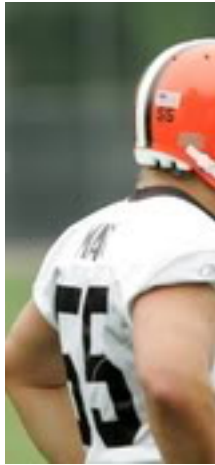


As Braylon Goes ...

Written by {ga=davekolonich}
Thursday, October 08 2009 7:00 PM -

A while back, Dave Kolonich concluded that the mantra for the Browns 2009 fortunes could be summed up as "As Braylon goes, so does the Browns". And for a short time during the Browns first four games, this statement held true. So, if the theory that as Braylon goes, so go the Browns still holds true, what happens now? Dave tackles that question, and also takes a look at which players on this team figure to be here for the long haul in his latest piece for us.



A while back, I decided that the mantra for the Browns 2009 fortunes could be summed up as follows:

[As Braylon goes, so go the Browns](#) .

And for a short time during the Browns first four games, this statement held true. Basically the flag-bearer of the Romeo Crennel regime, Braylon's blissfully sporadic play helped define the Browns as a team with unlimited potential residing in a frustrating basement of inconsistency. Heading into 2009, as the Browns already porous offensive depth was slashed even thinner thanks to the arrival of Eric Mangini, Braylon remained the only viable offensive threat left on the roster.

Although the Denver game was probably Braylon's best statistical performance of the season, his true value to the team emerged last weekend when the Bengals committed to blanketing the mercurial wideout for the entire afternoon, leaving rookie Mohammed Massaquoi free to exploit the defense in a most sensational manner. Call it the Decoy Effect, but in many respects, Braylon's final game as a Brown was perhaps his best performance - and it was all attributed to the often phantom potential that the one-time phenom continually teased us with.

And now Braylon and his natural precociousness and supernatural potential have left the Lakefront for good. So, if the theory that as Braylon goes, so go the Browns still holds true, what happens now?

What happens is this: the Browns will now devote the rest of 2009 to developing their two rookie wideouts, Mohammed Massaquoi and Brian Robiskie. Of course,

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I'm merely speculating that Robiskie will get some playing time - so far in his short NFL career, he has barely even glimpsed the kick coverage teams, let alone catch a pass. As for Massaquoi, he flew under the radar for exactly one NFL game - now, he has to perform with the lights shining directly upon him.

As I've stated before, if the Browns are reduced to giving two rookie wide receivers serious playing time, this offense will struggle in ways unimaginable, even to fans who sat through the Ken Dorsey and Bruce Gradkowski opus of 2008. While Massaquoi clearly has some talent, it's nearly impossible for a rookie wideout to effectively perform right out of the gate, let alone become a team's Number One option. However, in the Browns' case, there aren't many other options available.

And despite how depressing all of this sounds - and in case you still haven't figured it out, this team is clearly building for 2010 and 2011 - the fan reaction in Cleveland has been incredibly positive. Not to rain on anyone's optimism, but just think about this: the Browns will be playing two rookie wideouts (assuming Robiskie eventually plays) combined with a novice running back and a reheated quarterback, who up until last week, was pretty much left for dead.

And still - a lot of us are excited.

What will be intriguing to watch in the coming days and weeks is how the Browns roster eventually shakes out, particularly at the wide receiver spot. For example, if the Browns just brought in a player who is essentially a slot receiver in Chanci Stuckey, what happens to Mike Furrey? Or, if the Browns are promoting Robiskie to play along with Massaquoi - as Mangini's comments yesterday seemed to suggest - then what happens to the Josh Cribbs Experiment at Wide Receiver?

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At least based on the Bengal game, it appears that Cribbs' days as a wideout could be - or have - come to an end. Cribbs essentially lost his starting wideout job to Massaquoi before the Bengal game, then really lost it after the team just missed out on a win. It will be interesting to see if Cribbs gets another shot at wideout this season. If he does not, all of the contract squabbles that were shoved down our throats this past offseason could stay a thing of the past. Basically, if Cribbs remains strictly a Special Teams player, albeit one of the best in the league, he has lost some serious leverage in his quest for a new deal.

Which brings me to this...

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It was obvious from the start of this new era in Cleveland that Braylon was not one of "Mangini's guys." Much like Kellen Winslow and Shaun Smith, Braylon's combination of selfishness, ego and emotional insecurity helped to hasten his exit from Berea. Obviously, yesterday's trade was the culmination of a process started a long time ago by Mangini.

However, in speaking of just who is a "Mangini guy", it's becoming clear that we're starting to get a vision of who will remain in Cleveland for the long run. Or, in other words, if you project ahead a couple seasons, which current players will still be in Cleveland?

Here's a guess...

Joe Thomas

This one is pretty obvious. Regardless of Thomas' status as a Phil Savage draft pick, solid left tackles are at a premium in this league. And if you've been paying attention in 2009, you've seen an alarming number of multiple sack performances coming from defensive ends and outside linebackers. Just watching the Brett Favre Lovefest this past Monday, Vikings end Jared Allen destroyed Green Bay's pedestrian offensive line. Flash back to the season opener and witness how Thomas effectively controlled Allen.

Alex Mack

Another obvious choice, as Mangini's first draft pick will likely man the middle of the Browns' line for years to come. It will be interesting to see how Mack develops, as so far in 2009, the Browns have had virtually no inside running game. However, in a departure from the valuable, but often overmatched Hank Fraley, Mack usually does not end up five yards in the Browns backfield. However, given Mangini's Jets history of drafting O-linemen, it's possible that Mack could have a new right guard to play alongside in the future.

Mohammed Massaquoi

At least based on the Bengals game, Massaquoi looks to be a receiver the Browns can count on in the future. It's funny how the Browns "other" rookie receiver looks to be a blossoming star, while the more "polished" Robiskie has failed to see any offensive action so far.

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What's impressive about Massaquoi is that it seems like he could represent the entire package of what an NFL receiver should be. Massaquoi has good size, is strong, runs precise routes and catches the ball well...attributes that Browns offenses haven't seen in years.



Brian Robiskie

And since I'm projecting the Browns future here, Robiskie serves as the greatest example of "what could be" - meaning that no one has any clue what type of player he will become. However, Robiskie does have one thing going for him, which is a great opportunity in 2009, thanks to the Browns depleted Wide Receiver depth.

Robert Royal

I realize that a lot of fans are down on Royal, thanks to his less than stellar hands - but much like Mack, there is a huge reason why Mangini brought the veteran tight end to Cleveland - versatility. Unlike Browns tight ends of the past, Royal is a decent blocker and is quick enough to run mid-range pass routes. Also, the Browns offense features a huge amount of pre-snap shifting, which usually features Royal moving down the line and around the backfield.

Shaun Rogers

It seems like it was years ago that a newly arrived Eric Mangini and Shaun Rogers were reportedly on the outs in Berea. Fan reaction followed that suggested that the Browns should trade the behemoth defensive tackle - I seem to remember Jay Cutler's name popping up. But now, the Browns defense, which has largely been ineffective this season, is basically one Rogers injury away from becoming completely irrelevant. While certainly Rogers will not merit MVP consideration this season, thanks to the Browns dismal record, I challenge you to find a defensive player in the league who means more to his team than Rogers. And I'm pretty sure that Mangini has already thought about this.

D'Qwell Jackson

Jackson's play often goes overlooked, again thanks to the team's overall performance, but his value is immeasurable, both in terms of on-field and off-field performance. In many respects, Jackson could be the perfect pursuit 3-4 middle linebacker, assuming of course that Mangini can find a solid run stuffer in the coming seasons to put next to him.

Abe Elam

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I'm hesitant to include any of the Browns defensive secondary on this list, mainly because I get the feeling that Mangini will take a safety and corner in the 2010 draft. While Eric Wright could stick around Cleveland, perhaps the only sure bet here is Abe Elam, mainly based on his past ties with Mangini. While Elam can be a liability in pass coverage, his run defense skills and blitzing talent can be further exploited in the future - again, when the team upgrades its overall talent. And again, it's obvious that Elam is a "Mangini guy."



Josh Cribbs

Much like Shaun Rogers, a few months ago it appeared that Cribbs would be making his Cleveland swan song in 2009. However, thanks to Cribbs' less than stellar play as a starting receiver - thanks to Brady Quinn - and the recent emergence of Massaquoi, Cribbs will likely go back to what he does best - which is dominate the special teams units. And in doing so, any new contract Cribbs receives will likely not break the Browns bank like we once thought.

And why stop here? How about a few that "could be" Mangini guys?

Derek Anderson

No, really. At least based on the Bengal game, it is obvious that DA is Mangini's guy for the rest of 2009, at least. As for the future, who knows? Does Mangini want to invest in a high round draft pick, or will he see enough out of DA this year to make a commitment? Then again, DA could explode this season, while a former top draft pick sits on the bench. Sound familiar? Sadly, it does.

Jerome Harrison/James Davis

Much like the quarterback situation, it will be interesting to see whether Mangini decides to grab another running back for 2010. It's a shame that Davis was shut down for the season, as 2009 could have been a great opportunity for him to show both his current and future value. As for Harrison, the sky is the limit, especially considering the Browns vacant depth at the position. Perhaps the biggest challenge for Harrison will be staying healthy.

Kamerion Wimbley

Talk about a win-win situation for Wimbley. Coming off of consecutive disappointing seasons, Wimbley has finally shown some life in 2009 - which should endear him to the new coaching staff, who will likely take credit for this development. And for a coach who values the fundamentals of the game, having an example of improvement such as Wimbley could serve as a great source of pride. As for the rest of us, perhaps it's time to accept Wimbley for what he is, and stop holding him to the unrealistic projections established by the premier pass rushers of the league.

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Eric Mangini

And in case you haven't been paying attention for the past couple days, Mangini isn't going anywhere.