



Week 5 – Cleveland vs Atlanta

I used to have an anger problem.

It stemmed around Sundays in the Fall. It started shortly after 1999.

You see, I was one of those deluded masses that thought, after a 3 year absence, the expansion Browns would come in, have a few growing-pain years, and then blossom back into the perennial contender that I had known (sort of) throughout my youth (OK, 7 of 23 years).

So the frustrating, infuriating, mounting losses were exasperating to me. Weekly, I'd line up pillows to kick and bricks to throw, later demonstrating the ability to shatter glass with a single bellow. After the Chicago game in 2001 (which I attended), I didn't sleep that night. I was haunted by nightmares of onside kicks and Hail Mary's.

And those were the "Glory Days".

Lately, much to Roger Waters' chagrin, I have become comfortably numb. Every successive loss is met with the blasé-ness of un-great expectations.

I don't know what snapped on Sunday. For some reason, I was more excited about that game than I have been in a long time. If the Browns could somehow pull out that game against a really good Atlanta team and move to 2-3 - especially considering the schedule and the positive direction that I still feel the organization is moving in - well, that would really be something. It wouldn't mean Playoffs, hell no. But it would mean that ring of orange on the horizon was actually the Dawn, not fallout from a nuclear explosion.

So, naturally, when the game played out the way it did, a frustration-fest of elation to dejection all day long, I was kicking pillows and hurling bricks.

It really pissed me off. I couldn't shake it. I quit smoking (again) recently, so I couldn't smoke it away. I had to drive my daughters back to their mother's in an hour, so I couldn't drink it away. I was just left to stew and brood and fume.

I walked out to the backyard and laid down on the girls' trampoline, staring up at the oak canopy above and the unbroken blue beyond. Every once in a while, the breeze would kick up and the branches would sway slowly, sending down a shower of yellow leaves. The air was warm. My children played somewhere in the distance.

I thought: *Man, what a nice-ass day.*

No way am I gonna blow it dwelling on the Cleveland Browns doing what they always do.

Life is too short to waste my emotion on an organization whose actions and performance I cannot control.

I am a fan of the Browns, and I always will be. But I need to be more judicial with my passion. *Friends. Family. Hot sauce.*

That's about it. Sports are, after all, mere entertainment at this point. There is no need to get too high or too low when watching the professional football team of Cleveland. I should treat

their events much like I treat (and enjoy) the other teams in both the NFL and beyond:
Clinical interest.

I know I am lying to myself, and that when the Browns - 20 years from now - actually make the playoffs, I'll be kicking pillows and hurling bricks all over again. But, for now, until I actually am overly convinced that there's something worth investing emotional stock in again...

I have become comfortably numb.

Game Recap

The early part of the game was survival. The Browns continued their distressing trend of mistakes: fumbles, penalties, blown coverages. However, the Browns Defense was up to the task, repelling Atlanta's excellent field position and stiffening in the Red Zone to open the 2nd Quarter down merely a FG, despite zero help from the O. *Falcons 3, Browns 0.*

A rare 2010 good Kickoff return by Josh Cribbs set the Offense up from there, and Seneca Wallace passed exclusively, picking apart the Falcon D and essentially throwing 2 TD passes: A 24 yard pass to Mo Massaquoi that should have been reviewed (it was very close - it looked like he had possession before the first foot came up) and an actual 19 yard TD pass to a wide open Peyton Hillis, who made a great grab on an overthrown ball for the score (and hurt himself in the process). *Browns 7, Falcons 3.*

ATL responded with a long drive of their own, but the CLE D once again held in the Red Zone, and the Falcons had to kick another FG. The Browns traded a few drives, Hillis obviously struggling through pain and Jerome Harrison doing nothing but climbing his blockers' backs. To top it off, just before Halftime, Joe Thomas got brutally beaten (again) by John Abraham's speed rush which resulted in a Wallace sack and a Wallace high ankle sprain and a Jake Delhomme re-emergence. The Twiggy-thin 1 point Halftime lead did not engender enthusiasm. *Browns 7, Falcons 6.*

The 2nd Half started out with a Kapow when Scott Fujita strip-sacked Matt Ryan on 3rd Down, giving the Browns the ball on the ATL 24. Delhomme limped out onto the field, bringing despair to the brown-clad masses (more for his limping than his visage), but he did manage to drive CLE to the 2. But his 3rd Down handoff attempt to Hillis was bungled, and the Browns were lucky to emerge with the FG. *Browns 10, Falcons 6.*

On the next drive, Sheldon Brown got hurt making a tackle on Tony Gonzalez. He went out, so Ryan went immediately after his replacement - Joe Haden - for a decent gain. So Brown trotted back out again, and Ryan went immediately after him. Bomb. 45 yard Roddy White TD. And without Wallace, a limpy Delhomme, and a limpy Hillis, the feeling of "Game Over" was palpable. *Falcons 13, Browns 10.*

But Cleveland easily could've re-taken the lead on the next drive. Delhomme had Cribbs wide open for what would've been a 59 yard TD... and overthrew him. That was the last serious threat.

The Browns kept holding on, seemingly by their fingernails. It kept feeling like Atlanta was about to take control of the game, but then something (like Haden making a spectacular play to down a punt at the 1) would happen. Thus, it was a strange feeling to see Delhomme actually driving the Browns, hovering around midfield with just over 4 minutes left. Drive the last 50, punch it in, killing the clock as you go, win the game. Right?

Ah, hope. You are a cruel mistress.

Delhomme tried to throw a quick screen on 3rd Down, but some dude named Kroy Biermann (which is German for Beer Man - a quality name) came in untouched, jumped, knocked the pass up in the air, dived, caught it, stumbled up, and somehow made his way in for a TD (nice tackle attempt, Chansi Stuckey).

Now that "Game Over" feeling was reality.

Final: Falcons 20, Browns 10.

Conclusion

Time of Possession: Atlanta – 30:06, Cleveland – 29:54

Total Yards: Atlanta – 338, Cleveland - 269

First Downs: Cleveland - 18, Atlanta – 17

Closer than you thought, eh?

This underlines the fact that the Browns looked overmatched at times, but really hung in there and scrapped and fought, and the game really came down to 2 or 3 key plays. Yes, the Browns would have had to played a much cleaner game against a Falcons team that left a lot of opportunities on the table, but, again, these 2 teams didn't look like they were miles apart.

Maybe losing all these games that they certainly could've won will come back and aid the Browns in the draft. This is an 8-8 team that might go 5-11 or 4-12.

Gameballs

TJ Ward – In 5 games, has led the Browns in tackles 4 times. Including against the Falcons.

Seneca Wallace – Man, he was looking good. Looking like he was gonna make a legit QB controversy, healthy Delhomme or no. Then Joe Thomas went and got him killed. Sigh. Ain't it always just the way?

Peyton Hillis - Even on one leg was still highly effective situationally. I think a healthy Hillis racks up the yards in the 2nd Half.

Phil Dawson – Congratulations on tying Lou Groza's FG record. That is impressive, all the more so considering you played for some of the sorriest Offensive football squads since the turn of the century (and I mean the 20th).

Scott Fujita – Expensive, but paying off as of late with his play as well as his leadership.

Red Zone D – Kept the Browns in the game far longer than maybe they deserved to be.

Honorable Mention

Chansi Stuckey & Mo Massaquoi – And, contrary to popular belief, proof of their existence has been produced. Bigfoot is jealous.

Joe Haden – Now THAT'S the way to cover a punt.

Kenyon Coleman – Showed up 2 weeks in a row? Whaaaaaaaat???!!!

Rob Ryan – Kept that Defensive unit together well into the 2nd Half, even when they were getting scraps as far as help from their Offensive counterparts.

Eric Wright – Another (baby) step back towards respectability. (Yes, I'm hoping that he reads this and it boosts his confidence, now shhhhhhhh!)

Marcus Benard – A guy (and one of the few) who I always notice when he's on the field.

Wall of Shame

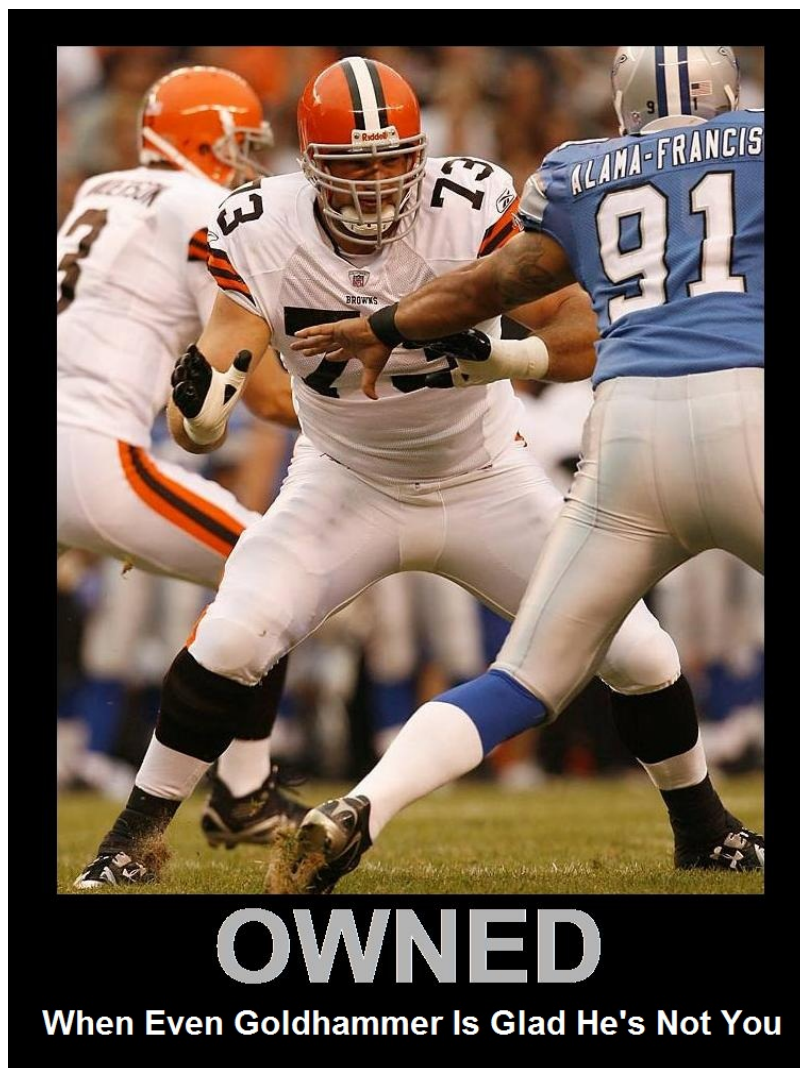
Brian Robiskie – I'd refer to him as the biggest bust in recent Browns 2nd Round history (and that's a long, storied list), but David Veikune (still unsigned, even on a Practice Squad) is the General of that Army.

Sheldon Brown – Not for giving up the bomb. You probably shouldn't have been on the field after leaving the field with an injury two plays earlier. It's for injuring yourself trying to lay the wood that aforementioned two plays earlier. Making the killer hit is all good - all great, even. But if you hurt yourself in the process, then just stick to tackles that don't end up with you impaired.

Jerome Harrison – Um, can I trade this model in for last year's version? Is there a general recall on this product? I mean, he is completely useless out there. He's making 2009 Jamal Lewis look quick and decisive. One more game like that, and I say cut the bastage and re-sign Chris Jennings, because Jerome's less effective right now than using cement as toilet paper.

Brian Daboll – It's not just the porn 'stache. It's the fact that your play calling is as innovative as square tires and the fact that you are the master of mis-using personnel. For instance, loved how you kept trotting out a completely and utterly ineffective Jerome Harrison time after time when you could have used James Davis or Josh Cribbs at tailback a couple plays just to see if - maybe - they were any better. The only way they could have been worse is if they took the handoff, turned around, and threw it in the opposite direction.

Joe Thomas – It truly is a dark day when Mr. Thomas makes this list. But never has he deserved it more. A lot of people are giving him a pass, but not me. No one did more (less) to earn this team the L than Joe, getting tossed around the field by John Abraham and getting his QB hurt with his slowness. The Falcons have this poster of Thomas in their locker room:



Seneca Wallace is almost certainly out for a while with a high ankle sprain. Jake Delhomme likely re-injured himself against the Falcons and could be out for a while too.

That means that 3rd string QB Colt McCoy will get his first NFL start in Game 6 of his rookie season. Against the Steelers. In Pittsburgh. In the POS-Return game. With an injury-hampered Peyton Hillis. Not to mention that WR corps.



Not an ideal way to start your NFL career. I haven't seen a campaign so undermanned since the Polish military tried to fight off the Nazi blitzkrieg on horseback. With muskets.

That didn't end so well (unless, of course, you're a Nazi or a Steeler fan), and there's little chance this will either.

Here's the only silver (aluminum) lining: *Everyone in Cleveland, Pittsburgh, and, well, Earth, fully expects nothing out of Colt McCoy on Sunday other than for him to be eviscerated* (that's fancy talk for him getting his colon pulled out his nose). So, if he merely survives the affair, then it will be looked upon as a mild success.

In other words, the pressure is definitely not on Mr. McCoy. That's mental pressure, of course. The physical pressure will certainly be on him on Sunday, and it will not be pleasant for him. The Steelers will know that the Browns can't rush the ball with a hurting Hillis and a useless frickin' sorry-ass Harrison, they'll stack the line, and they'll blitz all day long because Colt has shown a massive tendency to check-on-check-on-down.

The carnage will probably be horrific.

But, as I said, everyone will expect it to be. Probably even Colt expects it to be. But if he's worth a damn, he'll stand up to it the best he can and give it his best shot and maybe - just maybe - give us a reason to hope that he might be more than Brady Quinn II.

You can't judge a career on one start, and should he fail catastrophically it won't mean that Colt is immediate Toast. But it will help to confirm the suspicions of his detractors, and that kind of rep can become mental and lead to a permanent slide. Brady Quinn I is a good example. I think he had a chance at some point, but he became somewhat of a head case and didn't have the raw talent to overcome it and was basically done before he had 10 career starts.

But imagine the boost to his confidence should Colt come into this game and actually play halfway decent. I'm not even talking *good* here: I'm talking 50% completions, over 200 yards, less than 3 picks, 70 QB rating. That's how low my (the universe's) expectations are for McCoy in this game, and if he's able to stand in there and at least keep the game mildly non-embarrassing, then maybe - just maybe - we can start to believe.

I heard someone mention today that, due to the fact that he was knocked out of the BCS Championship Game so early, this is really Colt's 2nd chance at The Big Game. True, it's pretty obvious that the Browns come into this game far far far more undermanned than Texas was against Alabama, but the theory is nice.

I guess we'll see what Colt McCoy's about a lot sooner than we thought we would. And if he IS acutally eviscerated, then I suppose we'll know for certain another position we need to draft next year.

Carpe Diem, Colt.

We know how this would go if Hollywood ran the world.

Colt McCoy plays the first Half, getting beaten and tossed. Smugly, his arch-nemesis Brett Ratliff (a real dick) watches from the sideline, telling Mangini and Daboll how HE would have done it differently. Finally, right before the intermission, a LB shoots through and hits McCoy as he sells out for a critical 1st Down to put the Browns in FG position and a 17-6 deficit.

Tragedy. Colt is brutally injured. The bone is sticking out of his sock. And that hurts, as we can tell from the grimaces of the actor, er, McCoy.

In the locker room, the training staff tries to fix Colt up. But even duct tape and pain killers aren't enough to convince Mangini, who reluctantly makes the move to Ratliff. Brett saunters over and stands over the suffering McCoy.

"*Guess it's about time a REAL QB took over in this game,*" he brags, then leaves the room.

On crutches, Colt makes his way to the field to watch the Offense take the field for the 2nd Half. And it's terrible. Ratliff isn't even trying. His Receivers curse him out, the O Line shakes their head, but cocky little Brett is unconcerned. He has to keep his health for his endorsements (whatever they may be).

Somehow, the Browns' Defense manages to get an INT return for a TD in the 4th, and the team is down only 4 with 3 minutes left. The Kickoff Team comes on - Phil Dawson nails a ball that hits Hines Ward right in the head - and - miracle of miracles! - Cleveland recovers the onside kick!

Brett Ratliff grabs his helmet as if he's going to take the field, but Mangini grabs him. "No!" he yells. "

We need the REAL McCoy!

"

Colt looks in surprise at his Coach then his teammates, who all smile and nod at him. One starts a slow clap. "Colt!" he grunts. The rest of them (except Ratliff, of course) chime in.

"Colt! Colt! Colt! Colt!"

A sense of purpose plain on his face and in his big doe eyes, Colt grabs his helmet and limps onto the field. He gathers up the huddle.

"All right, boys! Time for only one play!"

(Ignore the fact that there are like 3 minutes left.)

"Red Q 22 X Wide Spaz! On 3! (All together) BREAK!"

McCoy settles in at the shotgun position next to Peyton Hillis. The snap. What's this? A handoff? No, it's a flea flicker!

But instead of the bomb, Colt pitches the ball back to Mo Mass, who's crossing behind him. Mo Mass stops and throws the ball horizontally to Josh Cribbs, who stands way over by the sidelines! What in the name of Simon & Garfunkel is going on?

Cribbs waits until the last possible second to heave the ball downfield, getting smashed by some random Steeler felon in the process. The ball hangs in the air forever, heading right towards Ben Watson at about the 10. But not only is the ball short of the Goal Line, there are also 3 defenders there, including some dude that looks like a poodle on crack. Watson jumps up with the Steeler defenders, and... PURPOSELY BATS THE BALL BACK TOWARDS THE LINE OF SCRIMMAGE!

But why???!!

Because Colt McCoy is limping down the field towards him, that's why! The batted ball lands in Colt's waiting arms, and he rushes towards the End Zone. It's right there, but there's one man to beat! It's that poodle guy! Oh no, it's not going to work!

But at the last moment, Colt cuts back! His wounded leg snaps in two, leaving him with nothing but a bloody stump on one side, but McCoy somehow manages to stay on his feet, er, foot! Two hops and a dive! The clock strikes zero. Colt soars through the air in slow motion, the ball outstretched! Will it cross the plane before his body touches the ground???!!

The ball crosses. The chest hits the ground. The sweaty fat Ref stares down the line, looks around, then randomly sticks his whistle in his mouth and raises both his arms!

TOUCHDOWN! TOUCHDOWN! OH MY GOD, THE BROWNS HAVE WON! THE BROWNS HAVE WON!

The Cleveland players mob the mono-legged McCoy, hoisting him up the air and celebrating as he whoops and hollers. His wife, who looks strangely like Megan Fox, bounces out to give him a big kiss and tell him that the Doctor just told her that her cancer has cleared up. His high school coach, Morgan Freeman, give him the thumbs up from the crowd. Brett Ratliff strolls over, head down, ashamed, and offers his hand to Colt.

"I guess you're not so bad after all," he concedes.

"I think I'm gonna pass out," Colt replies.

They laugh and shake hands. *"No, seriously,"* Colt tells him. *"I think I lost my leg..."*

We zoom out from the stadium, out from Western PA, out from the United States, out from North America, out from Earth and into space. We zoom through blackness to some distant planet, galaxies away, where three headed aliens watch the game in Super 3D and High-4 each other with their tentacled arms.

THE END.

Hurting Hillis half the hoss he was hence?

Jerome just jumpin' jerkily into a jostling jolt?

Davis' delicate defective leg damage designating him day-to-day?

Not sure why there's absolutely zero (apparent) interest in Chris Jennings.

Sure, Jennings isn't a hit-the-hole type of back. But at least he doesn't tippy-toe his way to the line, just to ram himself into the back of his nearest Offensive Lineman (Harrison cough cough Harrison). His tendency is to bounce it outside and try to make a mountain out of a manure heap. Sometimes it works. Sometimes he increases the amount of manure.

But he's actually healthy & fresh. And I doubt you'd see a 6 carries for 6 yards line out of him.

The NBA season is fixin' to start, and I hereby swear not watch the Miami Heat one time. Hell, I won't watch any NBA game but the Cavs. because I am protesting the NBA being complicit in developing a league of have and have-nots just for the nefarious purpose of bringing hype to glamorous markets while letting the rest of the country dangle. They have become the Reality Show of Professional Sports.

I wouldn't watch it at all, but the Cavs need my (our) support now more than ever. They don't deserve my abandonment. And, I think they'll be interesting. There's no doubt that the Regular Season will be a lot more interesting, since it will no longer be some useless preamble to the annual Postseason meltdown.

Go Cavs?

On Sunday, the Saints were down 10 with 5:18 left in the game. They had only 1 Time Out left, and they were facing only a 4th and 2 (albeit on their own 20).

The game was basically already over, but there was still some slim hope that they could quickly drive the field, get a TD, and maybe even still have the kick-it-away option left. Regardless, it was a no-brainer they would go for it.

Instead, they punted.

Down 10. 1 Time Out. 5 minutes left.

Sure, Sean Payton has earned himself some leeway since he just won the Super Bowl. But imagine if Eric Mangini had made the same decision.

He would never have gotten out of there alive.

San Francisco fans aren't necessarily known for their passion. And yet, on Sunday Night Football, they booed their QB and chanted "*We want Carr!*" as lustily as any fans I've ever heard.

Next time you hear someone that Cleveland fans are somehow angrier and meaner than others, give them this message:

That's the way fans are. Everywhere. In every city.

Then give them an open handed chop to the throat.

Speaking of fans, you've gotta have massive respect for Jets fans.

They can spell!

Next Up

Pittsburgh Steelers (3-1).

Speaking of fans, there's none that I despise like the unwashed hoard of displaced (misplaced) Steelers fans here in Northeast Ohio.

I have designed the following T-Shirt in their honor:



FRONT



BACK

