The Akron Beacon-Journal dubbed last night's loss "embarrassing" on the front page of their sports page. In his latest, Gary Benz asks if anyone is actually still embarrassed at this point. I mean really, it was a Thursday night game in December in Pittsburgh between two teams going nowhere on a network that most people can

We were dripping with ambivalence about the outcome or even the contest last night between the Browns and alleged rival Pittsburgh. Ambivalent mostly because it's late in the season, it's cold and the game means absolutely nothing to anyone outside of Romeo Crennel's realtor.

But we were shaken from our doldrums by the headline in this morning's Akron Beacon Journal which had to temerity to call the 27-7 pasting an "embarrassing" loss. To suffer embarrassment one must have done something incredibly stupid or ridiculous in front of someone else. In other words, there has to be an audience to witness the act. And if there is anything that's accurate about last night's loss is that whatever took place was not, fortunately, witnessed by anyone.

Sure, from what we could tell when we flipped over to Fox 8 during commercial breaks in "Grey's Anatomy" there were a few people actually sitting in Heinz Field last night. But from our view it didn't look like any of them were actually watching. Like any good Pittsburgher, they seemed more pre-occupied with the simultaneous tasks of trying to stay warm and playing "pull my finger."

And we're guessing that there were a handful of media types in the press box that felt compelled to occasionally check in on the score while they choked down brats or Primanti Brothers sandwiches or whatever the heck they serve in the buffet line. But outside of these pathetic souls, and the news team at Fox 8 that had to eyeball the game occasionally while they waited that extra hour or so before delivering the 10 o'clock news, certainly no one was watching the game.

We can only assume that's what the NFL had in mind when they decided to play a Thursday night game in December in Pittsburgh between two teams going nowhere on a network that most people can't get. Which is why, we believe, that whatever else you may call last night's loss, it wasn't embarrassing.

But if we can suspend reality and accept for the moment that people actually watched and were embarrassed by the Browns performance, we can only say we're embarrassed they're embarrassed. Surely, to anyone still paying attention the outcome of last night's game was so predictable it hardly warranted actually being played. The Browns have now played the Steelers 14 times since the return from the Art Modell-imposed hiatus. They've been folded, spindled and mutilated in 13 of those games. (Actually, in the golden years of 2001-2003 the games were pretty competitive. Still, we lost 5 of those 6 games). These last two seasons have been particularly brutal.

Thus, if the outcome was predetermined, it makes no difference to us how they played. Sure, when the Browns lost earlier in the season we had folks like WTAM sports troll Mike Trivissono bootlicking owner Randy Lerner the next day on the air by saying that at least it was a good loss and that the Browns were making progress. (True compared to 2005 Christmas Eve massacre but at odds with the relative competitiveness of the games played between 2001 and 2003) But outside of munchkins like Triv whose idea of a tough question was to ask Carmen Policy what kind of wine he drank the night before, trying to differentiate between good and bad losses is so much a fool's game for it obscures the fact that results still aren't being achieved.

Professional sports is the ultimate meritocracy. The reward for a coach who wins is that he keeps his job. Losers become analysts. From a fan's perspective, winning cures all ills and there is no such thing as a good loss. So excuse us if we feel no different about last night's loss than we did about the loss two weeks earlier. The fact remains that the Browns have, once

again, spent most of this season trying to convert a football town into a basketball town.

Still, if you must get embarrassed about what your team did last night in Pittsburgh, then have at it. There were plenty of moments to choose from and plenty of suspects to pick on. Braylon Edwards proved he can't take a hit and Dennis Northcutt proved he can't stand cold weather. The defensive line proved it can't shed a block and Derek Anderson proved that no matter how bad the line, the best way to avoid a sack is to get rid of the ball quicker.

We'd observe that there may be a quarterback controversy brewing, but really, how much controversy exists over who is better suited as next year's back-up to the free agent that will inevitably be signed? We'd observe that if there's a bigger poser in football than Steelers head coach Bill Cowher we haven't seen it, just as we'd observe that Steelers linebacker Joey Porter is giving Ravens linebacker Ray Lewis a real battle for biggest jerk in the AFC. (We'd say the league but until Terrell Owens retires, the award is his.)

But such observations, and any others we'd note like the continuing inability of this defense to stop any team on third down, would indicate a level of interest in last night's game that we're still having trouble mustering. But on the plus side, last night's game gave Time Warner no reason to sign on to the NFL Network anytime soon, thus sparing us next week's scintillating San Francisco at Seattle match up. Oh yea, and with last night's loss this now opens up our Sunday.