Week 1 – Cincinnati at Cleveland

"*It's only the first game. No need to panic*."

Logically, that's sound advice. But when you've watched the Browns as much as Cleveland fans have, it rings hollow. It sounds like pre-scripted optimism, hope for hope's sake.

Tragically, no matter who the coach is, no matter who the QB is, no matter who's sitting in the Front Office, you can watch a Browns game and write the final story before it happens.

Lack of talent, questionable QB play, blown leads, head-scratching play-calling, depression, dismay, doldrums, dud.

I have faith in Tom Heckert. I have faith in Mike Holmgren.

Beyond that, my faith is thin..

"*It's a marathon, not a sprint*."

That's true, but rare is the year where the Browns aren't passed out from dehydration before they've even run half the race. We've been through this so many times that you can proclaim "*The Season Is Over*
" after one game and it doesn't sound completely irrational because, well, it was probably over before it began.

The irritating fact is that I think the Browns are actually better than the Bengals. Don't get me wrong, the Browns are thin and lack talent and will lose a lionshare of games, but they're at least better than the Bengals.
But even the better team will lose if they make enough errors.

They shot themselves in the foot enough times to get themselves in a 13-0 hole, then came back and looked to be ready to take control of the game. But they made mistakes and refused to put Cincy away, and when you're as not-good as the Browns are, that will come back and bite you 102% of the time.

Then comes **Huddlegate**, the 3rd and 12 play from hell where the Browns were still in the huddle while the Bengals were inconsiderately running a play without waiting (the easiest TD pass AJ Green will ever see). But Cleveland has Colt McCoy and plenty of time for a game winning drive, right?
Ah, shucks, though... the rain was falling.
Colt doesn't like it when the weather isn't cooperative.
And it certainly doesn't help that the 3rd string Right Tackle was a high-speed treadmill to the QB.

Oh, and let's not forget the entire Defense dashing to stop the running play to the left that actually went to the right, allowing Cedric Benson to run untouched for a score.

Whoomp, there it is. Another opening day loss, another winnable game blundered away, and likely another lost season.

It's only the first game. If you're the Atlanta Falcons, no need to panic. If you're the New Orleans Saints, no need to panic.
If you're the Pittsburgh Steelers, no need to panic.

Cleveland's not in that class. Most of the players are young and have never known anything in the NFL but losing.

So if you're the Cleveland Browns and you just lost at home to a bad team starting a rookie QB that got hurt, you might as well go ahead and panic.

That is, if you have enough energy to bother.

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Stats

Time of Possession: CIN – 30:23, CLE – 29:37

Total Yards: CIN – 294, CLE - 285

Yards Passing: CLE - 202, CIN – 155

Yards Rushing: CIN – 139, CLE - 83

First Downs: CIN - 17, CLE – 17

Turnovers Forced: CIN - 1, CLE – 0

Sacks: CLE – 4, CIN - 2

Final Score: Cincy – 27, Cleveland - 17

These are misleading, as until late (aka Huddlegate) the Browns had a decided advantage in both ToP and Total Yards. If you take away that garbage 41 yard TD pass, Cincy had not much over 100 yards passing. And Cedric Benson's 39 yard TD run probably wouldn't have happened without Huddlegate either, so the Browns Defense would've very likely had the Bengals stuck at well below 250 total yards - a fine effort.

What you don't see here is QB Pressures, which became a huge factor late in the game. What you don't see here is Line of Scrimmage Battles Won, which was championed by Cincy most of the afternoon.

But the pre-Huddlegate stats supported what I proposed earlier: That the Browns should have won this game.

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Game Balls

Joe Haden – Fantastic game, all those passes defended, clutch tackling. No way in Hades do I put that last TD pass on him since the entire Defense was still in the huddle.
That's someone else's fault.

D'Qwell Jackson – The Browns are still a few Defensive playmakers short of having a really dangerous unit, but DQ is proving to be one of those. 10 tackles, 2 sacks, 1 forced fumble... I'd assume that extension talks will start in the not-distant future.

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Honorable Mention

Josh Cribbs – His 51 yard KO return in the 2nd sparked the Browns initial comeback, and his 4th Quarter Punt Return might've saved the Browns' asses had Greg Little not gotten in his way. I still feel that he doesn't bring much to the table as a WR and should be really used only on Special Teams, but it's not like there's anyone behind him vastly more talented.

Marcus Benard – He had a sack and a really nice ST tackle to pin the Bengals deep.

Buster Skrine – He had a FANTASTIC ST tackle to pin the Bengals deep.

Phil Taylor – Was solid, in on a lot of plays. When the Bengals did run successfully, it was away from him (the secret is out - run left). Plus, he basically knocked Andy Dalton out of the game.
Now, let's hope he can do that against QB's that matter.

Ahtyba Rubin – He also was solid, but the play of his that really stood out to me was the tackle he made down the field to hold a Brian Leonard screen to only 7 yards right before.
That would've gone a long way if not for him.

Montario Hardesty – He showed some nice flashes, but this is mainly for surviving his first Real NFL game unscathed.

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Wall of Shame

Oniel Cousins and Artis Hicks – The Right Tackle Duo was shoved around, especially towards the end of the game. As bad as the Bengals are, they dominated the Browns O Line for big chunks of the contest, and that is just a bad, bad sign for the rest of the season.

Richmond McGee – Punters that average less than 36 yards per punt and continually put the Defense at disadvantage don't last long in this league.

Evan Moore – Surprised to see him here? He did have 3 catches for 35 yards and a TD. Ah, yes, but his poor effort at catching a well-thrown would-be TD pass from Colt in the 3rd killed the Browns real last-chance to put the game away.

Shaun Lauvao – I hate to give him this, cuz I think he's a really solid Guard, but he had 2 False Start penalties in the 1st Quarter, and that's un-good.

TJ Ward – I hate to give him this too, since I think he's a real playmaker, but he was consistently beaten by the Tight End (Jeremy Gresham), got a late hit penalty, and misread

Cedric Benson's final TD run. I don't particularly think Ward is best utilized in coverage (I'd rather see more of Mike Adams on Tight Ends), but he *is* a Safety and will be forced to cover sometimes, and teams will begin to pick on him if he can't stay with his man.

Sheldon Brown – If the Bengals had a top tier QB, Brown would've gotten ripped to shreds. I just wonder if he's lost a step.

Coaching – See below.

Regarding the Coaching

To say that this was an inauspicious start for Paddy O'Shurmur and his fearless crew would be gentle. The periods of disorganized indiscipline that took place from the get-go led directly to the loss, and that goes on the coaching staff. 7 penalties in the 1st Quarter? 10 in the 1st Half alone?
A penalty on Shumur for knocking down a Ref?
What.
The.
Hell?

The obviously most egregious error was Huddlegate. Sure, it was tricksy of Bruce Gradkowski to hurry up and snap the ball, but the fact that none of the players noticed it, that none of the coaches did anything to stop it, is INEXCUSABLE.

Mr. Shurmur, why in the name of Jehosephat did you not call a Time Out when Cincy rushed up to the line and the Browns' Defensive players were still in the huddle discussing what to get Milly as a wedding present? Did you even think about it?

"*No, because I didn't anticipate that the ball was going to get snapped*."

Wha... WHY?

"*It's my understanding that they changed personnel, lined up and then quick-snapped it. There are rules that go along with that, so we'll see...*
My understanding is when the offense changes personnel, my understanding is the defense is allowed to do so as well and have time to do it.
That's my understanding
."

And that's what stopped you from doing anything about that impending disaster? Why didn't you make a bigger deal about this to the Refs then?
Were you sure about your convictions?

"*I'm going to have to go back and watch the tape, but we'll all see if that actually happened*."

So you're not even certain if the thing that you "understand" happened really happened? And you still did nothing to stop it?

Yeesh.

Now, Shurmur did admit the following day that he "should've called a time out". I'm sure my dad realizes now he should've worn a condom.
We all have regrets.

The only good thing that can come of this is that I'm sure the coaching staff is supremely embarrassed and will work like hell to ensure that these kind of mental breakdowns don't

happen again - either by them or the players.

But in the NFL, where every game is vital, there are no mulligans. At least you're not shirking the responsibility.

"*No excuses. I don't care if you're a rookie, I don't care if you've been in this thing for 12 years and I don't care if this is your last game, you can't make mistakes and I think there were a lot of unforced errors there... I think that's the message and it starts with me* ."

That's right. Get your house in order, sir.

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Regarding the 3rd Down Back

Where was Armond Smith? Yeah, I realize he's the 3rd string undrafted rookie in his first game ever, but if Brandon Jackson was still healthy, are you telling me he wouldn't have seen the field? So because he got hurt we're just going to ignore the role?

If you have a guy on your roster that you consider your change-of-pace guy, then you need to find a way to get that guy in the game. If he doesn't get it done, then you move in another direction. But just not playing him at all is really inexplicable.

Like the Browns couldn't have used some more speed on the field.

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Regarding Colt McCoy

It's hard to read this particular performance. He looked really good at times (that TD pass to Watson was a thing of beauty), then suddenly looks unable to move the Offense.
He holds the ball too long at times, which sometimes leads to exciting broken plays, but in general leads to sacks and turnovers.

It's also difficult to say how he's doing since even the best QB is dependent upon his targets getting open, and that didn't seem to be the case very often on Sunday. Dump offs and short slants seem to be very popular in this offense, but once the Browns stopped really throwing the ball down the field, the Bengals crept back up to the line of scrimmage and shut the short stuff down and crashed the pocket.
Relying on the running game came too late to be effective.

At the end, when the Cincy Ends were consistently beating Hicks (and challenging even Joey T), Colt just didn't have enough time to throw it deep. When pressured, McCoy seemed to panic, highlighted by that fateful pass to Alex Mack.

So the reason it's hard for me to read that effort is that the O Line and the Receivers (and, to an extent, the RB's) didn't do much to help him out. It's really hard to say whether or not a more veteran, established QB could have torn the Bengals apart without going back in time and acquiring a veteran, established QB.

Let me just say that I am not comfortable yet on the concept of Colt as Franchise QB. He can be, but his ceiling is much lower than, say, some 6'4, 235 lb guy with great mobility, a rocket arm, and great accuracy.
So if that Luck-y guy only meets 80% of his potential, he's still probably as good as a McCoy that meets 95%.
The odds are just not that good.

But he's got all year to convince us otherwise. If he fails, it'll likely mean that the Browns have a terrible record and will be conveniently placed to replace him anyway.

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Regarding Heinous Commercials

When I was at NYU, Martin Scorcese - a fellow alum - was bathed with almost Godlike adoration by the film student body general. Now, he should teach a course called Directing Useless Drivel.

I speak specifically of the new Bleu de Chanel commercial which has been on various sports networks recently. Some random dude at a press conference declares he won't be the person he's expected to be and marches off. I invite you to watch it here on YouTube , but if you are one of those who has already seen it, you'd probably rather not subject yourself to it again.

Now, it's obvious the commercial doesn't make a lick of sense, but I'm OK with that. It's a commercial.
It can just be interesting visuals and good music (Rolling Stones) and I'm cool with that.
But Scorcese tries to inject some kind of story into the thing, which is largely useless.

But that's not what makes me hate this ad with the fiery passion of a thousand white-hot suns.
No, it's this dude's pronouncement "
I'm not going to be the person I'm expected to be any more

."

What kind of douchebag says that? And in a press conference? What, is he a 15 year old rebelling against mommy and daddy's oppressive rules?

And he's a photographer or filmmaker (at least it seems that way). Who holds a big press conference for a stinkin' photographer?
What is the big deal that he has to be asked if he wants a question rephrased?
Why should we give a shit?

"*I'm not going to be the person I'm expected to be any more*." Uh, OK. Shut the F up. The only thing that would save that commercial at that point is if Jules from Pulp Fiction walks in and punts the dude in the huevos about 5 times in row.
Congratulations Chanel, you've created an advertisement so bad that I will go out of my way to buy your product for the rest of my life.
I will fly to Argentina just to avoid purchasing it.

Let's hope that Scorcese hasn't become the Brett Favre of Directors - a guy that just doesn't know when to call it a career.

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Regarding Whatever

***Another question for the coaching staff... 3:23 left, down 3, forced to punt. McGee punts the ball 35 yards to the Cincy 33.
Bengals get called for 12 men on the field.
Ref asks Shurmur if he wants to take the penalty.
Shurmur looks confused, turns around and looks at bench, then motions to decline it.

Why?

It's not like the 33 yard line is "pinning the Bengals deep". It's not like McGee just ripped a 60 yard punt.

You take the 5, punt it again, and hope that you can stick it inside the 20. There is no logical reason I can think of that this didn't happen.

***How is it that the NFL throws penalties for excessive celebration, then turns around and highlights a show on the NFL Network called "*Top 10 Endzone Celebrations*"? Is it not slightly hypocritical to highlight celebrations which are likely currently outlawed?

Next, you'll see "*Top 10 Vicious Headshots*".

***Watching Joe Bauserman play QB makes me die inside a little.

***Let's say that Peyton Manning ends up getting shut down for the year and the Colts are as bad as they've looked in the past when Manning was out (Jim Sorgi, anyone?) and they manage to lose their way to the #1 overall pick.

Do they take Andrew Luck?

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