

## 10 Reasons Not to Get Too Excited (or Depressed) About the Preseason

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Tuesday, August 16 2011 11:51 AM - Last Updated Tuesday, August 16 2011 3:38 PM

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Browns Town is aglow this week following a downright impressive performance in the preseason opener on Saturday night, and rightly so.



Impressive performances by this club – whether in the regular-season, the preseason, or the second toilet stall from the end – have been hard to come by since we were genuinely worried that we all might die because of Y2K.

And yet, as Cleveland fans, we are a people prone to overreaction, both good and bad. The typical Browns fan is capable of believing that a timely traffic- light change is a sign that he's about to win the lottery. But he's also capable of drowning in a rainstorm.

So before we begin talking about the playoffs for our 2011 Browns, or, conversely - after a probable less-impressive performance this week - start wondering aloud if the Browns will even win a game this year, I offer 10 reasons to keep from getting too high or too low in these next few weeks as we meander through back-to-school shopping and make up excuses not to mow the lawn.

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### ***1. Ten Browns teams lost as many games in the regular season as they did in the preseason***

The first thing we tend to forget as soon as the Browns hit the field every August is that while we go into any game in which athletic supporters are worn demanding victory, the primary object of the coaches and players is not to win the games.

They're taking reps, trying out new blocking and blitzing schemes, and figuring out who's going to be a marginal contributor on special teams and who's going to be working the deep fryer at Arby's next week.

Thus, when these two very different manifestos collide, you wind up with a football team knowingly and willingly losing games while the fans quickly slip into a feverish frenzy of juvenile panic.

Such collisions are rarely pretty. And many times, the fans' panic is completely unwarranted.

The most dramatic example came in 1972, when the Browns lost each preseason contest back in the preposterous era when men permed their hair and it was considered a good idea to play six exhibition games.

With fans preparing for a train wreck of a season, they instead got a 10-4 record and a playoff berth.

Similarly, in 1967, 1971, and 1989, the Browns looked miserable in August, winning just a single exhibition game each time, but then each of those teams went on to capture the division title four months later.

And the lovable Kardiak Kids not only went 1-3 in their preseason circuit, but were annihilated 42-0 in the exhibition opener to a mediocre Kansas City team. Anyone who forecasted the most

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exciting single season in team history that Saturday night would have been beaten to death behind a Kmart.

### ***2. Twelve Browns teams played .500 ball or better in the preseason but came nowhere close to it in the regular season***

Call it Beer Goggle Syndrome. We're intoxicated on \$4 shots of offseason optimism and the chick across the bar giving us eyes and a couple of preseason wins genuinely looks cute.

Then the next morning we wake up next to a lemur.

Based on how they looked in the preseason, we thought the '99 Browns would at least be competitive. After all, they'd won two games, including a win over a Dallas team that had made the playoffs the year before.

Ultimately that team left scars that even time won't heal, but it went a respectable 2-3 in the preseason. Then 2-14 when it counted. Similarly, Forrest Gregg's 1975 team took two of six preseason games, then lost the first nine games of the big-boy schedule en route to a 3-11 mark.

Butch Davis' last Browns team in 2004 turned out to be one of the most embarrassing in team history, posting a 4-12 record. But hey, Butch would probably still boast to reporters today that they went 3-1 in the preseason. Similarly, Romeo Crennel's first powder-puff unit won three of four when nobody cared, then only six of 16 when everybody did.

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### ***3. The Browns once played a preseason game in Stillwater, Oklahoma***

Thankfully, this trend has gone by the wayside, but it used to be a regular custom for the NFL to send its teams out into the middle of nowhere to play exhibitions in the hope of whipping up interest. Or punishing people.

Thus, the Browns not only trekked all over Ohio to play preseason contests in Akron, Canton, Toledo, Columbus, and even Cincinnati before the Bengals were even a black-striped glint in Paul Brown's eye, but played in places like Syracuse; South Bend; Ann Arbor; Portland, Oregon; Birmingham, Alabama; Knoxville, Tennessee; and Lincoln, Nebraska.

In other words, bringing a minor-league product to minor-league cities. The practice may have ended, but the principle remains the same.

### ***4. Mr. August***

There's one every year – a player who comes out of seemingly nowhere to blow everybody's minds in preseason games. He quickly becomes the talk of training camp, then fades into oblivion once the real games begin and is forgotten – until the next preseason when he's compared that year's Mr. August.

Remember when Michael Jackson earned the "Thriller" nickname in the '91 preseason and appeared to be the heir apparent to Webster Slaughter and Reggie Langhorne to become the Browns' next star receiver?

Or when Eric Zeier looked like the quarterback of the future?

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Sadly, the list goes on: Madre Hill. Randy Baldwin. Bill Johnson. Dan Footman. Terry Taylor. Travis Prentice. Jammi German. Luke McCown.

No doubt this year you'll be tempted once again to believe the Browns out-smarted everybody with that fifth-round draft pick who looks unstoppable in the third quarter of these preseason games.

Resist. To quote that great military tactician Admiral Ackbar: "It's a trap!"

### ***5. The end zones aren't painted yet***

Did you notice that on Saturday? The block letters spelling "Browns" were painted in white in both end zones, but not colored in. The team won't even waste a couple extra cans of paint on these games.

Just saying.

### ***6. Bernie's on TV***

He's sort of like our Punxsutawney Phil - Mr. Kosar pops his head out for four weeks, offers brilliant analysis on the preseason broadcasts, then disappears, not to be seen again for another year.

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Just as was the case in his playing career, Bernie is long on substance and short on style, thereby obviously not cut out for network broadcasting. But he's a perfect fit for the Browns' preseason telecasts.

And another perfect example of what you can get away with in August because it doesn't really count.

### ***7. Watching quarters 2 through 4 of a preseason game is like watching a horse give birth***

It's painful, it's weird, and when it's done, you feel like you need to take a shower. And yet it's football and it's on, so you feel obligated to see it through.

To watch the first quarter of a Browns preseason game is admirable. To watch the second is to be overexcited. To voluntarily watch the second half is probably an indication of serious psychological problems.

Do yourself a favor and turn off the television as soon as the first 15 minutes are up. You can stay up a little later in the third preseason game, when the starters traditionally play the entire first half, but then straight to bed, young man.

### ***8. The ratio of season-ending injuries to minutes played is absurd***

Think about it - how many times do guys suffer season-ending injuries in the preseason compared to the regular season? It's incredible. They're playing less, usually against

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less-capable competition, and yet every exhibition season, the Browns always seem lose at least one player to a season-ending injury – Gary Danielson, Chris Spielman, Ty Detmer, Montario Hardesty, et al.

Naturally there are loads of injuries once the regular season begins, but the vast majority are recoverable. For some reason, in the preseason, tendons are taut and brittle and ligaments are made of uncooked lasagna noodles.

### ***9. It's friggin' hot***

Call me a traditionalist, but to me football is not enjoyable when it's being watched as you feel sweat trickling down your butt crack while sitting perfectly still. Actually, now that I think of it, nothing is.

Football is a byproduct of autumn. Crisp days and cool nights. Thus, to see a Browns game delayed because of a freakish humidity-baked thunderstorm or drunk guys in the stands with their shirts off when the temperature isn't ten below just seems wrong.

Like when the USFL played its games in the spring. Just weird.

### ***10. Jake Delhomme looked awesome in the preseason last year***

Enough said.

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There are plenty of reasons to be excited about the preseason, especially this year when we got a small taste of what it would have been like without it.

But I encourage you to keep your expectations and damnations under control as we negotiate these next few weeks. Just remember that these games don't count and the performances - both the good and the bad - rarely indicate what's to come when the training wheels come off in September.

Or, as the case may be, when the regular wheels come off shortly thereafter.