It wasn't long ago that the Browns were the laughing stock of the league. But not anymore. We are now the Sally Field's of the NFL, except we aren't annoying. They like us. They really like us. And why not? The resurgence of the Browns, especially given what this franchise has been through, it's a great story. And the NFL is eating it up. We've been given the schedule of all schedules. We're all gonna have to step our games up: players, coaches, sports bars and tailgaters. It must be a team effort with everyone taking their gap integrity.

By now it seems like for ev-rah ago that Sean Salisbury , one of the lamer talking heads in the long history of lame sports talking heads, was calling then Maximum Leader Butch Davis' Browns'
The New Bengals of the NFL
TM
. The pundits lack of respect for the Browns made Rodney Dangerfield look like
John Shaft
. Fast forward to the young Browns' as the new Green Bay Packers now that Ahmuhkah's hero,
Brett Fav-ray, has taken his worn thin awe-shucks ma'am Skoal and Wranglers good old boy
act and his salt and pepper Clooney-esque old guy charm and decided he was done choking in big games. We are now the
Sally Field's
of the NFL, except we aren't annoying. They like us. They really like us. And why not? Who is the only city and fan base in history to raise so much hell when some carpet bagging owner and complicitous league tried to take our team, our name and our colors, that the league caved? Seattle, we feel your pain. What team has that old-school historic aura but has been down so long that near miss playoff contention at the

hands of Jim Sorgi looked like up? Who do real football fans have such a soft spot for deep in the cockles and sub-cockles of their hearts that they say and write things like "the Browns being good is good for the league", and they mean it? This is our time. It's 1985 all over again. The fates are all lined up for us to make one hell of a 3 to 4 year run.

And to the darling goes the spoils. Would you take a look at this schedule ?!?!

Count 'em: not one, not two, not three, but FIVE national games. Several others could be the featured network game of the week. What's more interesting is that there are only seven 1:00PM kick off times, which is more than conducive to festivities. I mean, don't get me wrong. Nothing says "hello beautiful Sunday" more than Kamchatka vodka
and orange juice at 7:00AM in Muni Lot. I'm all for effectively ending my weekends by six at night. But all these night games and four o'clock starts from all the national attention and media coverage after years of being (deservedly) ignored are simply amazing. I haven't seen anything like it since the golden days of the late 1980's. We're all gonna have to step our games up: players, coaches, sports bars and tailgaters. It must be a team effort with everyone taking their gap integrity.

The schedule itself APPEARS to be much more challenging than last season. It LOOKS harder. But in reality, who the heck knows for sure? You look on paper, injuries happen, teams rise and fall before you think they will, the Bears either wing 13 game or lose 13 games, and you look back and you're like one of those NFL fan commercials . We play the tough NFC East this year, which is no easy draw, and now we also face

the legacy of Pete Rozelle and the parity scheduling of a second place finishing team. So on one hand it may seem foolish to think we'll do better than the ten wins of last season. On the other hand, we improved the weakest area of the team, the defensive line, a great deal and signed another productive offensive player. We're a year older, wiser, and with the right continuity on offense. We just need to hope for health and the young linebackers to come into their own. But if you think I'm gonna sit here and make predictions like the Great Swami just to look the foooh this fall, you are sadly mistaken. Who the hell knows where we'll end up? Look at the Tribe. I doubt they win 90. I thought they'd contend. I'd rather predict sure things.

I do predict that playing better teams will make for a more interesting year. I will predict it will make the Browns a better team. I think we'll finally get over on the Inbred and win the division and I know for certain that Carson Palmer is from the Washington Wizards' school bulletin board material .

Here are some more fearless predictions...

I predict Sunday, September 14th, will proceed very much as follows:

10:00AM - Arrive in Muni.

10:12AM - Finish first beverage

10:15AM - Participate in first mass *"a**h***"* sing-song chant as an Appalachian walks by swilling an Ahrn

10:30AM. - Hurl first hillbilly smak at a Yinzer, possibly a larger woman still trying to rock spandex

10:45AM - Finish fifth beverage

11:00AM - Loudly point out to any toothless Appalachian that Ben, too, lacks his own teeth

12:00PM - Eat something

1:00PM - The day begins to deteriorate and I realize that I have finished the twelve of beer I brought. I start to mooch.

1:30PM - I get the feeling the Browns be goin' to the Super Bowl and decide to share my thoughts with the lot and folks driving on the Shoreway

2:45PM - Burn a Terrible Towel when the cops aren't looking

3:00PM - Time for a nice relaxing nap on the two feet of grass between the lot and the fence, or perhaps on a nice, soft car trunk.

5:00PM - Wake up refreshed; grab beverage number 19 on the day, a very lucky number for Browns' fans. Toast St Bernard.

5:30PM - Toast Johnny Evans

5:45PM - Get weepy reminiscing about The Cube's TD in 1986 the snapped the jinx. Share a man-hug moment recalling the legend that is Turkey Jones

6:00PM - Insult the 500th Yinzer on the day by suggesting what they can do with the thumb

7:00PM - Consume beverage 26 on the day and think about eating something

7:10PM - Decide to pass on eating because the fresh, cold beer tastes so good when it hits the lips

7:30PM - Head into CBS if lucky, or up to a sports bar if not, or maybe just hang with the TV and generator in Muni.

Monday, September 15th

2:00PM - Wake up. Contemplate stains on the Browns' jersey I'm still wearing and try to figure out what they are and how they got there.

2:01PM - Thank God you didn't drive and hold head in hands wondering why you feel like that dude in *Scanners*
.* (* - warning, that one's graphic and definitely PG13)

2:05PM - Visit STO to see who won.

3:00PM - Locate game re-broadcast on the NFL Network to relish the Browns 52 - 0 victory and enjoy an orange Gatoraid and chicken soup.

Oh yeah, and we play the Cowboys, Giants, Broncos, Bills and Eagles at night as well.

So while I won't give you a game-by-game analysis in April, and while I won't make predictions based on paper until we see how teams stack up on the

field, what I can guarantee is big fun for the coming year. A year filled with football nights out again like back in the day, 4:00 kick offs where you can actually have a Sunday and STILL settle in for a game, and at long last, delivery from Ian Eagle and Solomon Wilcotts!

Go Browns!!