

My Lost Weekend

Written by {ga=mikeperry}

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I married a Pittsburgh girl (not the one in the picture).

After getting my degree I went to work as a sports journalist at the newspaper in Butler, Pa. and it was here that I met my future wife. Butler is a lot like North Olmsted or Berea...people from those towns tell people who ask where they are from that they're from Cleveland. Well, people in Butler tell people they are from Pittsburgh, and I spent five years living there.

My wife is now a teacher and had Martin Luther King Day off, so we decided to head to her parents' house in Butler for the long weekend. The kids hadn't seen their Pennsylvania grandparents since before Christmas, so off to Butler we went.

What did this mean? I had to watch the Steelers-Ravens game with a bunch of Steelers fans who also just so happen to be in-laws.

Before kickoff I had no idea which team I was going to be rooting for, but it didn't take very long for me to realize I hate the Steelers about 1,000x worse than I hate the Ravens. Heck, there really aren't that many reasons to hate the Ravens anymore. Art Modell moved the team to Baltimore so he could hang on to his team and eventually turn it over to his son, David. But Arthur was such a horrible businessman that even with the City of Baltimore giving him a golden parachute (at the expense of the Baltimore Public School System) he could not keep his team, eventually selling to Steve Biscotti. Sorry Davey Boy.

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Yes, Ray Lewis is still there and remains a complete moron, but my hatred of the Ravens now is based in the fact that they are a divisional foe for the Browns and less because Modell screwed Cleveland.

But the Steelers? Plenty of reasons to hate them. First and foremost is the plethora of front-running morons that live in Cleveland and root for the Steelers. Everyone knows one of these clowns...you know, they have to make sure everyone knows they are a Steelers fan. They have to put stickers all over their stupid cars and wear idiotic Roethlisberger jerseys in social settings, just so no one can make the mistake of thinking they are anything but a frontrunner and a contrarian.

They love to bring up the Super Bowls, five of them, and refuse to acknowledge the Browns world championships as relevant. They act like the NFL started in 1967, that anything before Super Bowl I makes no difference.

Steelerfan in the Pittsburgh area is not much better. They are obnoxious football elitists. Two things they do really steams my oysters: They act sympathetic about my being a Browns fan because they do not see the Browns as any kind of a threat, and they call their players by their first names like they are the best friends in the world. Does any other city do this? There were numerous examples of this at my in-laws ... "Did Heinz get that touchdown?" "Hit him, Troy." "C'mon Ben, throw it to Heath!" It is enough to drive a man insane.

And the game was agony. Rooting for the Ravens was bad enough, but rooting for the Ravens surrounded by Steeler fans who refuse to accept the fact that, yes, their favorite team does commit penalties from time to time, is an exercise in futility. The first horrible pass interference call, the one that led to Pittsburgh's first touchdown, even with the replay evidence right there in their face, everyone in the room was like, "Look, he has his arm!" No, he didn't.

And the phantom holding on the Baltimore punt return for a touchdown that was called back, when their team gets an iffy call they can justify it in a number of ways...either they were "owed" one or the official had a better view of the play, etc. Sorry, your boy flopped in a way that would make Anderson Varejao proud and fooled the ref. And it was a critical penalty. Just man up and admit it.

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By the way, what was Jeff Triplett's crew doing on this game? Triplett, when he is not throwing flags filled with ball bearings at Orlando Brown's eye or Aaron Beasley's head, is one of the worst officials the NFL has to offer. A game of this magnitude, that promised to be very physical, begged for a competent crew...not a clueless gang of flag-happy posers that completely let the game out of control (how many times did Pittsburgh Chris Kemoeatu clean the pile late? I lost count. He got flagged for it once, but did it constantly). And a defensive holding call on a defensive lineman in a goal line situation? Really? You call that with the game in doubt?

Here is what finally made my in-laws as irritated with me being there watching the game with them as I was having to be there: I started in on how Roethlisberger had the two sexual misconduct accusations and the motorcycle crash. I brought up how, when I was there last year right after the accusation involving the college girl and the bar restroom, they were fed up with "Ben" and wanted the Steelers to get rid of him because he didn't "act like a Steeler." Then I pointed out how hypocritical it was of Steelers fans to now act like the guy walks on water again, just because the team is winning. Every time they would show a close-up of No. 7's big, bloated face and messed-up nose I would yell, "NO MEANS NO, BEN, NO MEANS NO!" That almost got me banished after I did it for the 37th time. But, think about it, what other ammo does a Browns fan have?

We used to be able to rip on Pittsburghers because of the terrible shape of the Pirates franchise. Now, with the Indians foundering and fighting to stay out of the cellar recently, that line of attack is gone. We also used to be able to talk about how Cleveland at least had an NBA team. Now, with everything that has happened this year, that's not something I want to bring up to anyone, let alone a Pittsburgher. They would always come back with how they had a hockey team, but professional hockey is not a major sport in this country, no matter what anyone says. But do our Cavs, losers of 13 in a row (or more, I stopped paying attention) trump their Penguins, who won the Stanley Cup in 2009? Uhhh, I don't want to answer that.

So what lesson did I learn this weekend? First of all, long weekends are great and all but if the in-laws want to see their grandkids in the near future they can come to Cleveland. Heck, it might be good for them to get out into civilization for a few days. Second, Steelers fans will never change. It started, for me, in the 1970's when I had classmates rooting for the Steel Curtain era...little front-running fourth graders who decided to take the easy way out. It is easy rooting for a franchise like the Pittsburgh Steelers, who are usually successful and make it to the playoffs year after year. Being a Browns fan has built character in me, even if there have been times I have thought of jumping off the nearest bridge because the team has broken my heart yet again.