Steve Buffum is a Cleveland sports fan living in Austin, Texas. And as someone that follows the Browns and is right in the backyard of the Houston Texans ... Buff knows bad football. And while subjecting himself to the horror of this Sunday's game, one of the Texans' announcers made a statement that really put things in perspective for him, which he writes about in his much celebrated return to our front page during his normal hibernation period. Four months 'till B-List season!

When I came to Austin for grad school in 1986, I didn't know a whole lot about Texas. Being a Cleveland fan, I always followed the AFC more than the NFC, so although my extended family was lifelong Redskins fans with a healthy hatred of all things Dallas Cowboy, I always figured that Texas would be more or less geographically split between the Oilers and the Cowboys. As it turned out, there were nine Oilers fans and roughly 25 millions Cowboys fans, so in the communal areas of my dorm, the TVs were always tuned to CBS and the Cowboys, while the Oilers languished in some nether zone of unpopularity.

The one exception that fall was the two times the Oilers faced the Browns, where two rabid Browns fans from Katy (a suburb of Houston) would head straight to one of the televisions after breakfast, set up shop, and practice the dorm version of tailgating to reserve one television for the NBC noon (we are in the Central time zone) game between Houston and Cleveland. Sure, Cowboys fans would always drift in to try to change the channel, but there were thirty-seven other televisions to go watch Dallas on, and my new best friends from Katy were somewhat large and wild-eyed and generally speaking, dorm denizens did not f#%* with large, wild-eyed boys from Katy wearing Browns gear and hurling expletives at what were, frankly, some of the most fair-weather bandwaggoning fans in North America.

(Invariably, we would get one of the lesser announcing teams, often with Reggie Rucker or Sam Rutigliano, but sometimes would be lucky enough to get Don

Criqui and Bob Trumpy, whom we referred to as "Itchy and Scratchy.")

In those days, there was no such thing as a bandwagon Oilers fan: you were either a big Houston fan or you would be hard-pressed to name five players. Mos t Texans could sing the song, "Houston Oilers, Houston Oilers, Houston Oilers Number One," which straddled the border between "campy" and "atrocious," and most hated the Steelers as well (common ground!), but the Oilers were never the "draw" of the more-storied Cowboys.

There was a heartbreaking scene in Houston when Carpet Bag Adams took the Oilers to Tennessee: in an effort to duplicate the groundswell of support that the Browns had drummed up during the FAX Brigade, a rabid Houston fan called for a protest. His face was painted Ice Blue and wore his gear and showed off his son, "Derrick." (Get it? Derrick? Oilers? Gracious.)

The turnout was nine.

Well, Houston did once love its Oilers, then Adams drained their life away and they bid him "F#%* you." So it was with great fanfare and a new stadium and a horrific helmet logo that the Houston Texans were born, the new AFC team on the block, and a new team to dedicate the AFC network (once NBC, now CBS) to on Sundays.

Except, of course, it's not dedicated at all.

Sure, when the Cowboys play, FOX shows the Cowboys game. It does not matter what the other matchups are.

The Cowboys will be on FOX.

The Texans? Not so much.

Yesterday, the Jets-Titans game was shown in the noon slot on CBS here in Austin. Objectively, this is hardly surprising: the undefeated Titans! Brett Favre! Two division leaders!

Brett Favre!

The Cinderella story of Kerry Collins!

The fatness of LenDale White!

Brett Favre!

Also, Brett Favre!

Whereas the Texans-Browns game featured ... mostly unspeakable horror.

Texans fans, such as they are, at least in a theoretical sense, have been treated to Sage Rosenfels and his Miraculous Vortex of Suck, a man who single-handedly blew a 17-point (with just over 4 minutes left!) 4th-quarter lead to give Indianapolis a preposterous come-from-way-behind victory.

They bollix the first quarter.

They bollix the fourth quarter.

They turn the ball over, give up acres of yardage, and blow in a way hardly seen by anyone except Houston Texans fans, to whom this particular brand of blowing is actually quite familiar indeed, insofar as they have blown in every single year of their existence.

The team blows.

Consider: the Texans gave up 38, 31, 30, 31, and 28 points in their first five games. After a brief respite of 21 against Detroit (which sucks) and 6 against Suckcinnati (which sucks), they got back on track to give up 28, 41, and 33 in their next three games. Scoring on Houston is not only easy, it's almost axiomatic.

It has been said that Herb Score had seen more bad baseball than anyone else, and I'm not about to argue the point. But when it comes to Bad Football, the Houston Texans radio crew can give just about anyone a run for their money.

Sure enough, in the 4th quarter, the Texans responded to a listless drive by the Derek Anderson Stumbling Deathmarch All-Stars by chipping in a couple of timely penalties to bring the Browns into scoring position.

Braylon Edwards, who the inestimable Jim Barrett has tagged "Edwards Scissorhands," dropped his ninety-third pass of the game, and the normally reliable Phil Dawson responded with a missed field goal.

Soon thereafter, the Rosenfels Vortex gave the Browns the ball back, whereupon Jamal "You aren't trying hard enough, and neither are my axons" Lewis fumbled the ball back to the Texans.

And this is when I heard the Texans radio crew, which may or may not have included legendary Houston Cougar Andre Ware,

utter the timeless phrase, *"This is a bad football team."*

Well, yes, I thought, of course it is. You have been announcing for them for some years now, I suppose you have come to the obvious conclusion. But no, that is not what he meant.

For emphasis, he repeated the phrase:

"The Cleveland Browns are a bad football team."

Now, listen: when it comes to identifying a bad football team, these guys know what they're talking about. Here are ten comparable situations:

10) When asked for comment on your behavior, Project Runway contestants Christian and Suede respond that you're behaving "a bit too gay."

9) When asked to asses your intestinal fortitude, the nation of France dismisses you as a "quitter."

8) "I found him uniquely lacking in substance," said Michael Mann.

7) "Your voice is very annoying," said Fran Drescher.

6) "Your lack of self-control will be your downfall," warned Lindsey Lohan.

5) When pressed for a comment on the current state of the government, Silvio Berlusconi responded that he found the level of corruption to be "simply appalling."

4) "I could never live there," the lifelong Inuit said from her home outside of Thule, Greenland. "It's much too cold and featureless."

3) "Your team has a huge problem," said Memphis Grizzlies GM Chris Wallace. "The front office just doesn't make smart moves."

2) "His views are simply too liberal to take seriously," said Dennis Kucinich. "Also, he is very, very short."

1) "A dull, lifeless performance," said Calvin Coolidge, who was very boring when he was alive, which he currently is not.

This is where this franchise has travelled: to the land where the Houston Texans pity you as a bad football team. As I type this, Romeo Crennel's press conference was delayed, and millions of Browns fans worked themselves into a state of excitement, feeling that surely this was the straw that broke Phil Savage's back, and that clearly this was the precursor to Crennel's firing.

It was not. It turns out that Crennel manages the clock in real life much as he does on the football field.

"F#%* you," Phil Savage wrote to a Browns fan after the Buffalo game. Indeed, it is the kind of timeless message that continues to resonate, apparently for years to come.