Generally, when a professional athlete begins lecturing fans on what's wrong with them, people tend to grab pitchforks and torches and head for the ballpark.

Not this time.

When a flummoxed Chris Perez opened his mouth Saturday night and let poetry flow forth with an opinion that literally no one else receiving paychecks with a little Chief Wahoo in the upper left-hand corner would have dared to utter, you couldn't help but wince reflexively and wait for the thunderclap.

Before we get into what the mouth-breathers who post pissy things in the "Comments" section beneath articles on the *Plain Dealer* website believe he said, let's examine what he actually said.

He's pissed at getting booed. Rightly so. Dude has been epic this year and - contrary to the opinion of several twits out there - was outstanding last year as well.

More importantly, when he gets booed, he's pissed that he's getting booed by so few people.

He’s pissed that the Indians are in first place and nobody cares. (Between the lines was the unspoken sentiment that the mongoloid Browns get more attention three months away from the start of training camp than the Indians do in the creamy filling of what thus far has been an Oreo of a season.)

More importantly, he’s pissed that the Indians are in first place and everybody’s acting like they’re in fourth (or, as its come to be known in the modern vernacular, “Browns-Place.”)

Unfortunately, what happened with Perez’s comments is what usually happens when an athlete says something other than "we're just taking them one game at a time." All anybody heard was a guy making millions of dollars a year bitching about fans who are balancing their checkbooks with a whip and a chair not coming out to pay $9.75 for 14 ounces of watery Miller Lite while basking in his innate awesomeness.

That right there is justification for spectator-led clobberin' time. Problem is, that's not what Perez was saying.

What he did say was perfectly valid. And it may just be the wakeup call Cleveland needs.

Like a sick plot twist in a Clive Barker novel, Chris Perez is having the best year of his life and getting booed in his home park. And for as outspoken and PG-13 controversial as he may be, Chris Perez is not John Rocker. Odds are he’s done better at his job over the past two months than you have at yours. So if you’ve booed Chris Perez since opening day, you’re the one who’s out of touch.

But let’s move past all this silliness and get to the gist of what Chris Perez’s comments inadvertently reveal.

Just as Perez is pissed, every sports fan in town is even more pissed that we’re closing in on the golden anniversary of Cleveland’s last world title. But over that half-century (particularly in the last quarter-century), the reason why this has happened should be coming through as clear as a satellite radio signal. Chris Perez's Parsley, Rage, Rosemary & Thyme press conference

serves as the ellipse for what comes next.

This isn't about one franchise that's struggled epically for a Halley's Comet rotation like the Boston Red Sox or Chicago Cubs. This is three - same Bat-Time, same Bat-Channel.

It's pretty amazing for a pro sports team to go 42, 48, or 64 years without winning a championship. It's rocking it Old Testament-style for all three droughts to happen in the same place at the same time. Any mathematician can tell you the probability of this is like seeing bigfoot while getting struck by lightning right after winning the lottery.

Because one has nothing to do with the others.

Frank Lane's incurable trading addiction had nothing to do with Art Modell's wanderlust. Mike Holmgren's mistakes have not been affected by Larry Dolan's balance sheet. Butch Davis' panic attack was not brought on by anything LeBron James did or didn't do.

There's only one thread that connects the failings of the Browns, Indians, and Cavaliers.

Three guesses and the first two don't count.

Each Cleveland team has gotten new playing venues, new ownership, and countless coaches and players. The audience is the sole thing that hasn't changed since 1964. But it's not exactly the fans that have kept Cleveland title-less.

It's our negativity.

That hurts to hear, I know. So does "I think you're addicted to opium." It's easier to try to find a bad trade or a billy goat to pin it on and keep on keepin' on. But that gets us nowhere. (Or, as

it's become known in the modern vernacular, "Cleveland Browns Stadium.")

Is our negativity justified? Sure it is. Nobody has been jerked around more than Cleveland since the once upon a time of *Mad Men*. We have every right to be frustrated and angry...and, yes, indeed, filled with Chris Perez-scented rage.

But the problem is that being frustrated and angry is not the way to cure frustration and anger.

Should fans be hesitant to jump all-in with the Tribe at this point? Of course. Right now the Indians are following the same script as last year's happy-spring, *Summer of my German Soldier-* flame-out, and we're closing in on the point in the 2011 schedule when the anvil dropped on their heads. Odds are (based on reality and the Tigers' payroll) that the Indians won't be in first place a month from now.

Most of us sense that, and probably feel like we're just battening down the hatches for when it happens by not allowing ourselves to enjoy this second straight fun start to a season (the lack thereof, if you recall, is all we complained about under the Eric Wedge regime). The logic is that if we don't get excited now, we won't get hurt later. I think many of us are to the point where it's just easier to embrace suffering straight out of the chute and avoid disappointment altogether as if it were construction on I-77.

Perez probably inched into weirdness by saying that the fans' attitude is why Cleveland teams can't sign free agents. I think even if Progressive Field were the baseball equivalent of Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, players would still go to the Bronx if offered a buck-sixty-five more. On the other hand, don't try to tell me the fans' constant bitching and paranoia - at the ballpark, on the talk shows, on the internet - hasn't had an affect on Cleveland athletes over the past 50 years.

Should it? No. Does it? Yes.

The fans here are not as demanding as New York's nor as vicious as Philadelphia's. We're loyal

as hell in the sense that we won't jump on anybody else's bandwagon (a loyalty which probably quickens our temper quite a bit) and generally appreciate dedication when we see it. But we're also suspicious and superstitious and our inferiority complex can be seen from space. Put it all together and you've got a very unique psychological rat's nest that understandably scares outsiders.

But don't think I'm hypocritical enough to cast the first stone. I'm as beaten down as anybody and a copy of Norman Vincent Peale's bestseller *The Power of Positive Thinking* once burst into flames when I picked it up.

Ubaldo Jimenez misses just outside with the first pitch of the game and I think, "Oh Christ, here we go again." Colt McCoy completed his first pass of 2011 to himself and I instinctively wrote off the whole season. (Problem is, a lot of times these knee-jerk hot flashes of negativity turn out to be right on the money, which doesn't help things.)

Even with our inner carnival of bitterness, you and I are the only ones who can turn this jalopy around and permanently change Cleveland's luck. Trent Richardson can't do it. Kyrie Irving can't do it. Jason Kipnis can't do it.

It's up to us, and that's powerful as hell.

Which isn't to say it's going to be easy. We've learned time and time again that being openly positive runs the risk of getting you a) mocked and b) humiliated. By being negative we're trying to prevent ourselves from getting our hopes up and then consequently getting kicked in the groin in public.

But no matter how many times we try to "protect" ourselves, we never seem to pick up that such a strategy has a 100% failure rate. When you start out with this attitude, you're kicking yourself in the groin thinking that's the only thing that will stop it from happening later.

It sounds so rock stupid, you wonder why we do it. But the human brain is one wacky honey-baked ham.

I’m not calling for Cleveland sports fans to take on a Pollyanish attitude toward existence. Putting it in *Office Space* terms, I firmly believe anyone who spot-diagnoses a “case of the Mondays” should be severely beaten.

What I am saying is that just as our three teams can certainly be better, so can we. And if we are, they will be, too. It will carry over onto the field, but more importantly, we'll feel better about basically everything in our lives.

Let’s start simply: when our team is in first place, enjoy it. Or at the very least, don’t boo that team’s most valuable player.

And when Chris Perez trots out to the mound later this week to add to his league-leading save total, let's give that crazy bastard a hearty round of applause for bringing the solution to our misery into stark relief.

You don't have to get off your gloomy Eeyore-the-stuffed-donkey backside and head down to the ballpark. This isn't about giving your hard-earned money to the Dolans if you don't think it's warranted. Put as simply as a one-two-three Chris Perez ninth, we just need to celebrate the wins and not turn every loss into the first 10 minutes of *Saving Private Ryan*.

The battlefield for Cleveland's next world championship is not at the Indians’ ticket office or around Chris Perez's locker, but in heads and hearts of Cleveland fans everywhere.

Win that fight and everything else takes care of itself.

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