The ""must-win game" is one of the most overused clichés in sports, and it's a phrase that Nick Allburn doesn't care for. No game is a "must-win" until a team is facing mathematical elimination. Even with that in mind, this Sunday's meeting with the Steelers has unusually high stakes for the Cleveland Browns, particularly for what is manifestly, only a week two game. Nick talks Browns/Steelers in his latest.

The "must-win game" is one of the most overused clichés in sports, and it's a phrase that I don't care for. No game is a "must-win" until a team is facing mathematical elimination. Even with that in mind, this Sunday's meeting with the Steelers has unusually high stakes for the Cleveland Browns, particularly for what is manifestly, only a week two game.

Obviously, if the Browns fall to the Steelers they will put themselves in a huge hole. They would be down two games to the Steelers, at least one game to the Ravens, and either tied or behind the woeful Bengals. And before someone throws out the "it's not how you start, it's how you finish" cliché, it should be noted that how you start plays a huge role in where you finish.

Unfortunately, the schedule does not favor the Browns if they lose this game. Although they will have lost to a pair of quality teams in Dallas and Pittsburgh, both of those losses would be at Cleveland Stadium, leaving only six remaining home games. For a Browns team that went 7-1 at home and just 3-5 on the road last season, that's bad news. Plus, the remainder of the schedule is going to be much more formidable than it was last year. Beyond their four contests against Baltimore and Cincinnati, and possibly the Houston game, it's tough to circle any surefire wins on the Browns' schedule.

Speaking of the Bengals and Ravens, the Browns can't expect much help from those two clubs. If you caught any of the Bengals/Ravens game over the

weekend, I don't have to tell you that both teams are pretty lousy. That's a positive for the Browns because it means they should be able to pencil in four victories as long as they don't lay an egg, but the downside is that it's extremely unlikely that either the Bengals or Ravens will be capable of stealing a game from Pittsburgh. Furthermore, the Steelers are typically one of the best in the league at winning the games that they should win. If the Browns are hoping for either of those teams to help knock the Steelers down a peg, they'd better not hold their collective breath.

If you're still not convinced of this game's importance, where do you think the Browns play their season finale on December 28th? You guessed it: Pittsburgh PA, on the ketchup field, in front of almost 70,000 fans with almost 10,000 full sets of teeth. If you like the Browns' odds in that one, well, I'd like to make a few wagers with you this weekend.

One can't help but think that the Steelers are inside the head of the whole Cleveland Browns organization, and for good reason. Pittsburgh has won their last nine match ups with the Browns, and the Browns haven't defeated the Stillers since the 33-13 Sunday night game in Pittsburgh, which was probably Tim Couch's finest hour. During this ridiculous streak, the Browns have been blown out like in last year's opener, and during the infamous 2005 Christmas Eve game. Perhaps more painful have been the games that the Browns let slip through their fingers, like their second meeting with the Steelers last season, when Ben Roethlisberger sent them packing almost single-handedly. There have been several games when the Browns have seemingly invented ways to lose, and you'd better believe that those choke jobs will be on the team's mind come Sunday.

In the end, it's that history and the Steelers' recent dominance that makes the Browns' task all the more daunting. Suffering another blowout, or even a close loss after laying down like they did in the opener would be very disheartening for the Browns, but up the ante by losing such a game to their most bitter rival, and the defeat could cripple them for the rest of the season. On the other hand, if the Browns can pull off an upset it could reenergize their beleaguered clubhouse and instead leave the Steelers swimming in self doubt. So to revisit our original question: is this a must-win game? No, not on paper anyway. But for an organization that's sweating bullets and a fan base on the brink of revolution, it's as close as it gets.