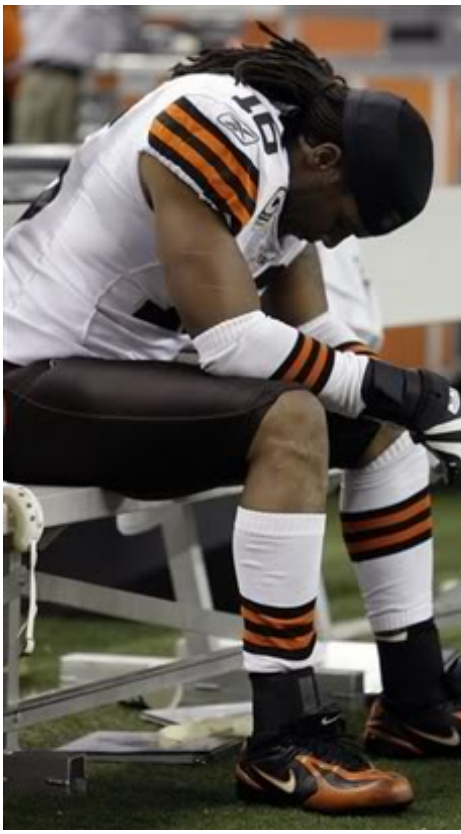
What the Browns did in losing to Detroit 38-37 on Sunday was pretty remarkable. Yeah, they built a 24-3 lead after weeks and weeks of historic offensive ineptitude. Yeah, they entirely blew said lead. Yeah, they rallied to take a 37-31 lead into the final minutes. And, yeah, they had the game won until Hank Poteat's pass interference call turned a game-ending Brodney Pool interception into first-and-goal with no time on the clock. But according to Erik Cassano, none of that is as amazing as the fact he felt absolutely nothing afterwards.



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And, I might add, the ensuing Browns timeout gave Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford a chance to recover from an injury suffered when he was leveled on the final timed play. Stafford dragged himself back into the game and threw the winning touchdown pass to Brandon Pettigrew with literally triple zeroes on the game clock.

But none of that is as amazing as the fact that I felt absolutely nothing afterward. Don't misinterpret that. I didn't feel numb. I felt nothing as in, I changed the channel and busied myself doing other things.

Leave it to the Browns: They don't even know how to frustrate me properly anymore.

Sunday's game had all the makings of a thriller. No lead was safe. Stafford and Brady Quinn were slinging the ball like Dan Marino and Johnny Unitas. Stafford finished with 422 yards passing and a 112.7 QB rating. Quinn finished with 304 yards and a 133.1 rating. Neither team relied much on their ground games. Jamal Lewis was the contest's leading rusher, with 75 yards on 24 carries.

Three touchdown passes in the game covered 40 yards or more: Quinn touchdowns to Mohamed Massaquoi (59 yards) and Chansi Stuckey (40 yards), and a Stafford hookup with Calvin Johnson (75 yards).

And that's before you even get to the screwball ending -- a Browns speciality since returning to the league in 1999.

This game was the direct descendent of the '90s run-and-shoot fad. Of Air Coryell and the American Football League. Observed through the lens of a single football game between two teams, this was everything that makes you want to sit down on a Sunday afternoon and watch football. You don't even have to be a fan of either of the teams playing to enjoy a high-scoring shootout. It's great TV, and probably even better in person.

But it was impossible to take Sunday's game without context. And the context is what made this game about as compelling as a marathon research session involving dusty encyclopedia volumes at the local library.

Both teams were 1-8 heading into play. They were bottom feeders at the season's outset, and have actually been worse than advertised. They were consigned to the trash heap a while back. The Lions, who play indoors at climate-controlled Ford Field, only drew a crowd of 43,000, microscopic by NFL standards. The lack of a sellout lowered a blackout on more than half of the state of Michigan, and most of northwest Ohio.

If anything, this game should have been shown outside of Michigan and Ohio, in markets that just wanted to see an entertaining football game. Instead, most of the country got a far-more-meaningful but lower-scoring wrestling match between Indianapolis and Baltimore, won by the still-unbeaten Colts 17-15.

In Ohio, and I can only guess in Michigan as well, this game was killed, gutted and cooked before it even arrived in the kitchen. From the standpoint of a Browns fan, it really didn't matter what Quinn did against a terrible Lions pass defense. It didn't matter what receiver stepped up. It didn't matter if Lewis found the fountain of youth for one more game. It didn't matter if Kamerion Wimbley looked like an actual pass rusher for one game.

It just didn't matter because the Browns are toast this year, there is a strong possibility that they're headed for another rebuild, that the coaching staff is going to be replaced and the roster once again gutted by a different decision-maker with different philosophies on building a team.

Essentially, this was an exhibition game that occurred about three months too late. There is no way this game could serve as a building block. There is no way this game could serve as any pinpoint of light, foretelling of better days ahead. Not against the post-Matt Millen Lions, a team that is 2-8 and already two wins better than last season.

Actually, this wasn't an exhibition game. Exhibition games generally accomplish something, even if it's just paring down the roster. You find out something about your team -- or at least your players -- during the preseason.

This game was an old-timers' reunion game played by 20- and 30-somethings. The Browns and Lions should have been wearing sneakers on the feet and flags on their belts. And what happens at the end of an old timers' game? You grab a beer and reminisce about the glory days. Really, as a Browns fan, what else is there right now?

The Browns didn't just fail on Sunday. They failed their fail. They took a game that should have had some meaning, a game with an ending that should have made me grumpy for the rest of Sunday and a good portion of Monday, and turned it into nothing with their performance in the previous nine games.

Here is the message the Browns' big thinkers need to hear: Want to get fans up for these kinds of games? Play them in September, when the season still has a pulse, before your radio broadcasts become background static for home winterization projects. Then use the momentum from those games -- some of which you'll hopefully win -- to carry the team into fan-drawing, late-season contests that have this foreign substance on them called "playoff

implications."

As of now, I really don't care if Quinn outduels Dan Fouts circa 1981. It's way too little, way too late to make me care.