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At this point in the Browns' seasons, wins are the enemy.

Wins drop you in the draft order. Wins keep Eric Mangini employed, and might even convince Randy Lerner that it's OK to move forward with Mangini as the primary personnel decision-maker.

When you're 1-11 and four games away from euthanizing, burying and forgetting about this season, wins do nothing but provide false hope and impede long-term progress.

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If you've lived on either side of this border rivalry between two cities separated by less than 150 miles of interstate, you know the history. Recently, it hasn't been much of a rivalry. The Browns had lost 12 straight to the Steelers, the last win coming at Heinz Field on Oct. 5, 2003.

How long ago was that? The following month, Michigan beat Ohio State 35-21 for their last victory over the Buckeyes to date. That's how long ago.

The Browns hadn't beaten the Steelers in Cleveland since Sept. 17, 2000. How long ago was that? A rookie from Penn State named Courtney Brown was the star of the game with three sacks.

There were excruciating near misses over that span. A 16-13 overtime loss in 2002, when the Steelers had a would-be game winning field goal blocked, but the ball stayed behind the line of scrimmage, allowing for a recovery and successful re-kick. A wild card playoff game at the end of that season in which the Browns held a 17-point second half lead, only to let it evaporate and lose, 36-33. A last-minute Willie Parker touchdown in 2006. A missed Phil Dawson 52-yard field goal attempt in 2007, which would have tied the game as time expired.

There were blowouts, too. Since returning to the NFL in 1999, the Browns have been blanked by the Steelers four times, by scores of 43-0, 22-0, 41-0 and 31-0. They held the Browns to seven points or less another five times.

But the biggest discrepancy of all: over that span, the Steelers have won two Super Bowls. The Browns have managed two winning seasons.

It's been a long, strange, crazy, heartbreaking, confusing, frustrating road for the Browns these past 10 years. The twice-yearly beatings at the hands of the Steelers, the declarations of the rivalry's death by members of the local and national media, all of it just served as the most pointed reminder that the Browns have fallen from glory, and hard. The one-time New York Yankees of professional football had become the Los Angeles Clippers -- a team with losing in its DNA.

Better talent, in the form of star players -- the kind a team is supposed to get when it drafts first overall -- is ultimately the only way the Browns are going to amass the bricks and mortar needed to turn their fortunes around. But that's not all of it. You need talent to win. But you also need to have your heart in it. You have to be invested physically, mentally and emotionally in wanting to win.

Thursday night, we saw for the first time in a long, long time a Browns team that cared. Really, truly cared. Thursday night, we saw a maligned coaching staff leading an offense and defense that was undermanned and undertalented, but still playing like this game meant something. Everyone from one-man wrecking crew Josh

Cribbs

to unheralded rookies like Marcus

Benard

started playing like they were sick and tired of losing to the Steelers

and finally wanted to do something about it.

The Steelers, for their part, were fighting for their playoff lives. They had lost four straight and had fallen to 6-6 heading into the game. Ben Roethlisberger

was a career 10-0 against the Browns. Maybe they viewed this game as a free throw, a chance to relax, get an easy win against a devastated team and right their ship.

Or maybe the

Steelers

really can't bail water fast enough to prevent their ship from sinking.

Whatever happened, the Steelers looked completely frazzled by the different looks that defensive coordinator Rob Ryan threw at them.

Roethlisberger

was sacked eight times.

Rashard

Mendenhall

was Pittsburgh's leading rusher, amassing a pedestrian 53 yards on 16 carries.

Still, through all of it, Pittsburgh hung tough and remained within a touchdown in the fourth quarter. The fourth quarter is when Roethlisberger, like all great quarterbacks, becomes an escape artist and pulls drive-saving completions out of his nether regions.

Thursday, it wasn't there. Roethlisberger moved the ball, but looked utterly mediocre in doing so. The deadly efficiency with which he normally marches his team on game-winning and game-tying drives was absent. Needing a touchdown to tie with time running thin, he didn't penetrate any further than the Cleveland 39 yard line before David Bowens knocked away a 4 t h
-and-6 pass, essentially sealing the game.

When Bowens knocked the ball away and began celebrating, I knew for certain that it was right for the Browns to win this game. They needed it. They worked for it. They deserved it.

We, as a city of football fans, deserved it.

After the game, Phil Dawson -- the only Brown to experience every loss to the Steelers since 1999 -- was found with moist eyes [in the locker room](#)

. He had pointed to the fans in the Dawg

Pound after the game, the ones who were sticking around in the open lakefront freezer, steaming the wind-chilled sub-zero air with their trademark barking.

"This was for them," Dawson told The Plain Dealer. "I just wanted to let them know how much I appreciate them. It was a moment like this that you want to share with them. I hope the people in Cleveland enjoy this one because they really deserve it."

High emotion at the end of a miserably cold game near the end of a lost season. Tears of joy after finally breaking the shackles of submission. Dawg Pound fans returning the sound and fury of the late '80s to the shores of Lake Erie, for at least one night.

That's why this is still a rivalry. That's why Thursday night was worth a couple of spots in the draft. That's why this game means more.