropped the INT.

Had he caught it, he could've run to Toledo.

But he didn't, and when you blow your opportunities, yes - you know the old saying - Marion Barber waltzes into the End Zone shortly thereafter.

And the Browns trotted into Halftime to a chorus of Boos.

Halftime: Cowboys 21, Browns 7.

Third Quarter

We can only imagine that the Browns got their asses chewed out during the break, because they actually applied pressure on the opening drive of the 4th. TO got called on an Offensive Pass Interference, Shaun Rodgers flopped on Romo, and the Browns actually muscled the Cowboys into a punt.

However, DA threw the 3rd and 2 pass somewhere far out of bounds, and the Browns got to punt it back.

Cleveland looked to keep up its pressure, and Romo actually got hit so hard that his chin required some love. Browns fans appeared to cheer the supposed injury, but I have to assume that they were cheering the Browns actually appearing to have testicles.

Sadly, Cleveland couldn't figure out Witten - yet again - and the drive continued on a 19 yard pass on 3rd and 5. That brought it back to Reality. On 3rd and 4 from the CLE 15, Sean Jones, Mr. Expensive Free Agent, couldn't bring down Barber, and the Cowboys got to carry on.

Appropriately, Felix Jones came in for his 1st NFL carry and plowed through the center of the Browns line for an 11 yard TD.

Cowboys 28, Browns 7.

At this point, I was finding much more entertainment from the baby-trading-stock commercials.

Derek Anderson and the Browns O roared back and... went 3 and Out.

The Browns D, tired and depressed, showed few signs of resistance on the following drive. But, on 2nd and Goal from the 4, Eric Wright beautifully undercut the Romo pass to TO, and the ensuing pick saved the Browns from horrible humiliation.

Well, OK, fine, it didn't.

The Quarter ended with a great 24 yard run by Jamal Lewis, and perhaps the optimists amongst you out there thought there was still hope.

End of 3rd: Cowboys 28, Browns 7.

Fourth Quarter

The Browns had the Cowboys right where they wanted them. No team cannot be confident when down by 21 at home with 15 minutes to go.

How could they lose?

After the promising start, the Browns drive continued. And suddenly we were transported into a Preseason game.

DA converted a 3rd and 10 to Syndric Steptoe. Then Steve Sanders caught an 18 yard pass. The Browns got down to the DAL 21, but Braylon got himself a nice False Start penalty.

On 3rd

and 12, Anderson got hit from behind, fumbled forward, but Steptoe picked up the indiscretion and moved it to the DAL 17 for a 4th

and 3.

Down by 21. 10 minutes left. Go for it, right?

Apparently not. Phil Dawson came onto the field to a cascade of Bronx cheers, kicked the FG, and the Browns were still down by 3 scores. More on this later.

Cowboys 28, Browns 10.

The Cowboys went into Prevent Offense and the Preseason theme continued, as Dallas fielded mostly backups. That was inconsequential as, despite 2 consecutive Offensive Holding calls, the Cowboys managed to move the ball down the field, killing the clock, and finally kneeling at the CLE 13 to take mercy upon all our souls.

Which is the most humiliating thing they could do.

Final: Cowboys 28, Browns 10.

Offensive MVP: **Kellen Winslow.** Because he can actually catch the ball.

Defensive MVP: **Eric Wright.** Because he didn't suck as much as most, and

he actually created a turnover.

Conclusion

~~~I've heard all the excuses. I've heard all the rationalizations. But it ends up that if you're a Dallas Cowboys fan that grew up in Northeast Ohio, then you are a frontrunning #\$\$\*sucker.

That means you, LeBron.

~~~The Browns Defense gave up 487 - 487!!! - freakin' yards. To severely understate - that AIN'T GOOD.

~~~Ah, and now to the topic that everyone wants to discuss - the Field Goal.

The Situation:

10:13 left in the game. Dallas leads by 21, 28-7. The Browns, having done nothing on Offense the entire half and struggling to stop the Cowboys on any possession, have finally moved the ball to the DAL 17.

It's 4  
th  
and 3.

### The Result:

Instead of trying to convert the relatively short 4<sup>th</sup> Down deep in Dallas territory and score a TD to cut the Cowboy lead to only 14 (a 2 possession game), Romeo Crennel opted to have Phil Dawson kick a FG, which left Dallas with an 18 point lead - still a 3 possession game.

With that much time left in the game, and the Browns lack of Defensive success to that point, kicking a FG with 10 minutes left was the equivalent of holding up your hands, crying like Dick Vermeil, and begging your enemy for mercy. It was a pitiful attempt at saving a little face, and every single fan in that stadium knew it.

You know what kind of message that sends to the fans, to the players, to the rest of the NFL?

*That we're scared.* That's what.

The Excuse:

Romeo said in his press conference later, *"I wanted to put some points on the board.*

*" We still had 10 minutes to go. A lot of things can happen. If you don't make it*

*(the 4*

*th*

*Down)*

*, then where do you go?*

*If we had gone for it and missed, you'd have asked why we didn't kick the field goal.*

*There were 10 minutes left, and a lot can happen in 10 minutes*

*."*

The Rebuttal:

Horseshit. That's a pathetic explanation. *"I screwed up." I was wrong. I must've been mixing muscle relaxers, pain killers, and vodka.*

*It was a terrible decision*

*."*

That's the explanation I'm looking for.

Let me ask all of you a question. Which do you think is more likely? A) The Browns convert a 4

th

and 3.

Or B) The Browns score 3 straight times, plus stop the Cowboys Offense 3 straight times, all in the space of 10 minutes.

Take your time. It's a difficult question.

How many of you answered B? Let's see a show of hands. Anyone? Anyone? Anyone choose B?

Romeo, no one would ask you why you went for it on 4<sup>th</sup> and 3 because THAT IS WHAT YOU HAD TO DO IN ORDER TO GIVE YOUR TEAM ANY SHOT WHATSOEVER OF WINNING THE DAMN GAME.

If it failed, well, you lose by 21 instead of 18. But since you went for the FG instead, it brings into serious question your decision-making abilities.

If you polled every single football coach at every single level since the dawn of time, I bet the percentage that would opt to kick a Field Goal in that situation would be less than the square root of pi multiplied by Ohio's Blood Alcohol Level (which comes to, incidentally, about 0.14%). Even the dead groundhog in my backyard knows that was a dumb call.

It was so bad that now you've got people questioning your integrity, that maybe you were trying to avoid covering a spread, that there were evil intentions in your game manipulation. I personally don't buy that for a second, but that, Romeo, should indicate to you the magnitude of your stupidity regarding that decision.

It took you exactly one game to take that chair of yours and toss it back in the fire pit. Real smooth, RAC.

~~~And while I'm at it, even though everyone from here to Greenland was perfectly aware that you didn't have this team ready to play this game, it still doesn't excuse the fact. Why is it that your teams are never prepared for live action come Week One? Certainly, one could fall back on the explanation that the Preseason injuries seriously derailed the team's cohesion, but the fact that you ran a Club Med training camp to "save" your team for the Regular Season sort of ceases to make sense when the team you so kindly "saved" starts out by playing the Regular Season like it's Preseason.

There's no reason to "save" a team for the Postseason run when they have no shot of getting into Playoffs due to a terrible start.

Is this job too hard for you, Romeo? You don't want your players to feel like you're a big meanie?

Think of it this way: You are the parent. They are the children. What's more important to you - to be friends with your kids?

Or for them to grow up right?

~~~If this team cannot muster more QB pressure than they had against Dallas, the team is ripe for disaster.

~~~I love Jamal Lewis. He runs hard, and he never goes down easy. But it's easy to see that he's not 100% right now, because Jason Wright was somewhat more effective when he was in there.

And supposed backup Jerome Harrison didn't have one carry - not one.

Even the best RB needs a series off here or there. And I, for one, want to see a little more Harrison on the field.

~~~After one of Braylon's many drops killed yet another drive, he and DA walked off the field together, and Derek was holding up his hands, as if to show Edwards how a Wide Receiver was *supposed* to catch a ball.

*“You've got to catch it with your hands. You have to hold them out in front of you, and, when the ball comes, you just sort of... grab it*  
*,”* DA said.

*“Oh, that's a good idea! All this time, I've been trying to catch it with my ego*  
*.”*

~~~The Browns Defense just looks SLOW. They couldn't even sniff the QB, the LB's and Safeties couldn't stay with Witten, the CB's couldn't stay with the Receivers. On one play in particular  
in the 2nd Quarter,
Marion Barber ran the ball.

The Browns had the perfect D - the middle was clogged.

So Barber ran it to his right.

There were plenty of Defenders over there; they should've strung the play out for a loss, or at least no gain.

Instead, he outran the LB's to the corner, turned it upfield, and got a 10 yard gain.

Mel Tucker has a Herculean task in making this talent-deficient Defense Playoff-worthy.

~~~I'm starting to give up on Kam Wimbley. I don't want be too reactionary, but he's not showing me anything that says

*Elite Pass Rusher*

TM

He seems to me like a Geometry Major. He feels like he's doing a disservice to his degree if he's not running the entire circumference of the pocket.

~~~I'm not on the Phil Savage fanwagon right this second, but he made a smart move in the first week of the season. He kept Phil Hubbard, a rookie WR out of Wisconsin, based on sheer measurables and potential.

Hubbard was clearly an inferior receiver - right now - compared to Steve Sanders and Travis Wilson.

Yet they both got cut because Savage didn't feel Hubbard would make it through waivers to the Practice Squad.

But, once the rest of the teams had their rosters set and the season had begun, Savage stuffed Hubbard on waivers and brought up Sanders. A very smart move.

~~~I don't know how many times the Browns players' helmets came off, but it was a large number.

Can't the Browns even make sure the helmets fit?

~~~Several times, I saw Terry Cousin sent on the blitz. Really? Are you serious?

That's your answer to Romo and TO and Witten and Barber?

Terry Cousin?

Needless to say, he never caused any pressure.

~~~If we have a bunch of players that can't even tackle Tony Romo, even if the game were two-hand tap, why in the hell aren't we seeing any Alex Hall?

~~~Wade Phillips has some serious man boobs.

~~~Anyone want to amend their playoff predictions?

You lose your franchise QB, and the next thing you know, you're lucky to beat Kansas City. At home.

Suddenly, Pittsburgh having to play New England and the Browns having to play Buffalo is a decided advantage for the Steelers.

Throw in the fact that San Diego and Indy hardly lit up the world. Especially Indy, getting absolutely Browns-ed at home by the Bears.

And the Bears most definitely ain't the Cowboys.

~~~Good for you, Aaron Rodgers. You played very well in your first game as starter, and you deserved the win.

~~~Vince Young got hurt in the Titans game versus the Jaguars.

People in Nashville must be doing backflips.

Coaches and front office men often do not make the right choices.

Your mailman, the waitress at Olive Garden, the greeter at Wal-Mart, and the little paraplegic kid at your daughter's school may all know what is right for the team, but, due to "player development" and "the salary cap", coaches and GM's make errors left and right.

And if you think that I'm saying that the Tennessee Titans are a better team without Vince Young... yes, that's exactly what I'm saying.

~~~I tried the Volcano Taco from Taco Bell. It ain't hot. Not even close.

False advertising on the level of "*The Name On The Door Is Cleveland*."
ot;

Next Up

~~~The Pittsburgh Steelers.

I have stated and re-stated my absolute abhorrence and loathing for the team that wears black and yella. And time and again I've made a special effort to point out my utter disdain for the fans of that team.

Each year my hatred builds. I ponder why this is.

I didn't hate the Steelers nearly as much when I lived in California. *Why?*, I ask myself.

Simple.

There were no Steelers fans around to annoy me when Pittsburgh annually and

inevitably beat my Browns.

Now, they're everywhere. You can't open a sewer drain without finding one.

It's of even greater frustration for me to sit back and watch the children of Ohio drifting off to Steeler worship. *How can this be?*, I ask. The answer is simple.

Some parents don't care enough to mandate to their children that this abomination should not occur. Children, left to their own devices, see that there are two NFL teams in this area that have a large following. And one of them always always always beats the other.

Kids don't find so much pride in loyally supporting a sad-sack team. They'd rather root for a winner.

This year, the Steelers were reported to have been weakened on both the Offensive and Defensive line. They were ripe for toppling, some said. The time for their disgrace had finally come, and maybe, just maybe, if they spent as much time in suffering and despair as the Browns have spent since 1994, the scales would finally balance out to "fair", and the local fanbase would ebb back across the border.

Reports of the Steelers demise were greatly exaggerated, as they came out and smashed the Houston Texans 38-17, dominating in all ways possible. Their Defense was just as good as it has always been.

Their Running Game showed no signs of slowing down.

Ugly Ben still looked poised.

Sigh. It sickens me.

Therefore, my scouting report for this game is the same as it has been for a long time... Browns will have trouble stopping the run... Browns will have trouble running the ball... Steelers will probably dominate the time of possession... blah blah blah blah blah blah.

Yet I still have hope for this game. I don't care how good they looked against Houston - Pittsburgh is not Dallas.

Is it too early to call this one a "must-win"? Yes.

But it sure feels like it.