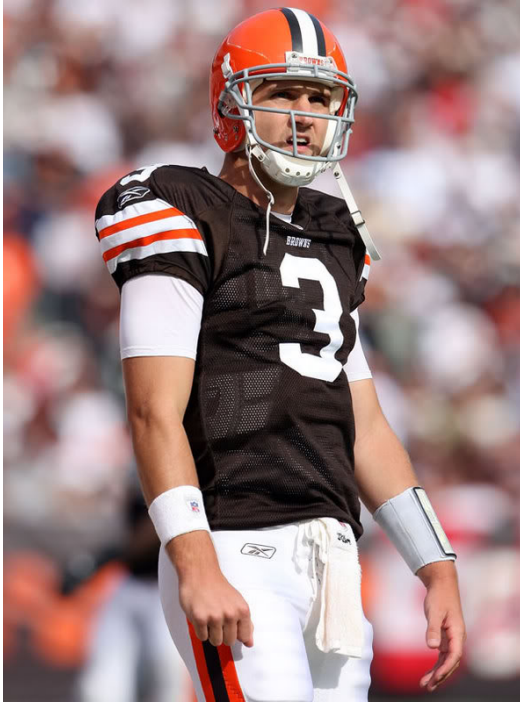


What Was Anderson Thinking?

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Saturday, March 08 2008 7:00 PM -

When Ben Roethlisberger re-signed with the Pittsburgh Steelers earlier this week, it wasn't hard to figure why. An eight-year, \$102 million offer that included a \$25 million upfront signing bonus is a pretty compelling reason. Harder to figure, instead, is why Derek Anderson re-signed with the Cleveland Browns. In this excellent piece by Gary, he makes a good argument as to why DA was foolish to reup in CTown.



When Ben Roethlisberger re-signed with the Pittsburgh Steelers earlier this week, it wasn't hard to figure why. An eight-year, \$102 million offer that included a \$25 million upfront signing bonus is a pretty compelling reason. Harder to figure, instead, is why Derek Anderson re-signed with the Cleveland Browns.

To this point, the debate around Anderson has followed the familiar rubric. Tony Lastoria did a [nice job](#) of breaking down the typical debate, arguing effectively that Browns general manager Phil Savage may have jumped too soon based on what amounted to one really good half season by Anderson. As Lastoria noted, but for a handful of games when Anderson really made his mark, the rest of the season was pretty average. There is any number of people ready to counter Lastoria's view, just check Boards at [The Cleveland Fan](#) or the various Ricks from Brunswick that call the local talk shows for a few of them.

But instead of focusing on Savage's motivation, focus instead on the issue from

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Anderson's perspective. No matter how much Savage may have wanted Anderson back, it takes two to make a deal and the Browns weren't necessarily the most logical choice for Anderson for any number of reasons.

In the first place, the Browns are hardly in need of a quarterback. Brady Quinn is chomping at the bit in the bull pen and the Browns paid heavily to get him last season. And until he actually demonstrates otherwise, Quinn will remain more popular than his accomplishments dictate and probably more popular than Anderson. Thus every time Anderson throws an interception or misses an open receiver, at least half of Cleveland Browns Stadium will be yelling for Quinn. It's not much of a comfort zone for Anderson to occupy.

Second, and related, there are several teams throughout the league far more desperate for his services. Do you think that more than a minute goes by each day before Baltimore Ravens general manager Ozzie Newsome slaps himself on the side of his head over letting Anderson get away? Do you think Atlanta, with Chris Redman and D.J. Shockley as the only two quarterbacks on their roster, might see Anderson as a better choice than say Joey Harrington, who they just cut? Do you think Bill Parcells really believes that Josh McCown and John Beckett are the answers in Miami? Do you really want me to go through this same drill with every team in need of a quarterback?

Third, whatever Savage might have said about wanting to sign Anderson, he also said plenty by only offering a three-year deal. That gesture spoke volumes about Savage's long-term commitment to Anderson, irrespective of what the salary and guaranteed money might be in the final deal. Thus, on the surface, it was at least as compelling, if not more so, for Anderson to leave than stay. Yet stay he did.

It could be that the answer is as simple as Anderson not having any other effective choices. He was a restricted free agent and the Browns tender offer put them in line for a first and a third round pick as compensation and many teams may have thought that was simply too steep of a price, especially when you consider that it also would have been necessary to sign him to a contract of at

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least twice the value as the three-year deal he signed with the Browns. Throw in the fact that Savage made it clear he would take nothing less than the contractually-required compensation for Anderson in a trade and you could understand why some general managers around the league, who usually are far better at finding reasons not to do something than to do it, had to be scared witless.

Even still, as risk adverse as most general managers tend to be, more than a few had to be giving Anderson second and third thoughts. Filling the quarterback slot isn't easy. Indeed, it's exactly why Roethlisberger got the richest contract in Steelers history, which will never be the same thing as getting the richest contract, say, in Yankees history.

The other thing is that wherever you may be on the whole Anderson talent debate, what isn't in dispute is that Anderson is a slinger with a quick release. That's another way of saying that he makes up his mind quickly and commits to that decision, good, bad, or indifferent. Fans tend to focus on the mistakes that can follow from such traits without ever appreciating how valued this skill is by folks like Savage and virtually every NFL general manager and head coach.

The margin for error in any pro sport is razor thin. In baseball, a quarter-inch difference on where a ball is struck on a bat makes the difference between a routine fly ball and a home run. In football, a fraction of a second on when a ball is thrown often determines whether it's caught or intercepted. With coaches looking for every conceivable edge they can, they'll always give the quarterback who thinks and reacts more quickly the benefit of the doubt. It's why Anderson remained on the team despite a very mediocre preseason.

Thus while his steep price was certainly a hurdle of some height that gave many teams pause to make the jump, the real answer to why Anderson stayed may lie less in the lack of choices he had and more with the foresight of a young quarterback who saw himself in the exact right situation at the exact right time.

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The same things that the anti-Anderson camp sees as the reason not to get too excited about him may be the exact same things Anderson sees as the basis for staying, and that starts with a good offensive line. The impact of Savage's rebuilding efforts cannot be overstated. Show me a team in need of a quarterback and I'll show you a team with a lousy offensive line.

It helps, certainly, to have talented running backs and receivers, but the one thing a quarterback understands is that a good offensive line covers up a lot of sins. Anderson knows that if he stays here and plays behind this Browns offensive line he has a real chance to put up monster numbers for at least another season, perhaps more, making him an even more attractive free agent when he'll only be 28 years of age, assuming he plays out all three years of his contract. Anderson didn't spend much time picking himself off of the turf last season and as long as the offensive line remains relatively injury-free, he isn't likely to spend much time on his back next season either.

Anderson may certainly have preferred a longer deal with the Browns than the one he got, but considering the alternatives out there, Anderson had to figure that his long-term financial prospects were likely better with a shorter term deal now on a team with a great offensive line. With word that Anderson's guaranteed money isn't all up front but spread over all three years, including a sizeable roster bonus next season, both Anderson and the Browns have created a contract situation that would allow him to thrive here for one more season and cash in elsewhere next season if Savage decides he prefers Quinn. In other words, Savage's lack of commitment is also to Anderson's advantage.

The wild card in all of this is Quinn. It's highly unlikely that his presence on the roster made much of a difference in Anderson's overall evaluation, but it would be foolish for him to ignore Quinn all together.

Not only does Quinn have the aforementioned advantage of being popular without having actually accomplished anything, but the coaching staff too knows that the Browns commitment to Anderson doesn't necessarily run all that deep, particularly

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given the kind of contract Anderson signed. Quinn sees the same thing. Anderson showed last year in preseason that he doesn't respond well to internal competition, but this time his adversary is a quarterback with a much better pedigree.

Anderson didn't necessarily make a wrong decision in re-signing with the Browns. In fact, it benefits him in more ways than not. But the tendency he has on the field to make quick decisions seems to have carried over to one of the more important off-the-field decisions he'll have to make. But where he gets a second chance on the next play to hit that receiver he just overthrew, the second chance he might need to really cash in could be years away, if at all.