



A lot of Browns, a lot of Thome and a lot of Buckeyes talk in this edition of The Weekend Wrap. From a tremendous 'Thomecoming' Friday to a last minute win engineered by the Browns on Sunday, it was a pretty good weekend in Cleveland sports. That's not to say I find it impossible to find some flaws....

I'm checking the standings a couple times per hour to make sure Sunday's game against the Dolphins is still being considered a win. 2-1 is infinitely better than 1-2 (actually it/s literally just a game better than 1-2 but you know what I'm saying) and you never complain about W's but I'm pretty much convinced neither team deserved to win that game and I'm also very grateful that there was no chance of overtime.

Listen, that throw that Colt McCoy made to Mohamed Massaquoi was a thing of beauty. I mean, that was a perfectly thrown ball under a lot of pressure in terms of having to put six on the board with less than a minute remaining. It was beautifully done and much needed to be sure.

But there wasn't much else all day in the passing game that was NFL-caliber.

McCoy was hit on 7-step drops, 5-step drops and 3-step drops and he had no receivers separating all day. On the rare occasions he wasn't getting hit he was having balls batted down at the line of scrimmage or throwing them into the chests of defensive linemen. And on the very rare occasion when he wasn't getting hit or throwing balls into linemen and a receiver did have separation, then McCoy was overthrowing that guy (Josh Cribbs in this instance) by 5-yards on a ball that should have gone for an easy TD.

The win will cover up a lot of issues but suffice it to say this offense still stinks. Where is the creativity? Where is the innovation and the calls to get McCoy out of the pocket in a half roll and let him make plays where he seems comfortable (like on the first TD pass to Cribbs)? The Dolphins just kept putting more and more guys up near the line of scrimmage and daring McCoy and the receivers to make plays.

And it wasn't until the final four minutes when the Dolphins were conceding the underneath stuff that the receivers made a few plays.

No, the passing game still reminds me of something you'd have thought was progressive back in the 1940's. This offense has been together for 9 weeks and that's still the biggest issue. But damn it's disgusting to watch at times.

Conversely, give all the credit in the world to the Browns defense. What promised to be the weak link this season is coming along nicely. It was the defense that won the ballgame Sunday despite spending most of the day on the field due to the offensive difficulties.

Every element on the defense contributed too. Ahtyba Rubin, Phil Taylor and Jabaal Sheard played well. D'Qwell Jackson, Chris Gocong and Scott Fujita made big plays in both the running and passing game and the DBs did a tremendous job holding Brandon Marshall in check. Again, Joe Haden in particular was outstanding on Marshall. It's hard to believe a guy giving away 6 inches and 50 pounds could be intimidating but Haden simply out-physicaled Marshall and frustrated him all day long.

So yes, it's great to be 2-1. But this offense better improve exponentially if they'd like to be at or near .500 going forward.

* No crying about penalties please. Both teams shot themselves in the feet with stupid, over-aggressive late hit and roughing calls, but for the most part the calls went both ways and were evenly assessed. You can complain about the sissification of the game and I'd be with you, but these guys know the rules and have to live with them and keep their aggression and hitting in check.

The penalty that irks me most and nearly cost the Browns the game was preventable and inexcusable. An excessive celebration unsportsmanlike conduct penalty cost the Browns 15 yards after their go ahead TD. There's simply no excuse for it. Get off the field and celebrate on the sidelines with your teammates. I understand it was a huge play and there's a ton of adrenaline pumping through players. But they allowed an official to make a subjective decision and it almost bit them in the ass. The rule is stupid and in my opinion the Massaquoi and Ben Watson celebration was tame. But when you let some mope decide between what is reasonable and what is excessive you put your fate in someone else's hands.

Just don't give them the choice.

* Montario Hardesty looked better and better as the game went on and he got comfortable. He was indecisive at first and got caught prancing but when he figured it out Hardesty showed a burst and an ability to fit through small creases. He also catches the ball very well and his 4th and 4 reception for a 1st down on the final drive was huge.

* Am I missing something regarding Evan Moore? Why is this guy not on the field more often and why isn't his ability to create mismatches being exploited?

* Great catch on the TD Josh Cribbs. Tremendous job going up and fighting for that football. But the drop on 3rd and 7 that would have been a 1st down can't be a trend. This team is fighting

itself offensively and balls that hit you in the hands and in stride have to be caught. That extends drives and gives a tired defense another couple breaths.

* You see in small samples why the Browns loved WR Greg Little enough to make him a 2nd round pick despite the fact he sat out his last college season. What a big, strong weapon who can wreak havoc after the catch if you can find him some space to operate.

* Don't get overly excited about the two-minute offense you saw Sunday. The Browns actually got the ball on their final drive with about 4 minutes left in the game and they may have actually possessed the ball longer on that drive than they did on any other possessions during the game. McCoy managed the game and the clock well on the drive. But there wasn't a tremendous amount of pressure on him time-wise. But still, that final TD throw....perfection.

* It doesn't suck to see the Falcons and Eagles each losing and dropping to 1-2 on the young season. Philadelphia was all but annointed Super Bowl champion before they met for training camp and the Falcons owe the Browns their 2012 1st round pick.

* Lastly, I hope Tony Sparano is renting his living quarters in Miami. He's about done. He did nothing to help himself with his play calling on the final drive. Having a weapon like Reggie Bush who is so capable of getting you yards that would have allowed you a FG chance and not using him is indefensible. Sparano chose instead to have Chad Henne attempt four throws into the strength of the Browns secondary and the Dolphins were never able to line up for a chance to win the game. That won't sit well in Miami where Sparano would already be gone if ownership could have successfully convinced Jim Harbaugh to take the job.

That's How They Drew it Up

You can call me nostalgic if you want. You can also play the role of a hardened and bitter Dolan-Shapiro-Antonetti hater and tell me how the Indians trade for Jim Thome a month back was a public relations move and not a move made for competition's sake. I'd argue the latter point all day long and Exhibit A would simply be pointing to the Indians everyday lineup that's been decimated by injuries. And to the former point I'd say, 'So what?'

Part of what makes baseball as special as it is are games like Friday night's game against the Twins when the Indians and Thome showed that good PR and winning baseball are not mutually exclusive. In fact, on the night the Indians and Thome made things right, Thome had three hits including one of his patented bombs to dead center field for a home run.

Special players seem to have storybook moments. Thome is a first ballot Hall of Famer who just seems to step up in big moments and delivers big hits and memorable moments. Much like Derek Jeter hitting a home run for his 3,000th hit a couple months back, Thome's big night on Thome's big night just seemed right.

There aren't a lot of Thome haters remaining in Cleveland. Many who were insulted when he decided to not leave \$40million on the table (and that number is from John Hart who was interviewed on local radio last week) have come to grips with Thome doing what he did. And even the biggest cynics had to shake their heads and smile Friday night.

When the Indians dealt for Thome a month or so ago it was widely stated that the club needed to draw an extra 15,000 or so fans to pay the remaining \$600,000 of Thome's 2011 salary. The Indians cleared that hurdle in T25's first weekend back. This weekend, well out of contention and with Ohio State and the Browns both playing at home, the Indians drew well over 110,000 fans for a series against the Twins that was all but meaningless in terms of its bearing on the standings.

Who cares that the Indians front office purposely played on the heartstrings of their fans by bringing Thome back? Who cares that Thome is clearly in the twilight of his career? The money Thome has generated in the last month or so of the season can be (and some of it better be) poured into the 2012 roster.

And the sight of a Cleveland legend stepping back into that left handed batter's box and pointing the bat at the pitcher in his familiar pre-pitch routine brought closure, not to mention goose bumps, to many Indians fans.

The Thome trade, and particularly this past Friday night, was as much for us as it was Thome. For us the homer on Friday night, on Jim Thome night of all things, immediately goes to right near the top of the list in terms of memorable Thome HRs as an Indian.

By all accounts Jim Thome deserves the respect and adulation this fan base has heaped on him over these years. And this fan base has earned and deserved the moment they watched unfold on Friday night.

By the Way

Can we please stop with this 'Chase for 2nd Place' shit? You know who's really busting their sacks for the coveted second spot in the AL Central? No one. It looks juvenile throwing that out there for public consumption. Is this Pony League? Is the next step after that is promising the club a trip to Dairy Queen?

Stop with the contrived motivational crap and just play with pride. That'll be enough because the White Sox are incapable of it. Publicly saying the Tribe is really busting it to get that second place spot is sad, demeaning and kind of pathetic.

It'll Do

There aren't too many 5/13 for 83 yard passing days that I get excited and Saturday's effort from newly anointed Buckeye QB Braxton Miller really isn't an exception. The one thing you can say about Miller's passing is at least 40% of his completed passes were TDs, even if Buckeye punter Ben Buchanan's punts had tighter spirals on them. ABC's announcer on the game, Mike Patrick, amusingly said the best thing about Miller's throws for most of the days was that they 'wobbled enough to catch either end of the ball'.

But that's not what Saturday was really about. It was really more about the fact that Ohio State got back on track against a terrible Colorado team and earned a 37-17 win over the Buffaloes in Miller's debut as the starter.

Miller delivered about what was expected as a college passer (if still not more than what Joe Bauserman is capable of delivering) but it was the fact that Miller is actually a threat from the

position even if he's not anywhere near where he needs to be as a passer. Miller rushed 17 times for 83 yards and, like Terrelle Pryor and Troy Smith before him, was able to keep a few drives and plays alive with his feet. The passing game still needs drastic work and improvement but the fact Miller can make plays in the passing game without actually passing is where he provides the biggest benefit over Bauserman.

I'm still convinced Miller is behind the eight ball somewhat in his development because Ohio State isn't exactly over loaded with enterprising offensive minds to guide him. Until the day he left, Pryor never fully developed the proper throwing mechanics. He relied on ridiculous athleticism and the fact that coverage from week to week can be exploited to give OSU's athletes favorable match ups. I think Miller's throwing motion is actually ahead of where Pryor was at the same point, as sad as that may seem today after watching him wobble balls all over the field. But Miller's head is swimming in formations, sets, reads and responsibilities and all that will have to be overcome before his natural motion provides the Buckeye fan base with some solace.

The Buckeyes need Miller's development to hit high gear soon. If that could be by net Saturday when Michigan State comes in it would be terrific. In most years MSU coming into the 'Shoe to face Ohio State would see the Buckeyes as comfortable favorites.

But you may have noticed over the last nine months that this is no normal year.

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