

Tim Couch, Courtney Brown, Gerard Warren, Braylon Edwards. Proof positive that a top five pick doesn't guarantee anything. And Erik Cassano sees a slew of flawed options available at the top of this year's draft as well. In the end, Phil Savage might come to the conclusion that the best option is to trade down and collect draft picks. And Erik Cassano would have no problem with that.



I'm going to start off by throwing a few names out there. You've heard them before:

Tim Couch, Courtney Brown, Gerard Warren, Braylon Edwards.

That's the answer. The question is, "Who have been the four unfortunate SOB's to have a Browns top five draft pick spent on them since 1999?"

Top five picks are supposed to be franchise-builders. Game changers. Cornerstones in the foundation of your team's future.

Couch? Strike one. Brown? Strike two. Warren? Strike three. Edwards? The jury is still out, but early returns have shown him to have an oversized ego, big mouth and hard hands.

If strike four is in the rules, Edwards is on his way.

Now, the Browns, thanks to a 4-12 record and a fortuitous coin flip, sit with the No. 3 pick in next month's draft. Another chance to draft another franchise cornerstone. The fans are waiting to see what deft brushstroke GM Phil Savage will make to expedite the team's return to prominence.

But early returns show that Savage's artistic ability will likely be compromised by a weak front end of the draft.

Chances are, if Savage stands pat and picks at No. 3, it's not going to turn out much better than the previous one-through-five brushstrokes painted by Dwight Clark and Butch Davis,

which time has shown to have been closer to a first-grader's fingerpaint doodle from art class than anything that came off the brush-tip of Picasso.

We all debate and salivate over whether the Browns could or should pick fleet-footed rusher Adrian Peterson, or beefy blocker Joe Thomas, or stud quarterbacks JaMarcus Russell or Brady Quinn.

Any one of them will be hailed as a franchise savior should the Browns select him. All will likely fail in that regard.

We cross our fingers and hope that there is a Peyton Manning or Ricky Williams or Reggie Bush waiting for the Browns at No. 3. There isn't, not this year.

Peterson is probably the most NFL-ready of the players the Browns might have a crack at with the third pick. But after a dominant freshman year in 2004, he's been beset by injuries ever since.

What are the odds he magically finds the fountain of eternal health in Cleveland? About the same as Larry Hughes?

Do we really need to be teased by a faster version of Lee Suggs?

Thomas is not the second coming of Orlando Pace. Even if he has that level of talent, to expect him and maybe one free agent signing to be the moves that solidify the Browns' offensive line is a big mistake. Odds are, teams will find a way around the rookie lineman and still get into the backfield next year. He'd be more of a momentary deterrent for a pass rusher than a brick wall.

Russell has all the tools and probably the best shot at stardom in this year's draft. But he doesn't have the experience. He needs to sit and learn behind a veteran quarterback in a situation where he isn't going to be pressed into service as a rookie. When the Browns are 2-8 and Romeo Crennel is bailing water full-speed, what are the odds he presses Russell into service as a desperation measure with the season already flushed? What are the odds Russell has a negative reaction to being ox-plowed into the turf two dozen times a week?

The same situation applies to Quinn, but he's less mobile and prone to melting down under pressure, so his margin for error is even more razor-thin.

There are no slam-dunk options where the Browns sit, not for a team with this many needs.

In the end, Savage might come to the conclusion that the best option is to trade down and collect draft picks. I'd have no problem with that.

There are no franchise saviors waiting to be plucked from the tree this spring. To pick someone at No. 3 might simply place a crushing burden of expectation on that player, creating a reputation he can never live up to.

In that situation, everybody loses. And we've had enough losing around these parts to last several lifetimes.