

We've nearly reached the Gobi Desert in terms of Cleveland sports. No more Browns games for months, the Tribe is still weeks away from meaningless spring training games and the Cavs are at the half way point of a long NBA season. This is the dead zone of the Cleveland sports calendar. It's a mish-mash from Peeker this Monday in the Weekend Wrap. He hits on the Cavs recent west coast swing, Rob Ryan's head coaching aspirations, Donte Stallworth, Mike Redmond, and the general dissatisfaction from the NFL Playoff games we've all watched these past two weekends.



Good Enough, Could Have Been Better

I got home in time from a night out Saturday to catch three quarters of the Cavaliers game. I'm watching them toy with the Clippers when my wife, also watching the game, starts railing about the fact that despite being down nine points the Cavaliers seem almost jovial on the court. Numerous shots of the bench show LeBron James laughing hysterically. Delonte West, on the court at the time, is joking with the bench and LBJ. Anderson Varejao is smiling and it's a laugh-fest in the Staples Center.

She wonders what can possibly be so funny when Clipper shots are falling at a ridiculous pace and the Cavs are looking like they're clowning around and in

danger of coming home with a losing record on the trip.

But I've seen this act too many times. I tell her when she wakes up in the morning the Cavs will have beaten the Clippers and come back with a respectable 3-2 west coast swing.

And they do. They get a one-point win over L.A. Lite and come home with the best record in the Eastern Conference while looking at 11 of their next 13 games at 'The Q'.

Now, the trip could have been much better. The Cavs lost to a Denver club playing without Carmelo Anthony and they lost on a last-second prayer in Utah. 5-0 on the west coast, virtually unheard of, was within their grasp.

But I can't find it in me to get bent about it.

After watching the Wine & Gold roll through the regular season last season only to be stopped a couple rungs from the top of the ladder I find myself perfectly fine with them pacing themselves through the regular season. Whether it is a game or a trip this team seems to be playing with one goal in mind; to be playing their best basketball when the playoffs roll around as opposed to during the regular season.

They're 31-11 while occasionally taking a night off. But they seem to have the ability to focus when a game or moment arrives that calls for their undivided attention.

I know it's hard not to shake your head occasionally when the Cavs play like they're a borderline lottery team and mail in an effort. But this team is bidding it's

time until the intensity and the stakes are raised. And they're still pretty damn good even while doing it.

Etcetera

We've nearly reached the Gobi Desert in terms of Cleveland sports. No more Browns games for months, the Tribe is still weeks away from meaningless spring training games and the Cavs are at the half way point of a long NBA season. You bet your ass there's not much more than etcetera out there right now.

- Might be much ado about nothing but I find Rob Ryan, currently the Browns Defensive Coordinator, campaigning for a Raiders job that doesn't currently exist, a bit strange.

On one hand I see a guy making a play for a promotion and one of only 32 head coaching jobs available at the utmost level of professional football. He's looking to improve his lot in life and there's nothing wrong with that. It's nothing that's not done every day in every profession. But when Ryan told the USA Today that, "Hell yeah I'd be interested in the Oakland job" it made me wonder if there was more to it than just a guy angling for a bigger job.

Even in the bordello that is the coaching profession it's bad form to promote oneself for a job before the actual owner of that job has been dismissed. And Tom Cable, at last check, is still the Raiders Head Coach. That kind of public campaigning for someone else's job isn't going to endear Ryan to others in the fraternity.

Going about it so publicly also makes me wonder just how secure Ryan is here in Cleveland. He doesn't share a defensive philosophy with new Browns president Mike Holmgren and, while there were times and games where the Browns defense made life miserable for opposing offenses (Paging Ben Roethlisberger), the defense was still ranked amongst the worst in the league.

Could be that Ryan sees the writing on the wall and is looking to land softly if and when the ax falls in Cleveland. I'm just not sure he's going about it the right way.

- I had forgotten Donte Stallworth was still alive. The oft-injured, often unproductive wide receiver took a season off after he hit and killed a pedestrian this past off season in Miami Beach. Sadly, he was unproductive enough when he was actually on the game day roster that he wasn't missed all that much.

But what do the Browns do with Stallworth now? And does their inexperienced and ineffective receiving corps play into the answer?

Stallworth signed a 7-year, \$35million deal as a free agent in March of 2008 and he's still the exclusive property of the Browns. When you consider the fact he's already cashed the signing bonus portion of that deal and that the likes of Mohamed Massaquoi, Brian Robiskie and Chansi Stuckey are currently the best options for Browns QBs, bringing Stallworth back and plugging him into the lineup may be more than just a passing thought.

- Last week it was Shelley Duncan and Austin Kearns signing minor league deals with the Tribe. This past week Mark Grudzielanek signed

a minor league deal with Cleveland and the Indians also signed 39-year old reserve catcher Mike Redmond to a one year, \$850k major league contract to be their backup catcher.

Predictably, some Indians fans went nuts. You'd think that giving Redmond a guaranteed deal was sensible given Redmond will likely help new first base coach Sandy Alomar Jr. tutor the young catchers like Carlos Santana and Lou Marson while also playing a couple of times per week. But some Tribe fans are up in arms that Wyatt Toregas will likely lose some playing time and major league service time with Redmond in the fold.

That's the same Wyatt Toregas who hit .176 with a .463 OPS in his short stint with the Indians last season. The same Wyatt Toregas who recently turned 27-years old and has a career minor league average of .264 and an OPS of less than .740 in six minor league seasons.

I don't care how much of a tool you may be nor how much baseball you believe you know, but when you can get a solid veteran to fill in **and** mentor the best prospect in the system that's \$850k well spent. And it's not like you were going to take that \$850k and use it to sign Jason Bay or Matt Holliday.

And to get up in arms over Wyatt Freaking Toregas being affected by the deal? Good God. It's going to be a long year.

- For the second week in a row the NFL served us a crap sandwich by way of this weekend's Divisional Playoff games. New Orleans destroyed Arizona, Baltimore was never in danger of crossing the goal

line in Indianapolis, much less winning the game, and Minnesota completely dismantled Dallas. Only the Jets-Chargers game had a hint of drama.

Hopefully the conference championships give us something to watch. Rex Ryan has the Jets believing they are destined to get to Miami. We'll see just how good that defense is next weekend in Indianapolis. And the Vikings and Saints should again keep the scoreboard operators occupied all afternoon.

Give us something to talk about. At the very least let the Jets be deprived of reaching the penultimate game of the season because one of their receivers drops a couple of catchable balls. You know the one.

That'd be enough to qualify next weekend as a good one.