

Opie's Opus: Part II - The Good

Written by {ga=jb}

Sunday, March 18 2007 7:00 PM -

We move onward to Mansfield's second installment of his comprehensive off-season look at our Cleveland Browns, and in Part II he focuses on the things that are good with this football team. Mansfield likes the tight ends, the linebackers, and potentially the backs and receivers if a couple things shake our way. A great read with some hard hitting player analysis.



So last week we got out the Chinet™ and plastic sporks and set the table, [recapping the Browns's free agent signings](#)

. This was no small feat as the Browns are tied with Tampa Bay for the most new free agents so far this off-season. In a few short weeks, Phil added a cornerback, a running back, two OL men, a pair of DL men, and a linebacker. While the talent influx was badly needed, you have to wonder about the coaching staff's ability to integrate this influx of new players given Romeo's dazed and confused routine and nearly a whole new offensive staff.

At any rate, now is a good time to take a look at the two-deep for each position as I see them, make some educated guesses as to who they are, and get ready for the next installment: what to do in the draft. This part deux is a two-part work, or would that be sub-parts? First, we're going to start with what looks good. Next week? We'll cover what looks good: not so much.

Areas of strength

Unfortunately, this is one of those *Big Book of British Smiles* lists.

Tight Ends

Kellen Winslow

Steve Heiden

Being completely irrational for a minute, and suspending The Cleveland Experience™ and the likelihood that the Souljah's micro-fracture surgery will yield the intended results, the Browns'

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tight end situation looks pretty strong.

While Winslow couldn't block worth a damn on one wheel, causing that sociopath Joey Porter to suggest Kellen is a don't ask/don't tell candidate who likes Broadway musicals and interior decorating, all he did was have as good of a year as any Browns' tight end ever. Obviously, if you are reading this, you know that includes a Hall of Famer who had a league MVP throwing to him one of his monster seasons, and a pro bowl player for a few more. The Souljah had Paul MacDonald, errrrr Charlie. Winslow is a winner, hates to lose, and catches anything thrown in his area code. Already his output is the equal of any tight end in the league. You give him a pair of knees that are remotely close to healthy and he'll be our first legitimate all pro since Michael Dean. When you do want some heavy formation work, Steve Heiden is a more than capable compliment, and would start on many teams. Dinkins gives you a special teams body and size for a two tight end formation with Winslow in a slot.

Areas with the potential to be good

Outside Linebackers

Kameron Wimbley

Willie McGinest

Antwan Peek

Matt Stewart/Chaun Thompson

Inside Linebackers

Andra Davis

D'Qwell Jackson

Leon Williams

Mason Unck

These guys intrigue me to the point where I believe they could make or break Phil's career here in Cleveland. If the three or four young players here can hit upside, you have the core for a solid defense. If they are of the Butch Davis Taylor-Bentley-Davis triumvirate variety, Phil may not have the time or resources to recover from the mis-investments here compounded with the disastrous 2005 draft.

Andra Davis is an average to below average NFL starting linebacker. He seems to have the size and enough speed to be better than that, and when healthy he was a game changer at Florida in college. In the pros he's the definition of a day late and a dollar short. He's a better, quicker version of Wali Rainer. The enabling factors for Andra, besides his gaudy tackle numbers (see also, Walleye Rainer), has been the assertion he had poor talent surrounding him and no help on the D line in front of him. All true. This year, we may see enough to really be able to evaluate Davis.

Kamerion Wimbley has the potential and work ethic to be nothing short of a defensive MVP type impact player. I see nothing from him that makes me think that Shawne Merriman level performance is out of his reach. He has that kind of God given ability when it comes to speed, size and strength, and you could see his instincts coming on. The sky is the limit for this kid.

The two kids who will tell the story are D'Qwell Jackson and Leon Williams. On draft day, I loved the NyQuil (he puts you to sleep) Jackson pick and hated the Williams pick. I wanted offensive or defensive line help and didn't understand the redundancy, particularly with a player who'd been benched his senior year. That take ended when I saw him play. NyQuil? Look at the players drafted out of the ACC on defense last season. The first pick overall, two picks in the top ten, the aforementioned Wimbley, and Manny Lawson. If you thought any of them were the ACC Defensive Player of the Year, you'd be wrong. That's how productive Jackson was in college. When I saw him play at Maryland, NyQuil had mad instincts, great closing ability, and hit like a player 15 pounds heavier. Thrown into action as a raw rookie behind a poor defensive

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line and next to a mediocre ILB partner, Jackson didn't set the world on fire. Then again, Romeo even playing a rookie is no small accomplishment. If this kid puts in solid time in the weight room in his first NFL off- season, and can put on another 10 pounds without losing speed and his experience allows the game to slow down, you'll have a tackling machine for a half-decade who may even make some stops at the line of scrimmage. I see NyQuil's potential as that of an Eddie Johnson with more speed.

Williams is nothing short of loaded with potential. He's very large, runs like a deer, and has a nose for the ball. Recently, Romeo has decreed that he'll stay inside. Assuming the man walking the Green Mile consulted with the real Boss and he's not talking out the corn hole, this is very bad news for Andra Davis. Williams and NyQuil are the perfect 3 – 4 ILB pair. One is the Mike player who stays at home and racks up the tackles, and that's NyQuil. The other is the Eagle position player who can blitz and run and raise hell in mismatches, and that's Williams. If and when they two line up together and Romeo stops playing defensive football like a French general in 1940, players like these two are how you build a defensive foundation on a good team.

Willie McGinest is a huge disappointment. The first half of last season he was arguably at a "Keith Hernandez as an Indian" level as a free agent signing. If this is the kind of "veteran leadership" that Romeo handpicked to come in and show the kids how it should be done, Romeo deserves what he'll probably get at the end of next season. Willie will quietly play out the remainder of his contract and be another in the long line of new Browns' veteran free agent disappointments. In fact, we ought to establish the "Lomas Brown Award", and give it out annually. Antwan Peek is eliciting hopes beyond his production from some. "Twan" is getting two-snaps up from some local pundits claiming he is the dark horse of free agency, a misused player in a bad scheme who has real talent. We NEVER get that lucky, so I'm going to see him for what he probably is: a less than average player against the run who will get Matt Stewart back on the field on running downs when McGinest doesn't give a damn, and is a guy who'll come in and go off the edge on third down as a one trick pony and maybe get a few sacks. That ain't all bad. But in the 2008 draft we'll be looking for a long-term solution at OLB.

There's a ton of flotsam and jetsam on this roster at these positions. Ham and egghead jabronies like the busta Chaun Thompson, the lost David McMillan, Clifton Smith, who it seems has been on every training camp roster since Nick Skorach was here and never makes the team, and I can't figure out if Nick Speegle is or isn't on the developmental roster. All these guys are non-entities and bodies to have a training camp.

Wide Receivers

Braylon Edwards

Tim Carter □

Joe Jurevicius

Travis Wilson

Anyone who can tell me with a straight face that they know what we have at wide receiver is a liar. As much as any group has been the microcosm for the star-crossed new Browns, this group is that. There is a history of high draft resources invested and real talent at the position, but attitudes and inconsistency have always made the group a bunch of underachievers. Maybe that's why we kept the position coach for so long? You have the overall number three draft pick who you can make a case is either heading for stardom or bust status depending how you frame the discussion, a solid NFL veteran's veteran who is the epitome of class and how things are done the right way, and a third round choice who apparently insulted the head coach's wife he was buried so deep on the bench, and an enigmatic speedster with bad hands we picked up for a vet running back. Then there's your usual 'who cares?' assortment of training camp route runners.

Honestly, I'm freaking sick of Braylan Edwards. I'm sick of hearing about him, I'm sick of seeing him, I'm sick of reading about him, I'm sick of his jerseys not being marked down. Mostly, I'm sick of writing about him. So let's keep it short. Good off season work ethic and great athletic ability. Should be a pro's pro given his father, but instead he has a spoiled brat attitude that makes him the candidate to be the next TO, except he lacks the walk to go with the talk. Braylan Edwards is simply the manifestation of every older Caucasian fan's worst stereotype when they rant on and on about the modern African-American athlete. Nuh-uh; no he did **NOT** just write that. Oh come **ON**

. Like none of you have immigrant or first generation grandparents who still live in Parma, Eastlake or West Park who just go off on these dudes and hate on the hip-hop culture. I'm just sayin'. "Attitude" brings inconsistent hands and merely average football speed, lazy route

running, and were he a quarter as good as he is in his own mind, he'd be in the pro bowl. He is the polar opposite of Hines Ward, and I hate Hines Ward.

Still, if Braylon grows up, his knee is 100%, and he can stop dropping what seems like is every third pass and lives up to his potential when he was labeled the best athlete in the draft, he takes this group of receivers from so-so to potentially as good as there is in the NFL. You pair up a legit number one receiver with the ultimate possession receiver in Joe J, and a high third round pick with good size and speed in Wilson, and there is no reason why you don't have everything you need here to have a great group of receivers, particularly with Winslow in route as well. The depth is a little thin, and Carter hasn't shown an ability to really develop into more than a track athlete, and Josh Cribbs is miscast in not playing a full Slash role as 3rd down RB and slot match up player, but as Attitude goes, so go the wide receivers. If Braylon is great, so are they. If he underachieves, so does this group.

Running Backs

Signing Jamal Lewis is the biggest crapshoot off-season signing in the league in my opinion.

If his ankles are better, if he is hungry playing for his last big contract with a one-year deal, and his off-season conditioning makes strides since he's not in the can (I thought all they did was lift weights in the joint anyway, along with making shanks, studying Islam, and either being or fighting off bands of tailpipe tigers?) he can have as much impact as any back in the NFL. When Jamal is right, he's that good. On the other hand, you see what Edge was in 'Zona removed from a good offense, which the Ratbirds really weren't, and what Willie McGinest brought to the defense. JaLew could easily be that kind of disappointment. But that's OK. We still have Charlie at QB. On second thought, just kill me if that happens. Dumping Rueben when you have so much cap space is an enigma to me. I would have thought that having JaLew and Droughns as a hammer and anvil pair would have been inspired. Jason Wright is a dime a dozen and coming off late season knee surgery. He does nothing to excite me. Jerome Harrison, who pie eyed goofy Browns' fans were telling each other was as good as Reggie Bush in July, doesn't look like he can pass block well enough to play on Sundays. He's a long shot. The fact is this group is awfully thin without Rueben.

The situation is the same at fullback, where the offense appears to have signed a power back that loves the traditional I formation and simultaneously released the traditional power I fullback for a Larry Centers-type versatile player. There is no credible back up. Hear me now, believe me later – even as I don't think Terrelle Smith's play ever lived up to his self-evaluation, these two moves are contradictory, make no sense, and make me want to go back and add another installment to [my "PHIL – WTF !?!” article](#) . Lawrence Vickers may be a good player. He may be an upgrade from Smith. But these two moves, signing JaLew and dumping Smith for a Marc Edwards-type player, make zero strategic sense.

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The Browns have a huge hole at RB next season, and have left themselves very vulnerable to field NFL Europe talent if JaLew gets hurt. They had the cap space to carry Droughns and Smith another season, and let Droughns serve as quality depth and have an open competition at fullback. So while this area has the potential to be great if JaLew is the player of two or three seasons ago , it also has the potential to be the very worst in the NFL is he gets hurt.

I love being a Browns' fan. It is never dull in the off-season. Only at most of the games after October.