

As Training Camp dawns around the NFL world, optimism is through the roof. Even the most solidly cynical souls are stealing sanguine stares at their selected sporting soldiers. Even the fans of the lowly Lions are lauding their club's likelihoods, lambasting last season as nothing more than lousy luck. But what about Chris Hutchison? Is he buying into the manufactured "I'm a Cleveland sports fan and I need something to be excited about" hype? In his Training Camp Spectacular, Chris gives us his thoughts on the '09 Browns.



A View From The Cheap Seats

As Training Camp dawns around the NFL world, optimism is through the roof. Even the most solidly cynical souls are stealing sanguine stares at their selected sporting soldiers. Even the fans of the lowly Lions are lauding their club's likelihoods, lambasting last season as nothing more than lousy luck.

But not me. As optimistic as I have been/tried to be since Mankinis came into power, Training Camp holds - for me - a certain amount of dread. You see, in many a Browns season, Training Camp is where hope goes to die. Holdouts. Lack of continuity. Injuries galore - both nagging and season-ending. It's over before it begins. A shiver goes down my spine.

Take last year, for instance. I went in with cautiously elevated expectations. By the end of Training Camp/Preseason, I knew the team was in for a bad ride. What with Braylon getting stepped on and DA getting his concussion and half the team getting injured during the Preseason beatdown vs. the Giants, it took only 6 short weeks for me to lose faith.

So, despite every reason for confidence that this year will be far superior to last (how could it not be?), I still have that now-ingrained sense of impending doom. Please, Mr. Mangini, turn this thing around.

Regarding Quarterbacks

The Players: (In alphabetical order, displayed by Number, Last Name, First Name) 3 *Anderson, Derek, 13 Bartel, Richard* ,
10
Quinn, Brady
, 5
Ratliff, Brett.

Overview: Coach Mangini continues to state that the starting QB job is an open competition between DA and Quinn, although many of us wonder how "open" it truly is (including DA, if you translate his non-answer of that question from an ESPN interview). Ratliff comes over from the Jets via a draft-day trade, and some view him as a dark dark pitch-black horse in the running due to his skill set and knowledge of the system. Due to injury, drops, and just plain suck, this position was a disaster of the first order last year.

Most Important Player: Quinn. Duh. Brady, Brady, he's our man! If he can't do it, we're F*****.

I mean that too. Opinions are like venereal diseases - everybody's got one. But DA is not a top end starting QB in the NFL, and if Quinn can't beat him out, then we'd better hope those Ratliff Rah Rahs know of which they speak or it'll be a long god-awful season.

Least Important Player: Richard Bartel. Barring injury, I have more chance of making this team.

Better or Worse than 2008: Ken Dorsey is no longer on the team, so there is no way that the unit cannot be better by his

subtraction.

Better or Worse than NFL Average: Worse, for now. Everyone claims we've got a good situation because we have two "good", "starting caliber" Quarterbacks and a guy with lots of potential sitting at # 3. I say that Derek Anderson is below-average starting NFL QB, and Quinn has yet to prove that he's anything at all. I'm certain I can find 16 teams out there whose starting QB I'd rather have at this point. Hopefully that will change as the season progresses.

Regarding Running Backs

The Players: 41 *Ali, Charles*, 28 *Davis, James*, 35 *Harrison, Jerome*, 33
Herron, Noah, 31
Lewis, Jamal, 47
Vickers, Lawrence.

Overview: I'm pretty sure the Browns Run O ranked about 33rd out of 32 teams last year. Lewis looked slow and Harrison was languishing away on the sidelines as part of Romeo Crennel's grand scheme to prove he had absolutely no idea what he was doing. Davis, a late round draft pick this year, is viewed as somewhat of a steal, but that means little when the games begin. Herron was added via Free Agency, but will struggle just to make the team.

Most Important Player: Harrison. Yep, it's true. I know it should be Jamal Lewis, but I think even an improved Jamal Lewis will still be only moderately effective. I see the Browns leaning a lot more towards a Running Back-by-committee with Lewis and Harrison, and Harrison is the one that will provide the greater spark.

Least Important Player: Davis. I think he'll contribute and I think he'll be fine, but some people have been touting him as if he's a future star in this league, and I believe expecting anything other than modest production from a 6th Round rookie is crazy-talk.

Better or Worse than 2008: I guess I'll go with better, but that's only because Lewis is healthy and should be somewhat more productive, and Harrison will get more carries. But I don't see this unit as being exponentially better as it stands.

Better or Worse than NFL Average: Worse. Some teams have 2 Running Backs better than any RB we have on the roster. Some teams just Run Block better. I'm going to assume that this unit is one more draft away from being Top 15.

Regarding Wide Receivers

The Players: 17 *Edwards*, *Braylon* (Non-Football Injury List), 88

F

Furrey, Mike

, 89

Hubbard, Paul

, 9

Leggett, Lance

, 11

Massaquoi, Mohamed

, 2

Norwood, Jordan

, 81

Patten, David

, 80

Robiskie, Brian

, 18

Stallworth, Donte

, 12

Steptoe, Syndric.

Overview: Braylon Edwards is a dumbass, but he should be ready for the season, where we can expect... who knows? The Browns added aging vets Patten and Furrey, but they're for depth. They also added 2nd Round picks Robiskie and

Massaquoi, who have the unenviable task of becoming vital players coming into their rookie season. Throw in a bunch of late round picks and undrafted Free Agents, and you have a crappy WR unit.

Most Important Player: You'd think I'd say Edwards, but I won't, because I've learned that fool is not to be trusted. So I'll go with Robiskie, since he's likely to be the other starting WR come the beginning of the season, and he'll have a lot of pressure on him to somehow replace Joe Jurevicius and Kellen Winslow in one fell swoop.

Least Important Player: Donte Stallworth. Heh heh.

Actually, the answer is pretty much everyone other than Braylon and Robo. I look at the list and... I... feel... sleepy...

Better or Worse than 2008: Well, Stallworth had like 2 catches last year as a starting WR, and Cribbs had like 2, and I think Steptoe (who actually had to START last season) had about 3 or 4, and Braylon dropped about 43 passes... I think you see where I'm going with this. It HAS to be better. The only way it could be worse is if they all died. At the same time.

Better or Worse than NFL Average: Oh, worse. So much worse. I don't even want to talk about it.

Regarding Tight Ends

The Players: 82 *Heiden, Steve*, 85 *Madsen, John*, 84 *Royal, Robert*, 86 *Rucker, Martin*, 87 *Walker, Aaron*.

Overview: Injury-prone self-proclaimed soldier Kellen Winslow Dos was sent packing via trade during the offseason, and much belly-aching was heard. But Rucker and Heiden are back from 2008 injuries, and Royal, a solid blocker and catcher, was picked up in FA.

Most Important Player: Rucker. He has

reputedly been very improved over last season, and he will be counted on to stretch the field and take over that pass-catching outlet role that Winslow served.

Least Important Player: Kellen Winslow. I believe the Browns won't miss him much at all. He was a good receiver, but he couldn't block to save his (or his QB's) life. He essentially played the # 2 receiver spot last season. And he was always hurt. Between Heiden, Royal, and Rucker, I feel the triumvirate will be able to duplicate Winslow's production while providing a lot more Run Blocking.

Better or Worse than 2008: Probably better. Winslow had a decent season, but all the Tight Ends missed significant time with injuries, and if this year's unit can stay healthy they should

have every chance to eclipse last year's effectiveness.

Better or Worse than NFL Average: It's hard for me to say. Not one guy in the unit can be described as "above average" on his own, but, as a whole, I think they're fairly solid. So I'm going to go out on a limb and proclaim them "average" to "very nearly average".

Regarding Offensive Linemen

The Players: 75 *Braxton, Branndon*, 79 *Davis*,

Marlon
(Non-Football Injury List), 74
Foster, George
, 66
Fraley, Hank
, 62
Fry, Dustin
, 70
Hadnot, Rex
, 55
Mack, Alex
, 63
Quarterman, Kurt
, 61
Sowells, Isaac
, 78
St. Clair, John
, 65
Steinbach, Eric
, 73
Thomas, Joe
, 72
Tucker, Ryan

, 77

Womack, Floyd

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Overview: Mack was the 1st Round pick of the Browns, the first Center selected in the draft. Thomas is a perennial All-Pro (tho' you could've fooled me last year). Steinbach is solid at LG, and a healthy Ryan Tucker (if he doesn't decide to retire) should man one of the RG/RT positions. The final spot will be filled with one of the plethora of semi-skilled, mid-level Free Agents the Browns brought in - Foster, St. Clair, or Womack.

Most Important Player: It's hard not to say Joe Thomas, but my answer is Alex Mack. He's the rookie, he's the upgrade, he's the big, physical, intelligent presence that was

brought in to run the unit and nullify the evil AFC North Defensive Tackles like Casey Hampton and Haloti Ngata.

Least Important Player: Ike Sowells. How has this guy hung around this long? Usually, if you've been around for 4 or 5 years and you've amply proven that you will never have starting potential, they replace you with a young project that *might* have that potential.

Better or Worse than 2008: Mack should be an improvement over Fraley, and Tucker - if healthy - will be more solid than what was happening with the right side of the OL last

season. And I don't care who the starting RT ends up being, he has to be better than Kevin Shaffer.

Better or Worse than NFL Average: Right about average, maybe a bit above average. I mean, Left Tackle through Center is Top 10 worthy, but the unsettlement at RG and RT brings down the overall ranking.

Regarding Defensive Linemen

The Players: 90 *Coleman, Kenyon*, 67 *Hoppel, Adam*

, 93

Leonard, Louis

, 69

Mosley, C.J

., 60

Purcell, Melila

, 92

Rogers, Shaun

, 71

Rubin, Ahtyba

, 98

Smith, Robaire

, 91

Smith, Shaun

, 97

Thomas, Santonio

, 99

Williams, Corey.

Overview: Probably the strongest unit on the roster. Rogers got over his case of the pouts and has returned to man the center of the line. Williams is finally healthy and on his second year in the 3-4. Coleman and Mosley came over from the Jets, and they know the system well. And Robaire Smith is back from his Achilles injury, giving this unit the most talent and depth that they've had in the expansion era.

Most Important Player: Shaun Rogers. It just is. He has to play as well as he did last year to aid the less-than-stellar Linebackers behind him. Without him in there, this unit will resemble a sand castle fighting the sea.

Least Important Player: Shaun Smith, or *The Other Shaun*

. When he's not shooting his mouth off or punching teammates, Shaun likes to take up large chunks of space most ineffectively on the field. His other interests include badminton, Manchurian art, and anything fried.

Better or Worse than 2008: Better, if they stay healthy. Williams has to be better, even if it's just because he's not dragging his bum arm around all game. Coleman will likely start at one of the DE positions, creating a rotation where Robaire is rotating in off the bench. Rubin will be a year better, Leonard showed some potential last season... this squad is legitimately 7 deep.

Better or Worse than NFL Average: Better.
If they can get a little more penetration from the DE's this season, this has the potential to be a Top 10 unit.

Regarding Linebackers

The Players: 50 *Barton, Eric*, 58 *Bell, Beau*, 49 *Benard, Marcus*, 96 *Bowens, David*, 59 *Brown, Titus*

, 44

Costanzo, Blake

, 51

Hall, Alex

, 53

Hunt, Phillip

, 52

Jackson, D'Qwell

, 56

Maiava, Kaluka

, 43

Ruud, Bo

, 57

Veikune, David

, 94

Williams, Leon

, 95

Wimbley, Kameron

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Overview: Andra Davis was swapped out for Barton, which damn well better be an improvement. Hall is entering his 2nd

season and has shown potential. The coaches will try to increase Wimbley's productivity by moving him around and having him utilize a bull-rush. Jackson is seen by some as on the edge of a breakout season. Veikune was drafted in the 2nd

Round and has reportedly picked up the system quickly and could play either inside or outside. Bowens, also brought over from the Jets, should provide solid depth.

And all this better mean that the Browns get more than 17 measly freakin' sacks this year.

Most Important Player: Well, it's Wimbley. I don't have a ton of faith in this guy, but he does have a nice combo of size and speed, and if the new Browns coaches can squeeze something out of him that the old Browns coaches couldn't (which seems a better than fair likelihood), he could greatly affect the amount of pressure Cleveland puts on opposing QB's.

Least Important Player: Beau Bell. There's still a few out there holding a candle for Beau, but I'm not one of them. My only expectation for him this season is to just NOT DIE. And since he could accomplish that from the bench or Portugal, anything he gives this team is

gravy as far as I'm concerned. Thick, lumpy gravy.

Better or Worse than 2008: Saying that they couldn't possibly be worse - even if they all lost their legs - still isn't a ringing endorsement. But that's all I can really give you for a unit that has absolutely no established pass rushers.

Better or Worse than NFL Average:
Worse. They are worse than average the way Manute Bol is taller than average. Likely, this unit will be the death of the D as a whole.

Regarding Cornerbacks

The Players: 37 *Carey, Don*, 25 *Francie
s, Coye*

(Non-Football Injury List), 40

Hood, Rod

, 29

Ivy, Corey

, 30

Lawson, Gerard

, 22

McDonald, Brandon

, 23

Poteat, Hank

, 24

Wright, Eric

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Overview: The starters will likely remain Wright and McDonald, but the nickel package was greatly improved by jettisoning Terry Cousin (my least favorite Brown ever) for Free Agents Ivy and Hood. Carey and Francies are intriguing late round draft picks that have reportedly done well.

This unit should be fine so long as the front 7 gets some heat on the QB. If not, they'll look like colander, just like any other team's unit would.

Most Important Player: McDonald. I know what to expect from Wright, and

that is to be solid - if unspectacular - on the enemy's # 1 WR. McDonald has to match up with the other starter, and has shown himself capable of the task... if the Receiver isn't too tall. McD will have to overcome his inconsistencies and his physical limitations if he is to make a step forward and make this unit as solid as it needs to be.

Least Important Player: Coye Francies. He's on the Non-Football Injury list all of the sudden, and rumors have it that whatever it is that he did to himself did not endear him to the coaching staff's collective hearts. Of course, it would be foolish to count on a 6

th

Round rookie anyway, but he reportedly was showing some nice play. I don't know what the issue is - the Browns are per norm not saying - but any setback at this point probably means a wasted '09 season for the Rook.

Better or Worse than 2008: Better.

Oh so much better. Why?

Terry. Cousin. Is. Gone.

Better or Worse than NFL Average:

I'll put them a lot closer to average than a lot of people would. There are certainly better units out there in the

NFL, but there are also worse ones. Having 2 young potentially good-to-very-good starters is something a lot of teams would envy.

Regarding Safeties

The Players: 42 *Abdullah, Hamza, 20*
Adams, Mike
, 26

Elam, Abram

, 39

Lockett, Bret

, 21

Pool, Brodney

, 27

Sorensen, Nick.

Overview: The Browns let Sean Jones go in Free Agency, but, seeing as he's a backup in Philly now, maybe that wasn't such a loss as first perceived. He was replaced by Elam, whom the Browns tried to sign as a Restricted Free Agent, only to have the Jets match their offer, only to

trade for him on draft day. The rest of the unit is pretty much the same, which is not comforting at all.

Most Important Player: Elam.

Without a doubt. One could argue that, outside of the QB, Elam will be the most important player on the entire team this season. Mangini was obviously desperate to get this guy, so my personal expectations are a bit higher than they would be for him normally. He is reputedly a good tackler, gets good pressure on QB blitzes, and is smart/knows the system. He'd better be all that and a

turkey sandwich.

Least Important Player: Sorensen. I love the golden-maned Sorensen on Special Teams. I do not want to see him on the field as a Safety, however. He's OK around the line of scrimmage, but he couldn't cover a dead mouse with a bedspread.

Better or Worse than 2008: Uh... dunno. I can't answer it. I really haven't seen enough of Elam to know if he's > or < Sean Jones. Almost nothing was added/changed other

than that, so I just shrug and say
we'll see

.

Better or Worse than NFL Average:
Worse. Even if Elam is better than Jones and somehow ekes into the top half of starting NFL strong safeties, Brodney Pool is still just bleh. He's ah-ite. He makes a play every once in a while, but he's nothing to write to Great Aunt Patty about.

Plus, this unit's depth is not deep.

Regarding Special Teams

The Players: 16 *Cribbs, Joshua*, 4 *Dawson, Phil*, 64
Pontbriand, Ryan, 15
Zastudil, Dave

Overview: The Browns' Official Site lists Josh Cribbs as a Wide Receiver,

but I don't because he's not. He might line up out there sometimes and catch some balls, but so the Running Backs and Tight Ends and even Quarterbacks in a Wildcat. Lining up out there every once in a while does not a Receiver make, and Cribbs ain't no Receiver.

That being said, this is a very solid unit full of former Pro Bowlers and grizzled vets. These guys don't necessarily guarantee a good Special Teams unit, but they sure help.

Most Important Player: Phil Dawson. He makes the tough kicks; he makes the clutch kicks. But, really, all the guys listed are integral to the Special Team success.

Least Important Player: Josh Cribbs. Hate to say it, because he's a pretty good return man and a solid gunner. But he's much better at returning kicks than punts, and with the new anti-wedge rules in the NFL this year, kick returning will be much more like punt returning, giving advantage to those quick water-bug-like guys rather than trains like Cribbs. Honestly, he's

probably going to look fairly ordinary this season.

Better or Worse than 2008: Nothing has really changed (other than the wedge rule), so I'd assume about the same. We don't know what Special Teams coach Brad Seely will bring to the table under Mangini, and we don't know the impact of the ST rookies (like Maiava), so it's safe to expect more of the same, which ain't bad.

Better or Worse than NFL Average:
Better. Long snapper, Kicker, and

Punter are the only positions that the Browns have had any consistency in during the expansion era, and it shows in the production. There are tons of teams out there that wish they had a Dawson, Zastudil, Pontbriand, and Cribbs.

Regarding Braylon

So, Braylon Edwards, trying to prove

that 2008 was a fluke, trying to earn himself a fat new contract, reports to camp a day late and promptly fails his physical due to an injury he sustained during the offseason, supposedly while playing a pickup game of basketball.

Mr. Edwards has proven time and again just how stupid, arrogant, and out-of-touch he is, and it has gotten to the point where I am now going to use the word "Braylon" as a synonym for "bitch-slap".

For example, if someone is acting a major fool and can't seem to keep their head out of their own ass, you would refer to that someone as "*needing a major Braylon*".

Regarding the 46 Defense

Rob Ryan mentions once that Mangini likes the 46 Defense, used by Ryan's

father Buddy for the 1985 Superbowl Champion Bears, and suddenly the media latches on like the Browns are "transitioning" to the 46, which will become vital to the success of the team.

Don't buy it. My guess is that you'll see that particular package about as much as the Wildcat. The base is still the 3-4. Ryan and Mangini will run different looks out of that base, which will include many different formations such as, yes, a 46. But this team is built to run a 3-4 and Mangini believes unquestionably in the 3-4. So you

can likely chalk this discussion up to
"*it's Summer and there ain't a
damn thing to talk about* ."

Regarding Reader E-Mail

From John Doe: "*I'm surprised
you haven't mentioned yet that the
Browns were discontinuing the
Browns Legends program. Have you
heard why they're doing this? Just*

like painting over the mural of the Browns greats, it's Mangini making another slap in the face of the great Cleveland Browns traditions
.";

Mr. Doe,

They moved the mural to another, more visible area. They aren't discontinuing the Browns Legends, they're suspending it for a year to re-assess the entry criteria. It's fine if you are already predisposed to hate Mangini, but at least get your facts

straight. I can say I intensely dislike Ben Roethlisberger, but I'm not going to claim it's because he once ate a puppy.

And unless you're over 55, the only tradition that you know of the Browns is this: Failure.

Sure, they were great back in the 50's and 60's, but the Persian Empire was once great as well. Now, it's a bunch of third world countries. It's so bad around here that people [bleep]ing fantasize about the "good ol'

days" of the late 80's when the Browns *almost* got to the Superbowl. That's how bad it is - we idolize a team that choked its [bleep]ing guts out twice in 3 AFC Championship tries. And the third time they got [bleep]ed like a two bit [bleep]. That's "success" to us.

That's the [bleep]ing legacy I know.
That's the [bleep]ing tradition I know.
Year after year after year after year of gut-wrenching suck. We're a joke. We're the Bengals. We're the Lions. I'm sick of it. It makes me want take a screwdriver and jam it into my

[bleep]ing eyes.

I don't give a flying [bleep] about the glories of the 50's. I don't give a rat's [bleep] about the 60's. I wasn't there. I don't remember all those wonderful times. I remember pathetic [bleep]ing [bleep], an endless desert of [bleep] with an occasional [bleep]y oasis thrown in just to keep us alive long enough so we can [bleep]ing suffer some more.

So if this dude can come in here and win a few games and start a NEW

tradition of WINNING - rather than pining fondly over some distant [bleep]ing past - then he can take a big [bleep] on the bronze statue of EVERY [bleep]ing Browns player in the Hall of [bleep]ing Fame for all I care.

PS - As always, thanks for reading.