In Gary Benz's latest column for us, we get a grab bag of topics. First, Gary hits on the Cavaliers disappointing opener last night and the prospects for the team this season. Then Gary moves on to Charlie Frye, who returns to town this weekend as the third string quarterback of the Seattle Seahawks. Lastly? Gary uses Eric Metcalf's addition to the Hall of Fame ballot this year to reflect on "Metcalf up the middle" and #21's playing career in general.

If you thought you had already witnessed a game like Wednesday night's Cavaliers/Dallas Mavericks game, it's because you had. Only it was back in September and it was between the Browns and the Pittsburgh Steelers.

The Mavs put a beat-down on the Cavs of Steelers proportions. They held LeBron James scoreless for the first half for the first time in his career and ultimately limited him to 10 points. If Cleveland thought that James' performance in the World Games this past summer when he shot something like 168% from the field was going to carryover into the NBA regular season, perhaps then last night's game was a real eye-opener. Most fans probably appreciate the differences between the two games, but still, an open 15-footer is an open 15-footer. It just wasn't James' night.

The bigger concern that last night's performance fed was that the woeful play of the preseason would carry into the regular season. Fans and players can shrug off the preseason as meaningless, but for a team like the Cavs that basically

stood pat in the off season, those games were played with the same crew that fans saw Wednesday night.

And while we're kvetching about the Cavs game, let's not get too excited about the imminent return of Sasha Pavlovic or the eventual signing of Anderson Varajeo. All that does is ensure that the Cavs will be at full strength. Whatever flaws they had and were exposed in the NBA Finals against San Antonio will still be there given the dearth of off-season activity by the club. The problem is that much of the rest of the league was moving forward, particularly Boston.

It's the second straight season the Cavs have basically stood still and while the team's regular season record was basically the same last year as the year before, the team did get deeper into the playoffs, even if they were swept by the Spurs in the Finals. Thus, the only places left for this year's team to go with essentially the same lineup are either to win it all or backward. Staying static, which means getting to the finals and being swept, doesn't sound all that appealing to anyone.

But if you think this team is ready to win it all, which is your right, I have one suggestion: put down the happy juice. If this team is to reach its stated goal of sustained excellence in the mold of the Spurs, then they have to find a way to upgrade the roster, significantly. Simple to say, hard to do, critical to accomplish.

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Speaking of the Browns/Pittsburgh Steelers game from week one, the poster child for the futility in that game, Charlie Frye, returns with the Seattle Seahawks this week. Frye was hardly the only culprit in that game, but it does speak volumes that the Browns themselves saw it that way when they yanked him midway through and traded him a few days later. It also speaks volumes that the Browns have thrived, offensively anyway, since then.

I always liked Frye, not necessarily as a big-time player in the NFL, but as a decent guy with local roots who worked hard and had his heart in the right place. I'm glad he landed somewhere in the NFL and while everyone is saying the right things about him, you'd be hard pressed to find anyone in the NFL that truly believes Frye will ever become the starter for any team outside of an injury to the regular quarterback.

And as much of a beating Frye has taken, both physically and to his ego, you have to admire his pluck. According to a story by Mary Kay Cabot in Thursday's Plain Dealer, Frye said he wasn't surprised at how well the Browns are moving the ball since "nobody was really stopping us in the preseason."

I guess that's true if by "us" Frye means "Brady Quinn." The only quarterback that seemed to move the team consistently in preseason was Quinn. He at least had three touchdown passes. Neither Frye nor Anderson had any. Moreover, the team was hardly an offensive juggernaut, scoring 16, 20, 17 and 19 points in the four games. In fact, throw in the seven points the team scored against Pittsburgh and at that point basically everyone was stopping them. There was absolutely no reason to believe that this team would suddenly turn into the machine it's become. That's what made the 51 points scored against the Bengals seem so stunning at the time.

The truth is that this team was going nowhere with Frye as the quarterback. Though confident to a fault when he spoke, Frye lacked the kind of confidence necessary to make decisions quickly. He always seemed so intent on not making a mistake that that's all he ended up doing, making mistakes. Anderson, on the other hand, carries his confidence on the field in a way Frye could not. Anderson makes quick decisions; less worried is he about making mistakes than in moving the team forward. And when he does make a mistake, it doesn't seem to linger on his next drive. In other words, he has what good quarterbacks in the NFL have to have, a short memory.

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And finally, there was a nice little nugget this week that Eric Metcalf is eligible for the Pro Football Hall of Fame this year. The Board of Selectors for the Hall of Fame puts out a preliminary list of eligible candidates this time of year. That list is eventually winnowed down to 17 finalists, 15 from the modern era and two senior nominees. From the finalists, at least four and no more than seven ultimately get selected, with final approval by 80 percent of the selectors required.

Apparently Metcalf is on that preliminary list. If you're like me, your initial reaction had to be something like "unless they're considering an exhibit of undersized running backs crashing into the middle of the line for no gain, how could Metcalf's name appear on any list?" I stand by that assessment.

But to be fair to Metcalf he did play 12 full seasons in the league, which is kind of hard to believe. Despite his size, he was relatively injury-free. He was also a NFL vagabond. After his six seasons in Cleveland, he was in Atlanta for two, and then in San Diego, Arizona, Carolina and Washington for one year each. His last year was 2002 when he appeared in one game for Green Bay.

Though he was utilized to most as a running back in Cleveland to no great effect, once he left town he was almost exclusively a receiver, again mostly to no great effect. He did have one monster season, 1995 with Atlanta when he had 104 receptions for 1189 yards and eight touchdowns. He never got close to that again.

Where Metcalf was most feared and most effective was as a return man. Overall, he had 280 kick returns and 351 punt returns. In fact, his 351 returns are second all time to Brian Mitchell, a contemporary of Metcalf's. Mitchell also holds the record for most kick returns, 607.

Metcalf's 10 touchdowns as a punt returner is a NFL record. He had two touchdowns twice with Cleveland and three with San Diego in 1997. But his average of 9.8 yards per return isn't even close to the record of 12.78. For

perspective, Josh Cribbs is currently averaging almost 12 yards per return.

Though he had a decent career upon which he can look back fondly, there is virtually nothing about it other than its sheer length that even hints at Hall of Fame. Undoubtedly the selectors will see likewise. But though he is long since gone I doubt he'll ever be forgotten here in Cleveland. That's because in Cleveland, just as everyone knows the "Red Right 88" they also know the name of the play where an undersized back like Jerome Harrison is sent into the line for no gain. It's called "Metcalf up the middle."