

Fools Gold

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

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A victim of their own success so far, the Browns have an interesting decision brewing at the quarterback position. They gave up a lot to move up to select Brady Quinn this past April, yet Derek Anderson has come out of nowhere to potentially emerge as a long term solution at the most important position on the field. In Gary's latest, he reminds us that when Phil Savage drafted Quinn he did so believing that Quinn was a better long-term prospect than anyone else on the roster, and that included Anderson. Will Savage stick with that belief or become seduced by the one-year performance of Anderson?



There's nothing like a little success to screw things up.

The Cleveland Browns, to the surprise of everyone, find themselves sitting at 5-3 heading into their game with Pittsburgh and suddenly everyone is talking crazy. And for point of clarification, I refer not to any playoff talk. In reality, a relatively soft schedule in the second half, at least as compared to the first half of the season, make it a legitimate chance that the Browns can with nine or 10 games this season, either of which could be enough to get into the playoffs.

Instead, I refer to other crazy talk, particularly that surrounding the suddenly emerging problem of what to do with Brady Quinn. The answer of course is nothing.

On these pages here and elsewhere, the specter of having two young quarterbacks with talent is a submarine controversy that begs for resolution, if not now then soon for no better reason than the fact that some people can't stand a little uncertainty. Admittedly, given Derek Anderson's play during the first half of this season (emphasis on the first half), a situation is developing that is arguably

similar to that which the San Diego Chargers faced a few years ago when they traded their first round pick, Eli Manning, to the New York Giants for Philip Rivers and a handful of draft choices, only to see Drew Brees emerge as a legitimate NFL starter.

There is a column this week in [Pro Football Weekly](#) by Matt Sohn suggesting that the Browns trade Quinn if not now then as soon as the season wraps, in order to recoup first-round value. According to Sohn, at that point Quinn will still have enough mystique, coupled with a year in the NFL observing from the sidelines, to make him a more attractive acquisition for a quarterback-starved team than spending a first round pick on college players like BC's Matt Ryan, Louisville's Brian Brohm or Kentucky's Andre Woodson.

There is probably some logic in that, but only in the sense that Quinn was a legitimate first round pick this past season and is probably a better prospect than any of those three anyway, even if he were in the same draft class. There is probably some logic, too, in the notion that trading Quinn gives the Browns the opportunity to recoup the first round pick they spent to get him in the first place.

But either of those are only points in what is surely a healthy point/counterpoint argument. What doesn't seem to get mentioned these days in this debate are some of the more obvious arguments against trading Quinn now or anytime soon, and by anytime I mean even going into next season.

In the first place, as well as Anderson has played, and he has played well, let's let him get a full season under his belt. In fact, let's let him get two full seasons under his belt before we start comparing it to the situation the Chargers faced. Instead, there are better examples anyway. I hate to bring up the specter of Scott Mitchell but do so only to damper premature enthusiasm with a solid reality check.

Mitchell, like Anderson, was big quarterback (6-6, 230 pounds) with a strong arm from a team, Utah, not necessarily noted as a pipeline of NFL talent. He was

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drafted in 1990 in the fourth round by Miami (Anderson was a 6th round pick of Baltimore). After seeing limited action in his first two seasons, he played most of 13 games in 1993, his free agent year, when Dan Marino was injured. All Mitchell did was come in and light it up, completing 57% of his passes, throwing 12 touchdowns and getting intercepted eight times. Browns fans may recall Mitchell leading the Dolphins to a 24-14 victory of the Bill Belichick-coached Browns that year.

Mitchell led the Dolphins to a 9-7 record, but missed the playoffs due mostly to a late-season collapse that saw the team lose their last five games. But prior to that collapse, Mitchell was certainly the feel-good story of the league even to the point where some were speculating that perhaps the Dolphins should re-sign Mitchell and let Marino, who was already in his 11th season, finish his career elsewhere. Again, sound familiar?

But Dolphins head coach Don Shula didn't get to the Hall of Fame by being stupid or getting carried away by fool's gold. He rightly surmised that Marino had some gas left in the tank. Marino returned the following season and all he did was earn another Pro Bowl berth. In fact, Marino played for another five seasons thereafter.

As for Mitchell, he did the whole star-turn thing by exploiting his free agency status in the off-season. The Detroit Lions bit and signed Mitchell. By Lions standards, it wasn't a disastrous signing by any stretch, but Mitchell proved merely serviceable, not phenomenal. His best year was 1995 when he led the Lions

to the playoffs, aided greatly by an offense that featured Barry Sanders and Herman Moore. Still, Mitchell was a big part of the story completing 59% of his passes for 4338 yards, 32 touchdowns and only 12 interceptions. It sounds like the kind of season Anderson his having for the Browns this year.

The rest of the story with Mitchell is that his career was basically average, at best. Other than the two breakout seasons, 1993 and 1995, there isn't much to distinguish him from any other quarterback who has kicked around the league for 10 years. In fact, he really only was a starter for four seasons, one of which was due to the aforementioned Marino injury. After being replaced by Charlie Batch (another mediocre quarterback) in 1998, he spent one season in Baltimore and two in Cincinnati before retiring. By the way, he only outlasted Marino by two years and those two years was as a back-up in Cincinnati.

This isn't to necessarily suggest that Anderson is the next Mitchell as much as it is to suggest that short-term success in the NFL doesn't necessarily guarantee anything. Mitchell in 1993 looked to be every bit the real deal as does Anderson in 2007. Even in Detroit, Mitchell wasn't a major disappointment for a few seasons, but neither did he ever fully deliver on the promise of his potential.

Meanwhile, in New Orleans and San Diego where the Rivers/Brees drama continues to unfold, there is still not enough evidence to suggest who got the better end of that deal. Brees played well last season, but is struggling a bit this season. The same goes for Rivers. It may be that in the end both quarterbacks end up being closer to Mitchell than Marino, meaning that the self-created controversy would have been much ado about not much at all.

All this really does is underscore that even assuming Anderson continues to play at the same high level throughout the rest of the season, it will still be too early to tell about the future. The problem, of course, is that like Mitchell in 1993, Anderson is a free agent at the end of this season, forcing the Browns to make a decision before they'd like.

Undoubtedly, GM Phil Savage probably wishes now that Anderson was signed for a few more years but that's just not the case. And just as undoubtedly Anderson's agent will be shopping the quarterback based on the strength of his play this year and getting more than a few teams interested, particularly the way the quarterback situation has played out in the NFL this season.

The question facing Savage is thus the same that faced by the Dolphins. When Savage drafted Quinn he did so believing that

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Quinn was a better long-term prospect than anyone else on the roster, and that included Anderson. Will Savage stick with that belief or become seduced by the one-year performance of Anderson? These are difficult decisions, but whichever direction he goes, Savage does so knowing that the final chapter on this story is still years away from being written.