I hate the word and the concept of ‘choking’. I find it too convenient and too broadly used to describe losses and failures of individuals and of teams. Especially when in collegiate sports you’re talking about 18-22 year old kids.

But Saturday night the Ohio State Buckeyes choked.

They choked away a nine-point halftime lead and the choked away an opportunity to play for a national championship Monday night against Kentucky when the moment apparently got too big (again) for a couple key contributors.

The loss to Kansas Saturday night wasn’t stunning. Kansas is a terrific basketball team with plenty of pride and history and plenty of talent. But the Buckeyes dominated the basketball game for pretty much 35 minutes before falling down, giving up a big lead late and not getting bailed out by any great player making any great plays. They went down like they played for too much of the year and that was rather meekly and in disappointing fashion.

Anyone familiar with Buckeye case law remembers *Buford v. Kentucky, NJ, March 2011*

That was the night last season where William Buford inexplicably missed open shot after open shot in the Regionals, going 2/16 on the night and playing a big role in the Buckeyes bowing out against an underdog Kentucky team. Saturday night in New Orleans you could almost hear the announcer before the play started saying, “Tonight the role of William Buford is being played by DeShaun Thomas”.

Thomas was, in a word, brutal. He was 3/14 from the field and finished with nine points on the night, less than half of what he averaged in the tournament's previous four games. Thomas was instrumental in getting Ohio State as far as they did get and this isn't an indictment of the kid or his talent. It's an indictment of the game he had when OSU needed him most. Nine points, coupled with just four rebounds, was a night Ohio State couldn't survive against a strong Kansas team.

By no means was it just Thomas though. Buford was actually the only Buckeye to shoot 50% or better from the floor on the night. The Buckeyes shot 33% on the night and worse than 25% in the second half to allow KU to regain their balance and mount a comeback that propelled them into Monday night's championship game.

Jared Sullinger was miserable with 13 points on 5/19 shooting (and showing NBA teams the easiest blue print to stopping him at the next level which is simply having someone bigger and equally un-athletic leaning on him all night), Aaron Craft was uneven offensively (and ridiculously effective defensively again) in scoring 11 points but requiring 11 shots to do so and, not surprisingly, the Buckeyes bench produced no points and just four rebounds.

All week leading up to the game the thought was Buford needed to show up for the Buckeyes to have a chance. Buford showed up. It was the rest of the Buckeyes that didn't show up when it mattered most.

Good for the Goose

It wasn't all that long ago that Jim Tressel was being lambasted almost annually when his team was losing BCS National Championship games. All I heard about was what a shitty game coach he was and how prehistoric his offensive game plans were and how the Buckeyes failed to live up to their talent level.

So when does Thad Matta come under the gun for that same stuff?

Seems to me like Matta is excellent at getting young talent into the program and blending them together into a pretty tight, cohesive unit that wins a ton of games and performs well in conference and then craps down its leg when the pressure is increased and potential titles are on the line. How is that different than Tressel dominating the conference, winning tons of games and then crapping down his leg in the title games? Other than, you know, Tressel actually getting his teams to those title games and winning one? Why isn't the national media wondering whether Thad Matta is a guy who can win a national championship?

Matta's never had "Kentucky-level talent" at Ohio State. At least not every, single year where he's running two or three NBA lottery picks onto the floor for a few years running. But OSU had as many McDonald's All Americans out onto the floor as any team other than Kentucky and more than Syracuse and Kansas ran out there. Apparently it's not enough. It doesn't help Matta's cause when teams learn Sullinger can be bullied and bodied but it also doesn't help when Matta's never been all that comfortable running his offense initially through his big time post players like Sullinger and Greg Oden before him.

I also have and continue to question the toughness of Matta's OSU teams. You don't have to be the baddest ass on the block like Michigan State often puts on the floor, but exhibiting some individual and team toughness isn't all that much to ask. And far too often this season and in past seasons Matta's teams have looked to be too much based on finesse and athleticism as opposed to once in a while simply kicking someone's ass.

Is that a reflection of Matta? I think you have to lay the responsibility for it there, yes. Matta sets the tone and it's Matta's demands that those players are expected to meet. If he's asking it and they aren't giving it then that's on Matta. If he's not asking those recruits for toughness when they accept that scholarship then that's on Matta. If he's not recruiting some kids that would rather punch in the face you than pick you up off the floor then that too is on Matta.

I'm not saying Matta can't get the job done or that his program needs to be demolished and someone else brought in. I'm saying that Matta, thus far, hasn't gotten the job done and that the program needs to be assessed and held to the same standards that every other program at Ohio State is held to. If Tressel was judged nationally and regionally by his failures and his inability to win the biggest games then Matta needs to be subjected to that same level of accountability.

Just Missed…Doggone It

Only here and only now could not landing the ancient Bobby Abreu be a big issue and one that could rile up the fan base. From the people who are unwilling to give up low-level prospects to the people who are bitching about the Dolan's spending habits while hating the front office's efforts to improve the club, to the people who are simply amused by the fact that they ***know*** Abreu is five years past his expiration date but that he's
still better
than Shelley Duncan.

It's a really a sociology lesson, following this team.

I'm in the last camp, by the way. Had the Indians grabbed Bobby Abreu in 2002 instead of in 2012 I'd be ecstatic. But he's about done. And yet I'm still disappointed because a 'done' Abreu is still a better everyday left field option than Duncan. Abreu might be a relic but as statues go he's more mobile than Duncan, more agile than Duncan, has a better arm than Duncan and would be, despite his declining physical skills, a better option to hand 400 MLB Abs in a given season.

You want proof of that?

The Indians wouldn't be kicking the tires on a washed up, physically deteriorating former RF to play LF for them if their other options weren't the baseball equivalent of steaming manure piles, none of which have ever gotten 300 MLB plate appearances (despite one of them being 32 years old) in a single season, much less 400 Abs.

The fact they're desperate enough to take on any of Abreu's inflated salary is a clear indication they're not buying a lot of Shelley Duncan stock and that they'd love to actually have someone else running (Stumbling? Shambling?) around in LF as the season is about to get underway.

Please Hurry

I'm begging for the NFL Draft to get here so it can be over. Not the draft and the player profiles and the fun I have in trying to guess along with this paranoid/schizophrenic organization, but with the bullshit and the misinformation.

My God…if I have to hear Mike Mayock or Gil Brandt talk about attending another QB's Pro Day and then telling me over and over on Twitter that guys like Ryan Tannehill is a better ***prospect*** than Robert Griffin III or that Brock Osweiler is a first round talent I swear I'll punch the next baby I see right its face.

There's so much chatter about these QBs that I've personally reached the saturation point. We (Browns writer and draft aficionado Jason Askew and I) started a blog, Grey Matters Sports , to write short previews that combine facts, stats, opinions and film analysis on potential Browns draftees and I've had a great time learning about guys like Isaiah Pead, Stephen Hill, LaMichael James, Chris Polk, Mohamed Sanu and so many other talented, RBs and WRs. It's ridiculous the amount of talent out there and available to the Browns with their picks in the first few rounds.

But I'd rather eat the barrel of a gun than talk about Tannehill to the Browns or how he's suddenly one of the very best prospects the NFL has to offer this season. You know why ESPN is pimping the shit out of Tannehill as the next best thing to iPods and internet porn? Because it creates drama and it creates clicks.

With Andrew Luck gone and Robert Griffin III gone the humps at ESPN know nothing sells like QBs. Black QBs, white QBs, big school and small school QBs are all the rage. Get a fan base excited about future stars like Osweiler and Tannehill and they'll click the shit out of your site.

Tannehill is now in the same league as RG3 and Luck? All because he didn't trip over his pud at his Pro Day? Did his film from the past couple seasons get better? Is he suddenly a guy who played more than 19 games at QB in his career and who was a WR at Texas A&M first because he wasn't as good as the QB there at the time (whose name you don't know)? Is Tannehill suddenly smarter? Has he thrown fewer than the 15 INTs he threw this past season and gotten more comfortable with his reads?

No. No, no, no, no.

It's because the RG3 drama and clicks dried up a few days after the Redskins won his draft right with their trade. It's because no one likes to debate Justin Blackmon vs. Michael Floyd like they like to debate the QB position.

And in three weeks or so it will be over. At least for another 8 months or so. And, man, I'm looking to those 8 months.

Contractual Obligation

Welcome to the "Officially Mailing it In" portion of the Cavaliers season. Kyrie Irving is hurt, the Cavs have no talent, the old guys like Antawn Jamison are playing 30 minutes, taking four shots from the field and trying three of those four from 3-point range and the crap has hit the fan at The Q.

Good.

Now it should be easier to do what should have been done all along. All the Cavs fan bois who talked about playoffs and what a wonderful gem Tristan Thompson is can shut up and get down with the ugly business that is getting better in the NBA: tanking games.

It's not for the faint of heart and it's not at all pretty. But it's effective and it's tried and true.

The Cavs now have a legitimate excuse to lose 90% of their remaining ball games. I'd shut down Irving for the next 6 weeks and I'd give a ton of minutes to Luke Harangody, Samardo Samuels and Thompson. Preferably all at the same time and night after night.

Let’s do this right and do it honestly. Seriously, there are two or three players on this roster who don’t make my skin crawl.

Let’s double that next season, okay?

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