



### ***A View From The Cheap Seats*    *The Offseason***

The Superbowl was yesterday, and, for the 44<sup>th</sup> year in a row, the Browns weren't in it. I'm sure you heard about it - it was all over the news. It was one of the top stories of Superbowl week - almost on par with some guy's ankle and something about a hurricane.

Yes, 44 years of Superbowl futility is a dubious record to hold, one Cleveland shares only with Detroit. Both the Browns and Lions dominated the 50's and the early 60's, but the Superbowl came into fruition just a bit too late for those two unfortunate franchises. And, from the looks of their 2009 teams, neither appears to be getting any closer.

One might argue that the Browns could do little better than they already have this offseason, what with the acquisition of both Mike Holmgren and Tom Heckert (not to mention the plethora of new Heckgren underlings and hirelings). And I'd have to agree. On paper, it's really hard to argue that the Cleveland professional football organization hasn't made leaps in the right direction.

But I think something's wrong with me. Somewhere along the line, I lost the ability to hope. I keep trying, but there's something broken in there. I can't hope. I don't know how any more. I don't even remember what it feels like.

The Browns always find a way to screw things up. It's almost like they're cursed (an angle that no one in these parts seems to have thought of).

*Surely you can hope about the Cavaliers, one counters. But I don't. Things seem too good*

right now. I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop.

And the Tribe? Come now.

I know how the argument goes: *The Saints made it to the Superbowl, and everyone knows their history of futility.* *The Cardinals made it last year, and they were previously more hopeless than trying to walk to Tunisia from Greenland.*

*Formerly downtrodden teams rise up and conquer all the time in the NFL.* *Why not the Browns?*

Why not, indeed?

All I know is that when I try to imagine it - even in my wildest fantasies (where the ability to throw a whale into space is ordinary) - I can't.

My only comfort is that I've been wrong more times than a broken clock. That, and something about the Browns incredible and lasting failure makes me love them all the more.

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And now that that pitiful diatribe is done, time to get down to business.

Said business being, of course, what do the Browns need to do to get to that Superbowl level?

The answer is: LOTS.

## Safety

Former starters Abe Elam and Brodney Pool are both Free Agents, but since that CBA has zero point zero chance of passing before March, they'll be Restricted. That means that the Browns can basically retain them (if they want to) simply by giving a tender that will make other teams flinch.

My guess is that Elam will be back, but Pool really should retire. With as many concussions as he's had, he should walk around with his head inside a gelatin-filled bubble. For his own health, he should hang 'em up. And even when he did play, Pool was rarely anything more than just some guy, barely distinguishable from Mike Adams or any other dude.

So the Browns will need to acquire at least one starter, and probably bring in another guy they can develop to possibly take over for Elam someday. If Eric Berry were to drop in the draft, he would be ideal, but don't hold your breath.

**Need - 1 Starter, 2 Total.**

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## Cornerback

Eric Wright is fine on one side, but Brandon McDonald has pretty much proven that his days as a starting Corner should be over. He and Coye Francies can probably man the Nickel, allowing for the blessed departure of one Hank Poteat.

But being short a starting-quality CB is a big problem, maybe the highest/second highest priority on the team. Many feel like it could possibly be addressed by Joe Haden (Florida) with the 7<sup>th</sup>

pick of the draft. It will be interesting to see how many starting-caliber Corners bring into town during the Free Agency period.

**Need - 1 Starter, 2 Total.**

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### Linebacker

If you had to ask me to name the starting 4 for the 2010 season using just guys they've already got, I'd have to say Matt Roth (assuming he's re-signed; he'll be a RFA) and Kam Wimbley on the edges, and D'Qwell Jackson (also a RFA) and David Bowens in the middle. Would I be satisfied with that? Yeah, it's OK. But it could also be improved, especially from the pass rush perspective.

The Browns have a lot of Linebackers, mainly serviceable, adequate players that can start and be decent or provide solid depth. Not one of them is a star. I by no means feel this position is set, but it's probably not as high a priority as some other positions, and might require no more than a few players to augment and enhance the depth.

That being said, if the Browns go Rolando McClain with the first pick, then I'm not gonna cry.

**Need - 2-3 Total (1 possibly a starter).**

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### Defensive Line

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Many speculate that Ahtyba Rubin will be moved to starting Nose this year due to his superior ability to clog up running lanes, allowing for Shaun Rogers to move to End, where his ability to penetrate would be better served. I think this is a capital idea, just capital.

Now, for the other End, you can choose between Corey Williams, Robaire Smith, Kenyon Coleman, or CJ Moseley. All of which are fairly decent, solid yet unspectacular. They're great depth, but I'm sure that the world wouldn't end if the Browns managed to pick up someone that was an upgrade and gave Cleveland a DL that could be described as "formidable". If Ndamukong Suh or Gerald McCoy were to fall to # 7 (snowball's chance in Pittsburgh), then I'm sure the Browns would leap for joy. Otherwise, this one might not get addressed this year.

**Need - 1 Total (possibly a starter).**

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### Offensive Line

You're set at LT and C for quite some time with Joe Thomas and Alex Mack. Eric Steinbach is probably still above average, so that leaves the right side of the line, where you need at least one new starter.

Porkchop Womack played well at RT at the end of the season, but that was when the Browns were running the ball 90% of the time. I don't think he's the answer there when Cleveland starts passing more. RG could also use some love. But neither of these positions will likely be addressed early in the draft (certainly not in the 1<sup>st</sup> Round). My guess is that one of those 2 positions will be filled via Free Agency.

But, really, that line is only about one quality starter away from being very solid.

**Need - 1 Starter (at least), 2-3 Total.**

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### **Tight End**

This unit was abysmal last year, even with the late season addition of Evan Moore. Moore should stick, but it's unlikely he becomes an upper-echelon NFL starter, and the depth is more shallow than Kim Kardashian.

Other than that, you've got absolute zero, even on the Kelvin scale.

**Need - 1 Starter, 2-3 Total.**

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### **Wide Receiver**

Here's another unit that makes me gag. Your # 1 WR is Mo Massaquoi, who is a competent starter, but only as a # 2. Then you have Brian Robiskie, who I'm not as down on as some people, but I will admit that he also doesn't have # 1 potential (I think he'll make a nice # 3). After that... blech.

Many feel that the # 1 wideout should be addressed via Free Agency so as to acquire some experience to the position, and I have no problem with that. Beats taking a WR in the 1<sup>st</sup> Round, or reincarnating a disturbing tradition by taking one in the 2<sup>nd</sup>

(Dennis Northcutt, Andre Davis, Quincy Morgan, etc.)

But you'll still need to draft one that has a higher ceiling - a project, a boom-or-bust type - in one of the later rounds. Cuz this position is lacking in both quality and quantity. Hurl.

**Need - 1 Starter, 2-3 Total.**

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### Running Back

I have to assume that both Jerome Harrison and Lawrence Vickers (RFA's) will be retained (if they don't, then it throws this whole position into limbo). Harrison showed enough at the end of last season to warrant a much bigger load... but not too big.

What this unit lacks is the one-two punch, a big back to relieve Harrison, to power through for those short yardage situations. I don't think Chris Jennings is it, and James Davis certainly isn't. There are, however, several draft prospects that might fit the bill.

One that interests me is LeGarrette Blount from Oregon. He's a power back with some quickness. If not for his punching and spazzing incident against Boise State (and subsequent suspension), I think he'd be rated a lot higher (currently projected in the 3<sup>rd</sup>). Now, I know what you're thinking - Mangini won't want him because of that incident. Yet I would point out that he's not necessarily against players with checkered pasts (Elam, for example). He just wants players to behave now. If he can be convinced Blount can do that, well...

Because he played well in the Senior Bowl and has his stock rising, Blount might be gone before the 3<sup>rd</sup>. But if he is sitting there come that time, I believe it would really behoove the Browns to bag Blount.

**Need - 1 player (possibly a co-starter).**

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## Quarterback

To preface this section, I recommend reading [this recent article in the PD](#) , which reveals a lot about Mike Holmgren's QB mindset:

*Oakland boss Al Davis always said, "Running backs don't take you to Super Bowls ... quarterbacks do."*

*"You would never have to sell me on that," said Browns President Mike Holmgren, who is one of only five head coaches to lead two different teams to the Super Bowl. "I've always thought that was the way it was.*

*"I learned that from my old mentor Bill Walsh (who took the San Francisco 49ers to three Super Bowl championships). He may have said it a little tongue-in-cheek, but knowing him I think he kind of meant it. He said if you're a 'physical' running team, the problem is you can't score fast enough. Particularly against teams like New Orleans.*

*"If you're a good rushing team, you're not going to win. They score too many points and you won't score fast enough. You might not have the time to do it."*

A discussion I've been having with many people (most who are arguing against the drafting of a QB early) is that teams can win it all with a mediocre QB if they have a dominant Defense and a strong Running Game. They cite the Baltimore Ravens and Tampa Bay Buccaneers as examples.

And I counter that those teams were anomalies, and that their stay at the top was very brief indeed. Neither even remotely challenged for the Championship after that (with that current cast of characters). Now, teams with great QB's, like New England and Indy and the Packers, they might not win every year, but they have a sustained run near the top, with an annual opportunity at least to get there. You cannot expect to be a perennial power without a Franchise QB.

I think Holmgren agrees:

*"Philosophically, you grow up in the business and you say, 'We're going to pound the ball. We're gonna have a tough team.' Then you go to a team that has great receivers, a veteran quarterback and your defense maybe isn't that strong. So what kind of offense are you going to run? Who cares if I want to be tough and rush the ball? How am I going to win the game? Too many people get lost in that. It's very funny to me. Tell me how are you going to win the game?"*

*"Everyone strives for balance, but typically the good rushing teams are good rushing teams because they don't throw the ball that well."*

*"I think there's more than one way to do it, but I think [running the ball] can only get you so far most of the time," Holmgren said. "If you get farther, then something screwy's happened, something a little lucky, something out of the box has happened."*

*"I look at Baltimore with [rookie quarterback Joe] Flacco last year and they went pretty far. Then all of a sudden, that's it. Unless something [crazy] happens. This year with the Jets -- now, you need a little luck -- when they were 7-7 and Indy didn't have anything to play for ... that allowed them to really get into the playoffs. Once you're in the playoffs, yeah, you can pull an upset. Then, boom, now you're close."*

*"But without 'that guy,' it's pretty hard to get to the Big Game. You really need that man."*

So, you should accept that Holmgren probably isn't going to be down with building a strong Defense and Running Game and just hanging with a mediocre QB. I don't blame him. The NFL

world doesn't work that way anymore. Take the Jets, for instance. Number 1 Defense. Number 1 Running Game. They can maybe make it to the Playoffs (even though how they got there was highly suspect). They can even win a game or two (and the only reason they did that was because of improved QB play).

But once they met a truly powerful Passing Attack, they were toast.

And, due to the NFL's increasingly Pass-friendly rules, they always will be.

Unless the NFL changes their emphasis on QB protection, a good QB with a good passing game will almost always trump good Defense. Take the Steelers last year. Top rated PIT Defense, please meet Arizona Passing Attack. Commence the shredding.

This trend isn't going to stop. Get used to it.

So, in an era where having a top-notch QB is more important than ever before in the history of the NFL, do you honestly think that Holmgren is going to be fine going into next season with Brady Quinn?

I don't either. He's going to acquire someone to start for this team. Whether via Free Agency (veteran stopgap), a Trade (please Kevin Kolb please), or the Draft (I doubt in the 1<sup>st</sup> Round, but wouldn't protest if that was their decision), there will be a new Starter at QB next season.

And, no, don't expect Brady Quinn to even have a chance to really compete for the job. Holmgren has gone on record several times stating that QB competitions don't work in his eyes, that they'll pick a horse and back it.

(And thank the Gods for that. QB competitions are less effective than using bubble gum as a condom.)

To wrap, barring some kind of trade, you've got Brady Quinn and Brett Ratliff as backups. Derek Anderson is set to make about \$9 mil next year, so you can kiss his ass goodbye. He has a better chance to win Miss America than he has of being a Brown. So we wait with great interest to see who will be leading our team into the next decade.

### **Need - 1 Starter, 1 Total.**

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If you're doing the math at home (and I know you are), there is a potential for about 10 new Starters in 2010. Those won't all come from the Draft. Only about 3, if you're lucky. So that means the Browns will have to be fairly active in Free Agency from a pool of players that has been trimmed down due to the Restricted hammer falling on so many Unrestricted-wannabes, in an era where contract discussion will lack the knowledge of what kind of future salary structure might exist.

Translation - There will be some people still starting in 2010 that shouldn't be.

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Since we just discussed Brady Quinn, I might as well address the rumor that has been floating around that the Browns might trade Quinn and a 3<sup>rd</sup> Round pick to Denver for Brandon Marshall. You know Brandon, the disgruntled WR that walked his way through practice one time to demonstrate his unhappiness with his contract.

Obviously, the first idea is that this won't happen. Not because it's not a good trade value - you're basically just trading a 3<sup>rd</sup> Round pick for one of the most productive WR's in the NFL, since Quinn is a dime a dozen. No, this trade won't happen likely because no way would Mangini tolerate having a tool like Marshall on his team. He already had to deal with a prima donna in Braylon Edwards, and he sent that dude packing.

I have to sadly agree. No matter how little I like sacrificing that much talent, you just can't have a guy like Marshall screwing up the locker room. If the Broncos are prepared to ship him out for the equivalent of what the Browns got for Edwards (who is nowhere near as good as Marshall), then that is just not a good sign.

Maybe a team like Indy or New England could absorb him and control him because the veteran leadership and the history of success would keep Marshall in place, but not the Browns.

Shucks. If he were able to remove his skull from his colon, Marshall would've been the perfect answer at # 1 WR. Damn, damn, double damn.

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Speaking of Braylon, I'm sure many of you read Tony Grossi's interview with Braylon's dad, Stan Edwards. If you haven't, here's a link.

(WARNING! READING THIS ARTICLE WILL MAKE YOU DUMBER DUE TO EXPOSURE)

*His father, Stan, said the relationship between Edwards and Cleveland fans was never going to improve and he is "100 percent sure" the root of the problem lies with Edwards being a University of Michigan graduate in Ohio State country.*

*"You guys all hate him," Stan Edwards said in a telephone interview. "If there was continuity in the organization and there was one quarterback he was playing with and he was still making Pro Bowl after Pro Bowl, the relationship would have still been the same with the Cleveland fans."*

When confronted with the fact that other Michigan players have been accepted in Cleveland just

fine, Stan reasoned:

*"There have been [Browns] who played for Michigan (Steve Everitt, Leroy Hoard, Derrick Alexander, Thom Darden) that didn't get the flak that Braylon got. I would agree with that," he said. "But the fact of the matter is there are so many people who didn't like him because he played for Michigan and gave him more crap and actually put our lives in danger on more than one occasion.*

*"But that's what fans do. Nobody can hold the fans accountable. It's virtually impossible. But Braylon's drops get talked about more in Cleveland because he is from Michigan. You can't tell me anything different."*

Which makes about as much sense as using Tabasco as a sexual lubricant.

I am normally careful not to use the term "retarded" to describe people, because that is a disservice to those who are truly retarded. And, when I use the term "retarded", I define it as someone who is slow or mentally impaired due to no fault of their own, but rather due to the pregnancy-related irresponsibility or genetic limitations of their parents. It's someone whose mental impairments are the fault - for whatever reason - of the mom and dad.

So, you see, we cannot blame Braylon for all the stupid things he says/does. The poor guy's a retard.

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That said, now that the Jets are finally out of the playoffs, I think it is time for me to let the Braylon Edwards thing go.

Sure, I'm never gonna like the guy, but my anger and obsession at wanting to see him fail was/is coming across as both petty and shallow (which I am).

Let's just be honest about Braylon. He's a guy that will get you, on average, 2-3 catches a game. He'll also get you 1-2 drops a game. About 3 times a season, he'll have a big game, showing you what he could be if he weren't such a dumbass. But he is such a dumbass, and that cannot be changed at this point. He'll be 27 this month, and rarely do you see players just mature and blossom at that juncture.

There is no doubt that there is currently no one on the Browns' roster that has as much raw talent as Braylon Edwards. It is also true that the Browns Pass Attack sucked with him as much as it sucked without him.

Maybe someone can harness his talent, focus him, make him into the elite Receiver he always wanted to be and never (not even in 2007) came close to being.

Then again, maybe someone can cure cancer with their mind.

Adieu, Braylon. I will no longer burden myself with pondering your existence. You're not my problem anymore, and I should act thusly.

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Of course, that in no way precludes my bringing multiple D batteries to the Jets-Browns game next year to welcome Braylon home.

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With Tom Heckert in the fold as GM, the structure of power in Berea now appears to be Mike Holmgren on the throne with two equal and trusted advisors - Heckert and Mangini - standing behind him. As Czar, Holmgren will let his advisors do their jobs, but he will be around to

remind them that they should not step out of line, or suffer his wrath.

Holmgren said something to that effect at the [introductory press conference](#) on January 12th:

*"We are talking about these fellas right here... We are all in it for the long haul. We believe in each other and I'm going to make sure that they all play nicely with one another. There are no disagreements. That's my job."*

It sounds like he's already anticipating a butting of heads between Heckert and Mangini. Now, there is never total harmony of opinion in any football organization, but it can get out of control to the detriment of the team (see: Savage, Phil and Crennel, Romeo). Holmgren is just stating that he won't let that happen.

I envision it going like this:

INT. BEREA OFFICE - DAY

**Tom Heckert**, an expanding man with a graying goatee, stands by a chalkboard, studying a notebook in his hand and writing names. He seems perplexed by something, leaning over his nearby desk and looking at some further reports, then back at his notebook.

A knock comes at the door. Tom, loathe to be interrupted, holds in an angry retort, breathes to calm himself, and says:

Tom: *Come!*

The door opens and in walks **Eric Mangini**, an expanding man without a graying goatee. He holds some papers in his fist and walks towards Tom with an irritated air.

Eric: *I got your new Free Agency lists, and we need to talk.*

Tom (dryly): *Ah. Eric. Pleasure to see you... again.*

Eric (ignoring): *Did you look at these lists?*

Tom: *I put those lists together, so... yes, I did look at them.*

Eric: *Well, then, what's with this guy being on the top of the Linebacker list?*

Tom: *Well, he's a Free Agent, and he's more talented than the rest of the guys that are Free Agents, and we need some talent at that position, so there you go.*

Eric: *I don't like that guy.*

Tom (trying to maintain patience): *Why don't you like that guy?*

Eric: *He's mouthy!*

Tom pauses, just staring at Eric.

Tom: *He's... mouthy?*

Eric: *Yeah! He makes a lot of smart comments!*

Tom: *And so we shouldn't sign him because he makes lots of smart comments? I thought you liked smart players?*

Eric (ignoring that): *I'm not gonna have some guy second-guessing me in the locker room, much less with the press, all the time! I won't stand for it!*

Tom: *So, who would you have me get?*

Eric (pointing at the list): *How about that guy?*

Tom: *Him? You want him to be the big signing? He's a 31-year-old career backup.*

Eric: *He's a real team player and he'd be great depth.*

Tom: *Eric, we can't just build a team of really nice special teamers. We have many deficiencies, and sooner or later we're gonna have to address them with players with some talent. You're just gonna have to deal with their attitudes.*

Eric looks aghast.

Eric: *Mike said I would have input on who we get.*

Tom: *And so you have. You've been in here 10 times a day for the last month, telling me about who you like and who you don't like. And I've taken notes, see?*

He holds up a yellow notepad with a picture of a gun drawn on it.

Tom: *But whether you like it or not, we have to get some better players here, because this is my big chance, and I'm not going to have my reputation shot because you can't handle some lip.*

Eric (getting louder now): *I'm telling you, I'm not going to put up with this guy being on my team! I won't tolerate it!*

Tom's eyes flash with anger. He points to the notebook he holds in his hands.

Tom: *You know what I'm doing right now, Eric? I'm putting together the Free Agency list for Wide Receivers. And you know who I have at the top of the list? That's right... Terrell Owens!*

Eric (gasping and stepping back): *You wouldn't!*

Tom: *I would! I've already talked to his agent! It's as good as done! Get ready, TO is coming to town! Brady Quinn better take a course in bus mechanics, because he's gonna be under one all season!*

Eric: *I don't believe you.*

Tom: *Believe it! We've already pre-ordered the jerseys!*

Eric (sputtering): *You... you... you suck!*

Tom: *You suck!*

Eric: *I don't like you anymore!*

Tom: *I never liked you. You smell like dog poop!*

Eric: *Yeah, well, you're a poophead!*

Tom: *I'd rather be a poophead than smell like poop!*

Eric: *Well, I'd rather smell like poop!*

Tom: *Good, cuz you do!*

Eric throws his lists at Tom. Tom retaliates by hurling chalkboard erasers back at him. Papers and chalk dust fills the air as Tom and Eric yell at each other and slap at each other's faces.

Mike (offscreen): *WHAT THE HELL IS GOING ON HERE!!!???*

Eric and Tom freeze in mid-fight, their faces dropping from rage to horror as in strides **Mike Holmgren**, an expanding man with an expansive moustache. He stares at the both of them in fury, his eyes actually throbbing.

Mike: *Someone better explain or I'm gonna beat some ass!*

Eric and Tom both point at each other.

Tom: *He said I was a poophead!*

Eric: *He said I smell like poop!*

Tom: *He won't leave me alone!*

Eric: *He told me we were gonna sign TO!*

Mike: *ENOUGH!!!*

Dead silence falls again. The only sound that can be heard is the heavy, angry breathing of Holmgren, not unlike that of a water buffalo that just climbed Everest. Mike looks at Tom first.

Mike: *Tom, how could you tell him that? You know there's no way we're gonna sign TO!*

Tom looks frustrated, and Eric smiles and makes a face at him.

Mike: *And, Eric, What did I tell you about coming in here all the time?*

Eric (dropping his head): *I just wanna know what's going on and he never tells me what's going on...*

Mike: *Shut it! I'm sick of this crap! We're all on the same team! Why can't you dumbasses just get along?*

Eric and Tom both kind of mutter sheepishly, avoiding Mike's gaze. Tom pushes some chalk with his foot dejectedly.

Mike: *If I hear this kind of crap again - and I mean EVER again - I'm gonna have to use this!*

He holds up a wooden paddle with holes drilled down the center. The paddle is 3 feet long and about a foot thick.

Mike: *This is the Foe Hammer, and if I ever hear you two fighting like this again, you will get to know the Hammer all too well! Do you understand me?*

Both Eric and Tom mutter their ascent.

Mike: *What? I didn't hear you!*

Eric and Tom (together, begrudgingly): *Yes.*

Mike: *OK. Now then, Tom, back to work. Eric, back to your room!*

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And that's why I think this thing will work.

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And, yes, I know that I said at the beginning that I don't have any hope.

I lied.

I do that.