

The Blueprint: Part Two

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For the second installment of the Blueprint series - or, as it's also known as...The Reactionary Path to Rebuilding the Browns Based on the Last Few Weeks of the NFL Playoffs...let's take a look at another area that needs critically upgraded before the Browns can emerge as legitimate playoff contenders.

Since most of us have already accepted the idea - albeit some more grudgingly than others - that the NFL has become nothing more than a glorified game of [flag football](#) , the next logical progression in the Browns latest reboot is to add some playmakers on defense.

And while some would claim that the Browns' defense improved under the guidance of Rob Ryan in 2009 - which is true - it's hard to suggest that the current collection of defenders comes anywhere close to resembling a dynamic playoff unit.

Much like this new postmodern version of the NFL rewards finesse passing teams and overall speed, the Browns desperately need to add some defenders who can basically "keep up" with the likes of the Colts, Saints and Steelers - teams who have mostly abandoned traditional football for the sake of progress.

Speaking of which, we've almost reached the point of the offseason where since the Browns have new leadership, certain difficult questions need to be asked. For example, while Rob Ryan delivered a tremendous job in keeping the team's defense afloat last season - considering what he had to work with - Mike Holmgren and company need to quickly determine what the major areas of concern are among a hard working, but talent-depleted unit.

Of course, the answer is fairly easy to find.

The Browns are one of the slowest defenses in the league...if not the slowest.



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Let's just focus on the situation at linebacker. The team's MVP this past season was David Bowens, who has the build of a lineman and footspeed of a...well, bigger lineman. Late season additions Jason Trusnik and Matt Roth - like Bowens - play a physical game, but are among the league's most unathletic linebackers. Entering 2010 and beyond, the Browns cannot rely on a defense that features one of these three desperately chasing a running back some twenty yards down the field.

Or, how about this? How many bubble screens did you tally throughout the playoffs? Personally, I counted 448. In fact, there's probably one being completed right now. In a league where the screen is the new pass that replaced the pass that was once the run, the Browns are not athletically equipped to compete at such a level.

Which brings us to the secondary. There's a reason why the Browns had to employ a Romeo-esque style of defense throughout the season - a.k.a., "keep the ball in front of you" coverage. The Browns simply don't feature any athleticism in the secondary, with the slight exception of Eric Wright and Mike Adams covering a five-yard radius.

As I've been stating for months, the team's defense cannot improve until Wright is given the opportunity to become the secondary option at corner, rather than the alleged "shutdown" variety. Simply put, Wright is not the guy. That's not to say that he can't be - or isn't - a productive player, but until a legitimate top-flight corner is added, Romeo Ball is going to played well into the future.

Obviously, if you've watched any NFL football over the past few weeks, the marquee name among cornerbacks is that of Darrelle Revis - a former Mangini draft pick. Revis is one of the more physical corners in the league, but the thing that sets him apart is his amazing and innate ability to shadow opposing receivers. In a most unfathomable development, Revis has overcome the league-enforced handicaps put on defensive backs.

And while it's a stretch to suggest that the Browns are going to find the next Revis in a future draft, the new team management could solve a lot of defensive ills by investing in an early round corner...not to mention adding another dynamic player to fill in at safety.

Finally, another striking feature of the recent playoffs has been a resurgence in aggression towards opposing quarterbacks. Credit New Orleans' Gregg Williams for assigning his defense the task of physically beating up the likes of Kurt Warner and Brett Favre in recent weeks. As it relates to the Browns, do we currently have such an impact player - one who brings a certain level of nastiness, one that goes beyond mere physicality?

In a quarterback's league, it has become obvious that disrupting a passer's rhythm is the only means to competing against top offenses. And while all of this seems rather elementary, recent history has suggested that teams that are able to physically attack an opposing passer can reach levels of success that seemed unattainable.

Or, in other words - there's a reason why the Patriots couldn't go undefeated...or why it took the Browns some seven seasons to finally beat the Steelers.

