I thought of every stereotypical Cleveland Fan excuse to open the column with this week.

They didn't fit.

I thought of every reason to blame the useless tackling dummy that is Eric Wright.

It wasn't him.

I thought of getting in here after that kick to the gut that was the Browns loss to the Jets and wondering out loud how in the hell a veteran wide receiver like Chansi Stuckey could be so dog-gone stupid in fighting for every inch instead of stepping the hell out of bounds to continue what should have been the coronation of a young quarterback ascending to the throne right in front of my eyes.

But that would have been missing the point entirely.

Eric Wright played a very good game regardless of which plays you choose to put under the microscope.

And Chansi Stuckey, despite the fact that if he had to run that play over 100 times would step out of bounds 99 of them, well, he was fighting for every inch as I said above.

And that’s what this team does.

For good or for bad they fight for every goddamned inch. And after watching 11 years of half-assed football I'll take the aggressive mistake that Chansi Stuckey made over the half-assed effort that Braylon Edwards gave as a Brown every damn day of the week.

And as to that coronation? Well, I know what I saw. And I know I don't need a scoreboard to tell me what it means. I watched a rookie quarterback in his fourth straight game in a crucible come within a cat's whisker of upsetting the Saints, Patriots and Jets in consecutive weeks. I watched a rookie quarterback outsmart, outplay and nearly outscore a much more publicized second year quarterback against the league's most feared and talked about defense.

Y'all can cry, bitch and complain about Eric Wright, Chansi Stuckey and the city of Cleveland and its football team lapping at the hind teat of karma all you want. I watched a team I'm proud to watch play for the first time since roughly 1989 give what they had and come up short. Not because they're not capable of winning, but because they're just not quite ready to win that game.

Here's what I know:

· Colt McCoy is it. He’s going to struggle and he’s going to fail at some point. When? I have no idea. He’s done everything you could ever ask of a rookie QB thus far and then some, but at some point Colt McCoy is going to be asked, no, required, to win a game like the Browns lost to the Jets 26-20 in OT Sunday.

That time is not now.

Now is the time to thank God that that 30-some teams passed a couple times on the kid from Texas. Because that kid (and this is the highest praise I can give) has lifted this team to another level, the likes of which have not been seen in 25 years.

I watched the effect that Bernie Kosar had on his team, his huddle and this town. Colt McCoy is walking the same path. And his drive for the tying score to force overtime in the final minute? Shit.

I’ll trade a loss in a season like this to sit there and see that from a guy we all wondered about and still had questions about.

You have questions now about what you have at the quarterback position.

· The Browns are relevant once more. You can look at the 3-6 record and start plotting where the Browns will pick in the first 20 spots of the NFL draft, but there's not a team in the league that wants to face the Cleveland Browns with their season on the line right now.

Not with McCoy gaining experience and confidence every day. Not with Peyton Hillis running over linemen and linebackers. Not with a defense that has seemingly little talent but always seems to be making plays.

3-6 is what it is. But there was something going down at CBS Sunday that can't be explained in 3-6. There was a belief and a feeling that the Browns belonged on the field with the best the AFC has to offer and, more to the point,that the Browns were on equal ground with the best the AFC has to offer.

Plainly and simply, there was pride displayed on the field and there was pride displayed in the stands.

Relevance is a huge first step.

· I also know Marcus Benard had as many sacks Sunday as he had episodes of collapsing and being admitted to the hospital during the week prior to the game.

You still question how much these guys want to win and how hard they're playing for their coaching staff.

Like I said earlier, there will be a time when moral victories, learning curves and playing hard are simply not enough and we will measure this team solely by whether or not they win or lose.

And we'll do that and get to that point because these guys on the field right now are busting their asses and making tomorrow's issues meaningful.

Yay

I can’t get into the Buckeyes.

For as inspired as the Browns leave me the Buckeyes leave me 180 degrees otherwise. I don’t mean to be a downer but their 38-14 win over Penn State made me a bit ill.

Especially since their lackluster and uninspired first half left them trailing 14-3 at the break.

Look; the Buckeyes should beat a bad Penn State team 38-14. But they shouldn’t need two INTs for touchdowns after the half as well as a tip drill touchdown in that second half to overcome a deficit to a bad Nittany Lion squad.

The Buckeyes didn’t show up Saturday until Jim Tressel called roll in the locker room at halftime. That’s the ugly truth. The fact that they’re talented and can name their final point total just speaks to the fact that that they wet the bed in their biggest game of the season and were nearly willing to do it all again Saturday.

I’ll take the win and I’ll move along. But I will say that after Iowa was upset by Northwestern yesterday that the Hawkeyes are ripe to come out like a house on fire next Saturday. And the Buckeyes better not be looking to sleep through a couple quarters on the road.

It Is What It Is

No sense dragging the Cleveland Cavaliers through the wringer on a weekly basis. They’re a moderately talented basketball team now playing without two of their more moderately talented players in Anderson Varejao and Mo Williams. Both Williams and Varejao are on the shelf with minor injuries as the Cavaliers look to stop leaking like a sieve at home.

And when a team in a new system loses a couple of anchors on the floor bad things happen.

Especially when there’s such a thin margin of error in terms of talent to begin with.

Nope. Not going to beat up the Cavaliers week in and week out. They’re about where they’ll probably end up in terms of winning percentage and they’re a lunch bucket group of guys. Let’s just watch and see who improves and to what degree and just how Dan Gilbert and Chris Grant are going to go about rebuilding this club.

And if they can get a few entertaining wins in the mix of 30 or so games they win, well, all the better.