The Cleveland Browns are only 6 games into the season so it will be a few weeks before we see the usual spate of "mid term grades" columns from the local media drones. In the best of years, these obligatory semi-interesting space fillers serve roughly the same function cotton candy does at a county fair. In a year like this, it will be as useless as putting Eric Wright in single coverage.

The problem, dear readers, is that trying to evaluate the Browns this season is a little like trying to evaluate Bristol Palin's performance on Dancing with the Stars. So much of how you look at it depends on the perspective you brought into the conversation in the first place.

After so many years of being such a downtrodden franchise, many fans have become desensitized to what good, competent football looks like. They see other teams play it from time to time, certainly, but they haven't had enough of a steady diet to really remember how it tastes, how it feels.

It's the opposite problem, really, of the Ohio State fans. They are so used to great football over virtually the same time period that Browns fans have been suffering that they come unglued at every loss as if it's the next sign of the apocalypse, even though the losses have been few and far between.

Different fans have different reactions to the constant beat downs. Some because hyper-optimistic. For this group of Browns fans, dulled to the point that Jake Delhomme looks like Tom Brady to them, every little positive is celebrated as if it's a trend and every little negative tends to get lost in the flood of all the big negatives.

If you're one of these fans looking at the Cleveland Browns' defense through that prism, you tend to think it might be one of the better units in football at the moment because, heck, that's kind of where they fall statistically. That then begets the thinking that if only the offense could have been slightly better this team might very well be 5-1 and fighting for a playoff spot.

Then when you parse that down to the individuals, you start getting all misty-eyed at the absolute awesomeness of players like T.J. Ward, who you're sure is the greatest draft choice in the history of the franchise, the spectacular running of Peyton Hillis, the likes of which you're convinced you haven't seen since Jim Brown, and on and on it goes until you insert enough Tab As into Slot Cs to reveal a team that is one, two players away from being a Super Bowl contender, tops.

Of course, there is another group, the flip side of the same coin, the hyper-critical. They're convinced that Eric Mangini is really Beelzebub and that the franchise is still paying for the ultimate sin of being located in Cleveland.

They see the defense as a group of mostly has-beens and never-will-bes whose statistics thus far are the product of a bunch of smoke and mirrors and that absent a major upgrade at every position it will languish and hold this team back forever. They also feel like the offense has been stuck in a mediocre re-make of Groundhog Day with Tim Couch playing the Bill Murray part except that no matter how fully realized the individuals on offense becomes, the alarm clock still goes off at 5:55 a.m. every morning with Sonny and Cher singing "I Got You Babe" in the background.

Parse that down to the players and it gets even worse. The quarterback situation is a joke with a washed up starter who can't stay healthy, a career backup as the backup and a guy who only the Browns would have drafted in the third round. There are better receivers on the Glenville High School team and don't even get them started on the joke that is the defensive backfield.

The problem is that both camps are actually right. This isn't a "the truth is somewhere in the middle" kind of thing. It really is a case where both sides are right.

The Browns occupy a particularly odd space at the moment where there seems to be evidence of improvement in some things and yet it's not made one bit of difference in the record and isn't likely to as the rest of the season drags on because this team isn't good enough to make that happen.

Ward really is an excellent draft pick, hyperbole aside. Joe Haden looks like he'll fall in the category as well. Hillis is an excellent, hard-nose running back who's brought some needed excitement to the running game. The defense really is playing better than last season, much better in fact, and has the stats to prove it. They have kept this team in games they otherwise probably wouldn't have been in last year and but for some ill-timed offensive miscues, the record probably is better than the current 1-5.

But no, sadly, this team isn't in line to be a Super Bowl contender anytime soon. If the current state of the Browns was represented by one of those evolution scales, they've just entered the phase where the monkey has lost its tail but is still mostly walking on all fours.

The team still has way too many question marks at way too many key positions to ever be taken too seriously by any of the better teams in the league. The quarterback situation is as tenuous now as it's ever been because it is true that Delhomme, a real professional though he may be, is on the back 10 of his career and Seneca Wallace is likely going to find productive work in the league for another 4 or 5 years but as a serviceable back up.

It's also true that no one was rushing the podium in New York City to draft McCoy when the Browns did. The defensive backfield's two best players at the moment are rookies and the defensive line would struggle putting pressure on a quarterback whose blindside protection was anchored by Cloris Leachman. The offensive coordinator is unimaginative and the defensive coordinator is reckless. Meanwhile, the head coach is still just trying to find his niche in a front office hierarchy that he didn't sign on to when he agreed to join the Browns.

When you stop to really consider that both camps of fans really have a good bit of truth to chomp on, you're left with virtually no way to really put any sort of grade on anything associated with this team. At times it looks vastly improved. At other times, you wonder whether CBS is just showing game films from early last season.

All this is a very long-winded way of saying that the most compelling thing about this team and the basis on which to evaluate it going forward is the same way you might view a really novel science experiment that by-passed the lab in favor of testing it under real-life conditions.

Sometimes it goes well and we're ready to write about it in the Science Journals as the greatest breakthrough since ketchup. Sometimes it's like an episode of Mythbusters where everything goes horribly wrong and it's all we can do to put the detritus in a medical waste bag and throw it into some heavy-duty incinerator somewhere, preferably outside the watchful eye of the EPA.

Perhaps someday the Browns will actually walk upright and all the experimenting will yield useful, repeatable results and actually bust a few myths in the process. But that time isn't now and isn't any time soon. Is that worth a grade? Probably not. But if pushed, the only answer is "incomplete" and that applies to the entire organization, except Eric Wright. He gets a "F."