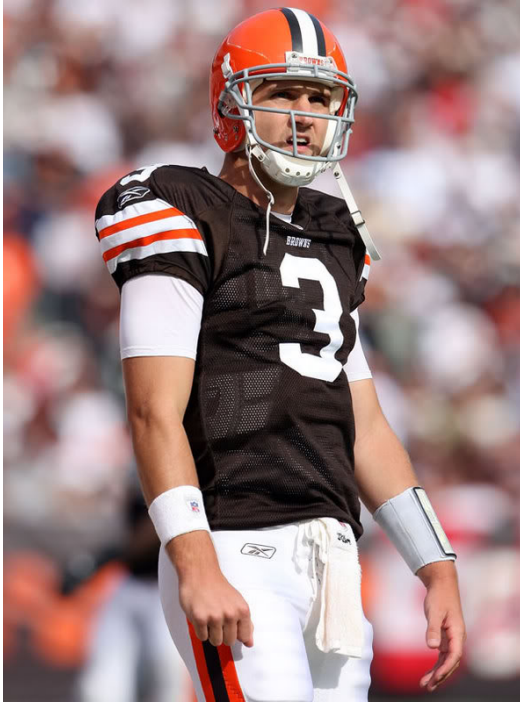


A Tale of Two Emotions

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Saturday, March 01 2008 7:00 PM -

All in the matter of one days time, Phil Savage went from saying publically that Derek Anderson would likely not be back, to then signing him to a three year deal with over 10 million dollars in guaranteed money. On the flip side, Brady Quinn went from thinking he'd be this teams starter, to again being the backup, with no clear time table on when he may take the reigns here in Cleveland. It's a tale of two emotions, and Gary Benz tells it to us in his latest effort.



If Browns quarterback Derek Anderson had one of the more down and then up days of his young life on Friday, then the Browns other quarterback, Brady Quinn, had one of the more up and then down days of his young life at about roughly the same time.

As most know by now, when the NFL's version of free agency officially opened for business at 12:01 AM Friday morning, Anderson was slated for a one-year tender offer as a restricted free agent. His agents and Browns general manager Phil Savage were unable to agree, prior to the deadline, on the amount of guaranteed money that would be coming Anderson's way over the next three years.

Savage then prepped the media by announcing that negotiations had failed and that the Browns would now turn their attention to developing Quinn more quickly, given Anderson's status. It wasn't entirely clear if Savage felt that Anderson might find another team to bite at a longer term contract and thus part with a first and third round pick in the process, but he had clearly resigned himself to that

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possibility, even discussing the extra salary cap room he now had and what he'd do with it.

But something else Savage said in that initial press conference was probably much more meaningful to the events that transpired just a few hours later. When asked if the Browns would consider trading Anderson for something less than a first and third round pick as a way of facilitating his exit, Savage, a straight and impassioned shooter if ever there was one, made it clear he would not. This had two intended effects: it sent a message to other teams not to even bother with any such proposals and it greatly limited the maneuverability of Anderson's agents.

It's quite possible, indeed pretty likely, that Anderson's agents could have worked a longer term deal with potentially more guaranteed money from another team, but not at the additional price of a first and third round pick to the Browns. Savage's other moves on Friday notwithstanding, most general managers value draft picks more than they value members of their own families.

Savage's strategy, intended or otherwise, worked. The parties got together rather quickly and created what they felt was a win-win situation for everyone, everyone that is except Quinn and the whole boatload of fans that remain unconvinced of Anderson's long-term value. The assembled media, having just been told about all the advantages that not signing Anderson had presented now were being told that this is what the Browns really wanted to do all along.

In a strange way, it's probably true. Early on in the negotiations, it was clear that Savage wanted to retain Anderson, but did not necessarily feel that his breakout season warranted the kind of commitment the Dallas Cowboys made to Tony Romo. Anderson had one of the better seasons any quarterback has had in Cleveland Browns history, but he's still just a one-year wonder. On close examination, there was enough inconsistency in Anderson's play, despite his production, to rightly give Savage a reason to not completely trash the investment he made in Quinn.

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The guess, too, is that Anderson's agents were more or less finding out the same thing around the league. One good year is great, now show me something. As a result, they probably had no real choice but to work something out with the Browns along the lines that Savage initially outlined.

For Anderson, re-signing with the Browns was a pretty low-risk gamble. As Savage noted, the kind of guaranteed money they are paying Anderson assures that he heads into next season as the clear number one quarterback. Consequently, he doesn't have to go through one of head coach Romeo Crennel's so-called open competitions that only ensure that no quarterback will be ready by the first game.

That should give Anderson the breathing space to find his rhythm in training camp without worrying that he's one bad pass from being benched. It also helps that Anderson now has a good understanding of a system that was new to him last year. But probably the biggest benefit for everyone concerned is that Anderson gets to prove his worth behind one of the league's better offensive lines and with enough skill players surrounding him so that he doesn't feel compelled to do more than he's capable. It's a far better situation than almost any other that was available to him in free agency. It also increases the likelihood of Anderson having another solid season to the point that his trade value next year might be even higher.

But the high upon which Anderson ended the day likely paled in comparison to what Quinn was probably feeling. At 7 AM Friday morning, Quinn was thinking he was going to get a legitimate chance to start next season. By 11 AM Quinn found himself pretty much in the same position he was in at the end of the season-holding a clipboard and waiting for Anderson to fail or get injured. This can't be at all what he imagined as his future just one year ago.

In large measure though, Anderson's fortunes and Quinn's status have a common thread: Quinn's agent Tom Condon. The best break that Anderson got was Condon's intransigence last summer during negotiations with the Browns. It

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completely changed the calculus that Savage and Crennel thought they'd be solving entering into training camp.

Instead of a situation where Quinn would be part of the mix from the outset, Crennel and company were left with only Anderson and Charlie Frye to evaluate. Though neither quarterback acquitted themselves particularly well, Anderson at least got the chance to demonstrate an ability to make decisions quickly, a skill Frye simply doesn't have. Anderson also showcased an exceptionally strong, though not always accurate, arm. These two attributes convinced at least offensive coordinator Rob Chudzinski that the Browns needed to keep Anderson around, even if he wasn't going to be the starter.

If Condon hadn't forced a holdout by trying to leverage the fact that the Browns gave up a number one pick in 2008 to get Quinn as a reason to pay Quinn well in excess of what his draft status (#22 overall) dictated, it's likely that a contract could have gotten done before training camp started. Had that occurred, both Anderson's and Frye's reps would have been significantly reduced in favor of Quinn. Given that Frye was the putative starter heading into training camp, it was Anderson who really would have suffered the most.

As it was, Quinn ended up signing the kind of deal that he could have had early on, a point Savage highlighted when Quinn did sign. That 11 days and 16 practices Quinn missed has now proven more costly to than he ever could have imagined. It's also proven to be more lucrative for Anderson than he had a right to imagine.

Now it looks like Quinn's chance is at least another season away. There's no reason to doubt Savage when he said on Friday that he had no intention of trading Anderson this year. There's likewise no reason to doubt Savage when he said, rather definitively, that Anderson is the starter.

Quinn's entrée into the NFL has hardly been a smooth one, from the fiasco that

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was draft day, to the unnecessary holdout, and now to the Browns near-term commitment to Anderson. But if Quinn is the type of player that Savage and the fans now bemoaning the resigning of Anderson think he is, then Quinn will be stronger for the experience. That being the case, then the Browns really are set at quarterback for the foreseeable future.