The glass is half full

To channel Butch Davis for a moment – nobody likes to lose. The players are upset and the fans are upset, but I'd be more upset if they weren't upset. After giving ourselves a day or two to let cooler heads prevail, let's not be short-sighted when we look at the 2010 Cleveland Browns.

Yes, the Browns have lost their first three games, and yes, all three games have been very winnable. The positive there is that *all three games have been very winnable.* Last year the Browns lost their first three games by a combined score of 95-29. This year that margin has only been 57-45.

These losses are difficult to absorb week after week, but with Team Walrus we finally have a regime that seems to know what they're doing, and as fans we need to be patient and stay the course. The Browns are improving, but anyone who thought this club was playoff-worthy over the summer was downright delusional.

This season isn't about wins and losses as much as giving this organization a cultural enema, upgrading the collective talent level, and making a decision about the futures of Eric Mangini and his coaching staff. Holmgren and Heckert are just starting to pour the foundation – they haven't even begun building the house yet.

As difficult as it is to stomach these losses week to week, we need to ride this season out with the knowledge that there is finally a plan in place, and show some (gulp) faith in our new management.

Sticking with Seneca

When the Browns traded for Seneca Wallace this spring, I was comfortable with the idea of starting him. Obviously he wasn't going to be a long-term solution, but he had given Seattle some quality starts over the last couple of seasons, and his quarterback ratings of 87 and 81.9 in 2008 and 2009, respectively, were higher than any Browns quarterback in the last 10 years (who started a majority of the games), save Derek Anderson's fluky 82.5 rating in 2007.

With Jake Delhomme sidelined the last two weeks, Wallace has come as advertised; accurate on short passes, mobile, and cautious with the football. Seneca Wallace isn't ever going to set the world on fire, but he's a competent NFL quarterback who will complete passes and give you a chance to win. After 10 years struggling to find any kind of consistency at quarterback, I'll take it. In fact, I think Wallace should be the starter even when Jake Delhomme is healthy.

Wallace definitely has room to improve; he needs to keep those floaters down the sidelines in bounds, and he might be checking down to Peyton Hillis a little too quickly. Running out of bounds to lose five yards instead of throwing the ball away needs to stop, too. But there are plenty of positives with Wallace, and he can be a placeholder quarterback for this season, and probably one or two more if necessary.

The NFL's other Peyton

You don't want to read too much into pre-season rushing yardage, but injuries and opportunity have turned Peyton Hillis into a very pleasant surprise. Hillis isn't a threat to crack off any Barry Sanders-esque highlight runs, but he's been extremely effective so far, averaging 5.6 yards per carry this season while running mate Jerome Harrison has managed just 3.4 yards per attempt.

Hillis is now the only Brown in franchise history to crack 100 yards rushing against the Ravens, and his touchdown in the second quarter was the first time anyone had found the end zone against Baltimore this season. That has to count for something.

What you have to like about Hillis is how quickly he hits the line, how he rarely gets tripped up for negative yardage, and the yards he generates after contact. The guy is practically reinventing "pushing the pile." His receiving skills and ability to pick up the blitz are an added bonus. Put Hillis on the field behind Lawrence Vickers, and you're looking at a 500-pound backfield. Good luck stopping that tandem in a goal line package.

Hillis isn't dynamic enough to be a featured back, but he can fill in for a few weeks while Jerome Harrison is dinged up, and he's an ideal candidate to pair with a speedster for the "thunder and lightning" backfield approach. Now we just have to find out if Jerome Harrison is up to the task.

There are receivers on this roster, right?

You could've fooled me. Mohamed Massaquoi and Brian Robiskie (injured against the Ravens) have just five catches in three games. That simply isn't good enough for starting split ends.

Brian Daboll is at least partially to blame for these issues. The receivers don't seem to be running any quick hitting slants over the middle that might take advantage of Seneca Wallace's skill set more than fly patterns on the sidelines. Part of the problem may also be that Seneca Wallace is only 5' 11" and has trouble seeing the receivers over the middle, but in that case, roll him out more to put some pressure on the defense. We need to see more from Massaquoi in particular, who showed promise at times last season.

Surprisingly, one of the bright spots among the receivers has been Joshua Cribbs, who has 143 yards and a touchdown on the young season. Count me among the skeptics on Cribbs making an impact at receiver, because it just feels like we've been waiting for him to develop for too long. But I would love to be proven wrong, and hopefully Cribbs has finally started to make that jump. The Browns could sure use the help.

An obvious goat.

It is almost always hyperbole to say that one player "single-handedly" won or lost any football game, but in Eric Wright's case, it might be true. Unfortunately for us, he was on the short end of that stick.

Wright was so bad in Baltimore that I would have made him fly home solo. You can't risk him breathing on his teammates and infecting them without whatever disease he had clearly contracted. Then again, after Sunday's game I'm not even convinced he can be trusted to catch a flight.

You could see that Wright's confidence was totally shaken, and to Joe Flacco's credit, he ravaged him all day long. Wright bit on inside fakes all day and was burned deep, and he was victimized on all three of Joe Flacco's touchdown passes.

Eric Wright is still an important part of the defense and one of its most talented players, so let's hope he can use this week of practice to regain his sea legs. It is a safe bet that Carson Palmer

will test him early.

The other 10 defenders.

The good news is that as bad as Wright was, the rest of the defense had a pretty solid day. Although Flacco had a great day (largely at the expense of the aforementioned Wright), the defense generally kept the explosive Ray Rice bottled up. For the first time in three weeks, T.J. Ward wasn't the leading tackler, which means that running backs weren't reaching the second and third levels with as much frequency.

Speaking of T.J. "Bossman" Ward, he's making Tom Heckert look awfully intelligent at the moment. Ward, who was considered by many to be a reach at the top of the second round, has been the standout of the new draft class thus far. Ward has been terrific in run support, and his pass coverage hasn't been bad either. If Ward can stay healthy, he has the potential to be the best Browns safety since Eric Turner was blowing guys up in the early '90s.

For the defense as a whole, it's clear that Rob Ryan will have to get creative if he wants to pressure the quarterback with regularity. Matt Roth and Marcus Benard are decent pass rushers, but there simply aren't many impact players in the front seven. The Browns will have to use the scheme to earn some sacks and probably play a ton of "bend but don't break" defense until they can try to infuse that side of the ball with more talent in the off-season.

Wacko for Flacco? Not just yet…

This is a huge year for Joe Flacco. The Ravens traded for Anquan Boldin in the off-season, and signed T.J. Houshmandzadeh just days before the season began. They have an outstanding

running back in Ray Rice, a solid tight end in Todd Heap, and another quality veteran receiver in Derrick Mason. Ozzie Newsome has worked hard to build a strong offense around Flacco and give him every opportunity to succeed.

Now the onus is on Flacco to develop more consistency and become the leader of the Baltimore offense. This is Flacco's third year (and also his third year starting), so his youth is becoming less and less of an excuse. Flacco is a guy that I'm comfortable with against mediocre defenses like Cleveland, but I don't trust him just yet against an elite defense at a crucial point of the game. When the Ravens were eliminated from the playoffs the last two years, Flacco turnovers were a big factor.

There is no doubt that Joe Flacco has the big arm and touch on the football necessary to be successful in the NFL, but the light hasn't totally come on for him yet. This is a big year for him if he's going to take that next step and start to be mentioned as one of the league's elite passers.

No turnovers.

For the first time this season, a key pick-six (I'm counting Delhomme's interception and long return by Ronde Barber as such) didn't sink the Browns. The Browns didn't lose any fumbles either. I know it's just a silver lining, but this week we saw that when the Browns don't make a crucial turnover, they can hang with a team like the Ravens, who are significantly more talented.

Although there weren't any turnovers, a key Browns miscue still seemed to take the wind out of the team's sails when Seneca Wallace and Peyton Hillis got mixed up on a pitch play in the fourth quarter. The Ravens had just scored to take a 21-17 lead, and the Browns needed to answer back. They did just the opposite, and the missed pitch ended up costing them 17 yards, killing any momentum that they had left. That said, if the offense doesn't make a bigger mistake than that each week, most of us would probably be pleased.

Five reasons why the Ravens suck

a) They are a fake franchise. Why isn't more attention drawn to the fact that Baltimore screamed bloody murder when their franchise was ripped away from them, and then welcomed another franchise that was improperly relocated with open arms? That is like having your heart broken by a cheating wife, getting remarried to a nice girl, and then fooling around on her with your now ex-wife. We haven't won much in Cleveland since 1999, but least we brought our team back the right way.

b) They wear purple uniforms with curvy numbers, because nothing screams "FOOTBALL" like excessive amounts of purple. What a bunch of Nancy boys.

c) Their logo looks like a giant winged rat.

d) They have male cheerleaders. As comical as it is to have cheerleaders at all in a chilly climate, having male cheerleaders in pro sports just seems wrong. But it's the Ravens, and that makes it funny. The Ravens' male cheerleaders are their answer to Steely McBeam.

e) They endorse manslaughter. I can't imagine the scene in the Ravens locker room – there must be so many arguments over who has the most confirmed kills. They already had (alleged) murderer Ray Lewis, so when Donte Stallworth became available, they knew he would be a huge addition to the club. Does Leonard Little still play football? Can The Juice come out of retirement? Do members of the Ravens brass have weekly brainstorming meetings trying to figure out how they can make their team less likeable?

Up next: 10/3, Cincinnati Bengals, Cleveland Stadium, 1:00

The Bengals have hardly been impressive in their two victories this year, and I'm slowly being convinced that Carson Palmer is washed up. Cincinnati's defense has looked solid the last two weeks after being abused by Tom Brady's Patriots in the opener, so don't expect the Browns to put up huge numbers. Even if we're not expecting the Browns to imitate the '99 Rams, look for a steady diet of Peyton Hillis and more decent quarterback play from Seneca Wallace.

The Bengals look ripe for the picking, and I'm starting to feel that the Browns can hang on by the figurative skin of their collective teeth, get into the win column for the first time this season, and bring the Ochocinco-Owens marriage one weeks closer to collapse. I wonder who's going to get all of that reality TV money?

I'm probably going to regret this, but…

Prediction: Browns 20, Bengals 17