

## Lingering Items - Stupid Is As Stupid Does Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Saturday, April 11 2009 7:00 PM -

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It's been a largely miserable ten years for the Browns since they returned to the NFL in 1999, but one thing they can take solace in is that they aren't the Cincinnati Bengals. In this week's Lingering Items, Gary hits on that fact and talks about the Bungles latest signing. Gary also hits on Tampa Bay making Kellen Winslow II the highest paid tight end in NFL history, the fast approaching NFL Draft, and the Browns 2009 schedule.



It's not hard to figure out why the Cleveland Browns have been lousy for the last 10 years. Dysfunction starts at the top and has run through the organization like a plate of bad clams through the digestive system. But while the Browns have been busy spending the last decade chasing their tails, the one positive is that at least they aren't the Cincinnati Bengals.

In case it escaped your notice while fitfully watching the onset of a new baseball season, the Bengals signed defensive lineman Tank Johnson to a free agent contract. Apparently the relative lack of criminal element on the Dallas Cowboys (!) wouldn't allow Johnson to perform at a high enough level and thus the search for a team with an atmosphere that was more to his liking.

Johnson fits right in with the Bengals and that has nothing to do with whatever ability he brings to their pass rush. As a convicted criminal who has served time in jail and been suspended by the league, signing Johnson allowed the Bengals to apparently check off every criteria they have on the job spec they keep for prospective free agents. Repeated arrests? Check. Jail time? Check. Illegal guns? Check. Traffic infractions? Check. League suspension? Check. Said he's really, really sorry this time, I'm not kidding, I mean it? Check. With this signing the Bengals solidified their line-up, assuming their intention was to play and win a

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game against the guards at the Marion Correctional Institution in a third remake of &quot;The Longest Yard.&quot; Now all they need to do is sign Todd Marinovich and they'll have their version of Paul Crew.

If the Bengals aren't working on a remake of &quot;The Longest Yard&quot; then maybe what sealed the Johnson signing it was the fact that receiver Chris Henry has managed to string together almost 12 consecutive months without another arrest. As most may remember (and if you don't, feel free to [re-read my rant](#) on that signing) the Bengals had publicly parted ways with Henry after his fifth arrest only to re-sign him to a two-year agreement months later when they needed more receivers. I suppose when they initially cut him following that arrest they had their fingers crossed behind their backs. Besides, what's a token gesture about taking a stand against employing recidivists if it's not truly token?

This latest signing, coupled with the arrest on Wednesday of Bengals' starting cornerback Leon Hall for drunk driving, more than solidifies the Bengals as the last outpost for all of the league's reprobates and miscreants. But in every dark cloud a silver lining of sorts does emerge. By comparison the Browns look positively well run, no matter who's in charge.

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Kellen Winslow is now at least \$20 million richer, which either makes the Tampa Bay Buccaneers the second dumbest or the second most desperate team in the NFL (as to the leader in both categories, see the first item).

Winslow has his issues, certainly, but that's not what makes his new 6-year contract so bizarre. Simply, it's his injury history. He's been hurt more than he's been healthy and he's now going on his sixth season in the NFL. The contract's length, no doubt, is a function of amortizing the guaranteed money over a longer period of time to cushion the impact on the Buccaneers' salary cap. But still, is there a person anywhere that thinks Winslow will last six more years in the NFL?

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The over and under in Vegas is probably three seasons and even then smart money says to take the under.

I've always felt in the minority in supporting Winslow. But it's always struck me that most fan animosity toward him was the result of his abject stupidity when it came to motorcycles. His foray into stunt riding didn't just basically cost him his career, it almost cost him his life. That understood, he took his lumps from the media and from Phil Savage who squeezed him into a more club-friendly contract. And he did work hard to get himself back into shape. He always played hard, when he played. The problem is that his body is so beat up that it prevents him from playing his best football. If that beat up body is the result of self-inflicted wounds, so be it. At least he gave the Browns a good effort while he was here.

None of that explains though why the Buccaneers would make Winslow the highest paid tight end in NFL history. It's not a distinction Winslow's earned yet by any measure and probably never will. He's an excellent receiver but a lousy and half-hearted blocker. Signing Winslow wasn't something Tampa Bay needed to do right now, either. Winslow was still under contract. What's wrong with waiting to see whether he can even approach something resembling that level of confidence?

The contract extension does in large measure justify the Browns trading Winslow. He clearly wasn't going to get that kind of reward here and it's also pretty clear that he was ready to be disruptive, in the form of holding out if necessary, in order to make that happen. In that sense, Winslow was a problem the Browns didn't need.

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Maybe it's because the Cavs are having a magical season or maybe it's because baseball season just started (someone tell the Indians), but the NFL draft is only a few weeks away and it's barely making more noise than the ground floor of a

campus library on a Friday night.

The lack of enthusiasm to this point is just more evidence that a good portion of fans have drifted from anger to indifference. It's what happens when a team isn't successful and has just embarked on another rebuild.

The draft is filled with enough intriguing prospects that the 5<sup>th</sup> pick this year should be a layup. Of course, the Browns have blown their share of layups, including the consecutive years in which Mike Junkin and Clifford Charlton were there first round picks. Feel free to pick your favorites. The question is whether a new regime, still trying to get the fresh paint of Berea out of their slacks, can find a way to make this year's draft a real foundation of this team. That's always the promise, isn't it?

I've never been a huge fan of the NFL draft. It's got every bit the feel of a Civil War era slave auction and the appeal of a one hour episode of Facts of Life. The day grinds on endlessly while Chris Berman, Tom Jackson, Mel Kuiper, and a gaggle of others strive to find something, anything to say to fill the interminably long period between picks. Let's look at more film, shall we?

With limited exceptions, there's very little drama involved unless your idea of fun is to watch Brady Quinn twist in the wind. The Browns have so many holes at the moment it doesn't really matter whether they take a receiver (always a mistake in the first round), a linebacker (a better idea) or a defensive lineman (the best idea). The only thing that does matter is that the Browns actually do use the draft to build a foundation for this team. They need players that will be around and contribute now and for the next several years. They don't need any more projects. I'm still trying to figure out Beau Bell, Martin Rucker, Ahtyba Rubin and Paul

Hubbard. My guess is that general manager George Kokinis and head coach Eric Mangini are doing the same thing.

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The NFL will release its team by team schedule this week and with it will come the inevitable discussions about how easy or difficult it will be. At this juncture, there is no way to tell. Teams that you think will be good won't be and vice versa. Moreover, the order in which you play teams is critical. Catching a good team on a short week is far better than catching it after a bye week.

Though the NFL makes much of its schedule being released, what they really are doing is releasing the order of the games. The schedule, in terms of which teams the Browns will play, has been known for months.

In addition to the usual two games against each divisional team, the Browns play Oakland, San Diego, Jacksonville, Green Bay and Minnesota at home and Denver, Kansas City, Buffalo, Chicago and Detroit on the road. When the NFL's only prime time games were on Monday night, you could pretty much bank on a 4-12 season as an automatic disqualification from the league's marquee game. But now the NFL plays prime time games on Thursday, some Saturdays, Sunday night and Monday night. If they could, they'd find a way to schedule games on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, too. That means the Browns are probably going to find themselves featured at least once.

If the league is smart, they'll make the Browns' feature game Thanksgiving Day against Detroit. With the Lions losing their grip on their traditional Thanksgiving Day spot, a competitive game this year is a must for them. Who better to fit their needs than the Browns?

But don't make your Thanksgiving plans just yet. More likely, we'll see the Browns on the NFL Network some Thursday night late in the season, meaning that outside of Cleveland, the only folks that will see the game are those who subscribe to satellite or to some mom-and-pop cable outfit that the NFL bullied into carrying their sub par programming. At this point, it serves as a form of punishment and the NFL brass may be in the mood to punish a team they foolishly featured 5 times last season.

Personally, I'm glad the Browns will not see their share of prime time games this season for two reasons, one of which is completely selfish. In the grand scheme, the Browns need to stay off the radar screen for awhile. They are rebuilding and they need to focus on the task at hand and not worry about the added pressure of performing in front of a national audience. Selfishly, I'm sick of losing sleep during the week. But it wasn't all lost. Without that game against Buffalo how would we have known that Savage was such a whiz with email?

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Since I haven't touched on the Indians, and there is plenty there to touch on, we'll just use them as the launching pad for this week's question to ponder: Simply, now what?