



At the dawn of the new year, Cleveland professional sports fans find two of their three hometown teams in a veritable disarray. The Browns don't have a head coach or quarterback--or, some would say, a capable front office. The Cavaliers, with a new coaching staff and an unbalanced roster, are in a blue funk, and nobody associated with the team can figure out why.

And the Indians are reeling over the loss of some very key players from 2013.

Makes things dicey for predicting what will happen on the local sports scene in 2014. Undaunted, though, we plow ahead with possible answers to 14 (well, 13) burning questions that the teams will face in the next 12 months.

1) Who will be the Browns' next head coach?

A better question is, Who in his right mind would accept the head coaching job? Rule out Bill Cowher, Tony Dungy, Lovie Smith, Jon Gruden and Nick Saban, all of whom would demand too much control and power to suit team president Joe Banner--despite what Banner said at the press conference Monday. Penn State's Bill O'Brien has already said "no" once, and there's no good reason he wouldn't say it again if the position were offered to him.

Looking over the remaining available names does not give staunch Browns fans a warm and fuzzy feeling. Patriots offensive coordinator Josh McDaniels is the apparent front-runner at this time, based on speculation by a cadre of local and national sports writers. But who really can know what is coursing through the warped minds that occupy the Browns' front office?

Seattle defensive coordinator Dan Quinn, Broncos offensive coordinator Adam Gase and fired Lions head coach Jim Schwartz also have been mentioned as possible candidates.

If you put me in front of a firing squad and demand that I speculate on Lombardi's decision, I'd have to say McDaniels, who has a history with Browns general manager Mike Lombardi. (And this front office has already shown it favors the "old-boy" network.) That said, I'd still give McDaniels no better than a 20% chance of winning the job.

Chances are much more likely that a dark-horse candidate (like Notre Dame's Brian Kelly, Stanford's David Shaw, Greg Roman of the 49ers or Mike Zimmer of the Bengals) emerges and is proclaimed the next Eric Mangini, Romeo Crennel, Pat Shurmur or Rob Chudzinski with all the attendant fanfare.

2) Who will the Browns pick with the No. 4 choice in the first round of May's college draft?

The possibility that they will NOT draft No. 4 is real. They have enough supplemental draft choices that they could trade up and go after Louisville QB Teddy Bridgewater. If things fall right.

However, as of now, Walter Football and Drafttek say the Browns will choose Clemson wide receiver Sammy Watkins. CBS Sports experts say Texas A&M offensive tackle Jake Matthews or UCLA outside linebacker Anthony Barr. Bleacher Report says Central Florida QB Blake Bortles, as does Yahoo Sports and draftsite.com. *Sports Illustrated* says Fresno State QB Derek Carr. The *Sporting News* says it'll be Texas A&M QB Johnny Manziel.

Knowing how the Browns have drafted in the past, I wouldn't be a bit surprised if they pick somebody like long-snapper Spergon Veikune of Northwest Montana Community College. However, it's more likely that they will choose Watkins, if they don't trade up and Bridgewater isn't available at No. 4. But who SHOULD they pick, if not Bridgewater? I'm going to catch hell for this: Bortles.

3) How many games will the Cavaliers win this season, and can they possibly still make the Eastern Division playoffs?

Despite a rocky two months, the Cavs indeed have a shot at the playoffs, given the lack of dominant teams in the division. Experts are saying that a team could make the cut with a record of under .500, which does not rule out the Cavs.

My crystal ball tells me that all the youngsters on the current roster will continue to improve through the rest of the season (except a certain recent No. 1 overall draft choice). The defense will improve, too, and the Cavs will win 35 games--enough to make a run at the ping-pong balls but not the playoffs.

4) During the regular season, how many games will the Indians win in 2014?

Not 92. Not 90. Not 82, but 80--unless GM Chris Antonetti provides manager Terry Francona with another serviceable starting pitcher and somebody with some pop in his bat. But that's hardly likely, since the free-agent market has pretty much dried up by now, and the team doesn't have any available talent to offer in a trade for anyone of decent value. We can only hope that Francona can work the same magic he did last season.

5) Who among the Browns' free agents--Alex Mack and T.J. Ward--will be back in the orange-and-brown come September?

Neither. And there's not a fair-minded person who could blame them for getting out while the getting's good. No professional athlete or coach anywhere would want to subject themselves to being treated like Chud was treated.

6) Can you name the Indians' starting rotation when the regular season commences in April?

Justin Masterson, Carlos Carrasco, Zach McAllister and Danny Salazar. Enigmatic Trevor Bauer is a long shot to fill the No. 4 slot.

7) Who will emerge as the Browns' starting QB during training camp?

Brian Hoyer should, if he's fully recovered from his injury. From their No. 4 drafting position, the Browns probably will have a chance to draft one of the second-tier college QBs like Carr or Bortels. But for any "second-tier" rookies to win the starting job is the ultimate long-shot, as long as Hoyer is healthy.

If I were Banner and Lombardi, I'd draft at least two QBs, sign a bunch of free-agent QBs, and let them battle with Hoyer throughout training camp. Last man standing would be the starter on opening day. But that's just me.

8) Who will lead the Indians in the following categories: batting average, home runs, runs-batted-in, and victories by a pitcher?

Batting average: Yan Gomes, who led the regulars last season with a .294 mark, could have a

break-out year.

Home runs: Let's cross our fingers and give new third-baseman Carlos Santana, freed up from regular catching duties, the nod.

Runs-batted-in: A close race, led by Jason Kipnis--but we'd love to see Santana get 100.

Victories: Justin Masterson; can't see any of the other options coming close.

9) Will the Indians make the American League playoffs for the second straight year?

No way. They'll finish ahead of the White Sox and Twins in the A.L. Central, but that's all. While the Tribe was the surprise team in the division last summer, Kansas City will be the surprise this coming summer, giving the Tigers a hell of a run for their money.

10) Does Anthony Bennett have a bright future with the Cavaliers?

Not in 2014, he doesn't. The kid is going to take at least three years to develop, if he develops at all.

11) Will the Browns win more than five games in 2014?

In past seasons, I've optimistically predicted eight or nine victories. I have learned my lesson. The Browns might win five games, but no more. (Maybe, just maybe, this prediction will put an end to the jinx.)

12) Will Browns OC Norv Turner and DC Ray Horton survive the off-season purge?

The new head coach will have two options: bring in his own guys, or, for the sake of consistency, keep Turner and Horton as the key coordinators. Consistency? This franchise does not know the meaning of the word. Besides that, both have received permission to “seek other positions.” Given the dysfunction of this organization, they would be fools if they didn’t at least test the waters elsewhere.

Bottom line: both Turner and Horton are gone.

13) Do any of the Cavaliers have a shot at any of the NBA’s major post-season awards?

If he stays healthy (and that’s a big “if,” now that he’s the starting center again), Andy Varejao could make a run at “Comeback Player of the Year.”

14) Is there no end in sight to the ineptitude of Cleveland sports teams?

After sloshing through all those hard-to-predict questions, I felt compelled to give myself one softball question this year. And the answer is...No.