

It's still early, but Erik Cassano doesn't like the direction in which Braylon Edwards' season is heading. Last year, the Browns receiver with All-World talent appeared to turn the corner toward not just Pro Bowl performance, but a noticeable increase in maturity. But as the NFL season enters its second week, Erik is beginning to wonder if he overestimated the guy. In 2008, Kid Braylon appears to have returned.



It's still early, but I don't like the direction in which Braylon Edwards' season is heading.

Last year, the Browns receiver with All-World talent appeared to turn the corner toward not just Pro Bowl performance, but a noticeable increase in maturity. Sure, he pulled a Dwayne Rudd in St. Louis, yanking off his helmet in celebration and drawing a 15-yard unsportsmanlike conduct penalty. But overall, he stopped flapping his gums and starting catching the balls that a No. 1 receiver is supposed to catch.

The hookup between Edwards and Derek Anderson became arguably the most dangerous weapon in the Browns' offensive arsenal, and one of the best highlight-producers in the NFL. Defenses constantly had to watch over their collective shoulder because a bomb to Edwards could come anytime, anyplace. It was the football equivalent of watching Cliff Lee morph from a paint-by-numbers pitcher to a mound artist who can throw any pitch at any time and get a hitter out.

When I looked forward to the '08 season, the beauty and efficiency of Edwards' game was one of the items I circled. Even though Edwards played for That State

Up North in college, any guy who can turn a 40-yard sideline route into must-see TV is OK in my book.

But as the NFL season enters its second week, I'm beginning to wonder if I overestimated the guy. In 2008, Kid Braylon appears to have returned.

It's 100 times worse than Kid LeBron, from "The LeBrons" Nike advertising campaign of the past several years. Kid LeBron shows up to a Cleveland sporting event to root for the other team. Kid Braylon gets stabbed in the foot by his teammate's cleats while horsing around in his stocking feet and misses most of the preseason. Kid Braylon wonders aloud if LeBron, the most important athlete in Ohio, even wants to play here. Kid Braylon lets catchable balls smack off his palms and fall harmlessly to the turf.

Kid Braylon is not the type of guy you want to build a team around. Kid Braylon causes headaches for his team's GM, coach and quarterback.

Most of the problems Kid Braylon causes are the result of doing first and thinking second. Though post-practice sprints are a part of the ritual for football teams at all levels, and it's understandable that a player might want to give his heavily-taped feet some relief by removing his shoes at the end of practice, running in your stocking feet in close proximity to a teammate who is running in sharp cleats would fall under the lesson you likely learned in kindergarten about not running with scissors. It's common sense. Coaches shouldn't have to monitor these types of things.

But Kid Braylon didn't weigh the consequences. And Donte' Stallworth's cleat clipped the back of his foot, opening a gash that required stitches and forced Edwards to miss the final three preseason games.

As a result, Edwards wasn't in anything remotely resembling game shape against Dallas. Huffing and puffing after long runs, it became apparent that he was expending so much energy just running his routes that he had nothing left to make a play once the ball arrived. Edwards' drops played a big part in short-circuiting what could have been a productive first quarter for the Browns. Instead of an entertaining shootout between two good offensive teams, the Browns offense became impotent without the big-play threat of Edwards, and the game became a blowout.

It's not fair to pin all the blame for the loss on Edwards. Stallworth sat out as well, and it looks like the lack of Joe Jurevicius as a short-yardage safety valve for Anderson is going to hurt the Browns every week. But Edwards' inability to do what he's paid millions to do -- catch the damn ball -- hurt the Browns as much as anything. And it can all be traced back to one act of indiscretion a month ago.

With that humiliation fresh on his mind, a mature star football player would keep his mouth shut and work twice as hard. Maybe Edwards did work twice as hard this week to try and make sure he's ready for the Steelers. But the "shut up" part ... not so much.

Already not in the good graces of Cleveland fans, Kid Braylon opened his monstrous yap on Tuesday during a personal appearance and gave his thoughts on LeBron's appearance at Cleveland Browns Stadium on Sunday to cheer on his beloved Cowboys:

"[James is] a guy from Akron who likes everybody but his hometown," Edwards [was quoted](#) by The Plain Dealer's Terry Pluto as saying. "LeBron isn't a Cleveland guy. LeBron only plays for the Cavaliers, and who knows if he even likes the Cavaliers?"

In Cleveland, where we are routinely subjected to national media rumors and articles concerning LeBron's supposed desire to bolt for the Knicks or Nets in two years, them's fightin' words. Especially coming from one of our own players.

Edwards considers LeBron a friend. He claims to have gotten to know him over the past couple of years. Though Edwards almost certainly is closer to LeBron than you or I, there is no evidence that Edwards has earned a spot in LeBron's highly-protected inner sanctum. So for him to speculate that LeBron might not like playing here would seem to be an act that needlessly irritates an already-exposed nerve among Northeast Ohio sports fans. Without considering that LeBron's fans are also his fans, Kid Braylon again did something without considering the consequences.

In Edwards' defense, it is easy to understand the nature of his comments. He, like a lot of area fans, was probably hurt by the fact that the most famous and influential athlete in the state, maybe the country, a man born and raised in Akron and playing for the Cavaliers, would show up and side with the enemy on a day when the Browns could have used all the support available.

Bob Feller made comments similar in nature last October. In response to LeBron's appearance at Game 1 of the Indians-Yankees series, Feller said he'd like to buy a Pistons hat and sit behind the Cavs bench to see how LeBron likes it.

The difference, of course, is that Feller has been retired as a player for more than 50 years. Edwards is an active player who we root for on a weekly basis. Feller also didn't insinuate that LeBron wants out of Cleveland, though you get the feeling that after that game, Feller probably would have gladly driven the car that took LeBron to the airport.

On the heels of an embarrassing performance against Dallas, no matter how Edwards personally felt about LeBron showing up to root for the Cowboys, he should have realized that the last thing he needed to do was spout off to the media about things that don't really concern him, spraying more water on the hornets' nest in the process.

That is the difference between the new, improved Braylon Edwards we saw in 2007 and the Kid Braylon that has returned so far this year. He's in the headlines for his mouth, not his game.

Unless Edwards wants to regress in a big way this year, that has to change as soon as possible.