There sure is a lot of melting and teeth gnashing going on over the Browns opening day loss to the Buccaneers.

Maybe I'm confused and the expectations after last year's 5-11 season were a lot higher coming into 2010 than I thought. Maybe the 35-year old quarterback with health and accuracy issues who was signed to restore some order to the huddle and make a few throws was supposed to be a whole lot more than that.

Maybe Browns fans were expecting a worst to first playoff run and nine or more wins with the talent from last year's roster developing and the new additions to the roster making an immediate impact.

Or maybe the expectations after the Browns won their final four games of 2009 was that Cleveland was ready to become at least a mediocre team that could be counted on to beat the dregs of the league and struggle with the more talented clubs they faced.

I'm not quite sure what sequence of events transpired between January and last Sunday that bred such optimism and confidence into Browns fans that they're now ready to swear off 2010 after one game but it's quite clear that I missed them.

I do know that one staple of a young and improving team is that it's hard to ever know what you're going to get from them from one game to the next. They're not predictable and things don't go according to Hoyle. The margin between victory and defeat in the NFL is razor thin and a young, less than talented team is going to have more games than not when their breakdowns, in whatever form they come, are going to be fatal.

So I have to ask: were you expecting more than what this team is likely to provide? And if you were, well, why? And do you think it might be reasonable to expect any improvements in the organization to be measured over the course of what everybody thought was likely to be no better than a seven or eight win season?

There's no question that Sunday's game in Tampa was disappointing. Hell, I watched it. It was vile and sickening. But it didn't catch me off guard or surprise me much.Many of the elements from last season's stinker of a season showed their heads again in Week 1. The Browns watched as a couple of interceptions and a costly fumble derailed their attempt to beat the Buccaneers. In fact, disappointing may very well be too mild a word. The first Jake Delhomme interception was infuriating. The second Peyton Hillis fumble (the one he actually lost) was back-breaking. The play calling was vexing at times, to say the least.

But to write off what the Browns are doing organizationally and to dismiss this season as a lost one is a bit narrow and small-minded, no? This is not a team where you're going to measure success based on any given game. This is instead a season that you're going to review based on the full body of what goes down through 16 games. If at the end of those 16 games the team is in better shape from a personnel and organizational standpoint then this was a successful year. That's not necessarily the case in other cities where playoff aspirations are legitimate. The Patriots, Colts, Ravens and Saints aren't looking to overhaul their organizational structures, processes and personnel while trying to win a few games to foster a competitive confidence.

The Browns are.

That's not to say that Sunday's shouldn't or won't be evaluated in terms of winning and losing or in terms of performance on the field. That is, after all, the reason we all watch and the reason

they keep score. But it seems many of us were very quick to lose focus of the fact that we expected and predicted that this team, after sweeping changes and a significant turnover of the roster, would win 5-7 games.

There will be plenty of peaks and valleys over the course of the next 16 weeks with this team. They'll continue to lose games they shouldn't and my bet is they'll win a few that they really have no right to win. Such is life with a rebuilding team that's put themselves in this perpetual cycle of suck and is working to escape it.

A bad loss in the opener doesn't change the fact that this season is about identifying players who can help and identifying players who can't. It doesn't change the fact that we already knew the quarterback situation was not optimal to begin with. It doesn't change the fact that the schemes and philosophies that will be the core of this team and organization for years going forward are not being employed by players either able or used to implementing them. It doesn't change the fact that there are guys out there in the new system that are not yet comfortable with each other much less that system.

The Browns, starting with team president Mike Holmgren, know what type of music they someday want to play. But they're not yet sure if the conductor is on the same page and they're still early in the process of figuring who they have in the orchestra. Yet many seemingly are expecting a perfect Beethoven's 9th from this team.

I know patience is not a virtue amongst sports fans. And I understand the disappointment that follows a putrid performance from the most beloved team in the town. But there's a sense that the expectations many of us have (or had) for this team weren't realistic to begin with. For better or worse the progress made by this team can't be measured on a game-by-game basis but rather only when the season ends and another off season of improving has taken place.

From a win-loss perspective this season was a wash before it even began and we may need to adjust our expectations accordingly.

The good news is we've been here before and should know how to proceed.