What a way to start the new year from a football perspective here on the north coast. Ohio State manhandled a very good Oregon team in the Rose Bowl, lifting the monkey off the backs of Coach Tressel and the Big Ten, and providing a great deal of momentum heading into a 2010 season in which they are expected to be serious national championship contenders. And the Browns ... all they did was win their fourth straight game to end the season, giving fans a lot to feel good about heading into the offseason and also giving Mike Holmgren a lot to think about as he assesses the fate of Eric Mangini and his staff. Peeker hits on it all in The Weekend Wrap.

Rosy Bowl Game as Bucks Bounce Ducks

The BCS set up may have bastardized some tradition along the way to determining a national ‘champion' in NCAA football but there is no question that the Rose Bowl is still held dear by Ohio State fans.

Tens of thousands of Buckeye fans converged on Pasadena Friday, their first such opportunity to do so since 2000. And they watched as a Buckeye defense completely put the clamps on an explosive Oregon offense while Terrelle Pryor took a couple steps forward and led the Buckeyes to a 26-17 win over the Ducks on New Years day.

After some big BCS losses, including two blowout losses in the title game itself, the win was cathartic for Jim Tressel's football team and Ohio State fans everywhere. And maybe, just maybe, it will help rebuild Ohio State's reputation on a national level. At least the Rose Bowl win over Oregon will temporarily shut up antagonistic haters like Mark May and Skip Bayless.

More on that later.

On Friday the Buckeye defense once again showed that it is a unit that is better than the sum of its parts. With the exception of perhaps Kurt Coleman and Cameron Heyward the Buckeyes defense boasts no stars or can't miss NFL prospects. They aren't as fast as OSU defenses of the past and they aren't as well known. But they are just as effective in shutting down opposing offenses. Maybe more so than teams that featured A.J. Hawk and James Laurinaitis, to name a few.

You certainly can't convince Oregon QB Jeremiah Masoli that they aren't dominant. The Buckeyes harassed and smacked Masoli around all day. The junior QB completed just 9 of his 20 passes all day for 81 yards. Oregon isn't a pass-happy club but Masoli found precious little time to throw the football with Heyward, Thaddeus Gibson and Doug Worthington in his face mask all game long.

More importantly, the Buckeyes held the explosive Ducks running game in check in Pasadena. LaMichael James and Kenjon Barner did combine for 134 yards on 22 carries but they never got completely loose for big plays. Brian Rolle and Ross Homan did a nice job of

containing the Oregon backs all day and they were getting a lot of help from safeties Anderson Russell and Coleman, neither of whom had to respect the passing game of Oregon.

Oregon had the ball for only 18 minutes all game exactly because the Buckeyes kept everything in front of them and because the Buckeye wrung out the clock like it was a car wash shammy. Most of the credit for the Buckeyes controlling the football and the clock goes to Pryor. The sophomore was more accurate than he had been for most of the season but it was his ability to run the football that was again the difference.

Pryor rushed 20 times for 72 yards but he made numerous plays when either his protection broke down or when his receivers were covered and he picked up three or four huge first downs on the ground by himself.

I know people want to point to the Rose Bowl as what may be Pryor's watershed moment as a QB coming of age as a passer, but I'd caution that we need to see where he is next September as compared to now. His 4th quarter TD pass to Devier Posey was a beautiful throw but he missed on a number of throws on the afternoon that should concern people expecting a Troy Smith-like transformation with Pryor.

The deep square in that Pryor threw behind a wide open Dane Sanzenbacher that would have been a touchdown is but one example and Pryor needs to build on the progress he made between the Michigan game and the bowl game before I can anoint him as a legitimate passer.

Still, no one's going to rain on this parade. The Rose Bowl has always been a special place and a special game for Ohio football fans and the Buckeyes capitalized on their opportunity to play in it by serving notice to everyone that they are a very good program right now and that they will be a force next season.

Friday was a perfect start to the 2010 sports year.

Rushing to End the Season

How does four in a row to finish the season taste, Browns fans?

Rush for over 200 yards and play stifling defense and strange things happen on the football field.

Like dominance.

And that's exactly what it was down on the lake front Sunday when the Browns ended the slim playoff hopes of the Jacksonville Jaguars with a 23- 17 win in the season finale.

Jerome Harrison rushed for 127 yards and a TD on 33 more carries, Josh Cribbs carried the ball six times for 47 yards and a TD and Chris Jennings ran it nine times for 38 yards as the Browns hammered out 214 yards on the ground to finish at 5-11 on the year and give fans something to feel good about heading into the off season.

Don't forget the defense either. Despite allowing an ‘Oh, by the way' TD to the Jags as time ran out the Browns again stormed to the football and pressured the quarterback on a bitterly cold and windy afternoon in Cleveland. They also held Maurice Jones-Drew to less than 100 yards on the ground and intercepted Jaguar QB David Garrard once.

You can complain about the talent level on this club but

you sure can't argue with the effort the 53 healthy bodies put forth each Sunday for the last five weeks. And now Mike Holmgren rides in to take a look at that talent and to figure out how best to improve upon it.

Things didn't look nearly so promising a month ago.

Rolling

The Cavs have won seven straight games going into Sunday night's game with the Bobcats at ‘The Q'. In the process they've overtaken both Boston and Orlando for the best record in the Eastern Conference and if the season ended today, and it most definitely does not, they'd own that critical 1st seed throughout the conference playoffs.

What's impressive is that the Cavs have rung up those seven straight and nine of their last

ten by beating some of the better teams in the league, at home and on the road. Yes, they've had a couple games against the dregs, but you play who's on the schedule and the Cavaliers are not showing any regard for reputations or records as they win. Wins over Houston, Phoenix, the Lakers, Sacramento and a couple over Atlanta show the Cavs are getting down to business and may be done with the feeling out process as it relates to their roster and rotation.

It took a couple a more weeks and a little more pain than I initially thought it would but the Cavs are firing on all cylinders right now. It's a good time to sit back and enjoy what they're giving us.

Etcetera

- People around these parts have an inferiority complex. I can't understand getting bent out of shape by guys like Lee Corso, Mark May and Skip Bayless. So they have what appears to be a bias against the Big Ten or Ohio State and they never miss an opportunity to poke the fans. You know why? Because people listen and because people respond to it.

You can fit in a thimble what Skip Bayless knows about football. But he knows TV and he knows radio and he knows that provoking hard core fan bases will keep people listening. It's all about viewers, listeners and web clicks and today's media personalities don't care whether you listen, watch or click because you love them or you hate them, as long as you listen, watch and click.

Mark May is an arrogant Big East honk who can't get past his Big East/Big Ten inferiority complex. But in a world where 90% of the people are fools he has a huge pool of people to talk to and rile up.

Suck sells if you're good enough at delivering it. Take it for what it is and go about your day comfortable in the fact that you probably know as much or about the topic as the man talking about it on television.

- I'll just say it: Eric Mangini, in my humble opinion, has earned the right to coach this football team or another next season.

Mangini not only salvaged his coaching career over the last four games but when you look at how he did it you have to walk away impressed. He not only improved on the team's number of wins from last season but he did it while culling a herd full of underachieving whiners and malcontents and accumulating 11 picks in April's draft.

People don't like him and I understand that. He's arrogant and he often comes off as unlikable. But you can't argue the fact that his team never quit and that the club is far more disciplined today than it was when Mangini accepted the gig. And players are buying in.

Mary Kay Cabot of the Plain Dealer interviewed fullback Lawrence Vickers

regarding Mangini and the team and Vickers had the following to say; (http://www.cleveland.com/browns/index.ssf/2010/01/its_one_last_chance_to_make_a.html)

"It was his way or no way and a lot of guys had a problem with that at first," said Vickers. "You're dealing with a bunch of grown men and a lot of egos. But once everyone got on his page, things went a lot smoother.

"It's getting to that page that was the hard part. Sometimes when you can't see the results, it's hard to believe it's going to work. But not knowing what to expect and

coming out on the other end of it, I learned a lot.

"He made me a better football player and I appreciate that. It was the hard way, but the hard way made life a whole lot easier. I understand the game a whole lot better and he actually makes you think. You have to think about everything with him. It's not just what you do, it's what everyone does. The ending hasn't been hard at all. You can really see there's something happening here."

It doesn't sound like he's lost anyone in that clubhouse. It sounds quite opposite of that actually.

I can understand Holmgren wanting to come in and work with a head coach he's comfortable with. It's Holmgren's ass on the line at the end of the day and he's accountable. But if you look at the fact that this team has more wins, more discipline and more draft picks than you had a year ago how can you not be impressed if you remove Mangini's public persona as a consideration?

Be careful what you wish for Browns fans. Seeing Marty Mornhinweg or Jim Zorn lead the team on the field next fall may make Holmgren more comfortable. But it sure isn't going to make me feel very good about things.

- I pray to the God of football that Derek Anderson has thrown his last pass a Cleveland Brown. I'm sure there have been others who have taken more physical gifts than Anderson was blessed with and done less with them, but Anderson is on that list.

- Six weeks until the Indians equipment trucks head to Arizona to signal the unofficial start of the 2010 baseball season. Based on the last couple years I wonder if the Tribe traded their nice, big tractors and trailers for a bunch of inexpensive Isuzu pick-up trucks.