The official opening of the Cleveland Browns training camp on Wednesday can't come soon enough this season with the Indians season veering off track in June. In Gary's latest, he talks a little bit about all the rituals that fans, players, and media types go through each season as camp commences, and the relative lack of controversies and positional battles we're likely to see at this one.

The official opening of the Cleveland Browns training camp on Wednesday also operates as the unofficial close of the Cleveland Indians 2008 season.

With the Indians attendance in the tank, neither owners Larry and Paul Dolan nor those responsible for putting the "Progressive" name on the former Jacobs Field are likely to be all that happy about it. But the daily overload of Browns coverage in this town provides enough of a distraction from the wreckage of an Indians season that initially held such promise that it all but assures that the Indians will be mostly a footnote for about the next six months to most fans.

Already there have been a couple of dozen of the same story about the upcoming Browns season from the usual media outlets. You've read them. It's a civic obligation. They have such come-on headlines as "The 10 Questions Heading into Training Camp" or "Everything You Need to Know about the 2008 Browns" or "The Five Key Battles to Watch in Training Camp." If there were indeed only 10 questions, five key battles and someone did know everything, we could bank the season and start the debate early on the 2009 Indians.

But these are the Browns, a puzzling franchise on its best days. All you really need to know right now is that the team made dramatic moves in the offseason that will take most of the season to evaluate, has temporarily staved off a potential quarterback controversy by anointing Derek Anderson the starter and managed to find a way to muzzle sports agent and self-promoter extraordinaire Drew Rosenhaus long enough so that Kellen Winslow, Jr.'s contract situation won't be a distraction, at least early on.

Thus do the Browns find themselves heading into the season riding the wave of trendy expectations with a whole bunch of naysayers waiting in the wings to say "I told you so." That can wait for another day, like when the first high ankle sprain is suffered. Questions may abound, just as they do with any team this time of year. But if you are harboring the naïve, almost quaint notion that the purpose of training camp is to resolve such matters, think again. Most of what will get resolved are questions that no one yet has thought to ask.

The problem, of course, is figuring out just how to glean insight from the daily grind of a mind-grippingly dull training camp. Feel free to attend if you'd like, but don't say you weren't warned. If you're going to go, take sunscreen. It will be hot, real hot.

Camp is important for the players, but for the fans there is little information to be gained from watching players stretch. The lure of training camp for fans really seems to be the ability to channel Phil Savage as you watch players going from one drill to the next.

You, too, can then cross your arms, adjust your sunglasses and experience the whistles blowing as the players go from drill to drill. You, too, can watch the kickers standing around mostly quizzing each other on movie trivia as they "rest" between kicks. You'll get to see passes thrown and passes dropped. Some will also be caught. Many will get intercepted. Predictably, you'll conclude that "Quinn threw several tight spirals" or "Anderson under threw his receivers all day." If you're lucky a few fights will break out.

None of it will mean a thing.

In fact, this year's version of training camp could very well be the most boring in recent memory. There's a decided lack of controversy. There aren't any hold outs. Most of the key positions are settled and those that are not have little chance of being settled in 7-on-7 drills.

That doesn't mean there isn't significant work to do, there is. It's just that most of it actually takes place away from the fans anyway, inside the meeting halls and conference rooms of the Browns' practice facility. It's there that film is broken down, technique studied and players lectured to for hours on end about the various finer points of the game.

So much about pro football has changed over the years that it's not a surprise that training camp has taken on such a vastly different character when compared to the "old days," by which I mean when the Browns used to hold training camp at Hiram College. Back then, the overriding emphasis was on getting players back in shape. Many actually had off-season jobs because they needed the money. If they stayed in shape, and many of them did certainly, it wasn't under the laser-like glare of team officials. The players needed training camp for physical conditioning as much as anything else.

These days, a player that reports for training camp in anything other than optimal shape is a major story and it should be. Football is considered their full time job and players are paid to work out in the off-season. If a player does anything else in the offseason, maybe he heads back to school to complete his degree. But his first priority is to keep himself in shape and focused and if it's not, then he finds himself looking for work elsewhere. Just ask Jason Taylor.

That's why so much of training camp is now devoted to the mental side of the game. Physically, the players are ready on Day 1 and whatever fine tuning is needed for established veterans comes during the otherwise meaningless

pre-season games. Mentally is where coaches believe this game seems to be won more often than not.

What you're left with really is the misnomer that training camp really has become. You see it in the schedule established and in the approach to the fans. There are now official autograph tents and plenty of buying opportunities-refreshments and team merchandise of course. But it seems that outside of making a few bucks, the only reason teams invite fans any more is tradition. Given the paranoia that grips most NFL teams, you get the sense they'd rather face a congressional inquiry on steroids then open up a meaningless practice in August.

Still, as rituals go, attending training camp is a mostly harmless exercise. And as a last bit of advice, treat it like you would the regular season. Go in with expectations lowered. That way you can't be disappointed. Oh, yeah. Take sunscreen.