1989

1994

2002

2007

The numbers listed above represent each of the last four years the Cleveland Browns finished over .500. If you recently snapped out of a 20-something year coma, then yes, it's been a far cry from the five consecutive playoff appearances this team made from 1985-1989. But it starts to get freaky weird when you write off the three dormant years of this franchise (1996-1998) and realize that in the last 20 seasons, this team has finished above .500 four times... exactly once every fifth year; do the math for yourself. Call it consistency, call it a coincidence, call it sad, call it odd, call it a homeless man's Olympic games; whatever you call it, for any passionate NFL fan whose loyalties are tied to a team, this five year periodicity is the type of stuff that breaches the fine line separating sports purgatory from sports hell. For the record, I was born in 1989 and believe I'm partially to blame here.

But despite this, like you, I'm still a Browns fan. That means I am exceptionally good at burying the past and looking forward. It also means I get pumped for the preseason. Perhaps a little too pumped. Like, 4,000-plus words pumped. Like, "where's the drug test when you need it"

pumped.

Now, let's mock some over/under's.

Over/Under the Browns being one “those” teams:
Over: +220
Under: -180

It happens every year, we’ve all seen it. A team that looks terrible on paper, somehow stumbles into a good situation, captures lightning in a bottle, seems to have all the breaks go there way, feeds off of their own overachievement, and makes the unfathomable leap to relevancy by winning 9 to 11 games. The Browns were one of those teams in 2007, and really, ever since, we've been left to pray it happens again.

When the season kicks off, the Browns are projected to be just the fourth team in the past 44 years to open a season with a starting rookie quarterback and running back, and the first team in the modern NFL to do so after taking both in the first round of the draft. It's also likely they end up starting four rookies total on offense. They also have a brand new owner. What do we make of this? Well, we can say that we know less about the 2012 Cleveland Browns than we do any other team in the league. Sure, this isn't a good thing, but it's certainly not a terrible thing either. Especially when you remember that (1) this league is specifically designed for weird things to happen, and (2) we're entering the infamous "Fifth Year."

Since the year 2000, 31 teams have finished 6-10 or worse and qualified for the playoffs the following year. (Two of those teams were 3-13 or worse, eight were 4-12, and nine were 5-11.) In that same span, there have been nine additional teams (5-11 or worse) that jumped five wins in the standings from one year to the next, but missed the playoffs. So since the 2000 season, 40 teams have turned themselves into playoff contenders in just one year.

Of the 40 above mentioned teams who made a sudden leap from one season to the next, 24 of them replaced their quarterbacks during the offseason...

It's border line comical to preach to a Cleveland audience that a new quarterback is the answer. But the fact of the matter is that, well, a lot of the times it is. By "a lot of times" I specifically mean when you're replacing terrible quarterback play. Of those 24 teams that changed quarterbacks, 16 of them were using starters who rated among the bottom 10 in football in yards per attempt. That's where McCoy ranked last year; he was dead last in the league, actually. The Browns replaced him with Brandon Weeden.

As a rookie, Sam Bradford had the look of an elite quarterback. According to ESPN's John Clayton, then-offensive coordinator Pat Shurmur had him working three-step drops and quick five-step throws, and Bradford completed 60 percent of his passes for 3,512 yards. Last season under Josh McDaniels, Bradford looked completely expendable.

This is just something to think about going forward...which ever way you want to think about it.

Over/Under Brandon Weeden being a significant upgrade at quarterback:
Over: -240
Under: +200

Don't worry, I've seen all of Weeden's college highlights on youtube, so I'm completely qualified to have an opinion here, and here it is...he has a rocket arm, the type of last name that you can augment into a pretty cool name for your fantasy team (i.e. The Garden of Weeden) , and we haven't yet decided if we can officially consider him a red-head. That's about all I know, sorry, I didn't watch Oklahoma State and I can't take a works leave of absence to attend a day at training camp. Oh, and I know he's 28, which for some reason is supposed to be a red flag.

Since Weeden's age isn't a issue (it's not), let's keep this short: Just know the San Francisco Forty Niners will enter 2012 with 28 year old Alex Smith at quarterback. Boom! Thank You (takes bow). Let's move on.

Last season, 14% of Colt McCoy's throws were down field (meaning past 15 yards); he was dead last in the NFL in that regard. We can expect Weeden to go down field more, and that alone will make the Browns more watchable and, ultimately, less stressful.

Let's say you can pick one of the following scenarios to occur when the Browns are starting a drive with the ball on their own 20.

Option A: 12 play drive that takes 6 minutes off the clock, stalls at the oppositions 40 yard line and results in a punt. Or...

Option B: 6 play drive that takes 3 minutes off the clock, stalls at the oppositions 40 yard line and results in a punt.

If you'd rather take option 1, then—according to the American Psychological Association—you're legally insane. Also, you're probably a huge fan of Colt McCoy. Just know that last season, the Browns offense led the league in number of plays run before punting and/or kicking the ball. And that's before I tell you that they were last in the league in trips inside the red zone, where they had just 31. And that's before I tell you that they were were second worst in the league on a points per/game basis. At some point that'll break any fans spirits, and trust me, it broke many. (I had to take a 40-day schism in January when the season ended) A quarterback with a rocket arm doesn't guarantee anything, we know that, but if your team has one it will immediately increase your life expectancy.

The key will be whether or not Weeden limits the number of interceptions that he's bound to throw.

Over/Under the Browns keeping a close eye on Trent Richardson's workload:
Over: +120
Under: -200

(Readers Note: This was written prior to the knowledge of Trent Richardson's MRI and linkage to Dr. James Andrews)

Of the 40 teams since 2000 to make a huge leap from one season to the next, 18 of them employed a new feature running back...

With the recent sale of the Browns, there are question marks surrounding the job security of the people in the front office. In other words, there's really no reason for Pat Shurmur to hold Richardson back, so he could very well cross the 300-carry threshold in his rookie season.

Richardson will replace what was arguably the worst RB situation in team franchise history—keep in mind, Hillis may have been a bigger distraction than T.O. or Chad ever were to their team, we don't know. In terms of opportunities, he might be in the best position of any RB in the NFL. I heavily debated reaching for him with the 10th pick in my fantasy draft, purely to fill my own psychic benefits of owning a Browns RB who could potentially be awesome. I ended up passing on him—in part, because I didn't want to shoulder the burden of becoming the 1st person in our leagues 10 year history to use a 1st round pick on a Brown, but more or less because I have the propensity of taking on the form of a human reproductive cavity when it comes to this kind of stuff. I grabbed Montario Hardesty instead. (Sigh)

But back to Richardson.

It helps that he will play behind a pretty good offensive-line, too. Despite what you may have been led to believe, the Cleveland Browns actually have one of the better o-lines in the league. Their line, which already consisted of Alex Mack and Joe Thomas, just got better with the addition of second round pick, Mitchell Schwartz. Schwartz actually fits in well in the Browns zone blocking scheme, and that's why they took him in the second round in what some say was a reach for the Browns. He's so big (6'6 and 317 pounds) that his size actually hurt his draft stock. A lot of that had to do with scouts being presumptuous to think a team would draft

Schwartz and play him at left tackle, his main position in college. But the Browns nabbed him to play right tackle—where he played 16 games at during college. Pro Football Weekly rated Schwartz as the top right tackle prospect, and the Browns viewed him that way too. Having a quarterback who can stretch the field will also help Richardson's cause.

Of the 40 mentioned teams since 2000 that have made a surprise leap from one season to the next, 8 of the 40 changed both RB's and quarterbacks from one season to the next.

I'll make this short: The most notable of those teams were the 2005 Bucs (4-12 to 11-5), 2005 Dolphins (4-12 to 9-7), 2006 Saints (3-13 to 10-6), 2008 Ravens (5-11 to 11-5), 2008 Falcons (5-11 to 11-5), and the 2007 Browns (4-12 to 10-6).

Key names: Ray Rice , Joe Flacco, Matt Ryan, Michael Turner , Drew Brees, Reggie Bush , Cadillac Williams,
Ronnie Browns
,
Jamal Lewis
. And, uh, well, Chris Simms ,Gus Frerotte, and Derek Anderson.

Over/Under Trent Richardson carrying this team:
Over: -80
Under: +130

I know it's a passing league, but having a top league talent at running back can help more than we think. The hope is that Richardson is as good as advertised and will be that guy. A large reason why the sale of the Browns went so smoothly (and quickly) for both sides was because of Richardson and the prospects of his future—even if it's only be for three or four seasons.

We know that running backs don't have a long shelf life, but in the short window of their prime they're capable of swinging seasons. Since 2002, 81 backs have gotten more than 295 carries. 67 of these teams finished with a .500 record or better. Of those 67 teams, 45 of those teams had what I would consider a shoddy receiving corps and/or mediocre-to-borderline terrible quarterbacking. Here are a few notables, among many.

(Shaun Alexander:) From 2003-2005, the Seahawks went 10-6, 9-7, and 13-3. This was with Matt Hasselbeck at quarterback and a receiver corps made up of Joe Jurevicious, Deion Branch, Bobby Ingram, and Jeremy Stevens.

(Ricky Williams:) In 2002 and 2003 Ricky Williams carried the ball 383 and 392 times. The Miami Dolphins went 9-7 and 10-6. This was with Jay Fiedler, Ray Lucas, and Brian Griese all chipping in at the quarterback position. In 2004 Ricky retired for weed and Miami went 4-12.

(**Jamal Lewis:)** In 2003 (10-6) and 2004 (9-7) the Ravens made the playoffs. Kyle Bowler and Anthony Wright were the teams split-duty, quarterbacks in 2003. Todd Heap, Travis Taylor, and Marcus Robinson were the teams leading receivers, none of which caught for more than 700 yards. In 2004 Kyle Boller started all 16 games and threw for 13 TD and 11 INT's.

(**Clinton Portis** and **Larry Johnson**:) In 2005 the Chiefs and Redskins went 10-6. That season Larry Johnson (336) and Clinton Portis (352) were fourth and fifth in the league in carries. The following year Larry Johnson trucked on with 405 total carries (the most in the last decade) and the Chiefs made the playoffs with Damon Huard and a aging Trent Green, each starting eight games at QB. Washington finished 5-11 that year, the same year Clinton Portis only played in seven games due to injury. 2008, the following year, was the last time we saw a

healthy Portis who carried the ball 342 times. That year, the Redskins—the team rumored to be the saddest franchise in football—finished 8-8; Jason Campbell started all 16 games and threw for 13 TD's and 6 INT's.

(**(Adrian Peterson:)** In 2008, Peterson (in his second season) carried the ball 367 times. The Vikings went 10-6 and won their division with Tarvaris Jackson and Gus Frerotte starting at quarterback. Read that last sentence one more time.

(Michael Turner): The Falcons signed Turner in the 2008 offseason where he would pair with rookie QB Matt Ryan—who I suppose we can say was a "shoddy QB" if only because it was his first season. That year he would carry the ball 376 times. As mentioned earlier, the Falcons went from a 4-12 record to 11-5.

LenDale White + Chris Johnson: QB-a disgruntled/suicidal Vince Young and a 50 year old Kerry Collins. 2007-10-6. 2008-13-3

DeAngelo Williams + Jonathan Stewart: 2008-12-4. QB-Jake Delhomme.

However, shortly after, these backs broke down. Sadly, carries can kill.

Over/Under Pat Shurmur resembling the look of a better Head Coach from 2011 to 2012:
Over: Even
Under: Even

12 of the 40 teams that made a leap from one season to the next replaced their head coaches during the offseason, and 6 additional teams replaced their head coach during the previous offseason.

Shurmur goes into year two with the Browns and he will be relieved (by Brad Childress) of his call playing duties on offense. This might make a bigger difference than we think. On a side note, is it just me or did it seem like Pat Shurmur had a personal vendetta against his entire offensive roster last year? (cough) excuse me, by that I meant, is it just me or did Pat Shurmur make it a point of trying to sabotage the careers of both Colt McCoy and Peyton Hillis' last year?

Well, regardless, lets hope he likes the guys on his 53-man roster this year..

Over/Under 0.5 times I mention Josh Gordon's three failed drug tests in the next two paragraphs:
Over: -400
Under: +320

On the same day that all hell broke loose at Penn State, the Browns took Josh Gordon in the 2nd round of the NFL's supplemental draft. It should have called for a celebration, maybe even its own copyright of "A Moment in Cleveland Browns History" —but the news was asphyxiated by the Paterno hysteria. It was sad, actually. At least it was for me. I mean, this was the first time the Browns did something significant (outside of the regular draft) since 2007, when they signed Eric Steinbach. After the news of Gordon broke, I reacted similarly to how I would if the Indians had made a blockbuster deal at the deadline. I was in awe. Reports had surfaced that the Browns were interested, but I figured that meant, you know, they would inevitably let us down. T*he Browns? Being the aggressors? Doing something to try and better themselves now? Clearly doing the smart thing by taking a flier on a little risk, big reward opportunity?* The addition of Josh Gordon, a WR who was projected to be a top 15 talent in next years draft, immediately changes the look of the Browns and restructures our entire perception of their

passing game.

Last week I was making my weekly truck from Akron to Columbus and flipped on the radio to hear that Josh Gordon was the early, hot topic in camp. Apparently this guy went from playing with the third-team offense to playing with the first-team offense in a span of 3 practice days. This news got me excited until the part where I remembered: *It's training camp.* The weirdest part about training camp is that the majority of us don't see it, yet so much emphasis and attention is given to it. For the common folk, you are left to form your opinions by sifting through an overload of blurbs, wire reports, and written analysis's. So to tell you the truth, much like Weeden, I know next to nothing about Josh Gordon. I know that a unnamed NFL executive said he compares similarly to Randy Moss. I'll end on that good note.

Over/Under Break out year for Mohamed Massaquoi:
Over: +400
Under: -400

If you're familiar with the *Cleveland Plain Dealer's* Terry Pluto , you know he has styled column where he talks to himself. Here is me talking to myself about Mohamed Massaquoi.

Me: Massaquoi is my sleeper pick.

The other me: Why?

Me: I've always had this nagging belief that he isn't as bad as we think. The belief that the former second round pick can still be salvaged.

The other me: So you're in that stage where you're stuck on a bold prediction, and because you're someone who writes about sports you're too stubborn to give up on MoMass because it would require you to admit that you were wrong?

Me: (swallows) No.

The other me: And now you will desperately patch some stats together, spin it into your favor, and use it as a platform to explain why you're still right about Massaquoi and that we should expect to see a beastly Mohamed Massaquoi in 2012?

Me: (with open palms) Ok, yeah...pretty much

The other me: Let's hear it.

Me: Ok, I've heard some say he's actually been the most impressive receiver at camp thus far.

The other me: Didn't you just say we shouldn't pay attention to much of anything that happens during practice open to the public?

Me: Yea but I'm not there to see it, so I don't know. It might be true, it might not. I do know that on multiple occasions I have heard Mike Holmgren talk about MoMass and his future. Homlgren sounds convincing when he says he expects Massaquoi to have a big year. Very convincing.

The other me: How do you know what convincing sounds like?

Me: I know that it doesn't sound anything like Holmgren back in January when he was asked to dish on Colt McCoy's future. But back to Massaquoi. Consider that, to this date, his two best games both came in his rookie season. One of those games was in his first ever NFL start, where he had 8 receptions for 148 yards. That day Derek Anderson was throwing to him. The other game was a shootout against Detroit when he caught 5 balls for 115 yards. The

quarterback that day was Brady Quinn.

The other me: Is there something you want to say about Quinn and Anderson? □□

Me: Yes, couldn't you make the case that either of those two are better than Jake Delhomme, Seneca Wallace, and Colt McCoy. With hindsight on my side, I can, and by gosh I will. Don't you kind of want to go back in time to see what would have happened if the Browns hadn't traded Braylon Edwards hours after the game where Massaquoi had fantasy owners bum rushing the waiver wire? Hell, don't you want to know what would have happened if they had kept Kellen Winslow II? Did you know that Massaquoi averaged 18.4 yards per catch in his first season, third best in the NFL? In the two years since, that number dipped to 12.9. In his three seasons, he's had 10 catches that went for over 30 yards. That's pretty impressive when you take a minute to recall how terrible the Browns offense (especially the pass) has been. Last year he only had 31 catches, but 19 of them were for first down. You know, for what it's worth

The other me: Now you're rambling.

Me: You're right. But he seems like he would thrive playing alongside a legitimate number one receiver. Perhaps Greg Little can be that guy..

Over/Under□ overrating□ Greg Little's # of dropped passes:

Over: -280
Under: +120

Little had 14 drops last season, second most in the NFL, but we have overblown this stat. Little ranked 20th in the NFL with 121 targets. I'm not going defend the guy by saying "He had more opportunities to drop passes." I'm going to point out that, of the 14 balls Little dropped, only three would have gone for a first down. Simply put, dropped passes aren't created equal, and that's why it's the most overrated, overblown stat in football. I mean, just ask yourself, how much better Greg Little would have been had he only dropped, say, half of what he did? Answer: Not much.

The issue isn't the amount of passes he let slip through his fingers; rather, the issue is that Little was 16th among all WR's in targets and only managed 709 yards, 2 TD's, 35 receptions for first down, and 6 receptions of 20+ yards. Those stats probably don't mean much to you, but since 2006 when "targets" became a stat, Greg Little holds claim to the worst statistical year ever for a WR who was targeted more than 115 times. So who should we blame here?

(This is the part where I take a huge cop-out.)

How about the quarterback?

But if you remain genuinely concerned with the number of Greg Little drops, maybe you can take solace in Jerry Rice who had 16 drops in his rookie year. Or how about Roddy White, he led the league in dropps last season. (In his defense, he did lead the league in targets.)

Over/Under "Randy Lerner was a good owner" argument:
Over: +1,000

Under: -5,000 □ □

Today, Randy Lerner should be celebrated. (Wait, what?) This has nothing to do with what he did for the Browns—how could it?—but everything to do with his seemingly spontaneous decision to sell the Browns. In a record 31 days, Jimmy Haslam and Randy Lerner finalized the biggest transaction (to date) in league history. For a lot of people, both aspects of this deal came as a surprise—the time it took, and the idea that someone would actually pay $1 billion-plus for this team. The most surprising part is the fact that someone—in this case, that someone being Lerner—was willing to part ways with a pro football franchise.

The league is a cash cow, by and large the most popular sport in this country. A bi-annual, profit machine for owners, as well as a rare ticket to participate in a real life *Game of Thrones*. Owning a NFL franchise is a once in a lifetime opportunity. It can do remarkable things to enhance one's ego, and the financial returns are quite outrageous. And the perks of the new CBA haven't even kicked in yet. So in other words, when Jimmy Haslam was presented the opportunity to buy, it's likely he soiled himself on the spot. For all of the above mentioned reasons, it's easy to see why this deal got done so fast and why Haslam overpaid for a thought to be decrepit Browns franchise.

But why did Lerner sell? If you own a NFL team in the year 2012, the only justifiable reason to sell it now would be if (1) you've got inside info on the Mayans prediction coming to fruition; (2) you're going dead broke; or (3) you own a team like the Jaguars (sold last year), a Florida team whose fans won't hesitate to abandon them when they're terrible simply because it's Florida and there are other things to do. So yeah, there aren't a lot of opportunities out there. But Randy Lerner proved a rare exception. He had had enough. And why wouldn't he have. Nothing, I repeat, nothing went right for him. Over the years, as the losses kept mounting and the angry letters kept coming, he began questioning himself the same way a fan would question the reasons they continue to support this terrible team. (or so I choose to theorize)

SCENE SCOOPS EVERYONE WITH THE TRUTH **BEHIND** THE DECISION!
MIKE AND **ERIC** BONDED WHILE TEAMING UP TO GIVE JOSH CRIBBS

[redacted]