



I am as depressed as hell.

It's not just that my checking account has that post-Christmas emptiness. It's not that the end of the holidays signals the onslaught of joyless January and frozen February. It's not that yet another year has flown by and I have nothing to show for it but a rapidly deteriorating shell; that life is clearly a forced march through meaninglessness; that my children will be adults in a world bereft of many opportunities that I had, and their children will be even worse off; that overpopulation will soon make the Earth resemble a bloated corpse covered in flies; that existence will continue to deteriorate to such an inglorious and tarnished level that inevitable death will be sweet relief.

No, I cannot focus on these petty matters, because I'm distracted by a vital and universal truth which is more disheartening than global warming or apocalypse - Browns fans have to endure another season with Pat Shurmur as Head Coach.

This sporting prison sentence is all so depressing. Is there no Tebow?

At least this now-pointless campaign is about over. Only one more game, kids, and we can sink

into the sweet relief of the offseason, dreaming draft dreams, fantasizing free agent fantasies.

One more testament to dedication, one more day of "making the doughnuts", one last Sunday chore for the 2011 season.

One more chance to watch a pretty bad team probably have chances to win but fall just short because of inferior talent and a buffoon as a Head Coach.

If I were to say something good about Shurmur, it's that his team isn't quitting on him.

That is the sum total of the good.

In all honesty, the 4-11 Browns have only been blown out in 4 games (TEN - 18 point loss, SF - 10 points, HOU - 18, 1st BAL game - 14). Even their blowouts haven't been real "blowouts". Those other 7 L's all could conceivably have been wins. Some of them took downright incompetence to be losses.

And that's why I'm so down about having to face next year with my ol' buddy ol' pal Shurmy back at the helm. He's to Head Coaching what Spurgeon Wynn was to Quarterbacking. He's the worst Head Coach we've had back here since the Return, and that's an anti-impressive list. Hell, he might be the worst Head Coach I've ever seen roaming the Cleveland sidelines, and I'm old enough to remember Bud Carson and Jim Shofner.

The play calling, the use of time outs, the lack of preparation, the lost look on the sidelines, the general sense of not knowing what is going on both on the field and off, the clueless explanations, the stupid answers to questions... even when he gets pissy with the media he just comes across as a buffoon.

If he could just manage to come across as a douchebag, at least I'd think he had a brain.

Dammit, I mean, by the time you've reached your 15th game, you're no longer a Rookie Head Coach. But it ain't gettin' any better.

On ESPN the other morning, the question was asked "*Do you think Drew Brees has this success without (Head Coach) Sean Payton?*"

" No one thought so. Even if we get a good QB (there ain't one here), do they excel under SSDD?"

I don't want to hate on the guy this much because I'm sure he's a decent human being, but he frustrates me to the point where I want to put his face on my rug so I can stomp on it all the time (note to self - design Pat Shurmur doormats to sell for the 2012 season, \$29.99 each).

But, as with the gradual decline of mankind, there is nothing I can do to stop it.

Therefore, I sigh, I drink a beer, I look to player acquisition, and I hope that Tom Heckert can assemble a team so good that even the Shurminator can't muck it up.

Stats

Time of Possession: BAL - 32:18, CLE - 27:42

Total Yards: BAL - 284, CLE - 256

Yards Passing: CLE - 139, BAL - 122

Yards Rushing: BAL - 162, CLE - 117

First Downs: CLE - 18, BAL - 15

Turnovers Forced: CLE - 1, BAL - 1

Sacks: BAL - 2, CLE - 1

Final Score: City of Crabs (Both Crustacean and Venereal) 20, Cleveland 14

3 points off the board with that 1st Q pick, 3-7 points off the board with the botched end of Half... and this is why you lose.

Much better job against the Baltimore rush attack this week, but 162 yards is still nothing to tattoo on your arm.

The game was really about as even as the stats imply. The Ravens had chances which they blew, but the Browns did too. In the end, Baltimore had 2 big plays (60 yard Pass Interference, long TD pass to Ray Rice) to Cleveland's 1 (Cribbs punt return). That's enough of a difference in the NFL.

Game Balls

Josh Cribbs - You know why.

Peyton Hillis - Finally reminding us why people voted to put him on a video game cover this year.

Honorable Mention

Ahtyba Rubin - Great move on the lone sack of Joey Flacco.

Evan Moore - 5 catches and a TD. Solid game by E.

Offensive Line - Really kept Seneca pretty clean against a notoriously nasty Ravens pass rush. And got Hillis 112 yards to boot.

The Shurmur

Paddy O'Shurmur - Botched end of the Half, weird play call on 4th down, poor use of Time Outs in the 2nd Half, guys not communicating, guys jumping offsides... and that's just this game. I know that many of these issues aren't his fault, but they keep happening, and they're happening on his watch.

Seneca Wallace - That pick to end the 1st drive was spectacular, and apparently the butchering

at the end of the Half was Seneca's call too. Meh.

Tony Pashos - Man, am I tired of watching this guy running after the man he was supposed to be blocking.

D'Qwell Jackson - Hate to do it, you've had a great year and you deserve the Pro Bowl, but you gave up both TD's, and that's not good.

Phil Taylor - You know why.

Kaluka Maiava - Horrific tackle attempt on Vonta Leach.

Regarding What The Hell Are You Talking About?

Comment - *Seneca Wallace's struggles prove that QB is not the problem.*

What? Huh? I didn't catch that - my mind just exploded.

That is some dumb shit right there.

That's like replacing a dead battery with another dead battery and claiming the batteries aren't the problem.

You replaced the Starter with the Backup, and the fact that he's not just THRIVING somehow vindicates Colt McCoy in your mind? The fact that Seneca Wallace looks just as good as (if not better than) Colt isn't a problem for you? The issue is still everyone else, huh?

Comment - It's not fair to judge Colt against Seneca because Seneca is getting run support.

Well, if we put aside the fact that that's just completely false (the Browns' rushing performance on Sunday wasn't even in their Top 5 of the season). Even if that's true and the team is running the ball better under Wallace, why is that? Magic? Peyton Hillis just instantly got healthy all of the sudden? The Offensive Line finally passed their Blocking Exam?

If the team is rushing better and the only major change that happened personnel-wise is the changing of the QB, ***doesn't that tell you something?***

Like maybe teams aren't crowding the LOS because they're actually wary of Seneca's deep ball?

Comment - QB is a problem, but it's not the only problem, and until everything else is fixed they should try to get by with Colt.

So because the team has some other holes they shouldn't address ***the biggest hole on the team?***

Do you know how long it would take to fill "all the other holes"? Do you think that there's ANY damn team in the league that has " all the holes" filled?

Do you not think that maybe a good QB makes some of those perceived holes effective enough to be successful?

Honestly, people, what has Colt McCoy ever done to deserve your undying love? You think he "seems" like a "good guy"? You owe him money? You think his wife's hot? You drive a Ford Truck?

I will always concede that Colt could magically turn it all around and become Drew Brees. But the odds are so low - just like Colt's ceiling. If you want to stick with an under-performing QB to the death, do it with one that has a better chance of success.

Regarding Peyton Hillis

For the second straight week, Hillis looked pretty good running the ball. To me, he still seems a step slow compared to last year, but at least he's hitting the holes and dragging some people with him.

The drama on the Hillis front has quieted quite a bit in the last month or so, which may or may not lead to further negotiations between his stupid Agent and the Browns' Front Office. It is certainly not inconceivable that they could reach an agreement.

I'm about 70% pro-signing at this point. I think Hillis is just ordinary, nothing special, but there aren't a lot of good FA RB's out there, and losing Hillis would probably require them to draft a RB at that point because Hardesty appears to be a huge bust.

Plus, a glance around the league tells you having an elite RB is no longer required for a great Offense. New England and Green Bay are making do with schlubs. Mendenhall is ahh-ight in Pittstown, but nothing special. It's not like Mark Ingram is what scares you about New Orleans.

So, yeah, you ink Hillis to a 3 year incentive-laden contract and maybe you don't have to worry about that position for a year or two. It's kind of a temp fix, sure, but this team has enough holes that some temp fixes are necessary.

Regarding Draft Positioning

When you're a Browns fan, December is all about draft positioning. This year's spot might be the most important in that regard since the Return, seeing as 2 very highly touted QB prospects will be up there and likely to go very early.

Based on whether they win or lose and the fate of certain other teams, Cleveland can pick as high as #3 and as low as #8. The tiebreakers for non-playoff team draft order are:

1. Record (duh).
2. Strength of Schedule (easiest schedule gets higher pick).
3. Division tiebreakers (if the teams are in the same division).
4. Conference tiebreakers (if the teams are in the same conference).
5. Coin flip.

Right now, the Strength of Schedule order for the teams in question are 1. STL (.588), 2. MIN

(.558), 3. TB (.550), 4. IND (.533), 5. CLE (.529), 6. MIA (.513), 7. JAX (.504), 8. WAS (.475).

If the Browns lose, they will get a pick between 3 and 5:

JAX beats Indy, MIN wins - Browns get the #3 pick.

JAX beats Indy, MIN loses - Browns get the #4 pick.

Indy beats JAX, MIN wins - Browns get the #4 pick.

Indy beats JAX, MIN loses - Browns get the #5 pick.

Now, if the Browns win, they will get the 5-8 slot depending on this:

MIA, WAS, and TB all win - Browns get the #5 pick.

Two of MIA, WAS, and TB win - Browns get the #6 pick.

One of MIA, WAS, and TB wins - Browns get the #7 pick.

MIA, WAS, and TB all lose - Browns get the #8 pick.

Indy is in Jacksonville, Minny plays Chicago at home, the Jets play at Miami, Tampa is in Atlanta, and Washington is in Philly. Now you know who to root for this weekend.

My guess? Indy, Minny, Miami win, Tampa and Washington lose. The Browns get #4 if they lose, #7 if they win. I'd like to think that everyone has learned the vast difference between #4 and #7 from last year's draft, but that's probably wishful thinking.

Regarding Possible 2012 QB's



Andrew Luck - This becomes more of an option if the Rams lose (har!) and the Colts win, leaving STL with the #1 overall pick. Conventional wisdom says the Rams already got their Franchise QB 2 years ago when they took Sam Bradford #1 overall, so they don't need another one and will trade the pick for a huge package, likely including 3 First Rounders and 2 Second Rounders. Is that too high a price to pay? Only Luck's career can answer that. Would you pay that for 10-15 years of Peyton Manning or John Elway? I would. Luck is a fantastic prospect and I'd love to have him, but that's a helluva lot to live up to.

Robert Griffin III - Thanks to Matt Barkley's highly questionable decision to go back to school,

RG3 is now the clear 2nd QB of the draft, and his value will spike accordingly. Some pundits claim that he might be a "Top 7" pick now, which I think is incredibly naive. A team very well might have to trade up to #2 in order to get this guy, who in most years would be easily the most exciting prospect. What would that take? Depends on where you are. The Browns could sit tight at, say, #4 and hope STL and MIN think they have their QB's and nobody leapfrogs them, or they might have to parlay both their First Rounders and probably a couple other high picks to move up a couple spots. Still, as far as I'm concerned, he's Option 1B after Luck, maybe Option 1A at his reduced price tag, definitely Option 1 if he falls.

Sam Bradford - If you're going against conventional wisdom, you can argue that if STL gets the #1 overall pick they will jettison Bradford and his hefty contract for the likely superior and more cap-friendly Andrew Luck (would actually be a smart move). At that point, Cleveland would instantly become one of the top suitors for Bradford's services. He knows Shurmur and his Offense, and looked much better under Shurmy than under Josh McDaniels. He's obviously talented and still young, and Holmgren loved him coming out. The drawbacks are that he's injury prone and doesn't seem to have that fire/leadership that separates "good" QB's from great ones. Personally, I'm not overly excited about this prospect, but he would be an upgrade and might be able to be had for much less than Luck or RG3. Option 3 in my book.

Matt Flynn - Pretty much the only available Free Agent that the Browns would have a shot at/would consider ([Here's a list](#) - Peyton Manning ain't coming here if released, Drew Brees and Alex Smith are staying put, and you can keep Kyle Orton, Jason Campbell, Donovan McNabb, etc). Knows the WCO, and Holmgren has been partial to GB backups in the past. I liked him in the NE game last year, and hope to see more of him in Week 17 since the Pack has nothing to play for vs. the Lions. Still, not a big guy, not a strong arm, really doesn't have a higher ceiling than Colt (which isn't to say he wouldn't be more effective). The most attractive thing about him is that you don't have to spend a draft pick to get him. Option 4.

Colt McCoy - I've already let you know how I feel about that. Not the end of the world, but definitely not my first preference. Option 5A.

Seneca Wallace - Pretty much the same as Colt. Option 5B.

Regarding Whatever

***That's why teams try those oh-so-obvious fake 4th Downs.

***I liked the fight by the Special Teams players. Showing you're not intimidated is SO important to this team.

***There was a graphic on the CBS telecast of the Browns game which was very telling: *Fewest Plays of 20+ Yards This Season*. The "leaders" were Cleveland - 34, Jacksonville - 34, St. Louis - 37, Indianapolis - 37. Basically the worst 4 teams in the league.

***Greg Little is a playmaker just waiting to shine.

***Anyone else watch Brodney Pool get knocked the F out by Ahmad Bradshaw on a TD run? Another on that long list of *Ex-Cleveland Browns That No One Misses*.

***I've been so disappointed in Joe Haden's performance over the last half of the season. I thought the guy was headed for greatness. Let's hope this is just a speed bump.

***I've found [this recurring article](#) on CNNSI.com about which players to watch in Bowl Games very helpful. Take a look.

***What are the chances that Heckert can swing a trade for Joe Webb? That guy's looked very enticing the last couple weeks in relief duty.

***With a loss to Pittstown, the Browns would once again go 0-6 in the AFC North. Incredibly, this would only be the 2nd time Cleveland has ever gone winless in the Division (it seems like a

yearly thing). In 77 AFC North games (or against current AFC North opponents from 1999-2001 when the Browns were still in the AFC Central), they are 20-57, 7-34 since 2005. They are 9-17 against Cincy, 7-19 against Baltimore, and a whopping 4-21 against the Inbred.

Almost as amazing is the fact that they have never finished better than .500 against Division opponents in the 13 years since the Return, and only managed a split 3 times.

If there's any majority reason the Browns have circled the toilet for so long, it's not hard to guess what it might be.

Next Up

Pittsburgh Steelers (11-4).

I hate the Steelers.

Even more than that, I hate their fanbase. Pittstown Steelers, Official Team of White Trash everywhere.

Normally, I want the Browns to kick their collective asses, no matter the circumstances. However, with the NFL moving this game to the 4 pm time slot, there are two distinct scenarios that could come into play here:

Scenario A: The Ravens beat the Bengals and become AFC North Champs. The Steelers have nothing to play for. They rest POS and start Charlie Batch and a whole bunch of other backups. Hell, Mike Tomlin probably secretly wouldn't mind losing and knocking the Browns

down from a possible 3 pick to a possible 9 pick - they don't want a competent QB in Cleveland.

Scenario B: The Bengals beat the Ravens, meaning that the Steelers can clinch the AFC North and a 1st round Bye with a win. Naturally, they play as many starters as they can (likely including POS) to try and facilitate that. The game becomes incredibly important to them.

If we have Scenario A, then a win against the Steelers' B Squad would mean nothing to me or the Browns. It would mean less than a Preseason game. I would just DVR the game for later viewing and hope that Cleveland somehow managed to still lose... although I'm pretty sure they would win because that's the worst case scenario. I can't imagine a more feel-bad win. It makes me sick thinking about it.

If we have Scenario B, then I want the Browns to pound the living feces out of Pittstown, I mean treat 'em like a low-rent hooker at a medieval seaport, no matter the draft consequences. THAT win would definitely hurt the Steelers (and their fans) and would feel GREAT. Might make the whole season.

Obviously, I would pick the Browns to lose in Scenario B.

But at least Scenario B has the draft-implications silver lining. It's almost a no-lose situation.

So the team I'm really rooting for on Sunday is the Bengals. As hard as that is to say.

Scenario A: Browns 16, Steelers 10.

Scenario B: Steelers 24, Browns 13.