I give up.

I've formally resigned myself to the fact the Indians have been relegated to a bottom-feeder in Major League baseball. I understand that they are doomed to be unable to compete annually and are basically a feeder system for the richer, better teams in the game.

I've come to grips that any player worth a crap who is acquired by the Indians via either the draft or via their annual 'Veteran Purge for Prospects' parade each July is destined to have their finest years with the Yankees or Phillies, Red Sox or Dodgers.

I get that.

I've resigned myself to the fact the Cavaliers are about to see their 'Golden Era' end (and without the joy of a title- such is a 'Golden Era' in these parts) when LeBron James vacillates very publicly for a month or two and then leaves for a better opportunity elsewhere.

I've talked myself into the fact that there is no other way for the LBJ saga to end for Cleveland.

I'm used to the Browns making bad decisions and/or collapsing under the weight of expectations. Their cycle of suck is at about 11 years and counting and even their one good season ended in a crushing playoff loss to the Steelers.

I'm down with all that. I've chewed the bitter pill and swallowed it down with $8 beers and $15 mixed drinks at all of Cleveland's sporting venues.

And after the Cavaliers spectacular collapse in May I was actually looking forward to an uneventful summer filled with Indians losses and passed by trying to avoid any and all LeBron talk before Browns camp reopened. I figured in August I'd join the swollen ranks of homers and optimists and dream about how Mike Holmgren might just pull a rabbit out of the hat and bring the Browns organization back to respectability.

I had a plan.

I was happy with my plan.

And then soccer happened.

Yeah, you read that right: soccer happened.

Just when I thought I was out the freaking US Men's National Team and the freaking World Cup pulled me back in.

I fell for it hook, line and sinker.

I'm not a soccer fan by trade. Never played it, never watched it, and never attended any games. I was born with arms, hands and fingers and I played football, basketball and baseball as a kid. Soccer was for kids who spoke a different language at their dinner table and who weren't very good at real sports.

I got caught up in it because my girls played it. As they advanced through the rec-league ranks to travel league and beyond I found myself more and more interested in the games. To me it blends elements of a lot of sports into a game that is more interesting as you learn its complexities and nuance.

So I watched a few 'friendlies' and World Cup qualifying matches and found myself screaming at the television and sitting on the edge of my seat as if I was watching a Tribe game in October of 2007 or a Browns-Steelers game.

I watched a replay of the U.S. - Algeria game with my youngest daughter and we were glued to the television. We both erupted in joy and relief when Landon Donovan booted home the game-winning goal in the 92nd minute on Wednesday. The United States had won their group for the first tome since 1930 and the entire country seemed to be mesmerized by soccer for the first time in my lifetime.

Ahh… but now I was emotionally invested for Saturday Knockout Round game against the only remaining African team in the tournament, Ghana.

That's bad news for a Cleveland boy. You know what happens when you give your emotions over to sport in this town.

And it happened again. It was another bicycle-kick to the stones late Saturday afternoon when the U.S. lost 2-1 in extra periods to the lone team remaining from the host continent. The U.S. had tied the game midway through the second half when Donovan knocked in a penalty kick. But missed opportunities and mistakes cost the U.S. the chance to advance and they couldn't come up with any late magic to make up for it.

Dejection.

Again.

Not “Tribe-Red Sox in ‘07” dejection but a gnawing disappointment nonetheless. Maybe in another four years I’ll be ready for all of it again. That’s the problem with soccer for me. I really love watching any sport being played at its highest level but soccer doesn’t give that to us every year.

It’s a lot like the Olympics in that regard for Americans. Very few of us follow the Alpine Skiing circuit week in and week out. We don’t look in the paper for Downhill results from some village in the Swiss Alps and we don’t look to see how our favorite luger did in Innsbruck. We just don’t care enough about the sport to follow it that religiously. But when the best of the best gather every four years for the Olympics we tune in nightly to see how Lindsay Vonn or Bode Miller fared. There’s a sense of patriotism and pride that takes over when it’s our best against the world’s best and you’re damn right we care and invest and follow it.

The World Cup is the same way. That’s good for soccer but it’s also not enough to move soccer up into the neighborhood of baseball and football in the collective consciences of sports fans.

I got caught up in the World Cup. But I doubt I’ll suddenly have a rooting interest in the Columbus Crew of the MLS or in the English Premier League. I doubt my daughter and I will suddenly identify with Real Madrid, Aston Villa or the Chicago Fire and sit in painstaking agony watching them play a regular season game.

The hardcore fans and soccer hardliners here think the game grew exponentially over the last month. They point out that for the first time ever the United States joined the rest of the world in making the World Cup a communal experience.

They may be right. I sat at Panini’s in Willoughby in 90degree heat with about 50 other people all intently watching the U.S.-Ghana match. I’ve never seen (or noticed anyway) people watching soccer that intently or that passionately. And it was a scene that played out all over the country.

I’m just not sure if it will stick. If FIFA and the U.S. soccer authorities strike now, while the iron is hot, maybe they can grow on what went down over the last month. A soccer-crazy United States would be huge for the game, but it won’t make or break soccer’s popularity world-wide. The game is already too big for that. It’s already an instrument to lift a kid or a country to new

heights and stardom. The world doesn't need a soccer-crazy United States but it would sure like to see it happen.

For now though, it's all over. It was a tremendous and exciting run while it lasted. And it does leave a void for more people today than it would have last month, whether the soccer haters want to admit it or not. Based on the fact we here in Cleveland have seen, felt and said all that more times than we care to count, I think I know a town that would be a perfect home for the US Team should they be looking for one.

Oh Yeah

The Indians had lost ten of their last eleven games at press time, the full-blown LeBron-a-Palooza hasn't even started and yet we all have agita over where a 25 year-old kid will dribble a ball next November and the Browns are still a month away from working out in shorts and shells twice a day.

With the World Cup having ended for the United States Saturday I fear I'll be looking at episodes of Spike TV's Ultimate Fighter series for subject matter next week.

Anybody big Wimbledon or College World Series fans?

P.S.

Good bye (for the third freaking time) to The King of Swing (and a miss) Russell Branyan.

I can't say I hardly knew you, because you kept coming back like untreated genital warts. But I can say I hardly liked you. Take your big timing, big swinging, little production out to Seattle again. And when it's all said and done and you look back on your career, take a second to consider why it was always really rotten baseball teams that had a spot for you.

I'll give you this Russell, your big swings and occasional contact earned you a living and a pension most of us can only dream of. So congrats on that anyway.