

As It Stands Again - Defensive Line

Written by {ga=davekolonich}
Monday, June 15 2009 7:00 PM -

As the slow infant crawl towards the opening of Browns' training camp continues, it's time for the next installment profiling the most essential roster positions that will determine success in 2009. Today, Dave Kolonich focuses on the defensive line, which centers around behemoth Shaun Rogers, and features several new players here in 2009. Dave talks about some of the new additions, and what this year's defensive front will look like in his latest piece for us. As the slow infant crawl towards the opening of Browns' training camp continues, it's time for the next installment profiling the most essential roster positions that will determine success in 2009.

We began with [this](#) ...or, in the beginning...

In the coming weeks, I'll cover all areas of the Browns roster heading into 2009, beginning with what I feel are the most essential positions that will determine success in 2009. We'll start with the Linebackers, because the core of a good 3-4 defensive unit demands strong play from this position. And as our run defense has shown us over the past decade, this is a position that could use some healthy competition.

In keeping with the time-honored spirit of web plagiarism, also known as blogging, I will steal from myself and use this same introduction again...only shifting the position from linebacker to defensive line. Considering the Browns' recent run defense struggles and the almost symbiotic nature of the front seven based on the 3-4 scheme, these two positions are hermetically linked, for better or worse.

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There is almost a biblical tale to be told when viewing the inherent flaws found in the Browns run defense over the past decade. Even agnostics can feign witness to the constant turnover of personnel along the line. Just as Michael Myers begat Jason Fisk who begat Corey Williams who begat C.J. Mosely...Or more precisely, as the defensive philosophy shifted from Butch Davis' Cowboy pass rushers to Phil Savage's misplaced defensive tackles and now to Eric Mangini's former Jet disciples, the Browns D line play has suffered based on a mashing of different styles, philosophies and techniques.

In the near anarchy that can resemble Cleveland Browns football, it appears that perhaps a well-nigh Messiah has appeared on the shores of Lake Erie, at least if you allow that Eric Mangini, much like his predecessors, has a vision of what type of D linemen he wants on his roster. In this sense, the clarity of the exact types of

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players the Browns line up in the trenches should be better established in 2009 than in the past few years. Also, barring any contract disputes, it is very possible that Shaun Rogers is truly the Son of God.



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One of the clear indicators of Mangini's vision of the front line are the acquisitions of C.J. Mosley and Kenyon Coleman. Compared to Phil Savage's collection of 3-4 linemen, Mosley and Coleman offer a contrast in terms of athleticism and size. Coleman has the most unique build of any of the Browns' linemen, as his 6'5 frame offers the kind of upright leverage that the likes of Robaire and Shaun Smith, who are more traditional bulldozers, do not possess.

Watching the Browns' D line over the past few years, it became obvious that Robaire Smith was not the disruptive force needed on the outside. Smith's game works when he can get underneath an offensive lineman, but age and injuries has slowed him down. If you compare Coleman's game with Robaire's, you get the sense that Mangini's 3-4 scheme, although frighteningly similar to Romeo Crennel's, will rely on a more rangy type of activity, similar to the ideal of Richard Seymour. Although a solid veteran presence, Smith is more suited inside in a four-man front.

The arrival of Coleman should immediately help the line play, and if Corey Williams can adapt to Mangini's scheme, we should see some improvement across the line. The potential of Williams is pretty much unknown, considering he had a huge learning curve last season, and essentially playing with one healthy arm slowed the process. Compared to Smith, Williams has much more explosion and uses his upper body fairly effectively for a 320 lb. lineman. It should be interesting to see what Mangini can teach and get out of Williams in 2009.

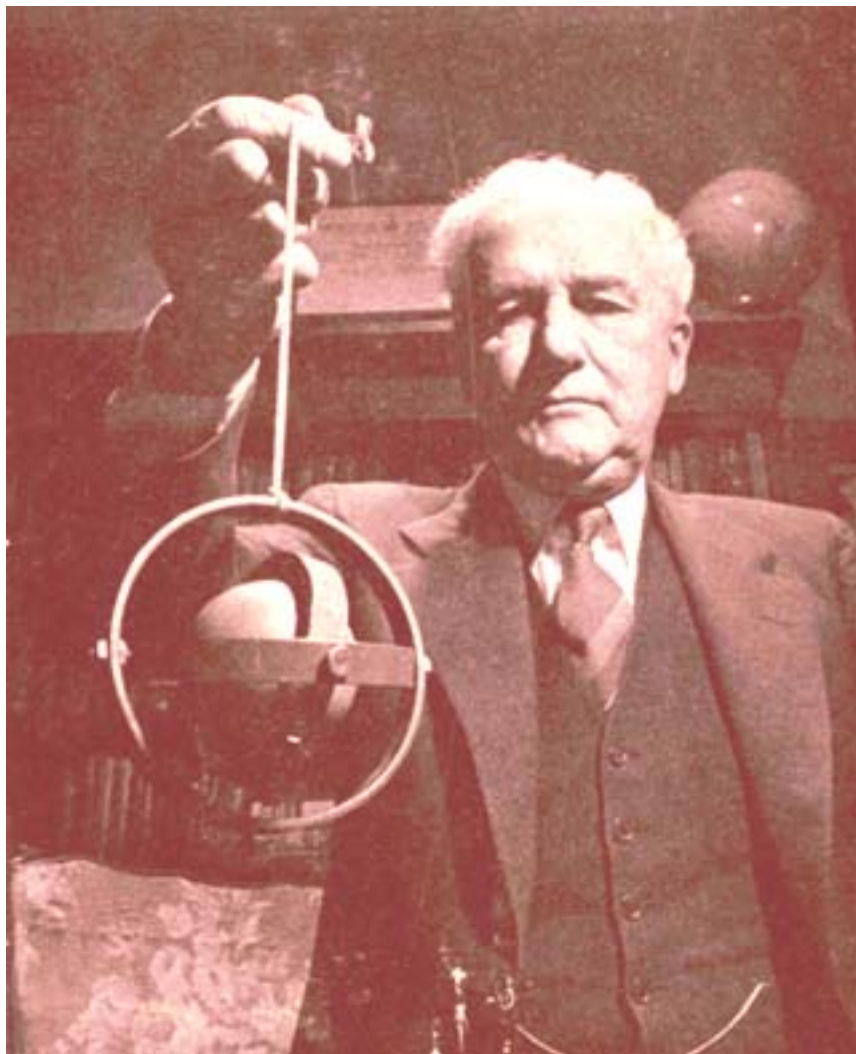
Of course, the fulcrum of the Browns' line is obviously Shaun Rogers. Watching Rogers play out the string in 2008 showed me volumes about his character and desire for the game. Before arriving in Cleveland, the book on Rogers gave glowing reviews regarding his athleticism, brute strength and ability to drive blockers into the backfield, but also warned of his occasional bouts with petulance and laziness. However in 2008, playing on a beaten-up unit, Rogers was dominant throughout several games and during his absences, the defense was one of the league's worst.

Some of the talk coming out of Berea suggests that Mangini may shift Rogers around the line, trying him at the end spots. This is an intriguing idea, especially considering the weaknesses the Browns have among the outside linebacker/pass rush positions. Any disturbances Rogers can create will likely free up the linebackers to make some much needed plays in the backfield. However, the downside to these positional changes is that Rogers' presence at nose tackle will

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be sorely missed, even when he is still on the field.



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Although the Browns' defensive line could show some surprising depth in 2009, behind Rogers at nose tackle, there is not much left. At the moment, Ahtyba Rubin is the primary backup in the middle of the line. Rubin has good size (330 lbs.) and appears to be solid in terms of lower body strength, but needs to take another step in development for the Browns line to become truly versatile.

The rest of the roster depth represents the mixing of personnel that has plagued the unit for years. Shaun Smith doesn't fit any particular position along the line, which is baffling, considering his massive size. Smith doesn't physically fare well in the middle of the line and is much too slow to succeed at the end spot. As for the other players who will likely earn roster spots, both Louis Leonard and C.J. Mosley are intriguing, but don't exactly fit one particular position. As for the rest, Santonio Thomas has some Belichick coaching experience and could fill in some of the rough edges.

IDEALLY...

Shaun Rogers picks up where he left off in 2008 and again plays at a dominant level. Mangini's schemes allow Rogers to become more of a force along the line and during the mixing of four man fronts, which Mangini has hinted at using. Kenyon Coleman's athleticism and experience allows him to become the playmaking 3-4 end the unit has lacked in previous years and he blossoms under Mangini's continued watch. Robaire Smith returns from injury and adds some much needed relief in run support. Corey Williams becomes a pass-rushing presence from the edge spot and a combination of Mosley, Leonard and Rubin gives the Browns a surprisingly effective line rotation. Shaun Smith survives Camp Mangini and goes an entire year without assaulting any of his teammates.

BUT REALLY...

Shaun Rogers doesn't get much help from his linemates and suffers another season of double and triple teams, before finally lashing out at his new tough guy coach. Kenyon Coleman is not a factor at the end spot and we become completely convinced that Corey Williams is not suited for Mangini's scheme. Robaire Smith continues to break down and the Mosley/Leonard/Rubin/Thomas grouping fail to establish a role other than injury fill-ins during the season. Finally, Shaun Smith makes front page headlines for accosting third-string quarterback Brett Ratliff in the showers after being eliminated in the first round of the team's November ping-pong tournament.

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Unlike the linebacker position, which is a strange mix of too young, too old, or just ineffective, the defensive line offers glimmers of hope for the Browns in 2009. Anchored by a true game-changer in Shaun Rogers and a solid veteran in Kenyon Coleman, the Browns D line could improve dramatically. The depth behind Rogers and Coleman is optimistically solid and at the least, still has plenty of volume. If Mangini can get positive contributions from Corey Williams and Robaire Smith and possibly develop a couple of the younger linemen, this unit could be a strength for the Browns in 2009.