Imagine if you can that you're a 17-year old first baseman from the Dominican Republic. Playing every day since you were old enough to stand upright, you get good enough that a major league team, say the Houston Astros, signs you to a contract. You beat around the minor league level for several years but never get past Double A ball. It happens.

But you hang in because you want to coach. You eventually work your way up that ladder through various fits and starts, landing, amazingly at the major league level as a coach.

Your real goal, though, is to be a big league manager. You'd do almost anything to make that happen. So when a destitute franchise that had relocated to a new city just a few years prior wants to hire you, you jump at the opportunity even if it really isn't a great one. You rationalize away the objectively lousy job opening by convincing yourself that succeeding there will prove you can succeed anywhere.

You eventually convince yourself that this really is the ideal situation. The team isn't very good and so the pressure to win isn't great. Your job is to help develop the young players and eventually get this team competitive.

It doesn't go well. The players management has collected over the years are terrible. In your first season your team wins only 73 games and that becomes the high water mark. In your second season, the team wins just 59 games. It's not your fault, you say. You can only coach the players they give you.

The general manager decides to bring you back for a third season, but about halfway through and the team is on pace to be even worse, so you're let go. It's time to move in a new direction, management tells the media.

It's the first time in years that you've had most of your summer free. There's no team to manage, no players to coach. You start thinking about your future and wonder whether professional baseball will even be a part of it. You could probably find a coaching gig somewhere, maybe latch on to a managerial job in the winter leagues. But you've had your shot as a big league manager and you wonder whether it will ever come again. You don't think your firing was fair; the deck was stacked against you. But there's no use complaining, no one's listening anyway.

Then, another moribund franchise being run on the cheap has an opening for a manager just like you. Instead of putting your previous experience in perspective, you jump head first into exactly the same situation that didn't work out the first time and just like that the cycle begins again.

That's the story of Indians manager Manny Acta, a manager seemingly sentenced to a life of pounding his head against the wall, just because it feels so good when he stops.

Acta held a team meeting Thursday night to address the team's most recent stretch of misery. He told them that this team wouldn't always be rebuilding and that this was their opportunity to seize the day. If only. When you're Manny Acta, that's the only thing you can say even if, down deep, you know it isn't true.

The Cleveland Indians, under this ownership and this management, will forever be building for a future that doesn't exist except in the abstract. If by chance enough of the current crop of prospects gets good at the same time and before free agency beckons, a moderately successful season will emerge. But given the team's financial underpinnings and a weak-willed commissioner leading an even weaker-willed group of owners, baseball in Cleveland isn't going to materially change until new ownership emerges or the financial structure of baseball is fundamentally changed.

Acta needs to throw some hope into his young players, just like he needs to throw some hope into his own prospects, but let's not kid anyone. Acta isn't going to be around for the long-term and neither are these prospects.

To generate interest and a false sense of hope in the fans, whichever Mark Shapiro protégé that's in charge at the time will eventually fire Acta in order to give this team a new voice, a different direction. Meanwhile, that same protégé will be trading good players on the cusp of free agency for the next group of prospects.

Acta is a good guy that probably deserves better, but he's brought this all on himself. When his time is done in Cleveland, be it after next season or the season after that, he'll find work somewhere, just probably not as a manger. That's too bad but ultimately what happens when the desperation to fulfill your dream through any means possible runs head first into the desperation of an owner looking for just another in a series of cheap and fungible caretakers.

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There's a cloud hanging over the NFL at the moment and it probably isn't going away any time

soon.

Commissioner Roger Goodell earlier this month made his rounds of various training camps in a preemptory strike of sorts to win over the hearts and minds of the fans as the league heads toward a labor showdown with its union come season's end.

Goodell has talked about head trauma issues and other very important safety related initiatives and yet in the same breath has positioned the extension of the regular season to 18 from 16 games as a key priority to be achieved in the upcoming negotiations. In making his pitch, Goodell painted it as good for the fans because it will lessen an already meaningless preseason.

Whether it's really a good thing is all a matter a perspective.

For the owners, it's a potential cash bonanza. The networks broadcast preseason games out of obligation knowing that the ratings are similar to a rerun of "Lockup: San Quentin" at 3 a.m. Saturday morning on CNBC. Turn those preseason games into something far more meaningful and suddenly the networks will take notice, in the form of higher rights fees. In a struggling economy it's never a bad thing to find new revenue streams, even for a cash cow like the NFL.

For the fans, the preseason is as meaningless as an Indians game in September. They get charged full price only to witness glorified scrimmages in which starters make token appearances and a slew of undrafted free agents vie for the last 10 or so remaining spots on the roster. All these games do is whet the appetite for the real season but otherwise they're mostly ignored.

From a head coach's perspective, the preseason isn't nearly long enough. If a lot of good evaluation can be made in 4 games, just think how much better 6 or 8 games would be!

For the players, it's a potential nightmare. The one constant in the NFL is that players get injured, far more frequently and far more severely than in any other sport. All an 18 game schedule does is increase the risk even further. Players may be just commodities but they are

the most important commodities. With injuries as a given, championships are won or lost on depth at all the key positions and that is simply something most teams don't have.

But don't expect the NFL to balance these perspectives because the only thing that matters are the owners. To them it's a priority and in the NFL's game of cards, that is like holding the ace of trump.

Teams like the Browns will suffer most initially because their depth is almost non-existent. And while I'm sure some of those games the last two weekends will be compelling, just as they are in a 16-game season or were in a 14-game season, there will also be plenty of games that are meaningless.

In other words, Goodell can try his best to sell an 18-game season as something good for the fans but in reality it will cost them most. Increases in rights fees eventually find their ways into the average fan's wallet, either because his cable bill has increased or because ticket prices have. Usually both.

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Has anyone outside of Tiger Woods ever done so much so quickly to hurt his image and brand than LeBron James?

The latest comes in the form of a mostly forgettable interview he did with a completely forgettable magazine, GQ. James is now in full third-person mode as if he's separated in his mind real life from the character named LeBron James that plays basketball.

The problem is that most of us mere mortals can no longer tell the difference. To us, James just looks like another clueless, spoiled athlete completely lacking in self-awareness, on or off the court.

His take on Cavs owner Dan Gilbert is near priceless. Asked about Gilbert's letter and its not so subtle criticism of James, LeBrand says that he was reminded by his mother that adversity brings out the real character of the person and that Gilbert never really cared about him anyway. James sees that letter as all the confirmation he needed that his decision was the right one.

Forget how Gilbert and the rest of the Cavs catered to every whim of James during his tenure. Just focus on the part where James says that adversity brings out the real character of the person. It was James who provoked the response from Gilbert in the first place by deliberately staying out of touch. It was James that decided to stab his team and his town in the back on national television.

Maybe The Letter wasn't Gilbert's proudest moment, but on the scale James established with LeDecision, it hardly creates a blip.

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Phil Dawson is the only member of the Browns still with organization since it came back. That leads to this week's question to ponder: Shouldn't that fact alone qualify Dawson for the Hall of Fame?