When it comes to the Cleveland Browns of recent vintage, by which I mean at least the last 10 years, I'm used to a fair amount of debate about what they need to do in order to finally win a game. What will take some getting used to is the fair amount of debate about what they need to do to improve the quality of their wins.

Scanning the internets and listening to various talking heads around and about town, one would think that the Browns were 0-3 and headed for another season of abject futility. Ok, so the jury is still out on whether this season will end up in abject futility. But for now why the long faces?

All of this whining just proves the point that the two worse things in life are not getting what you want and getting what you want.

Fans have been pining for a team with both an identity and a chance. Both are clearly emerging and yet all many of them can think to do is curse their fate.

I understand that all the various folks covering this team have air time to fill and column inches to write. But if I see another column like Beacon Journal reporter Nate Ulrich's weekly Browns Report Card, my head, as Rob Lowe's character on Parks and Recreation might say, will literally explode.

This incessant need to grade things is what's come to pass for real analysis these days, as if the subtlety and nuance of football (or any complex activity, actually) could be reduced to one or two pithy paragraphs.

What's so funny about Ulrich's report card (and the dozens like it) is that the Browns graded out to about a C in his book. Apparently there's no extra credit given for winning the friggin' game.

Maybe it's because winning isn't experienced much in these parts so we tend to forge that professional sports especially is a bottom line business and the fact remains that a Browns win, even if it looked like a loss, is still far better for the franchise then another Browns' loss that looked like a win.

In this town there is no longer any upside to being a fan unless it's always been your goal to be miserable. Maybe we come by the perpetual dark cloud hanging over us honestly, but it's no longer sufficient to simply recall the bad ol' days, it's now mandatory that they inform even the smallest of points of success.

There's no question that the Browns' offense looked like crap on Sunday. As amateurs we'd like to believe that teams play one game a week so it's not too much to ask for that team to play with sufficient emotion and effort. But it's never as easy as it seems from the comfort of our comfortable chairs.

Maybe it was the absence of Peyton Hillis that knocked Colt McCoy off his moorings, but I doubt it. Lost in all of this is that McCoy was starting just his 9th pro game and just his third under this latest offensive system. For the most part, last season was a total waste of everyone's time, including McCoy's, and thus his progress (or lack thereof) must be judged in the context of all that's taken place in his short career.

I'm not going to dwell on McCoy's feeling that the Eric Mangini/Brian Daboll offensive dynamo machine treated him like a non-person. That was just Mangini's way of letting high priced athletes understand that indeed their shit does stink. And I'm not going to dwell on how most of this is Mike Holmgren's fault because, well, I just devoted an entire column to that very subject.

Instead I'll just dwell on the more objective observation that neither Tom Brady nor Peyton Manning were Tom Brady or Peyton Manning after 9 starts. That's not to compare McCoy to those two now but it is to compare McCoy to those two then because, like those two, McCoy was a pretty fair college quarterback.

So McCoy is playing unevenly in the way that newbie NFL quarterbacks tend to play. It's one thing to know how to read a defense but reading it in the context of the NFL is far different. The players across the board are better. It's as if the quarterback is facing a college all star team each and every week.

So it's not a surprise that a young quarterback will have up and down weeks. There will be times when he looks great and other times when he looks like Derek Anderson and much of it has to do with the subtle changes and differences he faces by each week's opponent.

But when it mattered most, McCoy stepped forward and led the team on a career-defining drive. McCoy was poised, found the right receivers at the right moment and made the throws he had to in order to put the team in a position to win.

Maybe it's fair to complain about an offense playing new schemes that has been together for only 3 actual games. It's what they get paid to do. But to micro-analyze each play while forgetting its most important function, which is to score touchdowns, is a fool's game. You'll never lose money taking the team that finds a way to win over the team that looks good losing.

There's been some grumbling, too, about the defense. To me it looked like the Browns' defensive line was getting manhandled most of the game by the Dolphins' offensive line, but the statistics would indicate otherwise. Reggie Bush was mostly a non-factor, but Daniel Thomas did have 95 yards. Yet, quarterback Chad Henne was sacked 5 times. Yet when the Dolphins needed 1 or two yards, their offensive line gave them the push they needed, consistently and that seemed rather troubling, until it didn't.

The fact is that no defense is going to hold any offense in the NFL to three-and-out consistently. Offenses have the benefit of knowing the play. Defenses can just guess. Things happen and

teams move the ball (except those few years when the Browns would go weeks without scoring on offense).

What is far more important is how the team responds when it's tested and on that the Browns' defense on Sunday accorded itself well.

I'm not really referring to the lack of touchdowns by the Dolphins' offense when it approached the red zone. It's pretty clear after three Dolphins games that Dolphins' offensive coordinator Brian Daboll loses his nerve when he needs it most. The Dolphins don't score touchdowns because they don't take chances, more concerned with preserving any scoring opportunity then they are with maximizing those opportunities.

What I am referring to is that final drive by the Dolphins. Based on the ebb and flow of the game, there was no reason to think that the Dolphins wouldn't move the ball into reasonable field goal territory. Chad Henne had been incredibly efficient and despite the 5 sacks, which were due more to coverage than pressure, the offensive line was protecting him.

But that was precisely the point when the defensive line stepped forward and put enough pressure on Henne to force him to throw more quickly then he had been used to the entire game. Three incomplete passes and an interception later, the game was sealed and, not coincidentally, the complaining began.

There isn't any real question that this Browns team needs to continue getting better in order to be an actual force in the NFL, but the key word in that sentence is "continue" and not "better." It's already a better team.

The step between better and good can be huge but that's no reason to bemoan the process it takes to make it. There is a point at which it makes more sense to admire the forest and ignore the trees. This is one of those times.