"It was the best of times; it was the worst of times." Charles Dickens wasn't writing about the Browns when he set that phrase to paper but he may as well have been. In a week where the Browns seemingly took a huge step toward continuity, organizational accountability and professionalism with the official arrival of Mike Holmgren and the retention of Head Coach Eric Mangini (not to mention the expected arrival of a GM in Tom Heckert of the Eagles), Josh Cribbs peed in the punch bowl and put a stop to what was, up until then, a pretty enjoyable party. Peeker hits on the recent developments with the Browns, some signings from the Indians, and the Cavs and LeBron in The Weekend Wrap.

Can't Stand Prosperity?

"It was the best of times; it was the worst of times."

Charles Dickens wasn't writing about the Browns when he set that phrase to paper but he may as well have been. In a week where the Browns seemingly took a huge step toward continuity, organizational accountability and professionalism with the official arrival of Mike Holmgren and the retention of Head Coach Eric Mangini (not to mention the expected arrival of a GM in Tom Heckert of the Eagles), Josh

Cribbs peed in the punch bowl and put a stop to what was, up until then, a pretty enjoyable party.

The kick returner/receiver/wildcat quarterback/special teams killer/football player decided now was the best time to demand a new deal and his agent decided the best way to get one was to share business documents with the Cleveland media.

Bad move.

Cribbs has certainly out-performed his current deal but, maybe for the first time in his career, he's fumbled the ball in making his demands now and doing so as publicly as possible, whether it comes in the form of an email released by his agent or via Cribbs' personal Twitter account.

I've been on the ‘Pay the man' wagon for months. I love Josh Cribbs and what he does on the football field. And I'm still on the ‘Pay the man' wagon. Just not right this second. And Cribbs needs to be careful in how he goes about his quest for bigger paychecks lest he blow through all of the good will he's built up with the organization and Browns fans.

There are simply more important issues to address at the immediate moment than any one player's contract, regardless of how good that man is at his job. The Browns are rightfully more concerned with filling critical front office positions within the football organization and, once done, the men that are hired into those positions can look at paying Cribbs.

Some fans agree that Holmgren low-balled Cribbs with an offer for $1.4m per year, an almost 60% increase over Cribbs' cap figure last season. I don't see it that way. First off, the Browns are under no obligation to re-do a six year deal that Cribbs agreed to three years ago. That said, they realize he's worth more and they acknowledged as much with their offer. More importantly, it was a first offer regardless of how it was painted. There are rarely any ‘take it or leave it' offers made in negotiations. It may be a term used to indicate a range but if Cribbs was crazy enough to respond with a $1.5million per-year demand do you think the Browns would do that deal? You're damn right they would.

Cribbs needs to sit back and allow the organization to fill in. When a GM is named and has been given some time to study the team's payroll Cribbs will be in line to receive his deserved raise. But to expect or demand that raise while the organization is still being formed is immature and unreasonable.

In hindsight Holmgren should have taken that course immediately rather than throw out a number that he knew would not interest, and in fact ‘insult', Josh Cribbs. The delay may have frustrated Cribbs but it wouldn't have led to the acrimony and the public airing of laundry that we're seeing now.

My bet is that Holmgren was actually doing a Cribbs a favor. He was saying, "I know you're worth more and we want to address that, but without being completely educated in regard to the salary structure of the club and without hiring anyone yet whose job it will be to deal with salaries, this is what I can do today."

Unfortunately, in my estimation anyway, Cribbs and his overzealous agent weren't quite able to digest that message (or didn't want to) and they misplayed their hand completely.

A deal will get done and it will get done here in Cleveland if Cribbs steps back, reads the situation and proceeds without burning more bridges. It's important to understand that the Browns have all the leverage in this situation. Cribbs is under contract and can't go anywhere. What Cribbs does have is a strong work resume and a lot of goodwill with fans. But that goodwill is perishable and at the end of the day Browns fans understand that the team comes first and the player, regardless of how popular he may be, is but a piece of the puzzle.

Good Sign

I'm impressed with the fact that Holmgren kept Eric Mangini to coach this team next season. Regardless of the reasons, whether it was an unwillingness to add to the number of people collecting checks for not working for the team, the uncertainty whether the 2011 season will actually be played due to labor strife or Holmgren potentially seeing himself on the sidelines in the future, I'm impressed.

I figured the philosophical differences between Holmgren and Mangini would spell doom for the coach. And I raised a skeptical eyebrow on Monday afternoon when Holmgren said

that Mangini had a legitimate chance to remain pending their discussions. But by keeping Mangini in 2010 Holmgren made an impression.

It sure seems that he looked at Mangini's body of work before making a call. He saw an improved team on the field, more flexibility in regard to salaries and draft picks and a locker room that bought into what the coach was establishing. At the end of the day he was impressed enough to bring the man back.

It was the right move to make for a team longing for continuity. And it took a lot of guts for Holmgren to make.

Etcetera

- These are strongest words you're likely to read in regard to LeBron James and his propensity for going ‘LeBron on Five' at various times. And they came from Plain Dealer Cavaliers beat writer Brian Windhorst following Friday night's loss in Denver to a Nugget team without Carmelo Anthony:

Simply, when LeBron takes 28 shots and has eight turnovers against seven assists it is terrible offense. He took a stunning 18 shots in the second half and had just one assist. It is not totally his fault but a lot of it sure is. He's breaking off the plays

and he's sucking the creativity out of his teammates, which he's been doing at times over the last five years. He did a lot of good things, especially at the defensive end late, but this was a game that could have been had and it would have been a good win. A win that paid off as teams kept coming in here and losing over the next three months.

It wasn't a loss because of a few bad calls, it wasn't a loss because the Nuggets made some clutch shots (and, wow, did they) it was a loss because LeBron took 18 shots in the second half and the rest of the team took 20. If he gets the 18 shots out of good offense then fine. He's a megastar so everyone lives with it. He's going to win games by himself way more than he's going to lose them. But as with everything this season, it is all about the playoffs and doing that in the playoffs won't do. Won't do.

Granted, this was a ‘dog days of winter' loss to a Western Conference team on the road. And it came on a night when Boston and Orlando had already lost, so God only knows whether the Cavs hit the floor with any sense of urgency or intensity. They seem content to take the easier path when they have that option.

But Windhorst is right. James can't allow himself to get caught up in one-on-one sideshows as the Cavs head down the stretch

and into the playoffs. It didn't work last season and it won't work this year against the better teams or in the playoffs. The Cavs added Anthony Parker and Jamario Moon and have a more comfortable Mo Williams this year. In short, while none of those guys is the Pippen to James's MJ, they have more weapons. And that's all we've asked them to acquire in support of James. But those weapons don't matter if LBJ won't use them.

- Sweet. Austin Kearns and Shelley Duncan are in the fold. I can't wait for the 2004 Tribe season to start so we can see their incredible potential harnessed and their careers blossom.

I know, I know, they're cheap depth. I get it. Still doesn't make it much more palatable. What I do enjoy is that we're approximately one at-bat from each of them away from hearing the first people bitch about these two holding back the young guys in the Indians system. You know, blocking the path of the next Ben Francisco or Andy Marte.