How you view the Cleveland Browns 13-9 loss to the Pittsburgh Steelers on Sunday depends mightily on the bar you set. As measured by the usual late-season poundings the Browns endure from the big brother that's probably getting tired of pushing them around, it was a success. As measured by the usual things the NFL tends to chronicle more meaningfully, like wins and losses, not so much.

The loss came in the same mind numbing way that most Browns losses have come this season. A solid defensive effort for most of the game kept it close but a dearth of playmakers on offense once again kept the Browns from entering the end zone when they had the opportunity and when they needed it most. Settling for field goals early and unable to capitalize on two Steelers' turnovers and a final shot at the end zone late, the Browns lost to the Steelers for what seems like the 183rd straight time.

It also completed the Browns' 8th losing season in their last 9, and 16th losing season since 1990. It also marked the 10th time since their return in 1999 that they've won 6 or fewer games in a season. There's simply no way to sugarcoat it. The Browns as a franchise really are a runaway train, as Chris Palmer so presciently noted over a decade ago.

But really in the grand scheme of all things Browns, this was as meaningless of a game that could possibly take place so getting exorcised at this point is a wasted energy. Disregard any notion from some of the

players, such as Josh Cribbs, who called the game "their Super Bowl." It's a rather hollow statement, like "moral victory." The Steelers had something to play for, the Browns didn't. The Steelers took care of business, the Browns did what they've done 12 other times this season, play the victim.

The point, I guess, is that the backdrop to Sunday's game was about as irrelevant as a Browns' game can get, at least in terms of having any meaning locally. It's in that context, truly, that this game must be quickly viewed and easily forgotten.

If you're nevertheless trying to discern some meaning, then two things stood out. First, the Browns' shortcomings, so brilliantly displayed game after game, are as apparent as the backside of Kim Kardashian. Second, and to be more specific, what Sunday did so ably demonstrate is that the failures of this team don't start with the quarterback. Seneca Wallace, subbing again for Colt McCoy, looked exactly like McCoy has looked most of the season.

Maybe that's an indictment of McCoy or Wallace or both, I'm not sure anymore. What it is an indictment of is a porous right side of the line that can't sustain blocks in the passing game or open up holes in the running game and a lack of big time receivers that can consistently be counted on to scare an opposing defense.

Take the example of the Browns' two possessions in the fourth quarter following fumbles by Steelers' running back Isaac Redman and then the Browns' final possession of the game.

The first possession took place just as the fourth quarter started. Taking over at the Pittsburgh 43 yard line (after a face mask penalty on James Farrior on the Joe Haden recovery of the Stedman fumble) and trailing just 13-9, this was the place where a good team rises up and snatches the momentum.

Not the Browns. Wallace threw incomplete on first down and Montario Hardesty had no gain on second down. Wallace completed a rare pass to Mohamed Massaquoi, rare not because he wasn't throwing to Massaquoi but rare because Massaquoi actually held on, that gave the Browns a first down. But that's as far as it went. Hardesty lost two yards on the next play,

Massaquoi dropped Wallace's next pass and then a short, underneath pass to Greg Little was incomplete. The Browns were forced to punt.

Given an almost identical second chance minutes later, the Browns reacted in almost identically futile fashion. After a completion for a first down to Cribbs, Wallace then missed on his next three passes and the Browns again were forced to punt with just over 4 minutes remaining in the game.

The Steelers had a chance to run out the clock and seemed well on their way to doing so but on 3rd and 2 with 2 minutes remaining, the Steelers decided not to trust Redman again, who was subbing for the injured Rashard Mendenhall, and instead forced a risky pass from Ben Roethlisberger that went incomplete.

It gave the Browns one final chance with 1:46 remaining and no time outs. With snowflakes the size of canned hams flying furiously, Wallace moved the ball into Pittsburgh territory with a series of out passes. But when Evan Moore couldn't get out of bounds on a catch at the Pittsburgh 24-yard line, Wallace, demonstrating he can learn something about clock management, spiked the ball with 5 seconds remaining. It gave the Browns one final opportunity that went for naught when a Wallace Hail Mary fell harmlessly in the end zone.

While any of those three possessions nicely summed up the season, it's not as if the rest of the game ran anything other than to script.

After a scoreless first quarter that saw the Steelers strangely forego a field goal attempt from the Browns' 32-yard line on their first possession, the Browns rode the game's first wave of momentum to take an early 3-0 lead on a Dawson 26-yard field goal.

The momentum was courtesy, first, of a Jabaal Sheard sack of Roethlisberger that turned what would have been a short Scott Suisham field goal try into a 45-yard attempt into the wind. It went wide right. That gave the Browns a certain bounce in their step that lasted nearly all the way to the Steelers' end zone. But on 1st and goal at the 4 yard line, Peyton Hillis, last year's touchdown machine, lost 4 yards. Two passes ostensibly intended for Massaquoi were incomplete and the Browns settled for the field goal.

The Browns took a 6-0 lead near the end of the first half on a Dawson 45-yard field goal, but Pittsburgh got on the board with a Suisham 19-yard field goal just as the half expired. That was a victory of sorts for the defense though as Roethlisberger had moved the Steelers down to the Browns' 1-yard line with just over a minute remaining. But lacking any timeouts, the Steelers were forced to throw and both Rothliberger passes were incomplete, forcing the short field goal.

The Steelers' tied it on their first possession of the second half with a Suisham 29-yard field goal (after a long drive stalled at the Browns' 11 yard line) and then took the lead for good on their next possession following an interception by Troy Polamalu of a Wallace pass at the Browns' 43-yard line. Redman, holding on to the ball, finished the last 7 yards of the drive with a nice run up the middle for the touchdown and the ultimate margin of victory.

Though the Browns had those 3 separate opportunities to potentially win the game in the fourth quarter,

it wasn't to be, again.

So let the evaluation begin, though how much is really necessary is an open question. The Browns were bad in every month of the season and for the identical reasons each time—lousy blocking, poor running, dropped passes, arm tackling, that sort of thing.

Nothing about what took place Sunday was particularly instructive either, although Cribbs had a career day receiving with 7 catches, many of them acrobatic and in traffic, for 91 yards. Hillis had only 10 carries for 30 yards before exiting with an apparent knee injury and Hardesty was a non-factor.

The one thing about this offseason that will be different is that the Browns won't be looking for a new head coach. Pat Shurmur's job is safe even though there is some sentiment brewing among fans that Shurmur is indeed a major part of the problem.

That's a tough call at this point, as difficult, really, as assessing McCoy's potential. Shurmur had nothing to do with filling out the roster. He was foreclosed by the lockout from conducting any sort of offseason program that would have familiarized the players with a new system. By the time the lockout ended, much of the preseason was lost, further frustrating any chance to fully install a new office.

The one thing that will be the same about this offseason? It's the realization once again of what the Browns really need—everything. It will be the third season of the Mike Holmgren regime and this time he would do well to bring a sense or urgency to a fan base whose patience has about run out, if all the orange seats around Cleveland Browns Stadium in a game against the team's most hated rival is any indication.

Because another 4 or 5 win season and the Browns will find themselves like the Cincinnati Bengals, practically begging fans to attend games that no one will much care about anymore.