

The Deal With The Defense

Written by {ga=jb}

Monday, October 22 2007 7:00 PM -

Heading into this season, I was with the majority of Browns fans in my belief that the defense was going to be pretty good ... and that the offense would continue to struggle. Well, here we are, seven weeks in, and the Browns are the 1998 Rams recreated. And the defense stinks to the high heavens. In his latest, Mansfield Lucas tries to decipher for us exactly what is wrong with the defense. And if they stand a chance of getting any better as we head into the holidays.



You know, as one who does the whole C-Town holy trinity of the Browns, the Tribe and the Cavs (not to mention the Buckeyes); it's a little challenging to think about the Browns on bye week in the wake of the Indians playoff exit. But we're going to give it a shot.

After the great extra inning ALCS game two thriller, complete with much nervous sipping and much post game revelry that went into the wee hours, and heading into *The Mother of All Tailgates* on almost no sleep and even less detox, I had to check out the game on the NFL Network's replay because I was pretty sure I was sauced and saw D'Qwell Jackson get his ass run over by Cleo Lemon for a touchdown. Well, I was ripped, but it was true. Their quarterback ran over out middle linebacker on the goal line with both squared up. Eddie Johnson just rolled over, God bless him and his.

I should just let it go. All is right with the C-Town sports world. Jobu slumbers, sated by the 151 rum of Pablus offered in copious amounts in Muni Lot last weekend that KO'd me. The Indians are on the cusp of yet another C-town

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Sisyphus-esque effort, ready to push the boulder over the top and break the hated "1948, 1964, Never" syndrome. The Buckeyes are incredibly ranked number one after filling up half the NFL draft. The Cavs stand ready to take the next, last step, and perhaps most incredibly after the 34 - 7 opening day debacle, the Cleveland Browns are 3 - 3 in the bye week. Maybe this week's column should be about lionizing that accomplishment heading into the soft, creamy center of the schedule and dedicated to eating crow for criticizing the brilliant Braylon Edwards, Phil Savage's plan, and the savant first year coordinator, Rob Chudzinski.

Averaging 32 points is simply an amazing feat for this collection of mostly new players and a new coordinator. It is an offense that should have us legitimately thinking wild card possibility. Except for the defense.

Aye carumba, what the heck happened there?

It is not pretty.

Third worst in the NFL in points allowed per game.

Last in the league in total points allowed

Second worst in yards per game.

Worst in first downs given up per game.

They've allowed the most plays from scrimmage per game.

Here's a bright spot: fourth worst in yards passing surrendered per game. Then again, why pass when you can rush for 150 yards per game, the third worst in the

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NFL.

Hey, at least we're consistent.

This is completely befuddling to Mansfield. I foolishly thought that the defense would carry the offense early this season. So I say to myself, "self, why do we suck so bad on defense?" And then I try to answer.

Is it the draft picks?

The Browns aren't blessed with a richness of middle career draft picks based on their futility since 1999 and the resulting too frequent regime change. We know the reasons for that. But the defense hasn't been completely ignored either. In the three drafts that Savage has had, here's who he netted:

2005

2nd round Brodney Pool

4th round Antonio Perkins

5th round David McMillain

6th round Nick Speegle

6th round Andrew "Keg" Hoffman

2006

1st round Kameron Wimbley

2nd round D'Qwell Jackson

4th round Leon Williams

5th round DeMario Minter

6th round Baba Oshinowo

7th round Justin Hamilton

2007

2nd round Eric Wright

**5th round Brandon
McDonald**

6th round Melila Purcell

7th round Chase Pittman

Now I am NOT going to be one of those guys who brings up opportunity cost with the draft such as why did we pick Leon Williams (or Ike Sowell) over home boy Barry Cofield, as

many of us questioned real-time. That's not really fair to play that game. But daaaaaang, I know we need to see what this year's project players do, but I'm still looking at half-dozen cuts, two good picks, and two probable first day busts based on what we've seen so far. And it

looks as if we've whiffed on every single day two project so far unless Leon Williams can translate the athleticism into some actual game. We just flat out haven't drafted well to either stock the defense with role players or take impact players who sustain quality play. Pool

and Jackson have been particularly disappointing. We lack a number one pick next year and have a question at the running back position this coming off season. Improving the talent on defense as a result of all these blown picks is going to be a challenge

even if the drafting
improves.

Is it the Free Agents?

I'm not sure I
completely understand
the free agent strategy,

other than it must be one of "let's get older". 2005 brought in Joe Andruzzi, Trent Dilfer, Jason Fisk, Ray Mickins and Bryan Russell. Not a single building block in the bunch. Hopes were high in 2006 when

LeCharles Bentley signed, but we know the rest of the star crossed story. Still, not a defensive signing. Willie McGinest and Ted Washington were supposed to come in and provide leadership and 3 - 4 know-how as well as fill in for a

couple solid years to help out. Ralph Browns was also added. I'll give McGinest more credit than most. He could have taken the money and skated with an injury. But he pushed himself back and while he's lost two steps and his production is a

shadow of what it was when he really was the Willie McGinest we're paying for, his positioning has been outstanding. Ted Washington is just plain done. Gary Baxter was a high priced signing of an average NFL player who would have helped

and would be a great option to sit down Pool, but his fate is also well-documented. This year's free agent signings of Antwan Peek, Mike Adams, Robaire Smith and Shaun Smith have added absolutely nothing. Most

disappointing to me has
been the play of the S
mith Brothers, who
have been far better
purveyors of cough
drops
than defensive linemen.
I really thought between
them and the now
one-legged Orpheus
Roye that we'd have a

collection of veteran starters worthy of rotating into a decent defensive line.

The bottom line is that while I admire the single mindedness by which Phil Savage has

addressed and obviously fixed the offensive line, partially by good free agent signings, every single defensive free agent signing has pretty much ranged for disappointing to disastrous. No real help at all has come via free

agency.

**It is the coaching
and scheme?**

Three years ago the
decision was made to
pull the plug on the
Butch Davis one-gap 4

- 3 defense and the heavy investment made on the defensive linemen and bite the bullet to go to the 3 - 4 before the players were here to play that scheme. Much was made of the arrival of Romeo Crennel and his defensive affiliation

with Bill Parcells and Bill Belichick. He is paired with a Dom Capers' student, Todd Grantham, and Dom was the co-architect of the zone blitzing "defense of the 90's" Pittsburgh scheme along with Bill Cowher. Todd

Grantham interviewed for the Michigan State job and his name was said by some to be on a short list of the next generation of young coordinators meriting head coaching consideration. I'm going to guess the words "cold

product" might be creeping into those same conversations.

The three year running partnership of these two distinct 3 - 4 styles of defense has so far yielded the sad litany of statistics appearing near the start of this piece. Truly, if anyone

has any idea
whatsoever whet this 3
- 4 defense is trying to
accomplish, please
break it down for us in
the boards

. I really have no idea.
It neither contains nor
pressures. It neither
blitzes nor fills gaps
well. The defensive

linemen getting blown
off the ball do not
disguise the
linebackers being way
out of position, and
when things do work
right, no one can
tackle worth a damn.
At some point, even
with this sad collection
of players that has

allegedly improved the overall talent level from that of Ben Taylor and Kevin Bentley - doubtful - you'd think two veteran NFL coaches who have their staff assistants intact and who have been running the same scheme for

three years now could
come up with
something they could
teach to scheme and
rotate their way into
the upper reaches of
sub-mediocrity. If
these two could
literally get anything
out of this bunch to the
point where we were

only giving up 21 points a game, we'd be a legitimate threat to win 9 or 10 games with Derek Anderson at the helm of the offense that has a new scheme, a new coordinator in his first year, a new staff of assistants, and six

new starters at their positions. I dare you to really think about that for a

[Lodi](#)

minute and explain how that is possible.

When I ask the three questions above and the answers I get are

"yes", "yes", and "yes", I just don't have a real good feeling about this. I am close to writing off Jackson and Pool as guys who are just lacking; one lacking in sufficient physicality, the other in feel for the

game. Andra Davis never took a step forward since his first game, and there's not a single bona fide NFL starter on the defensive line, and the two-deep rotation is just bad. We have an over the hill player getting by on guile at

one outside
linebacker, and two
talented athletes who
are unfortunately one
dimensional as the
other outside backers.

The whole front seven
will need a complete
overhaul except for
Wimbley, we need a

real free safety, and th
en
they need to learn how
to play whatever
scheme we are taking
over 3 seasons to
incorporate. I know I
am the classic
half-empty kind of fan,
but it is very, very
difficult to look at the

defense and be optimistic we are a bolt tightened there and a paint touch up here away from being ready for prime time.

I've always been a big fan of offensive football and games that are shootouts.

Looks like I've gotten
my wish.