Bizjournals.com has proclaimed Browns fans to be the NFL's best, filling Cleveland Browns Stadium to 99.8 percent capacity over the past seven years to watch a team that has gone 37-80 since returning to action in 1999. Papa Cass couldn't agree more, citing the loyalty that fans have shown this team despite nothing but heartbreak and misery for the last 13 years.

Visit the Papa Cass weblog at http://papacass.blogspot.com/

If Cleveland's recent (and not-so-recent) sports history is devoid of championships on the field, we at least have won a championship in the stands.

Bizjournals.com has proclaimed Browns fans to be the NFL's best , filling Cleveland Browns Stadium to 99.8 percent capacity over the past seven years to watch a team that has gone 37-80 since returning to action in 1999.

That's 43 games under .500, folks. If that were the Indians, they'd be drawing college students, drunks and mayflies, and that's it.

Normally, you'd probably classify fans who consistently sell out games for a team that awful in one of two ways: masochistic or stupid.

Fans in Pittsburgh might disagree, but the tale of the tape shows Cleveland fans to be neither.

Ticket-buying loyalty is only half the battle when determining the best sports fans. They also have to be knowledgeable. After all, what good is all that losing if you can't truly suffer through it?

Pro sports is littered with fan bases that generally don't understand the intricacies of the sports they watch, for a variety of reasons. I have a feeling, for example, that with all the warm winter weather and surrounding theme park attractions, your garden variety Orlando Magic fan wouldn't be able to explain the intricacies of the pick and roll, let alone a 2-2-1 halfcourt zone defense.

Same goes for Arizona Cardinals fans. Did it break their hearts to watch their team implode against the Bears on Monday? Sure. Are they going to be driven to drink heavy doses of hard liquor by it? No.

In both cases, ignorance is bliss. Not so in Cleveland, particularly when it comes to the Browns. No, if you were born and raised in Cleveland, you not only were weaned on the Browns, you grew up in a place where there is nothing else to get you through the cold, dark winters. Well, now we have LeBron James, but before that, there was nothing else.

Either by choice or sheer limit of options, you watched the Browns. You absorbed the game of football like a sponge. You learned to tell the difference between an actual holding call and a bullshit holding call. You became aware that the receiver was dropping the ball because he was using his body instead of his hands. You even found out that those hapless Browns defenders were sliding off Jamal Lewis like falling leaves because they were taking poor routes to the ball carrier and not getting enough leverage.

For better or worse, you not only learned the Browns. You learned the game. And that's what makes you the best fans in football. Any fan base can sell out a stadium because it's the thing to do on a Sunday afternoon. Heck, the final 75 percent of the Indians' legendary 455 straight sellouts was largely because the Indians were the "thing to do."

But you sell out the games because you know football, and you need football. It's in your blood like cholesterol. It's not necessarily healthy, but it's there.

When you get down to it, the right team left in 1995. If the Indians or Cavaliers had left, tears would have been shed, no doubt. But it wouldn't have created the almost militaristic opposition the departure of the Browns did. We wouldn't have fought to keep the other two teams the way we did the Browns. We wouldn't have hammered away at the NBA or Major League Baseball the way we did the NFL, persisting until they threw us the bone of an expansion team, just so football wouldn't leave Cleveland forever.

If there is a final litmus test necessary to determine the best fans in football, that should be it.