



I have internal dialogue with myself all the time. Never more so than when I'm watching a sporting event involving the Browns, Indians, Cavs and Buckeyes. And I have to admit I'm a bit worried about what I'm saying to me in regard to the Cleveland Browns lately (and specifically after Browns-Lions on Saturday). After the first pre-season game against Green Bay I was excited. The Browns played the Packers even in pretty much every facet of the game and actually came out of Lambeau Field with a win. I told myself that the pre-season was indeed important when you're looking for a cultural change with an organization and when you were looking to progress on the field.

After the last two games, both losses in which the lack of depth and defensive talent on the field showed through, I'm starting to tell me that it's only pre-season and to stop being so critical about the end result.

That's known as 'rationalization' in the pseudo-sports writing business. You can also call it 'masking', 'fooling yourself', 'disingenuous' and 'intellectually dishonesty'.

The bottom line is I do not like what I'm seeing on the defensive side of the ball. The Browns gave up 35 points to the Detroit Lions in what's widely assumed to be the closest you're going to get to an actual NFL game in the pre-season. They gave up 35 points to Matt Stafford and a team that had their starting running back out of the game before most fans had settled into their seats.

That's just not going to cut it out when real bullets start flying in a few weeks.

Even if you take away the defensive TD the Lions scored the Browns defense simply wasn't impactful. There weren't enough impact plays and there haven't been throughout the pre-season. It's hard to imagine that the Browns are content playing a vanilla defense in the pre-season and that Scott Fujita and Chris Gocong will suddenly flip a switch when the season starts to become beasts.

The Browns threw all kinds of blitzes at Green Bay QB Aaron Rodgers without them making any difference and without getting to Rodgers is one of the very best at picking the blitz apart but the same can't be said for the Rams AJ Feeley or Sam Bradford and it's too early to say it about the Lions' Stafford.

Maybe we're in store for a 2007-type season where the Browns, who again looked crisp and competent offensively, can put up 30 points a game and a bend-but-don't-break defense does enough to get by.

Or maybe I'm just loss-logged after the summer of LeBron and 100 Indians losses and am putting the cart too far ahead of the horse in terms of my expectations.

That's possible If not likely. But the Browns defense just doesn't pass the 'eye test' right now. And we're heading to the point in time where it will begin to really matter.

The Wait is Over

Jim Tressel's Ohio State Buckeyes start a season that's overflowing with promise when they kick off the 2010 season with a Thursday game against Marshall. The Buckeyes are ridiculously talented and many of the people I talk to who are closer to the team than I am expect really big things from OSU.

As in National Championship Game-big.

You have an experienced and talented offense featuring third year starter Terrelle Pryor and he's surrounded by talented play-makers at nearly every offensive position. You also have a very good defense anchored by DL Cam Heyward that will make life miserable for most offenses this fall. Both Michigan and Penn State look to be no better than average this season and both come to the Horseshoe to face-off with the Buckeyes.

But big road games loom at Wisconsin and at Iowa. College football often comes down to such games and if the Buckeyes can take care of business on the road they may very well reach the BCS Championship game in January.

Much to the chagrin of the rest of the nation.

I'm really interested to see if Pryor makes the same personal strides in his junior year that Troy Smith during his tenure with OSU. Smith's ascension began in earnest in his third season and it transformed the Buckeyes from a conservative, ground-first offensive attack to a big-play, strike from anywhere on the field type of offense. Tressel trusted Smith completely and it showed in the play calling as well as in the freedom that Smith had to operate the offense.

If Pryor makes the same jump the Buckeyes are a boatload of trouble for anyone doing the game planning against them. Pryor was, is and always will be a threat to take the football the distance when he tucks it and runs and if he's improved his passing mechanics and has a more

complete understanding of his role on the field then the sky is the limit for OSU.

We'll begin to find out about all of this Thursday night.

Not Seeing It

Sam Amico, my colleague here at TheClevelandFan.com, wrote [this article](#) on the site last week. In the article Sam wrote that he believes the Cleveland Cavaliers will win upward of 50 games next season. Now, Sam is not some wide-eyed local. He writes for the NBA.com in addition to other reputable publications.

But I'm just not feeling it here.

Sam notes that Byron Scott will have the Cavs playing a much more up-tempo style offensively and that the Cavaliers have more talent and guys that know how to win than Scott ever inherited in his other coaching stops (with the Nets and Hornets). He also correctly points out that Scott's first two stops saw him struggle in his first year before turning things around in his second season.

But I still can't get past the 'talent' issue.

The Cavaliers took a huge, obvious hit when LeBron James turned over the dinner table on July 8th. And regardless of how often LBJ stifled the offensive flow with his dribbling out the shot clock from 30-feet away; he simply made players who shared the floor with him better than they are without him. Yes, Mo Williams may have had to alter his game somewhat while James went LeSo far too often, but Mo wasn't Chris Paul before he arrived in Cleveland. He wasn't Rajon Rondo either. Williams is a nice player who can (and will) score in bunches on any given night. But he's never been the focal point of the offense and he's never been known as one of the NBA's better distributors of the ball either.

The question I have is who is going to run this show featuring Williams, Antawn Jamison, Andy Varejao and JJ Hickson? I'm simply not seeing Williams in the Paul role where he's quickly slashing to the basket, kicking the ball when necessary and pulling up for jumpers when they're available.

Ad while we're on the topic, Varejao and Hickson may have been the two biggest beneficiaries over the years of James drawing two or three defenders and finding JJ or Wild Thing wide open for dunks and lay ins. I realize each is talented, but their best characteristic thus far has been their ability to not have a James pass hit them in the shoulder, head or face like Drew Gooden did time and time again.

While the ability to not have a ball hit you in the face and ricochet into the club seats is admirable, it's not exactly the difference maker in making an All-Star game.

No, I just don't see the Cavaliers getting near the 50 win mark this season. If they win half that many they'll meet my expectations. If they win 35 I'll be surprised. And if they win 40 and the four guys I mentioned above are all still here I'll be stunned and disappointed. Mostly in that Dan Gilbert and Chris Grant settled for perpetual mediocrity by not blowing it up and starting over.

Anyone Out There?

Because I grew up with the Indians during the 70's and 80's I'm accustomed to September being a lot like spring training with the Tribe. During those two decades September was typically not a time spent sweating each game in the hopes you could secure a playoff spot but rather a time when future Tribe big leaguers would audition for next season.

The problem now is that all those guys are and have been up here in Cleveland for some time.

And when I look at what's left in the farm system I get a bit concerned.

The cause of that concern is when I watch the Indians now I'm shocked and utterly disgusted by not only seeing guys like Trevor Crowe batting 6th in a Major League lineup but also by the fact that Crowe, who is a fifth outfielder in most organizations, if that, looks pretty secure in this organization.

Barring trades and big free agent signings (go ahead and giggle about that one now) I just don't see a ton of natural outfielders in the system that are close to challenging for a job. Shin-Soo Choo is a legit big leaguer. Michael Brantley has shown flashes. But when you're running guys like Shelley Duncan and Crowe out there regularly that says something about your outfield situation. What it actually says is that you're in big trouble and that you've probably honestly earned your abysmal win-loss record.

You can always turn positional surplus into prospects at other positions. So maybe the Indians can develop some of these pitchers in their pipeline and spin them for major league outfielders. But I defy you to look at the major league roster and down on the farm and tell me about a guy you're excited to see with the Tribe.

It's a dark, dark time for this team in terms of competing for a division title. And sunrise isn't on the horizon.

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