

The Braylon Effect

Written by {ga=davekolonich}
Monday, October 05 2009 7:00 PM -

Talk about a coincidence that could only be found in Cleveland. Literally hours after rookie wideout Mohammed Massaquoi announced his presence to the league, his mercurial teammate Braylon Edwards finds himself in yet another controversy. Call it the Diva Theorem of NFL Wide Receivers, but the idea of Braylon and positive momentum, much like the overall fortunes of the Browns moving in a positive direction, have proven seemingly impossible to maintain over the years. Dave Kolonich talks about the effect Braylon's latest problems may have on the Browns.

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While Edwards is far removed from being some sort of gun-toting thug, his petulance has so far exceeded his on-field production. And in a most convenient fashion, the latest example of Braylon's star-crossed behavior closely follows the near transcendent debut of Massaquoi as a legitimate threat for an offense that was in search of a savior.

However, despite the Browns nearly great effort against the Bengals and the arrival of Massaquoi as a potential star, guess what, or who, the main topic of discussion was?

"I don't want to ever walk out here, whether we're 16-0 or 0-4 or anytime and ever talk about our players in any way besides the most positive light -- and the players don't want that either," he said. "The thing I love talking about is how much they're doing in the community, who they're helping, how they're playing, all of those positive things and that's what they want, too.

"Sometimes things happen and you address them and you work to find out the best course of action, but the important thing for all of us is to be the best Cleveland Browns we can be and that's on the field and in the community and that's in every way possible."

Naturally, the first reaction most Browns fans would have regarding this story, combined with Massaquoi's play on Sunday would be as follows:

Trade Braylon. Trade him now.

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But unfortunately, it's just not that simple.



THE DECOY FACTOR

Much of the success enjoyed by Massaquoi on Sunday was a result of the Bengals rolling their coverages towards Edwards. For pretty much all of the afternoon, the Bengals devoted a corner and safety to Edwards - which left Massaquoi facing single coverage, resulting in his eight catches. Obviously, the Bengals figured that the book on the Browns was to eliminate Braylon, then wait for a long string of three and outs.

As for the emergence of Massaquoi, I'm pretty sure that the Bengals coaching staff were more surprised than even the most diehard of Browns fans in attendance. Heading into the game, it was clear that the defensive attention was to be exclusively focused on Braylon. And thanks to the Bengals' defensive approach, Massaquoi was allowed to flourish.

While I'm not trying to diminish Massaquoi's sterling performance, the honest assessment of his afternoon is that he certainly couldn't have done it all by himself. Without Braylon around to serve as a diversion, Massaquoi would have faced the brunt of the Bengal attention, and naturally, the results would have been greatly different.

So, let's project ahead a bit and buy into the current and popular speculation that suggests Braylon is again headed out of town - perhaps to the Jets, or to another usual suspect. While great for the future, where would this leave the Browns now?

MIKE FURREY AND A BAG OF CHANGE

It would be an almost cruel blow to the development of Massaquoi if Braylon were traded away in the next couple weeks. Emerging as a productive rookie receiver is troubling enough, but to take away a premiere veteran - in most cases - could severely hamper Massaquoi's 2009 season...along with the promise of offensive consistency that the Browns flashed this past weekend.

Notice that throughout this analysis no mention of Braylon's Sunday stat line has been made. There are two reasons for this - first, it didn't exist and second, Braylon's biggest contribution came by taking heat off of his rookie teammate. The same ideas can be applied to Mike Furrey's limited success and through the sudden resurgence of the Browns running attack.

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In most respects, the Browns have returned to their 2007 era running philosophy, which dictates that the downfield passing attack establishes the run. In a nod to Rob Chudzinski, much of Jerome Harrison's Sunday success could be attributed to the passing game, which again was sparked by Massaquoi, thanks to Braylon.

Take Braylon out of the equation and whatever gains the Browns offense made last Sunday could quickly be negated.



ONE OF MANGINI'S GUYS

However, all of this talk is probably futile in the end. Basically, there is no way that Braylon is a part of the Browns long-term future. Regardless of Massaquoi's one-game emergence, or even Braylon's latest controversy, or despite any of his future comments or actions, it is obvious that Eric Mangini will not include the starcrossed wideout as "one of his guys."

And for good reason.

During his time in Cleveland, Mangini has spoken consistently about finding players who "love the game of football." Does Braylon strike anyone as this kind of player? Certainly, Braylon has amazing talent and physical features and he definitely enjoys the perks of fame that are associated with being an NFL player, but is the desire there? Even if Braylon has the desire, is it enough to allow him to continue to play for the demanding Mangini?

Perhaps the best evidence of why Braylon is not a "Mangini guy" came in the season opening loss to Minnesota. On what now seems like a throw-away play, Braylon badly missed a block on an attempted wideout screen for Josh Cribbs. To compensate for his missed assignment, Braylon then shoved this same defender in the back, which further hurt the team. And then of course, Braylon's laissez-faire reaction to a critical Brady Quinn interception basically encapsulated his true desire to win.

Regardless of how the rest of 2009 transpires for the Browns, and also ignoring the potential for next offseason's salary cap-free spending and gutting madness, the logical fan cannot envision Braylon Edwards as a part of the Eric Mangini-led Browns future. Big money contracts aside, Braylon is not the type of player that can ever fully buy into Mangini's system - which is something that Mangini has probably already realized.

WHAT NEXT?

Whether or not the Browns actually trade Braylon in 2009 remains irrelevant. Basically, Browns fans should ready themselves to put their #17 jerseys in the closet next to other bad clothing investments, such as K2, Brady Quinn, Tim Couch and several others. In the end, Braylon will be frustrating another fanbase by constantly teasing his overwhelming potential.

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As for now, considering that Braylon is not a part of the Browns future, the next logical move would be to trade him while he still has a shred of value remaining. To lose Braylon - or no longer have him on the roster, depending on your perspective - without getting anything in return would be incredibly disappointing, especially considering all the holes to be found on the current roster.

However, in a no-win situation that has become as much a part of the team's history as Lakefront wind in December, any potential long-term benefits the Browns could receive by dealing Braylon now will ultimately hurt the development of Massaquoi. While a potential second round pick next year could land the team the type of right guard, outside linebacker or safety that the team desperately needs, offensive consistency that finally emerged against the Bengals could ultimately prove to be merely a one-game blip.