



As I began this article, it contained much disdain for the so-called "holdout" of the 5 Restricted Free Agents (Abe Elam, Matt Roth, Jerome Harrison, Lawrence Vickers, D'Qwell Jackson) and their extended pouting session. Since that time, the situation has resolved itself the way I was writing that it would resolve itself - the only possible way it could resolve itself - with all 5 reluctantly signing their tenders just prior to the June 15th deadline.

So this section just got a lot less interesting.

But, what the hey, why not keep reading anyway? Please? Pretty please?

I'll grow a beard and hold rallies and make self-deprecating music videos if you do.

If you even managed one drop of sweat over whether or not these guys were gonna acquiesce, you either weren't paying attention or you have a nervous disorder.

The RFA's were the property of the Cleveland Browns for 2010 whether they signed the tenders or not. No other team was going to try to sign them - they would've done so already if it were even a remote possibility.

The Browns weren't going to trade them, no matter how many times the RFA's asked or what kind of Twitter fits they threw.

Nor were the Browns going to sign them to long term contracts, no matter what kind of empty threats they made. This was made clear in Tom Heckert's nigh-genius public statement:

The players had no intentions of holding out past the 15th, because Tom Heckert had already stated that he was going to cut their tender amount from the 2nd Round value (about \$1.8 mil each) to 110% of their 2009 base salary if they did (about \$1 mil less for 4 out 5 of them).

And it's not just about lost money for this season. None of these guys is a Franchise type. Vickers is probably the closest to that moniker, but even he isn't "irreplaceable". No, these guys want long term contracts and big bucks somewhere, be it in Cleveland or otherwise, and they have no choice but to play in 2010 if they have any hope of receiving such contracts and bucks.

Their options were these: *Play for the Browns for the tendered amount, or sit and watch your career crumble into dust.*

That's it. Those were the only two options.

Push or get off the porcelain throne.

The whole thing was just a sad sham, a demonstration of how powerless the players are in the NFL world. Hell, if they were in the NBA, the players would've been free to let the organization dangle and the fans tear their hair in despair (Fair? Neither here nor there). But they're not in a league that lets the children run the school. Nope, they're in the NFL, and they'll have to live

with the fact that team and league will always come before player.

(Thank God).

Backed into a corner, none of these guys had an option to do anything but what they did. They knew full well since Day One that it would end this way, but they played out their silly and transparent charade of "solidarity" or "resistance" anyway (for Zeus knows what reason). They got a couple days off of practice, I suppose. But some of them also managed to jeopardize their chances at starting jobs.

Which is hardly optimal when you're trying to play your way to contracts and bucks.

A friend of mine told me that he thinks Heckert & Holmgren have made a mistake playing hardball with these guys because now they'll be less likely to re-sign with the Browns and other Free Agents around the league will look poorly on the organization because of the way they treat their players.

I asked him what condiments he'd put on the retard sandwich he'd been eating.

There's an acronym for that kind of mamby-pamby drivel: STFU. It means, I think, *Stop That Foolish Uncouthness*. Or something like that.

Here's the juice, mi amigo: If the Browns come calling with a fat contract sometime this season, those hurt feelings will go away quicker than teenage love.

Every other damn team in the league did exactly the same thing. Players and teams have spats all the damn time, and somehow, some way, when money finally changes hands, offended parties go from being irrevocably wounded by events to not giving a damn.

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## Regarding The Aforementioned RFA's

In the end, the white flag raised by the RFA's does benefit the team. It is true that none of these guys was a deal breaker, but all 5 were valuable contributors (at minimum). Their presence in camp helps the squad.

Listed in order of importance:

### Lawrence Vickers



He was the second player (after Jerome Harrison) who realized the holdout was ridiculous and thus managed to circumvent it without "giving in" by signing an injury waiver.

I'm not sure who talked to these guys (agent, union), but it's clear that someone spoke to the RFA's on ALL teams and encouraged them to resist playing ball and try for long term contracts before NFL Armageddon strikes. And it also seems clear that Vickers and Harrison agreed to do their part, then started to realize the futility of this particular "fight the power" as the itch to play returned and (in Harrison's case) high draft picks started taking their jobs.

It could be argued that Vickers is a Top 5 Fullback in the NFL, and he was a big part of the late season resurgence of the 2009 running game. My guess is that the brass looks kindly on him "crossing the picket lines", per se, and rewards him with a contract extension somewhere around Game 8.

'Specially if the running game is doing as well as I think it will.

### Jerome Harrison



One could argue that he is more integral to the team than some Fullback, but Vickers has been doing it for a while now, whilst Harrison is a kind of one-game-here-one-game-there kind of performer.

That's not necessarily his fault. He has been woefully underutilized as both Romeo and Mangini tried to squeeze a little more blood out of the Jamal Lewis rock. When Jerome's gotten the opportunity, he's done well.

Still, 3 games at the end of a lost season does not a Feature Back make. The idea that he is a Franchise every-down type RB is still very much in question. Hell, the idea that he is a 50-50

load sharer is still very much in question.

But I think the glowing reviews that Monterio Hardesty was receiving hastened Harrison's return to the team, as he was the first of the 5 to mosey on back into camp. And that was the smart thing to do. Why work all these years to finally get your shot at being a starting RB in this league, only to sit out OTA's and Minicamp and surrender your opportunity to a highly regarded rookie?

I've never known anyone flexible enough to do that to themselves.

### Abram Elam



I know, I know, this is a bit of a surprise to see Elam this high because Abe's the epitome of Just Another Guy. Elam is absolutely nothing special, and probably will be the starter for only another year or two, tops.

The reason that he's this high is that, despite the drafting of TJ Ward and Larry Asante, the Safety position is still woefully thin. Without Elam, you're either starting 2 rookies, or the likes of Mike Adams, Ray Ventrone, or Nick Sorensen. Yeesh.

One could argue that Elam was the biggest idiot for sitting out because he was the most replaceable, but the fact that he was the only one whose salary reduction was negligible means that it wasn't really that surprising that he took a little early off-season vaykay. He simply had less to lose.

## Matt Roth



With his earlier "trade demand", Roth earned the *Dumbass Award*<sup>™</sup> of the group. That was the worst bluff in the history of bluffs. It's like a naked man telling you "*Back off! I've got a gun!*"

All the "trade demand" really did was make Heckert state the truth of the situation publicly and make the proclamation look stupid.

Roth did play well at the end of last season, and I'm interested to see what he can bring to the team.

But a player of his stats and history should in no way, shape, or form be demanding trades. He has little to no league value. There probably aren't a lot of teams that would look at Roth as a potential starter. He should thank his fairy godmother that he landed somewhere he can actually get a chance to maximize his value.

I was half convinced that Roth was dumb enough to actually hold out past the 15th. I am happy to be wrong. Or, at least, wrong about his agent.

## D'Qwell Jackson



Nationally, this is probably the most recognized name of the 5. Which shows you what national sources know about the Cleveland Browns.

Mr. Jackson led the league in tackles in 2008. That just goes to show you what kind of meaningless stat "tackles" is.

How many of those tackles were on impact plays? How many of those tackles severely hampered or stopped a drive? Or, to stop mincing words, how many of those tackles were made 5 yards down the field after the primary goal of the play was already achieved?

I remember quite clearly that Wali Rainer led the Browns in tackles year after year during his time in Ohio. I also remember quite clearly that Wali Rainer could be replaced by an undrafted Free Agent without blinking an eye.

That's the kind of impact that D'QWali brings to Cleveland now. You know, the kind of impact that can't be seen, heard, felt, tasted, smelled, or detected in any tangible sense. In effect, a non-impact.

I have serious doubts that D'QWali would've started for the Browns this year anyway. After he got hurt, David Bowens took his place and made many more impact plays. Please, find me someone that feels the Browns' Defense was superior in the first 6 games under the eagle-like watch of D'QWali as opposed to the end of the season where he was IR'd and sipping piña coladas while getting caught in the rain.

Now, after his very public grudge, I'm guessing the Browns will show D'QWali exactly how much they value his services and make him a mid-line backup. Which is probably what he is.

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### **Regarding Minicamp**

There are many minicamp reports that are out there - just check any of the major Ohio newspaper sites - but what can really be gleaned from padless practices in June?

Not so much.

According to various sources, the following players have all looked good: Brian Robiskie, Mo Massaquoi, Monterio Hardesty, Coye Francies, Johnathan Haggerty (undrafted WR), David Veikune, and Jake Delhomme.

It means nothing.

We'll see what the dog days of August and the crack of actual pads brings. Until then, this discussion is just the fodder of those sorry souls that cannot abide the absence of American football.

Such as myself.

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### **Regarding Going With These Receivers**

It appears that the powers that be have eschewed the veteran WR option, and are prepared to enter the 2010 season with a Receiving corps of Mo Massaquoi, Brian Robiskie, Chansi Stuckey, Josh Cribbs, Evan Moore (yes, I count him as a WR, since he sure as hell ain't a blocking TE), Carlton Mitchell, and maybe one of Johnathan Haggerty, Jake Allen, James Robinson, and Syndric Steptoe.

I hope to Odin that Heckgren knows what they are doing. That list is like waking up next to Gheorghe Mureşan.



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## Regarding The World Cup

Unlike many of you, I very much enjoy watching the Soccer (henceforth to be referred to as International football).



However, I do NOT like watching it with those god-forsaken horns blowing all game.

Who in the HELL thought those horns was a good idea?

I don't care if it is some local tradition or some source of horribly misplaced national pride - those horns SUCK. It's like someone duct taped a beehive to my head and the inhabitants flew into my brain via my ear.

If FIFA ain't gonna do anything about the gol-darned horn fiasco (and they ain't), then I think it's on the television networks to fix this. And the fix is pretty damn easy.

You see, it's less enjoyable to watch the game with the sound completely down because you want to hear the announcers and you want to hear the fans (minus the horns). So you have announcers. And you throw in some pre-recorded crowd noise.

How hard would it be for some broadcast guy to sit at a volume control, moving the slide up or down on the looping track of crowd chatter in reaction to the game's events? Dude breaks free from the pack with the ball and it's just him and the goalie... slide that volume on up. Ball goes in... slide it up some more. Announcers yell, cut to shot of players jumping all over each other, fans in stands jumping up and down.

Boom! Annoying I-want-to-stab-my-ears-with-ice-picks buzzing situation solved.

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### Regarding LeBron James

I would like LeBron to re-sign with Cleveland. I do realize the team will be much diminished should he choose to move on to different pastures.

But I am disturbed and disgusted by the sheer amount of ass-kissing that's going on to try and entice him to stay.

Yes, I know that LeBron wants to be wooed. He wants someone to hold his hand and stroke his hair and tell him gently that He Is Loved. This is hardly surprising, considering the way that the general public has fawned over him since puberty. Professional athletes are just as big princesses as professional actors and professional musicians, and LeBron is hardly an exception. If anything, he's even more so than the average. He's gone beyond princess.



