Sadly, the question heading into today's season ending Browns/Steelers game isn't whether or not the Browns can go into Pittsburgh and steal one. The questions Browns fans are asking are whether or not the team can register a point. And how soon after the game will Romeo Crennel be fired? And will Phil Savage walk the plank with him? It finally ends today Browns fans. Jesse previews Browns/Steelers.

Time: 1:00 pm, Sunday, December 28, 2008

Location: Heinz Field, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Network, Announcers: CBS- Gus Johnson and Steve Tasker

Line: Steelers by ten-and-a-half

Team W/L Records: Cleveland is 4-11; the Steelers are 11-4.

Coaches: Romeo Crennel is 24-39 in his fourth season with the Browns; Mike Tomlin is 21-10 in his second season with the Steelers.

Last Week for the Browns: Made it twenty consecutive quarters without an offensive touchdown in a home shutout by the lowly Bengals, 14-0.

Last Week for the Steelers: Were thumped by the Titans in a battle for home-field advantage in the AFC playoffs, 31-14.

All-Time Series: Steelers lead, 56-55.

Last Meeting: September 13, 2008 - Pittsburgh held the Browns to 208 total yards, kept them out of the end zone, and forced two turnovers as they beat Cleveland for the tenth consecutive time, 10-6, on a rain-soaked Sunday night. The defeat was low-lighted by Romeo Crennel's decision to send out his field-goal unit with 3:24 remaining, down 10-3 with a fourth-and-seven on the Steelers 20.

Out or Questionable for Pittsburgh: Safety Ryan Clark (shoulder) is out; linebacker James Harrison (hip) is questionable.

Out or Questionable for Cleveland: Tight end Kellen Winslow (ankle) is doubtful; tight end Darnell Dinkins (ribs), linebacker Leon Williams (knee), and punter Dave Zastudil (right knee) are questionable.

What to watch for the Steelers: For Pittsburgh, it's only a question of motivation. The Steelers have already clinched the AFC's second seed and a first-round bye in the playoffs, so they don't need this game. Last year, in a similar situation, they let off the gas in the finale and lost to a Ravens team having almost as bad a season as the Browns are having this year. Of course, the Browns are so woeful, their psychological hole against Pittsburgh so deep at this point, that the Steelers can lie down in their jocks at the fifty-yard line for the entire game and still end up with more points on the scoreboard. So it probably doesn't matter either way.

What to watch for the Browns: I know this is old news, but I want to ramble a little bit about Braylon Edwards's rant from a few weeks ago following the Monday Night loss in Philadelphia. With the frustrations of a miserable season spilling over, Edwards said, among other things:

"I've learned being here that I'm very unappreciated," Edwards said. "Not in the organization, just in the eyes of the fans, the city. Since Day One I've been a marked man coming from Michigan . It's just gone that way. Even when things are good, there's heckles."

And,

"People in this town believe they are entitled to too much. They have been disrespectful to me and my family. I've gone out in public with my family and have had to deal with being called foul names. My parents have been called vulgar things at restaurants."

Predictably, there was a hue and cry after Braylon's words went public. He's putting this on *us*? We're not the ones dropping sure touchdown passes, we're not the ones committing procedure penalty after procedure penalty, we're not the ones half-assing our routes and getting our quarterback hung out to dry- we're the ones paying to sit there and watch. Are you effing kidding me? Just catch the damn ball!

Here's the thing, though. Braylon might have been oversensitive, touchy, and petulant. His leveraging of his charitable campaigns was embarrassing, and I hope he realizes what a jackass he made himself sound like in *that* bit. Assigning practically single-handed credit for the 2007 turnaround to His Truly ("I... resurrected this team from the darkness") was a little bit rich. BE was great last year, but it took a lot of things to go right for this Wile e. Coyote of a franchise to somehow win ten games. And he's been lousy this year, a fact he could have at least touched on somewhere in the course of his diatribe.

But what he says about this town's sense of entitlement holds truth. I've always seen Braylon as someone who listens to the talk shows, maybe does some lurking on the message boards, because he obviously cares about what people think of him, and his efforts to curry favor with the fans are so ostentatious and calculated: the showy philanthropy, the renditions of O-H-I-O on the sidelines, etc. I believe he's an anthropologist of this town's football culture. And that he's right in this case.

Because there is a sense of entitlement. People here feel entitled to retain GMs and fire coaches. They feel entitled to cheer injuries to quarterbacks, because they "deserve

better" (and yes, they were cheering for Derek Anderson's injury, they were *not* cheering Ken Dorsey's entrance, and I'm thinking the other players took note of *that* bit of treatment.) They feel entitled to boo their team off the field in the second quarter of the opener, when it's 10-7, because they "deserve better." They felt entitled to shower the playing field with plastic bottles at the end of a game, because they "deserve better." And apparently a few of them feel entitled to run their mouth to a man and his family while they are trying to eat a meal in peace.

(I watched those bottles fly from my living room that December day in 2001, and I won't lie- it felt good to see. We'd gotten hosed one too many times. But honestly, throwing empty bottles in pique is for those who sit in high-chairs, eat cereal out of airplane-shaped bowls, and wear Huggies. It was not a display to be proud about.)

This is an entitled fanbase. Without that entitlement, we wouldn't have football in this city. And after two decades of trauma, that entitlement has curdled into something unpleasant and surly. The passion is edged with bitterness. There is a personal nastiness in the way fans on the radio and the boards eviscerate this team, its players, its coaches, and its management. When the Indians and Cavaliers struggle, people simply stop showing up. With the Browns, people will always show up, if only to drink, boo, and hurl invective. Passion for this team doesn't disappear. It just boomerangs.

It would be nice if this city assigned its football team a less exalted status in the local sports hierarchy, a status it actually deserves. But that has as exactly zero chance of happening.

And there *is* a "Michigan thing" with BE. It's out there. I know the auto-response here is, *"What about Thom Darden? What about Leroy Hoard? What about Steve Everitt?"* Save it. Darden was a local kid from Sandusky. Everitt was a center, and I really don't remember anyone dancing the *hora* for him until he wore the Browns bandanna after the team had moved to Baltimore. Hoard was that venerable fan favorite- the overachiever- and his bruising style appealed to a Cleveland crowd that will always pull for a tough running back. None of them had the visibility of Braylon Edwards. If there was a "Michigan thing" there was no lightning rod to conduct it.

They also played in a different era. A decade of turmoil for the Browns and a decade of success

for Ohio State altered the dynamic between the two levels of fandom. The Ohio State culture is much more prevalent at CBS than it was at the Muni- I don't remember them playing "Hang on Sloopy" over the PA at the end of the third quarter back in the day, or even thinking of such a thing. Braylon may very well be using the Buckeye-centric environment as a crutch. But I can't blame him for feeling picked on for where he went to school, because he does get picked on for it. Not at every time by everyone, but loudly and consistently enough to feel like a "marked man."

I know, I know: boo-hoo. But it has to get exasperating for him to be taunted for something he no longer has any control over and doesn't matter anyway. He can run better routes, improve his footwork, catch the damn ball, but he can't be not from Michigan. I've seen the drops. But I hear what he's saying, too.

Damn, this season can't end soon enough.

Good Past Win over the Steelers: December 26, 1987 - Despite losing Bob Golic with a broken forearm midway through the game, the Browns clinched their third consecutive AFC Central crown with a hard-fought 19-13 win over the Steelers at Three Rivers Stadium. With Cleveland's offense struggling in the red zone, it was up to the defense to carry the day, and carry it they did, holding the Steelers to 221 yards and keeping them out of the end zone. Pittsburgh's only touchdown came on Cornell Gowdy's return of a Bernie Kosar interception in the fourth quarter.

Bad Past Loss to the Steelers: December 18, 1994 - Noted Browns-killer Yancey Thigpen opened the scoring with a 40-yard touchdown reception, and the Steelers sailed from there, building a 14-0 first-quarter lead and hanging on to beat the Browns 17-7, clinching the AFC Central. Cleveland out-gained Pittsburgh 331-276, but three turnovers and ten penalties were the killers for the Browns on this day. The victory was the second for the Steelers over the Browns that season. Three weeks later they made it three by dominating Cleveland 29-9 in an AFC Divisional Playoff game.

Next Week for Both Teams: Pittsburgh goes home and waits to see who they play in the second round of the playoffs. Cleveland just goes home.

Trivia: Since the Return, the Browns have a better record against the Steelers in Pittsburgh (2-7) than in Cleveland (1-9.)