The Browns are one of the NFL's pillar franchises. Years of modern-era losing haven't changed that.

Yes, the Browns entered the NFL in 1950, 30 years after its inception. Yes, the Browns played their first four seasons in another league. Yes, Cleveland had a handful of other NFL franchises prior to the Browns – most notably the Rams from 1933 to 1945.

And yes, the current Browns aren't even the original Browns. We don't need to pick at that scab right now.

But with four NFL titles and 11 NFL Championship Game appearances prior to the AFL-NFL merger in 1970, in addition to a clean sweep of All-America Football Conference championships in all four years the league existed, the Browns are held in the same historical esteem as franchises such as the Packers, Bears and Giants, all of whom entered the league in the 1920s and are, essentially, among the league's founding franchises.

The idea of the Packers ever playing home games in a dome is ludicrous. The Bears may play in a renovated Soldier Field that looks something like a UFO landing on the Parthenon, but the

Monsters of the Midway still play in the elements.

The Giants? Same story. New stadium, still outdoors, and will likely always be outdoors. The NFL didn't make a dome a condition when they awarded Super Bowl XLVIII to the New York market. MetLife Stadium, the home of the Giants and Jets, will host the game on Feb. 2, 2014.

So why do the Browns need a dome?

This week, incoming Browns owner Jimmy Haslam met with Cleveland city council members to, among other things, open the door for discussion on ways to improve Cleveland Browns Stadium as a revenue-generating venue for the region. Among the topics Haslam broached was the possibility of placing a retractable roof on the stadium, allowing year-round use of the facility, and possibly making Cleveland a more attractive destination for large-scale events that need the space provided by a domed stadium.

It's a touchy subject in Cleveland, a city that prides itself on an old-school football ethos. Tough players and tougher fans braving the late-season elements in our wind-whipped lakefront freezer box. It's how we've enjoyed (and not enjoyed) football since football was first played in front of an audience in this town.

But that viewpoint is at odds with the pragmatic need to get more dollars out of a facility that sits essentially vacant for well over 300 days a year. Cleveland Browns Stadium has the potential to become a much more prolific money maker for the region, but its lakefront location and exposure to the elements severely limit the breadth of its usefulness.

As it is, Cleveland doesn't have a lot in the way of prime exposition and event space. That outlook will certainly improve once the new convention center opens, but the city will still lack a venue to attract major spectator events that need a controlled environment and more seating capacity than the 20,562 seats that Quicken Loans Arena can offer.

That's where a domed Cleveland Browns Stadium would fit into the picture. These are among the events a dome would allow Cleveland to pursue:

The Super Bowl. Obviously, this would be the king crab to catch. It's the premier single-day sporting event in the world, and brings with it two weeks of related activities and events for the host city. In the event Cleveland could land a Super Bowl, it would likely be a one-off event, like it was for cities such as Detroit and Jacksonville. But for the only NFL city to neither have hosted a Super Bowl nor have had a team play in a Super Bowl, it's time for a football town like Cleveland to take a long-overdue turn reaping some benefits from the NFL's title game.

The Final Four. Much like the Super Bowl, it brings with it a slew of related events. In addition, Final Four cities often host a regional final bracket the year before, as a dry run for the following year. So landing a Final Four could bring two Marches' worth of events to Cleveland.

A minor college bowl game. If Detroit can host the Little Caesars Bowl, why couldn't Cleveland attempt to launch something similar? It wouldn't attract marquee programs, but for a 3 p.m. time slot on ESPN2 a few days after Christmas, you could attract a six-win Big Ten or Big 12 school to face off against a school from the MAC or Conference USA. If there is one thing we've learned over the past decade or so, it's that you can never have too many bowl games.

The Big Ten Championship Game. Lucas Oil Field in Indianapolis will host the game through 2015. After that, if Cleveland wanted to take a turn hosting it every few years, it would likely need a dome. Given the size of the Ohio State fan base in Northeast Ohio, and the frequency with which OSU figures to play in the Big Ten title game over the years, it would be a logical fit to have Cleveland in any rotation for the game.

The MAC Championship Game. Detroit hosts it right now because Detroit has the facility to host it. Cleveland is the home of the MAC's headquarters and has hosted the MAC basketball tournaments since 2000. It would seem that if Cleveland had a facility capable of hosting the MAC football title game, the conference could make a fairly airtight case for moving the game here.

Cleveland State football. It's a subject that gets bounced around in assorted forums from time to time. Could and should Cleveland State take the necessary steps to alter its charter and field a football program for the first time since the school was formed in 1964? If Cleveland had an indoor venue with an artificial surface that could stand up to the wear and tear of back-to-back

Saturday-Sunday football weekends without turning into a mud pit, the city would have an ideal stage on which to launch CSU football.

Other local rivalry games. The annual John Carroll-Baldwin Wallace game? The St. Ignatius-St. Edward Holy War? Playing them under the bright, covered lights at Cleveland Browns Stadium could add some spotlight appeal to the region's other big games.

A spectrum of other events. A covered stadium could also put Cleveland in the running for political conventions in presidential election years, stadium concert tours (for the few bands that still have them), stadium rodeo tours, WrestleMania and other events.

In reality, the movement to put a dome on Cleveland Browns Stadium has very little to do with the Browns. Whether they put a good or bad product on the field, they'll be good or bad whether they play in the open air, under a dome, on grass, on artificial turf or in a parking lot.

This has everything to do with acknowledging that while the Browns might be the primary tenant of their stadium, their games are, or should be, only one category in a catalog of events that could, take place at the stadium.

Cleveland isn't Green Bay, or Chicago, or New York, or Philadelphia. What we need out of our stadium is different from those cities. We're a post-industrial rust belt town with a shrinking population and negative national reputation. We're fighting an uphill battle against more attractive destinations for revenue-generating and profile-enhancing events. Our civic leaders need to fashion better tools to make that happen. A domed stadium is one such tool.

Making it happen will certainly cost money – possibly between $100 million and $400 million. The sin tax that built the stadium and still pays for its upkeep expires in 2015, so financing the project could mean another appeal to voters. However, since Haslam is taking the lead on this, at least in the idea phase, perhaps there is a chance that he'll front some of the cost. We can hope. We can dream.

If the dome ends up becoming a reality, we'll all miss the snowy, windy late-season games on

the lakefront. It's part of our football heritage. But times have changed, and the poetic vision of frozen turf and snowflakes dancing around the heads of 70,000 fans steaming the frigid air with their collective breath has to give way to the dollars and cents of the matter.

Cleveland needs money. A domed stadium can generate more money than a stadium without a dome. It's more spreadsheet than Shakespeare. But that's where we are. And that's why we, as a region, should find it in our best interest to put down our scarves and hats, and support a move indoors.