I know it's probably dawned on you slowly over the past few weeks that your life is a little less full. But you couldn't put your finger on exactly why. Then it hit you: You hadn't read an Erik Cassano column since June. Well ... the talented Papa Cass is back in the fold, and today, touches on a slew of topics and developments from the Cleveland sports scene from the last month. Erik hits on the Cavs new additions, which direction the Tribe should go in, and the looming start of Browns season.

I know it's probably dawned on you slowly over the past few weeks that your life is a little less full. But you couldn't put your finger on exactly why. Then it hit you: You hadn't read an Erik Cassano column since June.

We'll just continue to assume that because it makes me feel better. I've been on something of a self-imposed summer vacation since the end of June. And by "summer vacation" I mean "Insanely busy with little available time for leisure writing."

But I've gone into my schedule with a pickax and carved out some keyboard time. So let's get back up to speed on some of the things that have been going on in Cleveland sports.

Shaq has been a Cav for almost a month now.

And in that time, the Cavs lost their top offensive coach, John Kuester, who took the head coaching job in Detroit. Immediately, everyone in Cleveland seemed to clench their bowels at the idea of Mike Brown integrating The Big Geritol Tablet into the team's schemes without the help of an accomplished offensive assistant.

But reworking the playbook to accomodate Shaq really isn't an overly complex proposition, for two reasons. First, there aren't many ways to implement Shaq that haven't already been discovered. Second, Shaq is honestly a matchup player at

this point in his career.

Shaq is a low-post player, period. Even though he's a good passer, he can't play the high post all that well because he's no threat to drive and no threat to shoot when he's more than seven feet from the hoop. Take him out of the low post and he's Ben Wallace.

Offensively, the only thing he can do is take an entry pass on the block and try to find a path to the basket. If it's there, he shoots -- usually a layup, dunk or that little right-handed hook he's developed over the years. If a double team comes, he passes. That's pretty much Shaq in a nutshell. Nothing too complicated in theory. All a coach really needs are teammates who are willing to let Shaq get his 20 to 30 touches a game.

In addition, Shaq's role with the Cavs is narrowly-defined. He is here to match up with the likes of Dwight Howard, Andrew Bynum and Rasheed Wallace. When the games become slow, plodding halfcourt mud wrestling matches, Shaq is there to try and get the tough points and tough stops inside. The games in which the Cavs will truly, honestly need Shaq's services will occur in May and June -- and maybe a dozen regular season tilts.

Against the vast majority of teams on the regular season slate, the Cavs will likely keep hammering away on what worked last year -- smaller, quicker lineups. The Cavs were at their best last year when they could run with Mo Williams and Delonte West in the backcourt, with Anderson Varejao at center. That was their most athletic, most energetic and most potent lineup.

Against teams that don't have an elite big man, chances are the Cavs will still spend much of the time playing with a smaller, uptempo lineup that will give LeBron a chance to run the floor with quick guards. Shaq and Zydrunas Ilgauskas might find themselves on the bench for long stretches of those games.

The Anthony Parker signing was good for a Plan C.

Obviously, everyone -- Danny Ferry included -- would be ecstatic if we were sitting here right now contemplating how Brown is going to work Ron Artest or Trevor Ariza into the rotation. But that didn't happen. Blame whatever circumstances you want -- the cold Cleveland winters, Ohio's income tax structure or LeBron's impending free agency casting a murky cloud over the Cavs' future -- but they

didn't get Artest or Ariza. They got Anthony Parker, and he's still a good catch for $5.5 million over two years.

Parker is the kind of player GMs love. He's a career-long survivor who had to work his way back to the NBA from Europe. He works hard, takes nothing for granted, and brings a specific set of skills to the table -- perimeter defense and outside shooting. The Cavs need both.

Parker is 34, so there is the omnipresent worry that his athleticism, already on a downward trend due to Father Time, will suddenly start skidding over the next couple of years. But when quickness starts to go, it's usually first evident when a player tries to guard someone with explosiveness, someone who can blow past in the bat of an eyelash.

Examining the signing purely through the lens of trying to win a title, none of the teams that currently stand between the Cavs and the crown possess shooting guards with that kind of speed. Kobe Bryant had those kinds of quicks in his athletic prime, as did Vince Carter and Ray Allen. All are outside shooters now. Parker can keep shooters in front of him.

Even if Parker can't play 40 minutes of lockdown defense a night, he can at least play effective defense for 25 to 30 minutes. At 6'-6", his height alone means the Cavs match up better with the other contenders. It wouldn't shock me to see Parker win the starting shooting guard's job in training camp, with West moving to a supersub role.

The Anderson Varejao signing: Good, at least for the short term.

I understand why the Cavs signed Varejao for six years and up to $50 million. He is their best big man under the age of 30. He's been a productive player for his entire career. He could have let hard feelings from the 2007 holdout fiasco fester in his mind, but he put it behind him and played ball. In part, the contract length might have been a gesture of goodwill on the part of Cavs management, an attempt to show Varejao that they're willing to go a little above and beyond the call of duty to secure his future.

Securing Varejao also helps paint LeBron a picture of what kind of team the Cavs might have for the 2010-11 season. As important as it is to maintain salary cap flexibility for next summer, it's important to begin showing LeBron who his running

mates will be if he decides to re-sign or exercise his option next summer. LBJ likes Varejao, so in that vein, committing to Varejao is most definitely a positive move.

Is Varejao worth the years and dollars? To an extent. He is what he is. He'll never become even an average offensive player, he's an average rebounder at best, but his defense has improved, he's still a high-energy player and he still has a knack for drawing charges, even as the NBA promises time and time again that refs will crack down on flopping.

Ferry did overpay somewhat for Varejao, but at least he overpaid and made a half-decade commitment to a player who fits the Cavs' system. He might be best-suited to coming off the bench, but he can start at power forward and look competent, at least when he's not asked to guard Dwight Howard. Unfortunately, that's the last image we as fans have of Varejao to date, so it might color our assessment of him for the duration of the summer.

Where else can the Cavs spend money?

On Sunday, the Cavs signed Heat forward Jamario Moon to an offer sheet. Moon is a 6'-8", 29-year-old small forward known for his hops and man defense. He can probably play some power forward in smaller lineups, adding momentum to the idea that the Cavs will continue to play small and quick whenever the situation allows.

But in order for Moon to become a Cav, the Heat cannot match the offer sheet, which is reportedly in excess of $2 million and, like all offer sheets, must be for a minimum of two years. The Heat are deep at the forward position and might be pursuing bigger game in the form of Lamar Odom, so there appears to be a significant chance that Miami won't match to keep Moon. The Heat have until next Monday to make a decision.

If Miami does match, the Cavs will have to once again look at other options.

The Cavs worked out Sean May -- he of the notorious weight and conditioning problems -- in Las Vegas last week, but he might be headed to Sacramento. They reportedly had an interest in Warriors free agent Rob Kurz, an undrafted summer league find from a year ago. He is a 6'-9" outside shooter. The Suns' Matt Barnes has also reportedly been on the Cavs' radar, but for whatever reason,

Ferry and Co. only seem to have a lukewarm interest.

An intriguing player who recently landed in the free agent pool is Tim Thomas. Bought out by the Bulls last week, Thomas could fill a need for the Cavs if they could get him to sign for their remaining $3.2 million.

Thomas is a power forward with three-point range on his jumper. If you listen to basketball pundits from around the country, an outside-shooting power forward is part of the Shaq championship equation. Every title Shaq has won has come with some help from a power forward who can pull big men out of the lane and force them to contest perimeter shots -- the so-called "stretch four." Thomas doesn't play a lot of defense, but as Shaq's wingman, he could help pull would-be double teamers away from the big guy. On a one-year or two-year deal, Thomas might be worth a reasonable investment.

The Cavs' draft was all about the money not spent.

Ferry loves doing this to us, right? That pick out of left field. Last year, it was J.J. Hickson. This year, it was Congolese small forward Christian Eyenga, who has been playing pro ball in the European minor leagues.

When the pick was first announced, my initial reaction was that the Cavs had pulled another Ejike Ugboaja out of their hat. Ugboaja was the forward taken by the Cavs with one of their second-round picks in 2006. As time has gone by, I've become convinced that Ferry essentially punted that pick away by drafting a player he never had any intention of signing. I thought he did it again with Eyenga.

Ferry did kind of move the chess pieces around by drafting Eyenga and leaving more immediate help on the board. The idea is likely that a rookie picked at No. 30 probably can't help the Cavs win a title this coming year, so why draft someone you have to sign this year?

Unlike Ugboaja, Eyenga does have a future with the Cavs. He started to turn some heads with a solid showing at the Las Vegas summer league last week, but it's still improbable that he's going to open the season with the Cavs. Especially since the Cavs drafted North Carolina swingman Danny Green in the second round. Green might not possess Eyenga's ceiling, but he's more NBA-ready and figures to open the season with the team -- and for less money than Eyenga would make as a first-round pick.

Who should the Tribe trade?

Mark DeRosa is already gone to St. Louis. There is no question that the Indians are out of contention to stay. With the trade deadline less than two weeks away, now is the time when non-contenders usually start pawning off their expendable veterans for future help.

But unlike in years part, I think Mark Shapiro needs to be a little more selective about who he deals.

There is a school of thought that says now is the time to deal Cliff Lee and Victor Martinez. They have one more year remaining on their contracts, so Shapiro will be able to ask more than the going rate for a half-season rental. But Lee and Martinez are also the club's best pitcher and hitter respectively, and if the Indians want to hold any hope for a return to contention in 2010, they probably need to keep both.

I'm not ready to surrender 2010 just yet. Watching young players like Franklin Gutierrez go to other organizations and find success leads me to believe that the first corrective step is to hire a new manager and coaching staff, preferably with a heavy influence from another, more successful organization. There is a reason why the Cavs have tried to emulate the Spurs and the Browns have tried to emulate the Patriots. It doesn't always work, but if you're going to imitate, imitate a winner.

If a new coaching staff doesn't yield results next season, or if Shapiro's loyalty to his plan is so dense that he can't bring himself to alter his philosophy, then maybe an larger-scale rebuild is in order, in which case it's time for the everything-must-go used car blowout sale. In which case, maybe it's time for the Dolans to find Shapiro's successor.

Until then, keep Lee and Martinez. And please keep Kerry Wood. He hasn't won himself a lot of supporters with his performance thus far as an Indian, but after years of watching Bob Wickman and Joe Borowski save games with smoke, mirrors and mid-80s fastballs, we finally have a closer with closer stuff. I don't want to surrender him so soon. There is always a chance he could rebound next year, and if that isn't the case, then it might be time to part ways.

Am I pumped for Browns season? Yes, to a point.

They went 4-12 last year. As far as sexy drafts go, their '09 draft was somewhere south of Rosie O'Donnell. But maybe that's part of the appeal of Eric Mangini: He's not trying to blow everyone away with his ability to make big splashes like Phil Savage did.

There was a lot of change for the Browns this offseason, as there will always be when a new regime comes to town. But they've been mostly low-key changes. The apple cart hasn't been upset, which I think was a good move.

The Browns have the players to be a decent team. They needed more stability, better leadership and better luck with avoiding injuries to realize that potential. Mangini has, at least thus far, brought the first two elements to the table. As for the third? Buy a rabbit's foot and start rubbing it.

I still wonder what is going to happen to the running game when Jamal Lewis inevitably breaks down. I still think Mangini needs to name Brady Quinn the starting quarterback and be done with it. I still question the wisdom of putting the burden to produce on the shoulders of rookie receivers Brian Robiskie and Mohamed Massaquoi. But for the first time in a long time, my questions about the Browns aren't the product of across-the-board concerns with the team's overall philosophy.

I am honestly intrigued by what I'm going to see out of the Browns this year. I'm not expecting a lot right away, but I am interested to see Mangini at work.