

Random Thoughts From Berea

Written by {ga=mitch}

Saturday, July 28 2007 7:00 PM -

In addition to being our source for all things movie and entertainment, Mitch Cyrus is a huge Cleveland sports fan that I've been nagging to do a Browns column for us for a couple years now. Mitch makes an annual sabbatical out to Berea for the opening weekend of Training Camp, and has hammered out a fantastic summary of the first three sessions for our readers. Enjoy!



The first three sessions of Training Camp are in the book.

No one got hurt on the first day! An amazing change of fortune that might have had something to do with the fact that on Friday, the team didn't do much more than jog and stretch. Still...you have to start somewhere.

Great seeing Joe Thomas on the field for the very first practice. There is a lot of potential here, but any thoughts of instantaneous induction to the Hall of Fame were tempered when Joe was tossed like a rag doll in his first rep with the first team. A few snaps later, Joe was introduced to the insane speed of the NFL in the form of Kamerion Wimbley blowing by him like he was standing still. But Joe later recovered, and had a couple of nice pancake blocks. What has impressed me the most is his technique and his obvious intelligence. And we've all heard about his legendary work ethic. This one is going to be a keeper.

That said, at this point your first team offensive line is Kevin Shaffer at left tackle,

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Eric Steinbach at left guard, Hank Fraley at center, Seth McKinney at right guard, and Ryan Tucker at right tackle. But Thomas got more reps later on with the first team...and Kevin Shaffer also got first team reps at right tackle. This will be the most interesting story of training camp...but look for Thomas to start the year at LT.

There is a lot more going on with the LeCharles Bentley situation than what we're being told...and it really doesn't look good. I doubt we'll see him on the field in 2007. It's a great story if it happens, but I'm just not banking on it.

The quarterback situation is not anything to be jumping up and down in joy about. Charlie Frye doesn't seem to have improved one iota from last year. But that puts him a few strides ahead of Derek Anderson, who has flat out stunk in the first few practices. Great arm...but no one has any idea where the ball is going to go. In one case, he rolled out, and threw a pass at least fifteen feet over the head of the wideout...and almost over the fence and into someone's back yard.

No Brady Quinn sightings. Frankly, no one seemed that upset about it. Everyone seems to be of the opinion that he'll sign in the next two to seven days, which will guarantee his survival by planting him on the bench for at least the first six games. Given that those six games include games against Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Cincinnati, and New England, it's probably best for Brady's health and psyche NOT to be in there getting killed during those first few games while the new and improved O-Line is gelling.

Who was that guy wearing number 17, and what did he do with the mouth known as Braylon Edwards? The guy I've seen out there seems determined, fluid, and destined for a break out year. The light looks to have gone on in Mr. Edwards head, and he's looking like the best WR we've seen wearing the orange helmets since Bernie was throwing the ball.

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I'm not optimistic about the thoughts of Travis Wilson or Tim Carter supplanting Joe Jurevicius as the #2 receiver, as neither impressed me that much. Perhaps it's just that Carter is wearing #86, and all I can see is Dennis Northrop and his hands of stone. Luckily, Joe J. is still the consummate pro, and could catch a BB while wearing a blindfold.

Welcome back, Kellen Winslow, from your brief stay on the PUP. A collective gasp went through the crowd at one point when his legs went out from under him...but he was fine. I was looking hard to see any noticeable limp from Kellen, and I just did see anything of concern. I know Romeo has said he'll sit out some practices, but so far he hasn't.

The humanization of Jamal Lewis has begun. As he was walking off the field after the Saturday morning session, someone in my group yelled out "Hey, Lewis!" When Jamal turned his head, my buddy yelled out "Baltimore SUCKS!", earning a huge smile from Jamal. Other than that, he's been all business, and looks to be in incredible shape. During one drill he blew right by Andra Davis, who probably went into convulsions due to the horrible memory of seeing the back of #31's jersey during so many awful games.

Jerome Harrison's reported weight gain is quite noticeable, which is a good thing, as he was so small last year you were afraid he'd get broken. He looks to have not sacrificed any speed or agility, so look to see a lot more of him on third downs this year...although unlike the Ratbirds of Baltimore, Chud seems determined to utilize Jamal out of the backfield on pass plays...something SuperOffensiveGenius Brian Billick was loathe to try.

Ted Washington still is the only man I know with his own gravity. But he looks to be still enthusiastic for the game and was quite animate in trying to coach up rookie Chase Pittman after he was flattened by Thomas. The biggest thing that will help Ted is the addition of Shaun Smith as his backup. Shaun looks to be up

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to the task.

I'm still a bit concerned about the defensive ends. Orpheus is still going to be solid, but his best years are behind him. I'm not sold at all yet on Robaire Smith, as he didn't have much luck against either Shaffer or Thomas.

As noted, Kamerion Wimbley is phenomenal. His speed is incredible to watch live, especially from about 20 feet away. Hopefully he won't be the only threat this year, and we see more improvement from the linebacking corps. One encouraging sight was that Willie McGinest seems to have a passion that I think might have been lacking last year. They really need him to step up his performance from last year, as I'm not sure the Browns want to count on Antwaan Peek or Matt Stewart this season.

I definitely have high hopes for the defensive backfield...assuming they stay healthy (never a wise assumption). Leigh Bodden, Sean Jones, and Brodney Poole continued to show the talent they exhibited last year. And now they've added Eric Wright to the mix, who I witnessed as a kid with tremendous ability, sticking right with his man in one-on-one coverage. Depth in the defensive backfield is a concern, however. I know Gary Baxter is due back at practice on Monday from his miraculous recovery from double patella tendon surgery, but I just can't see much from him this year. I'm really hoping for (a) continued health of the starting four, and (b) finding some good backups off the waiver wire later this year (and PLEASE...no Ralph Browns).

Wright did have his one moment in the limelight...which he probably didn't want. After signing his contract on Thursday, he was unable to make all his connecting flights to Cleveland in time to make it to Friday's practice (a common problem across the country due to all the thunderstorms Thursday night and Friday morning). So when the entire team lined up Saturday morning to do wind sprints, and Romeo blew his whistle, the entire team stayed at the line while Eric ran his by himself, to the hoots and cheers of 2,400 people at the session.

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Welcome to the NFL, kid.

It's been a good couple of days...and while I'm not fool enough to be thinking playoffs or anything like that (especially with what I see as a major weakness at QB), I will say that this is the most professional and dedicated I've seen the players and the coaching staff at the start of Training Camp...something that bodes well for the next several months.

Mr. Quinn? White Courtesy Phone!