

Lingering Items - Cowboys Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Thursday, September 11 2008 7:00 PM -

If you're looking for a poster child to sum up the Cleveland Browns' effort last week against Dallas look no further than wide receiver Braylon Edwards says Gary in this weeks Lingering Items. Gary thinks Braylon has gotten caught up a little too much in his own hype, and talks about that as well as Romeo's explanation about the lack of a pass rush and also the rash of high profile injuries that swept through the NFL in week one.



If you're looking for a poster child to sum up the Cleveland Browns' effort last week against Dallas look no further than wide receiver Braylon Edwards. As I said after the game and maintain to this day, it's hard to lay much blame for the loss on the offense.

So in that sense singling out a member of the offense is an odd choice.

Yet, Edwards still meets my criteria for the perfect metaphor for that game: he's fallen so much in love with his own hype that actual performance has become an after thought.

Edwards is a great receiver, just ask him. But on Sunday he was anything but great, just like a lot of his teammates.

On the Wednesday before the Dallas game,

[Edwards was pretty definitive](#)

in saying that timing between he and quarterback Derek Anderson wouldn't be a problem, despite both missing most of the preseason.

He said they had a great week of practice and that, well, everything was just swell.

After the game, a game in which Edwards had as many penalties as catches (two), things weren't so swell. Edwards said he wouldn't make excuses for his

performance and then proceeded to do nothing but.

Essentially, and with no sense of irony, he blamed it on a lack of timing, owing to the fact that he and other starters missed a good deal of the preseason.

Of course, Edwards contributed greatly to that issue by missing those games because of an injury he suffered while horsing around with fellow receiver Donte' Stallworth, but introspection of that sort isn't necessarily Edwards' strong suit anyway.

Perhaps Edwards has since recognized the inconsistency of his competing views on the matter, [telling those in attendance](#) at a Yahoo.com function on Tuesday that really his poor play was the result of a relentless pursuit of perfection, to borrow a phrase. According to Edwards, "the biggest thing about that game was that I was trying to do too much." A

It was my first game back and I was trying to show everyone I was healthy, and I was trying to overcompensate a little bit for Donte [Stallworth] not being there....I played real uptight in trying to make every play a spectacular play. I played outside myself, and as a result, I didn't have a good game. It was a good lesson, a humbling before Pittsburgh comes to town."

So timing wouldn't be a problem until it was but it really wasn't because poor play was not an act of omission but commission. Whatever. About the only thing you can really take to the bank is that the next time Edwards feels humbled about anything will be the first time.

The Browns will win far more games with Edwards just making a boat load of ordinary catches each week than they will with Edwards self-absorption with coming across as the world's most spectacular receiver. The difference between good and great is not the occasional eye-popping play but the ability to be counted on time and again to make every routine play as well. It's why Joe Jurevicius' absence is so glaring.

The failure to catch key passes in your hands isn't a timing issue or a function of trying to do too much.

It's a lack of attention and concentration.

Each of the four balls Edwards dropped was in his hands.

Catching any of those required no special effort, only the attention to the mundane detail necessary to perform at a professional level.

And that's really the story of the game, from head coach Romeo Crennel on down and in every direction out. The Browns probably don't have enough talent to match up with the Cowboys, but that should never excuse a lack of preparation, concentration or effort.

The result of that game may not have been any different even if Edwards, for example, holds on to those passes.

But by believing paying more attention to their press clippings than their preparation, Edwards and his teammates made the team worse, not better.

The injuries to New England Patriots' quarterback Tom Brady, San Diego Chargers' linebacker Shawne Merriman, and Tennessee Titans' quarterback Vince Young, may be high profile, but all they really do is illustrate that the Browns are hardly alone when it comes to injuries. In fact, virtually every team is suffering the loss or diminution of one or two key contributors due to injuries and it's only the first week of the season.

What this also illustrates is that making the playoffs isn't necessarily a function of the quality of a team's starters, but of its depth. The guys who often get you to the playoffs in January are the second-tier players signed to fill out the team during the previous off season.

Certainly the fact that the Browns or any other team are suffering injuries isn't news. And as much as the NFL hierarchy will wring their hands over the loss of Brady, they know there isn't much that can be done about it. In the first place,

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football is a violent sport. Its main feature is bodies crashing into one another, sometimes at high rates of speed. When you couple that with the fact that those bodies are superbly conditioned athletes that are stronger and faster than ever as a result of increasingly sophisticated year round training, you begin to realize that injuries will happen.

The reason this seems to affect the Browns more than others is that Browns' general manager Phil Savage has had his hands full just trying to field a legitimate group of starting players on both sides of the ball. He simply hasn't had enough time to devote to upgrading the depth necessary to mitigate the impact of the inevitable injuries to the starters.

The defensive secondary is the most glaring example. The news on Wednesday that safety Sean Jones will undergo knee surgery is just the latest blow to a unit that lacked quality starters, let alone quality back ups.

It also highlights how dreadful the depth situation on this team really is.

Behind Jones and Brodney Pool, who may or may not return on Sunday, are Mike Adams and Nick Sorenson.

If you're starting to think that even former Pittsburgh Steelers' quarterback Tommy Maddox could exploit that situation on Sunday, let alone Ben Roethlisberger, you're not alone.

The pressure this puts on the defensive line is bigger than the combined yearly grocery bills for Shaun Rogers and Corey Williams.

Crennel says that the Browns are also out looking for additional safety help. That's comforting.

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You had to love Crennel's honest if incomplete explanation of why his team essentially put no pressure on Cowboys' quarterback Tony Romo on Sunday. Crennel said that they were dropping as many bodies into coverage as possible because of the weakness of the secondary and the strength of the Dallas receivers.

When they found that this scheme gave Romo enough time to learn French and still move the team down field, they decided to run more bodies at him.

That worked better but only in the sense that a category 2 hurricane is better than a category 3.

Left out of the explanation was why the defensive line had so much trouble putting any pressure on Romo in the first place. Dallas has a good offensive line, certainly, but shouldn't the Browns' defensive line made them at least break a sweat on Sunday? Ah, another problem for another day I suppose.

This week's question to ponder: If the Browns are 2-2 after their first four games, does it matter how they got there?