

Taking a Mulligan

Written by {ga=mrburns}

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Most of us are still smarting from the Browns' brutal loss to the Bengals. Whether you were damaged emotionally (watching the Browns snatch defeat from the jaws of victory never gets any easier), financially (I doubt I was the only one who picked the Browns in an eliminator pool), or physically (I doubt I was the only one who may have over-imbibed), this Browns loss lingered longer than most.

I can admit it – I was chalking up 1-0. The Browns were facing a rookie quarterback and a mediocre Bengals club at home, and then travelling to Indianapolis to euthanize a Peyton-less Colts team. That's 2-0 if you're keeping score at home. Between the Dolphins and Titans – again, both at home – the Browns should have been able to at least manage a split and roll into the bye at 3-1.

After all these years, I should know better. The old adage “don't count your chickens before they hatch” really should be modernized to directly reference Cleveland sports.

However, as bad as things look, the Browns have a chance to make it right. Sure, they can't go back and replay the game Sunday against the Bengals, but staring our Cleveland Browns straight in the face this Sunday are the Indianapolis Colts, Manning-free and buttered up on a silver platter.

Last Sunday's implosion transformed this week's contest into a must-win affair. This summer, Pat Shurmur's new up-tempo offense and Colt McCoy's development bought the team significant goodwill with a fan base that has become understandably cynical. Combine those reasons for hope with the Indians' epic collapse, and you were left with a fan base craving Browns football like a junkie joneses for [Walter White's blue meth](#) .

Fortunately, it was just one game and the Browns have time to right the ship. The Browns might not play a .500 team until they travel south to Houston in week nine. With three of the last four

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games on the road – not to mention four of the last five against division powers Baltimore and Pittsburgh – the Browns can ill afford to give away games against the soft part of their schedule.

Only about 12% of 0-2 teams have made the playoffs in the last 20 years. While the Browns would still be a serious long shot for the playoffs even if they get off the schnide in the Hoosier State, the fan base and perhaps the team's collective morale simply will not be able to endure what would be the sixth 0-2 start in the last seven seasons.

If you're a Cleveland fan, you know how quickly this thing can spiral into another 4-12 season; good enough for a top five draft pick, but not good enough to bag Andrew Luck. A win can help recapture some preseason excitement and give fans a reason to watch other than force of habit.

The Browns shanked it into the reeds last week. Fortunately, they can take a mulligan and put it in the fairway this week. So go ahead coach Shurmer, dig a fresh Titleist out of your bag. Just remember – you only get one.