On Location-

When the world gives you a Sunday full of 12-year old girls at an ice skating birthday party you, as the saying goes, make lemonade. The metaphor may be off (or at the very least mixed) but I'd just like to thank God for creating the guy that created laptops and batteries. I'm using both at the moment while lording over my daughter Jessica's 12th birthday party at an ice arena in Mentor.

As much as I'd like to be on the ice and knocking some of these screaming kids into the boards one thing is really working against me in that regard: I can't skate and one of those girls would knock me on my ass.

Never did figure out the skating thing. We have a pond that freezes over in our backyard and I excitedly bought skates 10 years ago to learn the skill myself. I took my oldest out there once when she was four, almost killed us both, and vowed never to try again in daylight, lest Child Services show up and immediately remove my kids from a dangerous situation. I tried a few

times at night and it got no better. So the last time we went to Mentor I dropped the skates off to have them sharpened because clearly that was the issue. That was about 2 years ago and I still haven't picked up the skates. I actually have the claim slip in my wallet but I'm pretty comfortable with the skates remaining where they are.

It's so embarrassing and emasculating to get on ice skates and cling to the boards in a slow revolution while 2-year old boys in helmets and pads whistle past you and 4-yr old girls practice their spins. I've done it many times so the kids would get out there but they are now to the point where they are either embarrassed by my 'abilities' or they are sympathetic to the fact that bones are more likely to start breaking when older people fall.

On with the show.

The Calm Before the Storm

Eighteen regular season games remain in the Cavaliers '09-'10 season.

They've won 19 of their last 23 games overall, good for a 5 ½ game lead over the Magic for the best record in the Eastern Conference and a 2 ½ game lead over the Lakers for the best record in the NBA.

And now it's time to re-set and re-load. The latest re-set occurred Saturday night in Milwaukee when LeBron James sat out his first game of the season. Chances are good he'll sit out another one Monday night at home against the Spurs due to a balky ankle that he tweaked a couple of times Friday night against the Pistons.

By getting another night of rest against San Antonio that will give LBJ a complete week for that ankle to heal up and for every other body part that has to be somewhat weary at this point to get some well needed downtime.

James didn't officially miss the Bucks game due to injury but rather due to Head Coach Mike Brown's decision to sit him down. It's the right call and so too is sitting him Monday if that's the route Brown goes. Give your star some R&R while you have a lead in the race for home court.

Despite being down James and Shaquille O'Neal, and with Zydrunas Ilgauskas still a couple weeks away from returning, there's enough talent on the roster to run with the Milwaukees and San Antonios of the world right now. The Cavs didn't get it done Saturday night in Milwaukee mostly due to the fact that Mo Williams is still getting back into the flow of things after his own return from injuries. He was putrid Saturday but he'll work his way through it.

Losing any game is not enjoyable, but I've talked about 'win equity' before and it's in play now. The Cavs have earned the game's best record by depositing big numbers in the win column. They're dipping into some of that equity to get their star healthy and energized for the stretch run.

It's a sound plan unless your one set of tickets this season happens to be for Monday night.

Slings and Arrows

My inability to jump up and down over the start of the Indians season ruffled a few feathers. There was the normal number of people playing the, "What Kind of Fan Are You?" card as well as a number who went the, "It's About Developing the Kids and Opening Another Window of Contention" route.

Save it.

I've been watching the cycle of suck around here for almost 40 years. My memories don't start in 1994. Long before that period of anomaly the Indians were awful. Every couple years we heard about the focus being on the development of talent in hopes of contending in the near future. In maybe six of those forty years it actually worked that way. Never mind it took the Browns leaving, a new stadium opening and some actual Hall of Fame-type talent developing at the same time to occur. That perfect storm of coincidence came and went and left us with what

we have today.

I'm not going all Bob Feller and listing my fan credentials. But let's just say there's no one out there who loves the game or the team more than I do. And as to those who say I should be excited to watch the individuals develop? You have to be kidding me. There are a couple reasons I'm not:

1. *I'm not going to see that happen because MLB's financial situation is broken.*

I'm going to suffer through Russell Branyan at bats until he's inevitably hurt instead of watching a young, exciting kid like Michael Brantley develop because the Indians' financial situation and MLB's unwillingness to address it mean that Brantley can't play here until later this year. The Indians have to worry about his service time accrual. They can't let him learn, develop and help here in April because it will cost them a full season of control over Brantley down the road. Instead, a team that can't afford much at all in the way of talent has to overpay some hump like Branyan to be here while a kid they need for the future and who would benefit from major league at bats sits in Columbus because his MLB clock ticks too quickly in Cleveland.

1. *When these kids to get here and they are productive, that simply means the day that they go to a big market team that can afford them is one day closer.*

It just doesn't thrill me anymore to be a glorified farm team for the Yankees, Red Sox and Dodgers. There's no 'window' for the Indians to compete. There's a peep hole. They need to hope and pray a group of kids all arrive, blossom and prosper in the majors at the same time to challenge for a title. And they know that if that unlikely event happens that the talent they've accrued is likely too expensive to retain.

The large market teams can pay over slot for their draft picks and they're also realistically the only teams that can keep star players from the time they are drafted until their careers are over. Do you honestly think if Derek Jeter or Mariano Rivera come up through the Royals organization that the Royals retain them both until they retire?

Come on y'all. You know better. Call a spade a spade and least admit that the situation blows. Maybe when you look at it that way or you watch the situation blow for forty years yourself you'll understand why apathy replaces joy and anticipation for another baseball season.

It's not the game. The game is enduringly perfect and beautiful. It's what MLB has done to the

game at the highest levels makes me sick and tired instead of excited.

Not Exactly a Break Neck Pace

“Smart, tough and physical.”

Those are the traits Browns President Mike Holmgren used to describe his first two free agent signings in Saints LB Scott Fujita and 49ers OL Tony Pashos.

Note that you didn’t hear ‘incredibly athletic’ in there anywhere. Fujita and Pashos will both be on the wrong side of 30 when the season starts but they fill areas of need for the Browns. Not the sexiest signings of the weekend but getting a competent linebacker who is regarded as a leader and adding a quality offensive linemen to the roster is a solid start for the Holmgren regime.

Elsewhere, the Chicago Bears went all NY Yankee on the league and quickly signed Julius Peppers and Chester Taylor, two of the biggest free agent jewels available. All it cost the Bears, who are desperate to appease their fans and close the gap on NFC North rivals Minnesota and Green Bay, was $50m in guaranteed cash over the next 6 seasons.

There’s a lot of cash being thrown around and it looks like teams have divided themselves into a couple different camps in what might be an uncapped year of play. There are teams like the Bears, Lions and Dolphins who are making deals and noise and there are teams like the Browns who are sitting back and targeting the less expensive options that fill needs.

The Browns also appear to be stockpiling draft picks to either build through the draft or to have the picks as more ammunition for trades closer to draft day.

Interestingly, all the Browns restricted free agents received 2nd round tenders. Teams can sign guys like Jerome Harrison, D’Qwell Jackson and Lawrence Vickers to offer sheets but the

Browns can match. If the Browns don't match they acquire the signing team's 2nd round pick. The one guy who didn't get tendered was Brodney Pool whose days here in Cleveland are done. Pool was a serviceable safety but he couldn't stay on the field. It was getting to the point where the gun ending the first half of play was nearly loud enough to give Pool a concussion so he was let loose.

So while you saw a couple of deals go down with the Browns it looks like the real excitement for Mike Holmgren's front office will come closer to the draft and on Draft weekend.

In Holmgren I trust. We'll see how that works out soon enough.