



It's Memorial Day already. That means the 4th of July is just about six weeks away when it feels like Christmas was just three or four days ago. But as time passes things come into focus and are more clearly defined. Not just with our sports teams, but with our world view and within our own lives.

So let's get to some of that in The Weekend Wrap.

Memorial Day

It bothers me when I wake up, grab a cup of coffee and some breakfast and check the social media sites that seem to dominate more and more of our time and I see, "Happy Memorial Day!" posts. It also bothers me some when I see all the "Thank you for your service" posts.

This is no one's issue other than mine but the former post or response to Memorial Day misses the point of the holiday all together and the second has become almost trite and doesn't even begin to cover the debt of gratitude we owe the people who serve in our military, especially in this day and age where soldiers can't safely walk big city streets without being targeted.

The biggest regret I have in life is not enlisting to serve. And probably the guiltiest I have been about anything in an otherwise guiltless lifetime is the reason why: I thought I was above service.

Back in 1985 when I graduated high school entering the military was never even a consideration for me. Mostly because I thought military service was for people who didn't have the wherewithal or aptitude to go on to college and get a degree. Yes, that's a horribly shameful attitude but it's the one I had at that time.

It wasn't as if I didn't have friends and relatives who had served. Like most people, I had uncles and cousins and friends who served proudly before going onto other things in life. But I thought of the military at that time as an option for those who had few other options.

Part of it was the hubris and stupidity of youth, mixed with a healthy amount of arrogance that life slowly whittles away, and part of it was timing. For the most part, nothing of great importance seemed to be happening from the time I was old enough to understand basic concepts about war and conflict to the time most people decide what to do after high school. I'm too young to have been profoundly affected by Viet Nam but old enough to have read accounts of that war that, fairly or unfairly, classified Viet Nam as a failure from a military perspective. The first Gulf War was still years away in 1985 and the only real context I had was what I had read on Viet Nam and what I watched on television. A horribly botched Iran Hostage rescue attempt further colored my impressions of what was going on in the services and it truly seemed like most of the people I knew who were enlisting were hard cases who needed the service to keep them squared away.

Even conversations with some of those uncles and cousins seemed to suggest that they would have preferred being anywhere else in the world other than where they were serving.

So I didn't go.

I enrolled at BGSU and spent four years there before getting married to the woman I still unapologetically and completely love and live with today, just six months after graduating from Bowling Green. After graduation and marriage I seriously considered entering both the Navy and the Air Force but at the end of the day I decided it would far too unfair to Lisa to have spend the first years of our marriage either separated for months at a time or hopping from one base to another. Too many marriages fail regardless of reasons and that seemed to me to be putting a lot more stress and strain on a young marriage than it might support. And since the moment I met that girl she's always been and will always be the most important person in the world to me.

So I didn't go.

Then came kids and a job that I've had for about 20 years and there was never the 'right' time to do it. But the world basically exploded (in my mind) starting somewhere around 1990 and there's been a constant flow of friends and family who have served.

I've been fortunate in that most of my friends and family have safely returned from their deployments and tours but there have been thousands who have not. Kids who have been sent (right or wrong) to some of the most backward and ugly and barren places on earth and who have truly done good work in those places so that the suffering of others would be lessened (and yes, also for some other reasons such as to keep oil flowing back here and to support puppet regimes that were propped up by the government of this country).

And it's not at all a blood-lust thing. While I find war accounts like Marcus Luttrell's "Lone Survivor" and David Bellavia's "House to House: an Epic Memoir of War" to be fascinating, it's more fascinating to me how every day people respond to unbearable stress and situations and deal with them because they have no choice, and because of the incredible training they receive in the service that allows them to function in these extraordinary situations.

For the most part, these kids and their leaders are special people. They legitimately care more about the people on either side of them than they do about themselves and time and time again I read accounts of how they completely ignore imminent and grave danger to themselves and instead sacrifice their lives and limbs for their fellow soldiers.

Living in the corporate world where life is the complete opposite and it's pretty much everyone for themselves, that's a notion that's hard to wrap one's head around. Their willingness to sacrifice espouses what this country, in my mind, should be while it's about 180* from what it actually is. That's why it breaks my heart when I read accounts of things going wrong or troops being killed. Every time that happens it takes away one more person that truly embodies what I believe my country is and should be all about.

That's why "Happy Memorial Day" makes me sick and "Thank You for Your Service" isn't even remotely close to being enough.

This little diatribe isn't going to change anything and maybe it shouldn't. When I was growing up and then going to school Memorial Day was a welcome day off from classes and work. It was the unofficial kick-off to summer and it was a reason for the adults to get together with BBQ and potato salad and buckets of cold beer and pop, and to hang out before going back to work on Tuesday.

That's what it was to me too. I'm just telling you that life has a way of knocking sense into you one way or the other and that Memorial Day is much different for me today than it was then. I can't pass a highway sign commemorating a fallen soldier without taking a moment to think about what that kid's parents are doing or feeling at that moment. I can't read about SEALs dying on a freaking helicopter ride without thinking about all the countless, more dangerous things they've done on behalf of this country that couldn't be acknowledged and I can't help but think about some young, tow-headed kid that the SEAL left behind who will never know what his dad did.

I can't put into words how incredibly sad it is to me that an American sniper like Chris Kyle could protect his fellow soldiers so effectively overseas for so long, and neutralize as many enemies as he did from so far, only to be killed in Texas by a fellow veteran with mental issues.

What I can say is that I understand now. I respect what these soldiers do now and all they give up to do it. I appreciate them for who they are and what they do. And as a father of kids in their formative years my obligation is to ensure that my kids learn that lesson far faster than I did. In that way I'm not too old to serve and it's not too late.

Maybe Memorial Day is about BBQs. But there has to be a moment or two during that event where we tip our caps to the guys (and girls) a world away who are eating MREs and taking a weekly cold shower in some foreign country and don't say some half-assed thank you but actually and genuinely appreciate that them doing what they do is truly all that allows us to enjoy what we are doing here.

"We sleep safely at night because rough men stand ready to visit violence on those who would harm us." – Winston Churchill

Not My Business

I'm glad that the NBA Draft is just a month away because at least then I can watch, listen and read to the talking heads in this town criticize an actual pick instead of a prospective pick.

I'm not going to tell you that I have anywhere near the interest or knowledge to know who the Cavs should take with the first pick in the entire draft much less the 19th pick in the first round or with picks 31 and 33 in the 2nd round.

I do think you can somewhat employ the process of elimination in looking at potential Cavs selections and by doing so you'd likely eliminate PG and SG from your grocery list. The Cavs have Kyrie Irving at PG (at least for the 40 games per season he's likely to be healthy enough to play) and they invested the fourth pick last season in SG Dion Waiters.

They also have a power forward in Tristan Thompson who developed a ton last year so that's probably not a glaring need either. What are the glaring needs? Well, a small forward is a glaring need. The Cavs don't really have one you should have a great deal of faith and confidence in. And despite the likelihood Anderson Varejao returns ready to play in the fall, I think there's a glaring need for a C that would allow Varejao to play more often at the PF spot where he'd be physically better off and where he'd provide the Cavs a ton of depth at the position and in their rotations as a whole.

To me that means that you cut through all the crap and narrow the Cavs obvious selection down to either Nerlens Noel, the Kentucky C, or Otto Porter, the Georgetown SF.

Could the Cavs go with Victor Oladipo, the uber-athletic Indiana SG, or someone like UNLV's beastly PF Anthony Bennett? They could. But it would seem that selecting one of those two guys would require getting rid of Waiters or Varejao.

In my opinion, Porter is the safest pick but not necessarily the right one. Noel would be a huge

presence for the Cavs in terms of defending the rim and helping this team overcome a lot of defensive deficiencies. If Noel is capable of putting on weight for the pounding he'll take in the NBA and if his surgically repaired ACL will return to full strength, I don't know that you can pass him up. He'll score ten points a game off Irving's penetration while he develops an offensive game of his own and he's that much of a game changer on the defensive end that he'd be my guy.

Either way, this will be a critical year for the Cavs to add pieces that make them a legitimate contender for a playoff spot. They have to get a guy or two that can elevate this team to that level and they need to do it before their All-Star PG gets frustrated.

Warning Sign or Ebbs and Flows?

As has been mentioned many times in this column, I'm not an overly analytical guy when it comes to baseball. I understand and look at WAR and OPS+ and some other metrics, but my eyes are my calculators and I watch enough baseball to have a pretty good handle on who can play and who can't and whose performance is suffering or elevating.

But a couple numbers from Saturday's Indians game scared me a bit and the numbers were 87 and 88. Those were the typical radar gun readings in miles per hour of Vinnie Pestano's fastballs and those numbers supported the fact that Vinnie got knocked around pretty good against the Red Sox in a 7-4 loss. Pestano inherited a 4-3 lead and then got roughed up. And his velocity was down.

I'm not going to try and break down Pestano's mechanics because that's not my forte, and it was a miserable day whether-wise in Boston and guys have a tough time getting loose in those conditions. But Pestano just looks "off" to me and I'm hoping his mechanics and his elbow are just slowly responding to a couple weeks of downtime Pestano saw when he went on the DL a few weeks back.

The last thing this Indians team needs is to have Pestano shelved for any period of time. Well, actually the last thing they need is an unhealthy Pestano pitching in games. But you get the point. Even with the emergence and continued development of Cody Allen this Indians team needs a reliable arm like Pestano's in the mix.

That's a situation worth watching as this brutal stretch of games against some of the better teams in baseball continues over the next couple of weeks.

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