

Training camp commences out in Berea this morning, and as the Browns start to ready themselves for the season opener, they do so without a key contributing member of last year's high-octane passing attack. Wide receiver Joe Jurevicius is likely to miss not just all of training camp, but also the first 6 games of the regular season, at a minimum, after the club announced he will be placed on the PUP list following yet another knee surgery and resultant staph infection during the off season. Peeker talks about the loss of Joe J in his latest for us.



"Hey, psycho - we're not gonna discuss this, OK, its over. Please get out of my Van Halen t-shirt before you jinx the band and they break up ."

- Robbie Gould (Adam Sandler) in 'The Wedding Singer'

My wife just had to have that Joe Jurevicius game jersey. I hope she's content with what she's wrought.

The Browns head into the 2008 season with expectations higher than they have been since the club came back as an expansion team in 1999. They face a killer schedule as well as those lofty expectations and they've worked long and hard and put in a lot of effort to build a team that can compete with anybody in the NFL every week.

Yet as they prepare for the start of training camp they do so without a key contributing member of last year's high-octane passing attack. Wide receiver Joe Jurevicius is likely to miss not just all of training camp, but also the first 6 games of the regular season, at a minimum, after the club announced he will be placed on the Physically Unable to Perform (PUP) list following yet another knee surgery and resultant staph infection during the off season.

In years past there were plenty of staff issues to debate; Butch Davis, Chris Palmer, Carmen Policy, Pete Garcia, and so on. But *these staph issues* are having just as much an adverse affect on the current Browns as the mistakes of Palmer, Davis and Policy ever had. That's a story for another day. What we know today is that an important weapon has been removed from the Browns arsenal before a meaningful snap has been taken in the 2008 season.

Some will debate just how important a weapon Jurevicius is for the Browns. He is, after all, a third receiver on a club that now boasts Braylon Edwards, Donte Stallworth and Kellen Winslow as targets for second year starter Derek Anderson. And newcomer Martin Rucker is also expected to be a contributor out of the TE spot after being drafted out of Missouri with a fourth round pick.

But before we minimize the importance and impact of a third receiver it might be beneficial to reflect upon the season that Jurevicius put together last season.

In the '07 season JJ caught 50 passes out of that third receiver spot for 614 yards and three touchdowns. Certainly not Randy Moss or even Wes Welker numbers, but impressive in their own right. Now look deeper. Of the 50 balls Jurevicius hauled in, an impressive 34 of those receptions were good for first downs. 22 of those 34 first down receptions came on third down plays, a number that was good for fifth in the league and a number that was equal to or greater than players like Welker, Edwards, Winslow, Larry Fitzgerald, Hines Ward, Antonio Gates, Chad Johnson and many others.

Jurevicius kept the chains moving for the Browns offense and helped extend some drives that ended in points while also keeping a leaky defense off the field, if only momentarily, a couple times every game.

JJ became a 'go-to' guy for Anderson in third down situations and when Edwards and Winslow either weren't on the field or weren't open (and despite Winslow's contentions otherwise, that occasionally did occur). And why not? He's a 6' 5" 230lb veteran of three Super Bowls (Giants, Buccaneers and Seahawks) who demonstrated the ability to work himself free as well as possessing the gift of some great hands. The man knows how to work in tight spaces and get open. And when he does he makes catches, makes plays and gains critical yards. He simply had to be accounted for on the field which helped create match up problems for opposing defenses and certainly contributed to the numbers that Winslow, Edwards and Anderson put up.

Jurevicius is also a presence in the locker room and in the community, this community especially. Three Super Bowl appearances has some cache in the locker room and Jurevicius has been a quiet leader in his two seasons with the Browns. Being a local product and a graduate of Lake Catholic High School endears him to the 70,000+ who fill the seats at CBS every Sunday.

That combination of size, experience and ability are not easily replaced and the Browns are likely to try and do just that with Travis Wilson and/or Kevin Kasper.

Wilson is entering his 3rd season with the Browns and has been, to say the least, a huge disappointment since being drafted out of Oklahoma in the third round of the 2006 draft. The 6' 1" Wilson has all of two catches in his professional career and easily has twice as many drops in that limited time.

Kasper was a 6th round pick in 2001 by the Denver Broncos and he brings 24 **career** receptions to the table. He does share something in common with Hall of Fame Receiver Jerry Rice though: neither of them has caught a single NFL pass in the last three seasons. In fact, Kasper hasn't caught an NFL pass in 4 years. Kasper

is listed at 6-feet tall, roughly one foot for every time he's been released from an NFL squad.

None of the potential replacements for Jurevicius bring similar size to the table. And with the occasionally erratic Anderson (and Charlie Frye before him) under center it wasn't just a luxury to have the 6' 3" Edwards, the 6' 4" Winslow, the 6' 5" Steve Heiden and the 6' 5" Jurevicius on the receiving end of some of those throws. It was a necessity. Perhaps bigger WRs like rookie Paul Hubbard and/or Steve Sanders develop this season into a target for Anderson but the jury is still out on each of those two players.

The point isn't to completely trash the players the Browns will look at to replace Jurevicius's production on the field. It's more or less a warning shot that the Browns are going into 2008 missing a key, if unheralded, component of their offense from last season. Anderson also heads into 2008 without his favorite life preserver and safety valve. That puts a bit of added pressure on a young QB who didn't always make the best decisions last season.

Hopefully Anderson has grown from the experience gained last year. Hopefully Jamal Lewis keeps the heat off DA by grinding out 1400 yards. Hopefully a few of the players getting an opportunity while Jurevicius is out step up and answer the bell.

Hopefully the defense is improved enough to take some of the pressure off of the offense.

The Browns are going to need damn near all of that to improve upon last season because their schedule looks to be hell and they will not slip past any opponent unnoticed. And hopefully #84 gets healthy enough to get back out onto the field and contribute in the second half of the season.

You certainly don't want a roster full of possession receivers like Jurevicius. But we may soon appreciate even more just how much of a luxury it is to have one that is simply money in the bank. One that just catches everything thrown his way and keeps moving the chains.