I just spent the worst week of deer gun hunting season of my life. Weather was fine, property was fine, the people I was with were more than fine, but there were simply very few animals moving around. When you sit in a tree for a week and don't even bring the gun to your shoulder it gets tiring, frustrating and physically and emotionally painful. That said, even the worst week of deer hunting beats a good week of work…. Or watching the Cavs and Browns play and the Indians 'build' toward their 2013 season.

Take It and Run Away

Give credit where it's due: the Browns ran into a team dumber and worse off talent-wise than they are and they went to Oakland and won a game they should have won, 20-17. Brandon Weeden made enough throws and Trent Richardson did enough on the ground to carry the offense and the defense took advantage of the fact that Carson Palmer's best days are back in Cincinnati to make it two in a row for the Browns.

That works and we'll not look a gift horse in the mouth or speak too poorly of the overall quality of the football game. There are no additional credits for aesthetic beauty. 4-8 is much better than 3-9 and you almost walk away from the game feeling like the three hours that it took to watch it was worth it.

But thank God that the Raiders are a wreck because there are some things that make you scratch your head while you look back at the football game. The biggest one for me came late in the fourth quarter with the Browns leading 13-10, at the Raiders 40-yard line or so, and facing a 3rd and inches. The Browns had already used two timeouts, had one remaining and were completely screwed on the spot of the ball after Weeden clearly snuck for enough to pick up the first down. Who knows of replay would have showed an angle that reversed the call given CBS

probably had a total of two cameras and six employees in the Coliseum for this dog of a game, but if any situation called for a challenge this was the one.

Worst case, you lose the challenge and that last timeout. Best case, you win the challenge and keep that timeout in your pocket. So what does Pat Shurmur do? He burns the timeout. Not with a challenge, but just flat-out uses his final timeout to call another QB sneak. The Browns got the first down and went on to score the clinching touchdown but if any situation should tell you just how over-matched this head coach is, that was the one.

It was a ridiculous, dumb, bonehead move and it could have come back to bite the Browns right in the ass. And it's no wonder, with a head coach setting the example, that Jordan Cameron took a pass soon after and failed to get out of bounds, giving the Raiders the chance to save a timeout on the same drive. Now, the Raiders returned the favor by jumping offside on a 3rd and 1 inside their own 10-yard line that enabled the Browns to keep the drive going and for Richardson to punch it in, so all's well that ends well.

But good Lord. Do the right thing every time and you can't be held up as a jackass every Monday win or lose.

A few additional thoughts:

~ Weeden was mediocre. I know he put up 364 yards and a TD and he was 25/36. He also did a nice job of finding the guy seemingly every play that the Raiders left completely uncovered. Playing in the Big12 gives you that experience and ability. But on too many plays, with any pressure on him, Weeden put too many footballs up for grabs. He threw two interceptions and could have thrown two more that I counted.

We take stock of Weeden around here after every four games and divide the season into quarters and Weeden, in my opinion, hasn't gotten appreciably better since Game 8. He made strides in the first four games and in the second four, but he's hit a progress wall in the third quarter of the season and he's going to have to demonstrate more in terms of growth for me to have any confidence that he's the guy to lead this team next year and beyond.

~ Sheldon Brown was on TV more than the Kardashians Sunday as teams seem to be geared up to avoid Joe Haden at all costs and instead pick on the aging Brown. Sunday Brown battled to a standstill with a nifty pass break up where he stripped a ball out of the hands of an Oakland receiver and he also picked off a woefully underthrown Palmer pass late in the game.

Sheldon better hit the ice bath and throw down his vitamins because he can look forward to four more games of wearing a bulls-eye on his back.

~ Another nice job by Montario Hardesty coming on to spell Richardson. Hardesty is hitting holes with authority and he ran the ball five times for 40-yards Sunday.

~ Big day for Josh Gordon and Greg Little against a decimated Raiders secondary. Gordon went over 100 yards receiving with a TD and demonstrated something we haven't seen in Cleveland in a long time: a deep threat with good hands. His TD catch came on a long throw and Gordon plucked the ball out of the air with those hands and scored easily.

Little caught four balls for 48 yards and had no drops that I can recall. He also gave a great block that de-cleated a Raider DB and sprung Mohamed Massaquoi for an additional 20 yards after MoMass took a short crossing route from Weeden.

It's nice to see Little and Gordon willingly using their size and strength in the blocking game.

That's two wins in a row for the Browns. They're 4-3 over their last seven and they have the Chiefs coming to CBS next Sunday in what's another eminently winnable game. The Chiefs bowed up after the tragedy that took them by surprise Saturday morning and they beat the Panthers Sunday, but that's a bad football team and that emotional toll that Jovan Belcher's murder-suicide takes from them will likely be paid next Sunday. That's how it typically goes when tragedies like this take place.

That said, the Browns could conceivably be looking at three straight wins by this time next week with a bonus of having sent Peyton Hillis and Brady Quinn home with an "L".

Screw draft position and keep winning games. Keep doing the right things and everything else will work itself out. Right, Pat?

The Indians

It's the hot stove season in Cleveland. That's the time of the year when teams cut some fat and look to sign or trade for some players who will give their fans hope that the team can compete starting in four months.

But apparently not in Cleveland.

Mark Shapiro is under fire for some comments he made on Les Levine's "More Sports with Les Levine" television show that aired on November 20th.

A brief summary:

Shapiro's answer to a critical emailer, who asked why they should renew their season tickets for 2013.

*Shapiro told the emailer that if their only reason for purchasing was to see the Indians win, "**Don't come**."*

No business owner, or executive, should ever approach telling their customers to stay away. The Indians certainly can't afford that dismissive attitude given their dismal home attendance last season.

Shapiro, when contacted yesterday, clarified his stance, but largely defended his comment to the disgruntled season-ticket holder.

"I told him if the sole reason, the only reason, for renewing is predicated on us winning, then they shouldn't come," Shapiro said. "I stand by that. Baseball has to mean more than just being a fan when you win.

"No where are we spending more of our time, more of our energy or more money in trying to win. We all understand that the single-most important thing in baseball is winning and losing. ***But we are always going to have cycles to when we can win*** *."*

That's not going to sit well with many people but I can't really get too bent about what Shapiro said.

Mostly because it's true.

Mid-market teams do have windows and there is more to going to a ball game than just a win or a loss. Sure, winning is the ultimate goal and it certainly enhances the ballpark experience. But going to a game with your dad, wife, son or daughter is about way more than just the win or the loss. If you're a true baseball fan and are surrounded by them you already know that. If you're not, no amount of me explaining it to you is going to convince you otherwise.

And teams like the Indians do have "windows" of opportunity where they can compete and contend for division titles and playoff appearances. That's the simple economics of baseball in play. The Indians can't afford to supplement their roster with high-priced free agents and they can't even retain their own big time players when they are eligible to go the highest bidder.

That's the simple truth.

If you want to complain about what Shapiro said, then take it to the next level and question why the Indians most recent “window” was never really opened and doesn’t look like it will be for any time soon. Question Shapiro on the execution of his plan to operate within a small market, an environment that requires him and his staff to be much better at evaluating talent and acquiring it than they have been over the past few seasons.

Question what they saw in Ubaldo Jimenez and why they traded the organization’s top two prospects for a pitcher who’s been mediocre at best since he arrived in Cleveland. Question why the best options that Shapiro and GM Chris Antonetti could come up with in left field were Shelley Duncan and Aaron Cunningham (amongst others).

Question why Matt LaPorta busted out and why Carlos Santana hasn’t developed and why the Indians can’t seem to motivate SS Asdrubal Cabrera to put together a complete season. Question why Justin Masterson regressed in 2012 and enters 2013 as a huge question mark and why the Indians seem to have such a dearth of minor league talent ready to step up and claim so many open positions.

You can question all that and so with reason.

But don’t question Shapiro’s statement that any given, individual baseball game is about far more than winning or losing. It’s pretty much the one thing that the guy has been right about the last three years.

The Cavs

They’re 4-13 and have the second worst record in the NBA behind the pathetic Washington Wizards. Their best player is out for another 3-4 weeks and they’re woefully thin pretty much everywhere on the floor due to being young and due to the fourth pick in the 2011 draft being pretty much a non-factor.

Other than Anderson Varejao, whose reckless style of play invites future injury, and occasionally this year's first round pick, Dion Waiters, who rolled his ankle in a loss Saturday night, this team right now is pretty much unwatchable.

Obviously having Kyrie Irving back changes that dynamic, but even with Irving the Cavs are at least another draft and a lot of development away from being a threat in the Eastern Conference. And that doesn't even begin to consider the clock you hear ticking on Varejao's next injury or Kyrie's free agency clock.

I feel terrible for the true basketball fans that follow the Cavaliers. Of all the franchises in Cleveland and all of the professional sports leagues out there, it's hardest for me to find any optimism for the Cavs in the NBA, as it's presently set up. I know this team plays hard and seems to work hard for each other every night, but it pisses me off that that's what amounts to enjoyment for Cavs fans now, and probably going forward.

It's Been a While, But the STFU Award Goes To…

…David Stern and the NBA league offices for the sad, spiteful and misguided furor over Gregg Popovich coaching his team and players this past week. To throw a $250,000 fine in the mix on top of acting like 3-year olds in $3,000 suits makes it even more ridiculous.

What happened? ESPN sums it up nicely (probably because Chris Berman had nothing to do with the summation):

"Rather than play Tim Duncan , Tony Parker and Manu Ginobili -- three of the NBA's biggest names -- against LeBron James and Miami in a nationally televised game Thursday night, Popovich put them on a plane and sent them home. It came at the end of a six-game road trip and after the Spurs had played five times in seven days.

Swingman Danny Green was also put on that early flight to San Antonio. Popovich justified his decision in Miami by saying he didn't want to subject Green and his aging Big Three to so much wear and tear this early in the season.

That decision infuriated Stern."

Tough shit, David Stern.

If you want to dictate how the Spurs handle their lineup and their substation rotations then take an 80% pay cut and coach the effing Spurs. Otherwise, STFU and let the guy who's won four NBA titles and two NBA Coach of the Year awards because he has some semblance of an idea as to what he's doing with his team and with his players. A team and players, by the way, that you and your masochistic group of schedule makers, sent on a 10-day road trip that began before Thanksgiving and had two back-to-back sets of games. In fact, the Miami game would have been the Spurs fourth game in five nights.

That's why Popovich sent his old guys home. He's bright enough to understand that the grind the schedule calls for has a lasting effect on old men and old legs and that his guys, his team and his organization would be better served by those guys getting rest instead of another night of abuse.

So what if the team didn't notify the league or league offices about the move?

And if you want to maintain any last ounce of respect from many fans, stop talking about how Popovich's move was unfair to the Miami fans. These are the same people that can't find their way to the arena despite a team consisting of Dwyane Wade, Chris Bosh and LeBron James. This is a fan base that has to be encouraged to 'Fan Up' with t-shirts on the $1,000 seats and with constant prompting from the media and the in-game entertainers.

There are a large percentage of people who attended that game Thursday night and STILL don't know that Popovich sent home four guys beforehand. There is still a large percentage of Miami 'fans' that couldn't pick Manu Ginobili and Danny Green out of a police lineup.

Screw the so-called Heat 'fans'. That city is the biggest front-running, band-wagoning fan base in the country and they don't deserve the respect that Stern says was lacking in the San Antonio approach. Those fools should be thrilled that the Heat actually won the game at all. It took a late three by Ray Allen with about 20-seconds remaining to give Miami the lead in that game in the first place.

So you're going to publicly rip and humiliate a four-time NBA championship coach and a model organization for doing what they're supposed to do in protecting their season at the potential cost a of a single game, and then watch that team nearly beat your favorite son on the road and get pissy and childish about it afterward?

Gutless move David Stern.

You might want to stop and think about the fact that San Antonio (along with Oklahoma City) are about the only two non major media markets who compete in your increasing joke of league where 22 teams go into the year as fodder for your big boys. The Spurs are one of the only reasons fans in Denver and Portland and Cleveland and Charlotte still buy into your horseshit that any team can win the whole thing with the right decisions being made in the front office and on the floor.

Spanking them for doing the very things that give them a chance against teams like Miami, who simply bought (and likely tampered with) what players they needed, reeks of favoritism and hypocrisy. Let the coaches determine who plays and when, and you stay in your ivory tower counting money and maybe seeing which city you can shake down next for a new arena.

What a douche bag.

Final Thoughts

I don't know where you come out on deer hunting or hunting altogether. I also don't really care. I eat what I kill and I won't kill what I don't eat. I have half a deer in the freezer as the old man (and I say that with the utmost love and affection) I hunt with and I split our harvest 50/50. That benefitted me more while he was teaching me the sport and the woods and it's now swung more toward me actually stumbling into more animals. I shot a doe during bow season a couple weeks back so there will be venison on the table and I will get another in either a couple weeks when there is an additional couple days of gun season or during muzzle loader season in early January.

But what sitting in a tree for 50 hours in a week does allow for is some peace and quiet and thought. And the biggest thing I took out of this week is how few of these seasons there actually are to be enjoyed. When I was a little younger I just accepted that tomorrow or next week or next season would be plentiful and fulfilling whether it be from a hunting or sports perspective. But there are a finite number of seasons for all of us, regardless of the sports we enjoy or participate in. The old man I hunt with isn't getting younger and neither am I. I've reached a point in my life that I'm no longer willing to count on next year or next season under the assumption it will be better or even available as it is today. My priorities have changed to the point where I'd rather be out doing what I love to do instead of watching others frustrate me doing what they do.

My watching days are getting fewer and more far between and are spent on watching my kids participate in their athletic endeavors.

The finite number of seasons works two ways. I have far less tolerance for organizations and teams that continue to slop through every year, concerned not so much with winning but with making sure the right amount of money comes through the door to turn a profit. I'm sick of the excuses and the attitude that 'next year will be better'. It hasn't been for a long time with most of these teams.

But the other side is I find myself less attached to these teams and less interested in supporting them with my money and my time. I'll still go to games and still watch, in large part because of what Shapiro alluded to above. But if the choice is between watching and doing, whether 'doing' be hunting or hanging out with the kids and watching a movie or doing something more interactive, ten 'doing' is winning out. Maybe it took me too long to figure this stuff out and I can't

get back what it cost me either way.

But we all run out of ‘next years’ at some point. It’s a shame to waste them on organizations and teams that don’t care anywhere near as much as we do. These teams are losing me. I admit it.

I’m also okay with it.

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