

Next Monday, the eyes of the football-watching world will somehow find their way to Cleveland via ESPN. That's because, somehow, the Browns found their way onto the Monday Night Football schedule for 2009. As we all know, a couple of attention needy Browns fans have captured headlines due to their proposed protest and subsequent meeting with owner Randy Lerner. In Erik Cassano's latest, he gives us his thoughts on this circus, and his suggestion on how angry fans should do to make sure their voice is heard.



Next Monday, the eyes of the football-watching world will somehow find their way to Cleveland via ESPN. That's because, somehow, the Browns found their way onto the Monday Night Football schedule for 2009.

It's a divisional game versus the Ravens, an AFC Championship Game participant a year ago. Outside of Baltimore, Cleveland and the football junkie section of the U.S. population -- the kind that would watch the Rams play the Lions, even with no rooting interest, just because it's football -- there is no reason for anybody to build their evening around this game.

The Ravens, trendy Super Bowl picks at the outset of the season, are kind of sputtering along at 4-4. They'll be coming into town fresh off a 10-point loss to the suddenly-successful Bengals, stuck in the wild card chase pack behind Pittsburgh and San Diego.

The Browns are 1-7, and needed a botched kick return to even get the "1" on their record. They haven't even been competitive in six of their seven losses.

When these two teams met in Week 3, the game was so comically lopsided that Brady Quinn was benched for Derek Anderson halfway through. Anderson injected maybe half a quarter of life into a stone-dead Browns offense, but the Ravens still cruised to a 34-3 win.

It's a game ESPN would probably like to hand back to CBS for Sunday airing. The Browns would probably just as soon skip out on the national publicity right now,

too. A 27-point pounding is bad enough on a regional Sunday broadcast. A 27-point pounding in front of the nation -- an apathetic nation, granted, but still all 50 states -- is exponentially worse.

It is against this backdrop of an underachieving football team playing a bottom feeder on the NFL's biggest weekly stage that an enterprising Browns fan would like those of you unlucky enough to have tickets to tell Randy Lerner, and the nation, how you really feel about the state of your team.

"Dawg Pound Mike" Randall, one of the more visible Browns fans (you can tell it's him by the giant dog bone he wears on his head), along with fellow Browns fan Tony Schafer, want everyone in attendance to refrain from entering the seating bowl prior to kickoff. Just long enough to let ESPN begin their broadcast and present their establishing stadium shots with no one in the stands.

It seems the primary objective of Randall and Schafer is to create more accountability on the part of Lerner and the front office. He wants Lerner to address the fans publicly and take his verbal lumps for the sorry state of the Browns organization.

Randall and Schafer received several thousand e-mails from other fans supporting their stance and demanding more accountability out of Lerner and the team's football decision-makers. They presented some of the e-mails to Lerner [during a meeting last week](#), The Plain Dealer reported.

If Randall and Schafer want to lead a demonstration, fine. Public demonstrating has been an integral part of the American experience ever since a few guys [threw crates of tea into Boston Harbor](#). But if Randall and his crew want real change and real accountability, a delayed mass sit-down in front of a disinterested nation isn't the way to do it.

Why? A few points:

1. You're not telling Lerner anything he doesn't already know.

The team is awful. The fans are upset. We demand answers. We want the responsible feet held to the fire for this mess. Lerner knows this.

It's not like he's going to see an semi-empty stadium, possibly receive an inbox full of hate-mail, and suddenly have a grand epiphany in which he finally realizes that the team is awful, the fans are angry and he'd better do something about it.

Lerner knows the state of the team. The trouble is, his attempts to change the team's fortunes have gone only slightly better than the *Hindenburg's* attempt to [land at a windy airfield](#) in Lakehurst, N.J. in 1937.

In other words, don't mistake incompetence for inattentiveness. Lerner isn't failing as an NFL owner because he's not listening to the fans' pleas for change. He's failing as an NFL owner because his administrative decisions have been terrible.

2. Fan protests, as a general rule, don't improve team performance.

Orioles fans staged a walkout from a game at Camden Yards in 2006. Pirates fans tried the same tactic with a planned walkout in 2007. Management of those teams obviously heard their fans loud and clear. The Orioles just finished a last-place 64-98 season. The Pirates just finished a last-place 62-99 campaign. Both protests have been long forgotten by the baseball-watching public.

Voice your frustration all you want. Just don't expect the management of your favorite, struggling team to suddenly turn over a new leaf. Or in the case of the Pirates, find the money to compete with the big-market bullies.

3. The nature of the protest seems flawed.

The primary problem I see with a delayed sit-down is Randall, Schafer and their backers are trying to have their cake and eat it, too. To enter the stadium and hang out on the concourse until kickoff is kind of like trying to send McDonald's a message by continuing to eat there, but only using the drive-through instead of walking through the restaurant door. In the end, you're still plunking your money down and shoveling their food into your esophagus.

The walk-in protest has drawn enough national attention that ESPN and the people around the nation who do tune in will know why the stands are next to empty at kickoff, if this protest indeed is a success. So in that sense, it will draw attention. But there will be other establishing shots over the course of the game, other blimp shots, other pans of the crowd. It seems like it wouldn't make a very

strong statement if the opening shots show empty stands and the halftime shots show a raucous, supportive crowd.

You want to support the players, even if you're angry at management. You also paid a lot of money for those seats that get you on TV. I get that. But the net result might be a wishy-washy protest that generates little to none of the desired effect -- which is apparently to make a lasting statement about the fans' displeasure with the state of their team. You're going to have a heck of a time making that kind of impression if you're still in attendance and spending your money on concessions and merchandise.

4. With that in mind, there is one sure way to make your voice heard.

As a fan, what is the one variable you control in all of this? What is the one foolproof way you can let Browns management know you're unhappy with their job performance?

You might be sitting on it right now. It's called your wallet.

If you aren't happy with how Randy Lerner is running the Browns, answer with apathy. How do you do that? You don't buy tickets. You don't purchase or renew your season ticket plans. You don't buy the gear, you don't buy concessions, you don't go out of your way to watch the team on Sundays.

You let the team play in front of dwindling crowds with sagging TV ratings. You send NFL Commissioner Roger Goodell unmistakable signs that the bungling of Lerner and his minions is wilting what has historically been one of the NFL's strongest fan bases.

You, as a lone fan, can't put the screws to Lerner. But as a unified force of disposable income-spending football fans, you can send a message to the guy who can put the screws to Lerner. The one main guy who outranks Lerner in the NFL hierarchy. The one guy who can, if necessary, pressure Lerner into selling the team.

If you're among those who are going to join Dawg Pound Mike in playing to the cameras next Monday, have fun with it. Just don't expect it to make Lerner jump out of his chair or make Eric Mangini sweat bullets.

The real protest that fans can initiate is much quieter. It's the sound of cash registers not ringing and silent televisions on Sunday afternoons.