Hands down, late January and early February is sports purgatory in this town as we all wait for Spring Training, March Madness, and the back end of the Cavaliers season to kick in here in CTown. But the good soldier Brian McPeek remains undeterred, plugging along with The Weekend Wrap, making stories for us if there are no legitimate ones to report on. It's our Monday morning staple on TCF ... It's The Wrap.

The Frozen Tundra (of content)

For legitimate sports writers, this stretch of the year is a reach as far as stories and subject matter are concerned. For an insurance company employee posing as a writer in his spare time, this time of year is pure death.

I hate this time of year. The Browns are idle (again), the Indians are weeks away from heading off to stretch and play catch under the warm Florida sun, college basketball is in the midst of their sometimes predictable and uneventful conference schedules and the Cavs are half way through their schedule with the stretch run and playoff series months away.

But we've always got something for you at wwwtheclevelandfan.com
and this week is no different.

Picking Up The Pace

Twinkies and cupcakes are good for you. They're part of a balanced diet that can get you and keep you healthy. At least they are as far as the Cavaliers are concerned. Winners of 10 of their last 12 games, the Cavs have feasted on the soft, sweet delicacies that the NBA schedule has to offer.

Atlanta, Sacramento, Charlotte, Miami and Memphis are good for fattening up both the won-loss record and the confidence. And that's okay. As you long as you beat the teams you should beat (regardless of how many overtime periods it may take) you're simply doing what the other playoff-caliber teams have the opportunity to do.

And the Cavs are clearly playing better basketball. Sunday's win came against a quality Lakers team on the road. That was preceded by a home game against Phoenix that should have also gone on the win side of the ledger had the Cavs not blown an 18 point lead and had LeBron James not uncharacteristically missed a couple of chippies late in that ballgame.

So the Cavs currently find themselves at 24-19 and not too far at all off the pace they set from last season. They are getting excellence out of James every night and they're starting to get regular, albeit small, contributions from a few other guys. Damon Jones and Daniel Gibson are hitting just enough shots to keep defenses honest and Zydrunas Ilgauskas is putting together a very solid season.

If the Cavs can somehow get and stay healthy (hurry back Mr. Varejao) and can somehow wake up Drew Gooden for scheduled games they could

make some noise again come May. Being a glass half-empty type, I'm still not counting on those question marks being answered positively, but winning 10 of 12 is good for the soul and the attitude.

Super Genius

The whole ‘Tom Brady in a Boot' thing is brilliant. I understand that 99% of the people inhabiting earth don't give a rat's ass about the health of Brady's ankle or knee or whatever part of his anatomy the Patriots are being so coy about.

In the grand scheme of things it is meaningless.

But Patriots Head Coach Bill Belichick doesn't care a lick about the grand scheme of anything. In fact, he believes the grand scheme is substituting a big, hard-hitting safety for one of his linebackers on 3rd and long. What Belichick has brilliantly done is make the focus of the two weeks between the AFC Championship game and the Super Bowl the one human being and football player he implicitly trusts can handle it.

Belichick has efficiently and effectively made Brady the focal point of the media. In doing so he has taken the onus and the focus off of every other Patriot player. You find that difficult to believe? Well let me ask you how much time, attention and ink has been devoted to the Randy Moss assault saga that dominated the days before the AFC title game? How much play has the ‘dirty player' allegations levied against Pats

DE Richard Seymour received.

Belichick is a master of deflection and slight of hand. His handling of his football team and his manipulation of the media is another masterful play on his part.

For all of the attention focused on Brady over the past week and in the week to come, I'd be stunned if Brady didn't come out next Sunday perfectly healthy and with a huge game.

Speaking of the Big Game

I see a big day for the Patriots. That is not going out on a ledge but there are reasons beyond the obvious for me going with New England next Sunday in Arizona. To address the obvious first, the Patriots have far too many weapons for the Giants and their depleted secondary to effectively deal with. Moss stands to have a huge day and 3 scores from him would not shock me. Especially in the warmth of Glendale and on a fast track.

Wes Welker and Donte' Stallworth may benefit greatly from the attention Moss receives as well. And if the Giants sell out to slow down Brady and the passing game, Laurence Maroney is again capable of taking the reins and leading

the Pats to another win.

But looking at it more closely, you can be guaranteed that of the two teams playing next weekend, only one may potentially be affected by the size of the stage. And that team certainly is not New England. The Pats will not be at all fazed by the scope of the game. They've been there far too often and are too well coached to bow to the pressure they'll be under. I'm not saying the Giants will be tight or will bow to the pressure either, but if you had to choose one team that *could be* affected by pressure, the Giants would be the one.

Likewise, if the game comes down to the quarterbacks, which one is more likely to cave into the magnitude of the situation? I know the one I'd pick. Again, I'm not saying Eli Manning will wet the bed. But I am saying that if I have to place an order for plastic pants or rubber sheets, I'll be doing it in his name.

Lastly, Bill Belichick is not a clown prince of comedy. But he has seen this show before and he knows exactly what type of itinerary he's going to need to maximize preparation and minimize the pressure his players are under. Tom Coughlin, on the other hand, could squeeze the fun out of a Vegas bachelor party with his rules, regulations and

management style. Again, for these reasons and more, I'm taking the Patriots and I'm doing so while I lay the 13 points.

Etcetera

- The body of the 2007 season wasn't even cold before the Browns announced ticket prices would be raised for the 2008 season. I have no problem with a bump in prices. Everything is more expensive. But my lower Dawg Pound seats are being raised 25% for 2008. That is a substantial increase and it reeks of a team taking advantage of its most loyal followers in order to generate a few more

dollars.

- The OSU hoops team continues to plod along, beating the teams they should beat in Big 10 play and setting themselves up for an at-large NCAA bid. The Buckeyes continue to get big effort from Jamar Butler. It'll be nice to see OSU in the tourney again and it will bill another feather in the cap of Head Coach Thad Matta. But this team is nowhere near the level of last year's squad and doesn't seem to be coming together as quickly or as effectively as that team did. Still, another ten conference games and a conference tournament to play could see this year's edition of the Buckeye hoops team meld together and make some noise in March.

- What a difference a week makes for the CSU Viking basketball team. Back-to-back road losses to Wisconsin-Green Bay and Wisconsin-Milwaukee hung the first two Horizon League losses on coach Gary Water's squad and knocked them out of first place in the conference. CSU has a couple more road games this week against Loyola and Illinois-Chicago before three straight home games that will show whether CSU is a legit Horizon contender or if they are a year or so away from contending for a conference title and an NCAA berth.

- Lastly, all of these topics and

hundreds more are discussed daily on the message boards here at The Cleveland Fan . Stop in and post your thoughts.