

Man is it good to see Hiko back on the front page. And he knocks one out of the park with his latest installment of "The Browns Outsider". With free agency just one week away, Hiko takes a look at the Browns free agents, and also the players the Browns may target, throwing Ray Lewis out there as a possibility. Hiko also talks about what a trade of Derek Anderson would yield, hits on the quickly approaching NFL Draft, and the NFL Scouting Combine.



## **A View From The Cheap Seats** **1 Week Until Free Agency**

As the NFL Free Agency period looms its deceptively lustrous head, beginning February 27th, the Browns have 13 players as of yet unsigned and potentially headed for Free Agency:

Jason Wright, Darnell Dinkins, John Madsen (TE - Restricted), Seth McKinney, Lennie Friedman, Louis Leonard (Exclusive Rights), Andra Davis, Kris Griffin, Willie McGinest, Travis Daniels, Daven Holly, Sean Jones, and Mike Adams.

Be still my fluttering heart.

Obviously, the one that jumps out at you is Sean Jones. He's a starter at a position that isn't that deep - Safety. But he also is going to command big dinero. I've heard rumblings about the Browns slapping the Franchise Tag on Jones, but that's all hoo-ha, as that would mean he gets paid the average of the top 5 Safeties in the league, an amount I don't believe he is worth. Certainly, his play last season was hampered by his injuries, but watching him get run over, whiffing on tackles, out of position, trailing receivers... it doesn't incite me to hope the Browns throw large sums of money at the guy. If healthy, I expect him to play better next year, but he's not an elite Safety by any stretch, and if some other team wants to give Jones suitcases full of dough, let 'em, I say.

Of course, losing Jones opens up another hole, a hole that would likely have to be filled by one Free Agent and one fairly high draft pick. And, thanks to the magic of Phil Savage, we don't have a helluva lot of those in 2009.

Regarding the rest of the Free Agents, I wouldn't mind retaining (as backups) Jason Wright, Darnell Dinkins, Seth McKinney, Lennie Friedman, Kris Griffin, Daven Holly, and Mike Adams - especially Holly and Adams, because the Defensive Backfield is thinner than Kate Moss. Yes, I wouldn't mind keeping these guys... I also wouldn't mind it much if they left. They're replaceable.

Madsen is a practice squad-type player. Louis Leonard is valuable, but he's an Exclusive Rights Free Agent, which means that if the Browns tender him - and I'm sure they will - he will be playing in Cleveland next year or no where. I don't see Andra Davis or Willie McGinest coming back here even if the Browns wanted them (which is doubtful), and that's fine with me, as neither of them is very effective or has much left.

And Travis Daniels? Who cares? Most inexplicable trade that Savage ever made.

In the end, none of the Browns own Free Agents will make a ton of difference to the holes that already exist, and they are, in order:

1. *Inside Linebacker*.
  2. *Wide Receiver*.
  3. *Cornerback*.
  4. *Outside Linebacker*.
  5. *Running Back*.
  6. *Right Tackle*.
  7. *Defensive End*.
  8. *Safety*.
- (this gets moved up should Jones leave).

That's a lot of holes - BIG holes - to be filled in just one Free Agency period and one Draft.

What that means is that it won't all happen *this*

offseason.

## **Make Up Yer Damn Mind**

One way for the Browns to fill holes is to obtain additional draft picks via trades, and their 2 most tradable assets appear to Kellen Winslow and Derek Anderson.

Not much has been said of the Winslow situation, but, if you read the [Plain Dealer sports section](#), then you will have noticed that Browns beat reporter Tony Grossi has an almost daily &quot;Possible DA Trade Partners&quot; article. It seems he is very keen for Mr. Anderson to be wearing a different uniform. He's making it his personal mission to find someone to take the Browns erratic QB off our hands.

And yet, several times, I have seen him insist that the Browns should get a 1<sup>st</sup> Round pick in return for Derek. Here is [on](#)  
[e such quote](#)  
:

*&quot;It says here that it's not unrealistic for the Browns to demand a No. 1 pick for Anderson, or a combination of picks that approaches similar value .&quot;*

Yes it is. Pardon my bellicosity, Mr. Grossi, but what flavor of crack are you smoking? You can't wait for this guy to be gone, but someone out there is so in love with our trash - the trash of a 4-12 team - that they'll just hand us the keys to the city for it?

A 1<sup>st</sup> Round pick for Derek Anderson?  
Guffaw! I would've been ecstatic to get a 1<sup>st</sup>

Round pick for DA... last year! You know, when he had some value? Not after a season where he had the NFL's worst QB rating and completion percentage. Not after the kind of performances that led drunken fools to cheer his leaving the field with an injury.

A 1<sup>st</sup> Round pick? Do these magical trade partners not have the power of video tape?

Now, yes, I realize that DA's trade value will drastically rise when the

Browns are forced to pay (and eat) his \$5 million roster bonus on March 15<sup>th</sup>. He gets that whether the Browns cut him or not - the only way they could get out of that hit would be to trade him prior to 3/15, but what team is going to want make that swap and get stuck on the hook for the \$5 mil? No one. Once the Browns eat that bonus, then he is much more attractive to the suitors out there that think they can salvage DA just because he is tall and has a strong arm.

However, a 1<sup>st</sup> Round pick is just ludicrous. I wouldn't even hope for a

2<sup>nd</sup> at this point.

Maybe a high 3<sup>rd</sup>.

And, all things considered, especially after having already paid the \$5 mil bonus, it might be worth more to the Browns to wait until Training Camp to either A) see what they have in DA in this new system or B) trade him to a team that has gotten more desperate as the season rolls into view.

So all of you out there counting on DA recouping us an important player for the 2009 season... the wait might be longer than the lines at Cedar Point.

## **Sympathy For The Devil**

As I stated earlier, the #1 position of need (in my opinion), is Middle Linebacker. You've

GOT to have effective Middle Linebackers in the 3-4. The Defensive Linemen are space takers, blocker occupiers. The MLB's are the ones that have to shoot the gaps and make the tackles. They are key in Run Defense.

The Baltimore Ravens will Franchise Terrell Suggs, meaning it will be doubtful that they will have enough cap space left to retain Ray Lewis. You

know, the Ray Lewis that, although inherently evil and utterly hate-able, has been one of the most dominant Linebackers in NFL History. It is true that, at the age of 34 (by the start of the season), Lewis has lost a little bit. But 90% of Ray Lewis is still better than most of the league. He was an All Pro and a Pro Bowler in 2008. I think maybe he's doing OK.

The problems with signing a Ray

Lewis are, obviously, his age and the size of the contract he will require. My guess is that he'll be looking for a 4 year deal - taking him through the age of 37 - and it will be costly. Elite Linebackers don't come cheap.

However, he still has gas in the tank, he's a great team leader, he knows new Browns GM George Kokinis, he knows the 3-4, he knows the AFC North, he would be motivated to take out

his anger on Baltimore twice a year, and he would fill the position of greatest need on the Cleveland roster.

Just something to consider...

Speaking of embracing enemies, I also wouldn't mind the Browns taking a look at Free Agent WR TJ Houshmandzadeh. However, he might be too expensive to

justify the nominal upgrade in production that might be had from a different Free Agent. Still, #2 WR is a position that **MUST** be addressed in Free Agency, because there's little chance the Browns are going to spend a 1<sup>st</sup> or 2<sup>nd</sup> Round pick on a Receiver, and I have more chance of being on the 2009 Browns roster than Donte Stallworth does.

# Ground Zero

One area that cannot be fixed via Free Agency is the Running Back position. There are lots of brand names out there: Fred Taylor, Deuce McAllister, possibly Edgerrin James, the list goes on. There's a reason for that - the shelf life of Running Backs in the NFL

is short, and once they start to lose it, 9 times out of 10 it goes in a hurry.

Jamal Lewis is a good example. He seemed rejuvenated with the Browns in 2007, rushing for over 1300 yards. But, last season, he just seemed to have hit that invisible wall. He was slow to the hole, indecisive,

dancing. Basically, he's done as an every-down back in the NFL.

But you don't replace an aging and eroding RB with another aging and eroding RB.

Thus, the Running Back

quandary will have to be solved in the Draft. I've seen a couple Mocks that have the Browns taking Knowshon Moreno or Chris "Beanie" Wells at # 5, but that makes about as much sense as a duck with horns, since the Browns primary need is on Defense and perfectly good-to-great Running Backs come out of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Round all the time.

RB's that might be available  
come the 4<sup>th</sup> pick of the 2<sup>nd</sup>  
Round (# 36 overall):

[LeSean McCoy](#)

(Pitt),

[Donald Brown](#)

(UConn),

[Shonn Greene](#)

(Iowa),

[Javon Ringer](#)

(Mich St.), and

[Jeremiah Johnson](#)

(Oregon). Most of these

guys are more intriguing to me than some busted-ass vet.

## **Much Ado About Little**

The Scouting Combine in Indy started this week,

and I can't wait to not pay any attention to it.

Like the Senior Bowl and its ilk, the Combine is the most overblown NFL event of the season.

Watching players in shorts run circles around cones is the most

useless information that could ever be gleaned by scouts. Now, I know that draft gurus and scout-types love to talk about players moving up and down draft boards due to their Combine vertical leaps, but, in all honesty, if the personnel people of the NFL teams make their decisions

based upon measurables rather than performance, they shouldn't have jobs.

You've seen video of all the players' college games for 3 or 4 years. You can see their lateral and vertical speed - in pads - by watching those

games. It's how they perform in the actual contests that makes a football player, not their percentage of body fat.

The Combine should be used as an opportunity to interview players and determine the extent of

their prior injuries. *Maybe* you find a guy or two who might be a decent a late round project. That's about it. 40 times might be somewhat interesting, but 40 times change when you put a player in pads and throw him out onto the muddy, snowy December grass of

# Cleveland Browns Stadium.

But just so that those of you out there who tend to be hand-wringers don't hyperventilate, yes, the full contingent of Browns front office personnel are attending.

# Do Woo Need A Tissoo?

Speaking of that, I have seen an inordinate amount of Browns related whining lately. It is inevitable that there would be some

consternation due to the Browns' Decade of Futility and another Superbowl win by the cretins of Western PA, but it has reached the point of excess. It makes Browns fans look like crybabies. And it's not just coming from fans - the media is

chipping in too.  
Normally respectable  
journalists have joined  
the huge Pity Party.  
Hell, they're the DJ's.

Here are a few things  
I've heard people whine  
about:

*Eric Mangini is the Browns coach.*

If you wanted one of the hot coordinators without Head Coaching experience, then I can't really argue with you. Maybe they would've

worked, maybe not.  
There's no data to  
compute.

But many of you out  
there, myself included,  
wanted a Head Coach  
with experience, and if  
that's what you wanted,

then what the freak is the problem? I think that when you said you want AN experienced Head Coach, you meant Bill Cowher. After he said no, then nothing was going to make you happy.

Cowher and Shanahan weren't options (and don't give me the argument that Shanahan would've come for enough money - if "enough money" was the only factor, then Bill Cowher would be coach right now). Chucky

didn't get released until most of the teams had already hired new Coaches. Marty Schottenheimer is a band-aid. Really, the only viable options for experienced Head Coaches at that time were Mangini and Brian Billick. If you'd rather

have had Billick, then  
fair enough. Maybe  
you're right, but,  
personally, I'll take  
Mangini.

*Randy Lerner needs to  
sell the team.*

Yeah, good luck with that. You can go ahead and say it. You can even yell about it. But billionaires don't grow on trees (at least not in my neighborhood), and there's nothing that can make

Randy sell, no matter how much you want him

to.

Just ask the people in  
Cincy, Detroit, and  
(before this year)  
Arizona.

*Mangini painted over a*

# *mural of Browns Hall of Famers.*

This one about took the cake. Not only was it not true (the mural got taken down and moved to another area of the compound), but who

gives a rat's ass? As long as the Browns win, I could care less if Mangini decorates Berea in hot pink and disco balls.

*The Browns fired some employees.*

The company I work for also fired some employees. It happens. Maybe I should write the CEO demanding an explanation for their termination. And while I'm at it, I'll write the CEO's of every other corporation out there that has the gall to fire

some of its workers.

I don't know why the Browns fired the people they fired. They had their reasons, I suppose, and we'll probably never know what they were.

*The coach was hired  
before the GM.*

When the  
Blankety-Blank did  
hiring a GM first  
become law? I must've  
missed that one. Did  
Pittsburgh's GM hire

Tomlin? Did Arizona's GM hire Whisenhunt? Did New England's GM hire Belichick? No, the OWNERS hired them. That's one of the perks of owning a team - you get to decide whom you hire. Lots of other owners do it.

Is it right? Is it wrong?  
Will it work? I don't  
know. Neither do you.

*Mangini is from the NE  
tree and Kokinis is from  
the BAL tree, just like  
the last pair.*

This is just a dumb argument. The failures of our previous Head Coach/GM have absolutely nothing to do with the potential success (or lack thereof) of the new regime.

*Mangini doesn't  
communicate with the  
media.*

Well, now we see why  
certain individuals are  
throwing hisssies.

Unfortunately, ladies  
and gentlemen of the

press, it is not the responsibility of the coaching staff to make your job easier. If they feel the best way to win games is to keep certain information private, then that's their prerogative.

*TJ McCreight (one of the Browns top scouts) was fired.*

I'd never heard of the guy until after the season when he interviewed for the GM job. Rumor has it that

he was leaking info and got busted. In the end, who cares? It's not like he was the only scout. Mangini and especially Kokinis have plenty of sources.

*The Browns had no one*

*at the Senior Bowl.* □

A, scouts WERE there,  
and B, I've made my  
views on the Senior  
Bowl clear previously.

*Mangini supposedly*

*ignored Shaun Rogers  
at a social event.*

Oh. My. God! Did you hear? Eric was at the dance, and Shaun was there too, but then Eric didn't even say hi to Shaun! Eric told Margie

who told Cindy that he didn't even see Shaun, but I don't believe him. I heard Shaun's really hurt. He told Bill who told Lucy that if he saw Eric at the bonfire, he wouldn't say hi back!

I swear that it seems like some "Browns fans" out there are truly hoping Mangini will fail. As if his failure will justify their point of view, validate their self-loathing.

If I might be so bold as to make a suggestion... How's 'bout we maybe lay off this crap for a while? As the Browns new Top Men, Mangini and Kokinis have yet to conduct one draft, to navigate one Free Agency period, to run one Training Camp, to

coach one game.

Maybe we can stop  
checking off Signs of  
the Apocalypse until  
after that?

**Buh-Bye**

Recently, Mangini & Kokinis made their first roster moves, releasing the following: Ken Dorsey, Bruce Gradkowski, Antwan Peek, Terry Cousin and three developmental players, two of whom were kickers.

Peek was a bit of surprise, seeing as the Browns need Linebackers, but maybe his contract and the fact that he just can't stay healthy led to the decision.

As far Dorsey,  
Gradkowski, and Cousin  
are concerned... maybe  
Mangini & Kokinis DO  
know what they're  
doing. Those guys  
didn't just need cut.  
They need to be  
blindfolded, lined up  
against a brick wall, and  
given a cigarette.

# Hits From A Bong

Michael Phelps, heroic Olympic swimmer and odious Michigan Wolverines/Baltimore Ravens fan, was recently disgraced due to a published photo of

him smoking a bong.

Yes, I know - a 23 year old smoking pot at a party! It's shocking! I've never seen it. I've never even heard of it. I thought that stuff was illegal. What's this

world coming to?

Poor Mike. If you were just Joe Schmoe on the local college swim team, no one would ever have cared. Hell, if you were some random dude that swam the 3<sup>rd</sup> leg of the

relay in the Olympics - and you weren't Michael Phelps - no one would have cared. But because you're big and famous, you have to make public apologies and lose cereal endorsements solely for doing what people do when they're 23.

I've been racking my brain, and I believe I've only been able to come up with one person that I know well - out of, say, 50 - that hadn't smoked at least once by age 23. And that was because he had parental responsibilities, which,

as they say, can put a quick end to youth.

That's what you're supposed to do in your early 20's - get all that stuff out of your system so, that, later in life, when you get married

and have kids, you aren't looking back and wondering what you missed. Even the most conservative people I know had their moments of recklessness in college, between the ages of 17-25. Look around you. You see

Earl, the uptight accountant with the comb-over and the tie with soup stains?

Yeah, well, in the 70's, Earl was knee deep in coke at Disco Inferno, until he got the clap, and, well, that was really uncomfortable.

How about Eric Mangini? He might seem kind of vanilla now, but, when he was 23, he was an intern for the Browns, living in an apartment with some other interns, amongst them new Browns GM George Kokinis. Now, I'm sure

these young men were plenty busy in their jobs at Berea. But, when they were off, when they came home, they didn't have wives or children to consider/take care of. They didn't have the responsibilities they have now. Just some

free time to come back  
to the apartment and  
let off a little steam with  
the boys...

INT. APARTMENT -  
NIGHT

# Berea, OH - 1994

George Kokinis, a thin young man with dark hair and a heavy 5 o'clock shadow sits in the middle of this messy apartment, playing a video game -

Madden '95 - while  
listening to music -  
Beastie Boys' *///*  
*Comminication*

. He sits on the floor,  
leaning back against  
the couch, a low table  
between him and TV.  
Empty food wrappers,  
an ashtray, magazines,  
a couple beer bottles,

and even a blue bong rest on the table.

Similar debris can be found throughout the apartment, such as endless video tapes, CD's, and a few laser discs around the rack next to the TV that has audio equipment and a VCR.

George doesn't look up as Eric, a husky young man with pale skin, walks in. He holds a white bag full of food, which he sets down on the table as he sits on the couch near George.

George (still not looking up): *How was work?*

Eric: *Sucked. □ Modell came in today. □ He was a dick like normal.*

George: *What'd he do?*

Eric: *Walked around half the day with his fly wide open. Yelled at Maggie when he found out, like it was her fault.*

George: *Damn, glad I missed that. Was Bill pissed that I wasn't there?*

Eric: *He didn't even notice. He was looking at video all day. Why the hell are you*

*Detroit?*

George: *I like running  
Barry Sanders.*

Eric: *Yeah, but... they  
blow.*

George: *Shee-it.□ I'm playing the Jets.□ I could beat them with a high school team.*

Eric grunts and picks up the bong.

Eric: *This thing still good?*

George: *Should be. I just packed it. Should be plenty in there...*

*DAMN! Herman*

*Moore can't catch shit!*

Eric: *Dude, Herman Moore is awesome.*

George: *Not there he wasn't.*

Eric lights the bowl on

the bong, pulls the carb, and smoke shoots straight up the tube. He can't take it, coughing violently, tearing up.

George: *Nice hit, genius.* □ *That's what*

*you get for being greedy.*

Eric's eyes are watering as he sets the bong back down.

Eric: *Whoa! There was more in there than I thought.*

George: *Obviously.*

Eric, recovering, opens

up his bag, takes out a Styrofoam container, and starts chowing down on the hot wings inside. George pauses the game, then takes a hit off the bong himself.

George (holding the smoke in): *By the way, I need your part of the rent by Tuesday.*

Eric licks wing sauce off his messy fingers, wincing.

Eric: *Yeah, whatever.* □  
*Damn, these are hot.*

George: *What'd you  
get?*

Eric: *I dunno.* □

*Whatever the hottest one was.*

George: *You going out tonight?*

Eric (chewing): *Nah,*

*I'm beat.*

George: *What about Samantha from merchandising? I thought that was tonight.*

Eric: *Nah, she went to that piano bar in the Flats with her friends.*

George (exhaling a lot of smoke): *We should go there.□ The girls get ripped.□ Like shooting fish in a barrel.*

Eric: *Cuz I don't  
wanna spend my night  
watching some guy  
sing show tunes.*

George (shrugging and  
returning to his game):  
*Your loss... Oh, did  
you hear about OJ?*

Eric (mouth full): *Wuff  
abo OJ?*

George: *He tried to  
run.*

Eric: *No fway!*

George: *Yeah, it was on TV forever. Driving all over LA in some white Bronco, trying to escape. Ended up going nowhere.*

Eric: *Dude, he is so guilty. Stupid OJ.*

*You hire people to do that stuff for you!*

George: *Amen.*

Eric finishes off his last wing and throws the

bone in the Styrofoam container, then wipes his hands on a napkin.

Eric (standing): *You get beer?*

George: *Not yet.*

Eric (annoyed): *Does that mean I have to go get it?*

George

(unsympathetic): *It's your turn.*

Eric sighs and walks into the bathroom, leaving the door wide open. The sound of urination is heard.

George (calling): *You should wash your hands before doing that!*

Almost on cue, the sounds of pain and cursing about hot sauce come from the

bathroom. George  
shakes his head sadly.

George: *They never  
listen.*

**Chewing on Tinfoil**

I was going to forgo this topic, since it brings me nothing but pain, but 2 things happened today that made it impossible to swallow my bile.

The first - I went into

the local Giant Eagle to get a prescription filled.

This particular grocery store is located between Canton and Akron, Ohio, an area well within what is considered the Cleveland television market.

In this store, there is a section that has t-shirts and various other paraphernalia for the local sports teams.

Always, in the past, it had been the Buckeyes, the Cavs, the Indians, the Browns, and, yes, the Steelers. Generally,

the Browns-Steelers gear was about 50-50.

Not today. There was an entire wall of new Steelers championship t-shirts. And there was not one stinking piece of Browns stuff in the

whole store. Not ONE.  
I know - I looked.

I can understand a  
natural press to jump  
on the Pittsburgh  
bandwagon by all the  
borderline  
pseudo-fans, but this

was like walking into a 7-Eleven in Queens and seeing nothing but Red Sox crap. It's shocking, unseemly, wrong, and just downright unholy.

The second - a friend

sent me a link to a recent Bristol Palin [interview](#)

, where she, like, talked about, like, how it was, like, weird to, like, have a kid and stuff. There we go, Governor Sarah Palin's daughter, the uneducated married 18

year old mom, being glorified on national TV. Great.

Sure enough, Sarah Palin popped her head into the interview and started jabbering, talking about how she

had her young son, Trig (wtf?), not so long ago and now along comes Bristol's son, Tripp (wtf?), and the interview cut to a picture of the two babies together, and there was little Trig wearing a Steelers sweatshirt.

Yep, that confirms it:  
Alaska is one giant  
trailer park.

And that kills my theory  
that if I move out of  
Ohio, that if I run far  
enough away, I can be  
rid of Hilljack Nation.

But there's not much further one can run from Ohio (and still stay in the U.S.) than Alaska, and apparently even there isn't safe.

I wonder what Palin's reason for being a

Steelers fan is? She's from Idaho, not Pennsylvania - I looked it up. Maybe her great-uncle's first-wife's cousin's landlord was from Pittsburgh, and through that random connection, she feels some kind of loyalty to a football team that

plays 3000 miles  
away? I've heard less  
plausible explanations.

Hey, can't fault her for  
jumpin' on the  
bandwagon. So many  
people in Northeast  
Ohio have done the

same.

Who needs a soul  
when you can claim  
your team just won the  
Superbowl?

And I suppose that brings me to the actual point of this topic: How I am trying (struggling, but trying) to move past the massive aggravation that is the Steelers winning another Lombardi. I am trying not to let the hordes of black-n-yella

wearing yahoos irritate me. I am trying not to throw lamps at the TV every time the commercial for the SI - Steelers Championship offer comes on (the things I'd do to that collector's football). I am trying to focus on the fortunes of my

team and my team alone. I am trying to make the Pittsburgh Steelers nameless and faceless - a non-entity - just another team in a sea of teams I care nothing about. It's the only way I can retain my sanity.

So, from now on, I hereby declare my ongoing attempt to take the high road when it comes to our neighbors to the East. I will not call them names. I will not make jokes at their expense. I will no longer create voodoo dolls and other

false idols in an effort  
to maim their physical  
beings. I will stop  
telling my daughters to  
wear brass knuckles to  
school for all the little  
boys donning  
Roethlisberger jerseys.

I will curb my anger  
and I will channel my  
passion away from  
negativity and towards  
the support of the team  
that I love most in the  
world, the team that  
has given me the  
greatest  
disappointment and  
frustration, the team

that will someday give  
me the greatest joy:  
The Cleveland Browns.

Thus, with all sincerity,  
I offer my heartfelt and  
unreserved  
congratulations to the

2008-2009 Superbowl  
Champions - the  
Fixburgh Steelers.

(I WILL take the high  
road... starting  
tomorrow.)