

Kibble & Bits- Now It's For Real

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After attending a few practices and watching four preseason games there were a few pre-training camp thoughts I had that were right, and there were a few I was clearly wrong about.

Some may have been taken back by some training camp developments and final roster decisions but all in all there wasn't anything I would consider upsetting or earth shattering so let's look back at the recently concluded training camp and preseason.

Things Confirmed

** Phil Dawson truly has father time in his back pocket. Watching him in camp was confirmation that his leg is as strong as ever and his accuracy is unquestionable.

** Ahtyba Rubin is no flash in the pan.....the defense has an entirely different feel when he plays and there were times in practice where the offense couldn't even get good practice reps in because Rubin lived in the backfield. Rubin is one of the best DTs in the league both statistically and through the eye-ball test.

** Jabaal Sheard has gotten much stronger since last season and his lower body seems to have

gotten thicker but he hasn't lost his explosion. He ate Mitchell Schwartz up all camp and he looks stronger against the run. We should expect more of the same from him this year.

** Aside from Sheldon Brown the back seven of the defense can really run. That statement includes the LBs. They get around really quickly and swarm to the ball. Brown still has something left in the tank but I truly believe if Patterson didn't get hurt early in camp that Sheldon's job was in jeopardy.

** Colt McCoy is heads and tails a much different looking player than he was last year. I understand that he had a pretty bad game 4 in the preseason but he played well in the other three and looked good in practice all camp.

The other thing about the QBs that was confirmed was the rocket arm of rookie Brandon Weeden. When he makes up his mind to put some extra rpm's on the ball.....the ball explodes out of his hand.

** For me preseason also confirmed that Montario Hardesty is a better player than we saw last year. Now that he is healthy and one year farther away from his knee injury he looks much more confident and explosive.....and he can actually get the edge on outside runs which is nice to see.

** The preseason confirmed a few things about the WR group. One is Greg Little will be a good WR in this league. He looks much more comfortable and we are finally seeing some of his run after the catch ability.

It also confirmed my fears of trusting Mohamed Massaquoi. After the first catch he made in preseason he left the game with a head injury. The AFC north is not the division to have a flanker with concussion issues. I simply won't trust the guy to make it a full season until he actually does.

** Seeing Jordan Cameron operate in practice and seeing how much stronger his body looks helped to confirm his future as a starting TE for this team. Like I said before, as long as Ben

Watson is healthy he is still the better player right now, but I believe in Cameron's future as a starter.

Roster Thoughts

I was not surprised that Tom Heckert continued the roster turnover by deciding to keep 15 rookies. They have said all along that they were building this team through the draft and I think everyone should believe them by now.

I understand this front office may not get to finish because a new owner brings the possibility of change, but I truly appreciate the change of philosophy when it comes to building a roster.

They could have went the route most new regimes go and bring in people they are familiar with, but all in all they really have started from scratch, and if nothing else the youth has brought some speed and explosiveness that other Browns rosters have lacked. The jury is still out on the offensive players ability to make plays in the NFL, but they are far from big and slow like we have seen in the past.

None of the cuts were shocks to me. I did expect some players like James Dockery and Quinton Spears to make the team but in the end I can't complain they didn't. I saw the same things the coaches saw in the guys that made the roster over them.

For Spears I thought he could use his pass rush ability to make a difference but this defensive scheme never allowed that, and he is not a good enough LB to play outright. Dockery got outplayed in practice and games by Trevin Wade and he also got outplayed on special teams by Johnson Bedemosi.

I wrote before that Bademosi could shine on special teams because he is a physical freak (size,speed) and he did. Wade was much better than I thought based on what I saw from him at Arizona. The young CB struggled with consistency in college but he played much better in training camp than he did his senior year at Arizona so I applaud his improvement.

Other than those comments I really wasn't taken back by any of the moves. Evan Moore was a gimmick player last year, Seneca Wallace simply wasn't needed anymore and, although I don't understand the value of Chris Ogbonnaya if Trent Richardson is the bell cow everyone thinks he is, I guess when you are talking about someone that far down on the list it doesn't matter that much.

Rookie Stuff and Waiver Claims

** Even though it was disappointing that Trent Richardson had to get more surgery, I am not worried one bit that he didn't play in the preseason. I really don't think it is all that important for a RB to get preseason carries because RBs don't play long enough in preseason games where a conditioning would be achieved. The only real thing that could probably have been achieved is timing, but for a player with his running ability he can make up for some of the early timing issues with his superb instincts.

Some would say Richardson missed out on some blocking opportunities in the passing game but I don't even buy that because teams play so vanilla in the preseason he wouldn't have gotten quality blitz looks anyway.

** Josh Gordon looked just like Greg Little looked last year. On some plays you can clearly see his ability to make big plays but on other plays he looks like he doesn't have a clue. We should expect him to make some plays but we can also expect plenty of errors. For a rookie WR who hasn't played football in two years we just need to hope his valleys aren't too low and they don't last too long.

** Rookie RT Mitchell Schwartz is all over the map and quite frankly should have everyone, including Brandon Weeden, on alert. He looks stellar firing off the ball on running plays but he looks equally bad trying to stop speed rushers on passing plays. Until this rookie can get it together.....chips,TEs, screen plays, and draws will be his best friend. He needs to get his act together or his rookie QB won't last.

I am not throwing the kid under the bus or claiming he has no hope but right now he is playing

like his head is spinning, and until the game slows down for him the coaching staff will need to help him out through scheme.

The Browns play the NFC East this year and that division is absolutely stacked with pass rushing monsters and I can guarantee they aren't going to be lining up to rush the passer against all-pro LT Joe Thomas.....so rookie, you better pack a lunch and snack.... every Sunday will be a long day this season.

** I really thought both rookie FB/TE Brad Smelley played well in practices and games but it just wasn't enough to beat out the stellar Owen Marecic. I am glad to see they put Smelley on the practice squad and based on our 2nd year FBs history of getting his bell rung I would stay alert and ready to play if I were Smelley.

** Of all of the defensive rookies I am sticking by Billy Winn when it comes to naming a player who could have the biggest impact. Most of the inside players in our division are power players but if you look at the success of Cincinnati's DT Geno Atkins, who has great movement skills, I think Winn can be an impact player inside.

In practice he gave guards fits when exploding up field and I can remember at least two plays during the preseason where he made plays in the opponents backfield after exploding off of the ball, so be on the lookout for him to (at a minimum) get some time in nickel situations.

** I love the instincts of rookie L.J. Fort. He reminds me of a young D'Qwell Jackson when it comes to sniffing out running plays. Their natural ability to get through lineman and find RBs is a trait that can overcome their lack of ideal size, so don't be surprised if the rookie sticks around long term.

** I went back and watched the Raven's last preseason game so I could watch rookie DT Ishma'ily Kitchen (great name) whom the Browns claimed on waivers and the big man is powerful. I am not exaggerating at all when I say he totally dominated the backup guards of the Rams. In a few series of playing time he had 4 solo tackles, a sack and a TFL. He is a big, strong player who moves well for a 330lb man. The Browns have to really be high on him because Scott Paxson was a solid contributor when he was given an opportunity to play and he was jettisoned in favor of the rookie.

With only 4 DTs on the roster I expect him to get some snaps right away and I will be eager to see what he does against starting caliber guards.

The other waiver wire claim, rookie Tank Carder, is a LB I wasn't high on when studying the draft this year. The reason I wasn't a big fan is because he didn't seem very stout to me. He is versatile and should be a core special teams player but don't expect too much more than that, at least this year anyway. He needs to get bigger and stronger in order to be an impact player in this league, but he does have good length so he is a good developmental player probably on the strong side.

College Season

Since college season has started and I do a draft series I am going to try and stuff some college players in this season's K&B articles. Today I want to talk about a few QBs I will be watching this season.

Logan Thomas (Va. Tech)- If you want to watch a physical specimen just check out this TE turned QB recruit. Thomas is fairly early in his QB career when you compare him to players who have been playing the position since junior high, but he has tremendous athletic ability and a rocket launcher for an arm. He is also a huge man (6-5 255lbs) who will run over defenders without notice. He is fun to watch and his size and arm strength have him on high alert with NFL scouts.

Keith Price (Washington)- Price is a really good QB who doesn't have the NFL prototype size so he often gets overlooked, but if you watched him play in the Alamo Bowl this year against RG3 you would have watched him outplay the Heisman winner. He is a very athletic QB who uses his athleticism to create throws rather than run the ball and he is also an accurate passer. Price was a first year starter last year and put up a terrific season. I only expect him to get better.

Tyler Wilson (Arkansas)- Wilson is another short QB who doesn't get the credit he deserves. Wilson is a gifted QB that can get throws off from all different types of angles. I think he will get more respect this year once he duplicates his 3500 plus yards without speedsters Joe Adams

and Jarius Wright on the roster. He is one of my favorite QBs because he is ultra competitive and he simply finds a way to get the job done.

Geno Smith (West Virginia)- Smith is a QB for the Mountaineers who is going into his 3rd year and keeps getting better every year. He has upped his stats and command of the game each year and put up monster numbers in game one of this year's college season. Smith is another QB that people spend too much time talking about what he

can't

do, but I think he will continue to get better this year and be a solid pro prospect. He has all the physical tools and if he continues to be as accurate during the season as he was in game one he will earn himself a ton of cash this college season.

Closing

I usually stick to strictly football in these articles but I wanted to veer off the path slightly for second and take this opportunity to give my daughter who just turned 11 in June a little ink.

I know every parent thinks highly of their kid and we can get feelings of pride when they do some of the simplest things but in this case I don't think I am going overboard when I say that if the Cleveland Browns can play with the determination, focus, and give everything to their team attitude that my 11 year old displayed over the month of August they will go miles in their journey to football respect.

I have long known my kid is one of those ultra competitive people who can block out pain to compete because at the age of 9 she blocked out pain for over 5 weeks while going to gymnastics practice five days a week and competing in multiple meets before telling anyone she was in pain. When she finally said something and was taken to the doctor we found out she had a broken arm.

This time she played soccer on a fractured leg for a month before her body finally made her stop and tell the truth about how bad her pain was. And after I asked her why she didn't say something earlier about the type of pain she was in she said, "I thought it would go away....my team needed me".

I know that section sounded like a parent stealing a moment to talk about their kid but it was much more than that. It was a message about the attitude this Cleveland Browns team will need to compete against some stellar football teams in this 2012 season.

The Browns are starting the season out once again climbing up hill. They have a really young team with a rookie QB and have many distractions before the season even starts. One of those distractions and maybe the biggest is facing new ownership and the feeling in the building that change is coming.....but none of that is a good enough excuse.

The 2012 Browns need to develop the type of mental toughness and tunnel vision that 11 year old displayed and focus all their energy on playing each play to the best of their ability no matter what the obstacles are.

They need to block out all the obstacles and hurdles in their way and find a way to play good football. Management has been working to ensure the 2012 team isn't overmatched physically by acquiring more talent this offseason and now it is up to the players to do their part and focus on playing winning football.

Last year the mentality of the defense changed and the young players made plays that kept us in games and this year it is time for the offense to make strides and do their part. If that happens the Browns will compete and make us proud to be Cleveland Browns fans once again.

I am not a believer in eternal curses and I don't consign to the "doomed no matter what we do" attitude..... Each team, each year determines their own outcome. The 2012 Cleveland Browns can either step up to the plate and compete or they can take the road plenty of other Cleveland Brown teams have taken and be victims who find excuses to fail.

I am not asking for a specific record..... I am simply asking this team this year to play with the type of heart and determination that would make me and many other Browns fans all over the world proud to wear our beloved orange and brown in every sports bar around the nation.

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Well fellow Browns fans, enjoy your families one last weekend before 17 weeks of peaks and valleys and, until next time.....Go Browns!