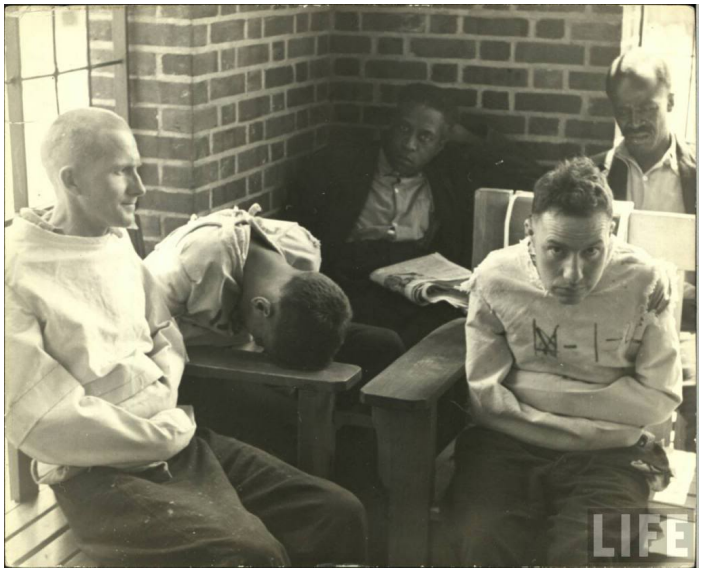


We have always had a healthy respect for, and appreciation of, our fellow Cleveland sports fans.

Fans of the Browns, Cavs and Indians are passionate, there's no questioning that. And, by and large, we are an intelligent bunch – even if we don't always get credit for it. Trust us, we lived outside of New York City for seven years after college and were surrounded by Yankee and Knick fans who are allegedly sophisticated and knowledgeable. We quickly learned, however, that when it comes to New Yorkers, knowledgeable is just a code for loud and obnoxious.

But we digress.

The psyche of many Cleveland fans took a big hit in the October of 1995 when the Indians made the World Series for the first time in 41 years and an incompetent Art Modell – the only person who ever lost money owning an NFL team – announced that he was moving the Browns to Baltimore.

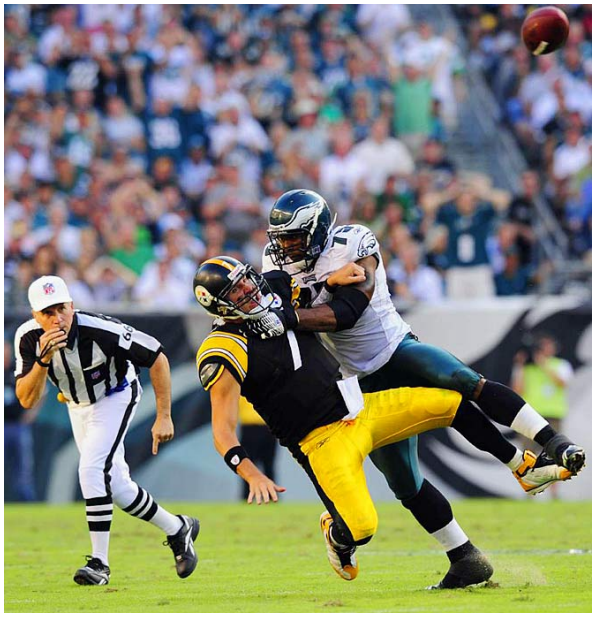
Those two events, coming within a few weeks of each other, short-circuited many fans brains as the extreme joy of seeing the Indians compete for a championship clashed with the utter despair of watching the soul of Cleveland sports taken away.

As a fan base we've rebounded pretty well in the ensuing 17 years, seeing the Indians and Cavs flirt with title chases and celebrating the return of the Browns, along with the (too infrequent) highs and (too numerous to count) lows.

But we've lately started to worry if, after a collective 138 years (and counting) without a championship, Cleveland fans are nearing the breaking point.

Our fears were put in sharp relief twice last week.

The first came with the start of free agency in the NFL on Tuesday. Despite Browns general manager Tom Heckert telling fans "we're not going to go crazy in free agency, we're just not going to do it," it took about 20 minutes after the start of free agency for people to start complaining for the Browns to do "something."



When it comes to the Browns, a large segment of the fan base views the team in a vacuum, not looking at the rest of the league or the bigger, long-term picture. And therein lies the problem.

We all watched the Browns this past season and we all know where the team needs help. Wide receiver. Defensive end. Right tackle.

Pierre Garcon. Mario Williams. Eric Winston.

Those are three players that would have all looked good in Orange and Brown and would filled a pressing need on the field. But when you past the headlines those signings would have created, a much different picture emerges.

Garcon wisely took his first visit to Washington, where Redskins owner Daniel Snyder loves nothing more than off-season headlines and, for some reason, is credited with a “win now” philosophy (the fact that the team doesn’t win is apparently beside the point).

A five-year, $42.5 million contract with $21.5 million in guaranteed money made sure that Garcon never left. For that money, the Redskins picked up a receiver who has caught only 53 percent of the passes thrown to him over the past three seasons (compared to 64 percent for the rest of the Colts wide receivers) and has averaged 13.6 yards per catch, almost exactly the league average.

And, as Cold Hard Football Facts points out, over-valuing wide receivers does not guarantee a team will be successful .

Buffalo signed Williams to a six-year deal with $50 million in guaranteed money. That was the only way the Bills, who haven’t made the playoffs since 1999 and haven’t won a playoff games since 1995, could get Williams to agree to join the team. Knowing that, what would it have cost the Browns? $55 million? $60 million?

Either way, the price would have been exorbitant and would have thrown the team’s salary structure out of whack. Fans see that the Browns have cap space and want to spend it – all of it – as quickly as possible. But that ignores the fact that the Browns have other players on the team that they may want to keep in the coming years. The rookie contracts signed by Alex Mack and Joe Haden, for example, will be expiring in the coming years and we would think it would be to the team’s benefit to resign them at the appropriate time.

Or would you rather lose them because the Browns foolishly tied up their money on the likes of

Laurent Robinson?

That brings us to Winston, one of the best right tackles in the league and, at age 28, someone who would have made a perfect bookend to left tackle Joe Thomas. Winston signed with Kansas City, however, reportedly for $22 million.

This one we don't understand as the Browns have no one currently on the team capable of playing right tackle and if the reported money is true, it seems as if they could have been serious contenders for Winston.

And we're going to hold off, for now, on the quarterback issue. There's only so much we can take in one day.

As fans, when we see other teams doing *something* in free agency, the fact that the Browns don't want to overspend weighs even harder on our minds – even for those fans who understand the reality that, in the NFL, high-priced free agency is simply not the path to success.

The other big news of the week came from the Cavs, who are quickly turning into the most divisive team in town as more and more fans fall into two camps: those who want the team to make the playoffs *now* (and what a fun, four-game series that would be against Miami) and those who realize that, as great as Kyrie Irving has played and as much potential Tristan Thompson has shown, the team needs considerably more talent to realistically compete for an NBA championship.

[redacted]