



Inconsistent.

If asked to use one word to describe free agent wide receiver Antonio Bryant, you won't find one that fits better.

Make no mistake, Bryant has talent. He's one of only two players in history (other was Randy Moss) to win the Biletnikoff Award as a sophomore. He's got good size at 6'2. He garnered 1,000 yards receiving last season for a Browns team that had nothing close to a prolific pass offense. He's only 25 years old.

However, it is this same set of attributes that will result in Bryant being paid pretty close to #1 wide receiver money this off-season. And a #1 wide receiver Antonio Bryant is not.

Bryant is the type of player whose departure will cause an uproar with fans. He made some big plays last season, and is one of just five players in franchise history to post 1,000 yards receiving in a year. And the Browns haven't exactly been overstocked with talented pass receiving options since their return. To let one go that we already had in tow will be incomprehensible to some.

What these people fail to realize is what Bryant cost us this past season, and what

he could cost us in the future.

If there was an official statistic for dropped balls, Bryant would be at the top of the list. His inconsistency, not only with his pass catching, but his route running and run blocking, has simply been too great to feel comfortable counting on this guy at the ends of games. His drop late in the Detroit game single-handedly cost us that game, and similar boners affected several others. And for all the “big play” talk, Bryant scored just four touchdowns last year, with a couple of those coming in garbage time.

There are other factors at play here as well, leaving his inconsistency aside.

The Browns have a lot of money and hope invested into Charlie Frye and Braylon Edwards. Do the Browns want millions of dollars invested in a guy that has made a living squabbling with quarterbacks? A guy that Dallas ordered to attend anger management classes as a prerequisite to re-joining the team? Do the Browns want Braylon Edwards learning the NFL ropes on how to play the position from Bryant?

Additionally, the Browns already have a lot of cash invested into pass catchers. Edwards and Kellen Winslow are two of the teams’ highest paid players. Can a team that wants to win games running the football and playing stout defense afford to tie this much money up into pass catchers?

Antonio Bryant is going to want #1 wide receiver money, or close to it. And someone will be stupid enough to give it to him. The whole X-Factor of free agency is that it only takes one team to set the market for a guy.

NFL careers aren’t long. This is Bryant’s one chance to get paid, and he will look to do so. You think he’s going to take a hometown discount to go play for a coach that bad mouthed him all year, and with essentially a rookie quarterback taking

the helm in 2006? If so, I've got some land to sell you.

And therein lies the problem. In addition to wanting to get paid like a #1, Bryant will want to get the touches of a #1 WR. That isn't going to happen here. The only reason Bryant was somewhat subdued in his behavior here was because he was getting those looks. Bring Braylon and Kellen back into the picture, and Bryant goes back to sulking, as he has time and time again in his career.

There's no doubt Romeo Crennel has had a big hand in the decision to essentially cut bait on Bryant, as reported this week by the Plain Dealer and Akron Beacon Journal. Crennel's in-season comments on Bryant were hardly glowing, and he watched teams in New England and New York win Super Bowls without any receivers as talented as Bryant. Bryant is representative of the types of players Butch Davis brought in here, and we just sacrificed a full year purging ourselves of those types. You go ahead and overpay the guy that looks great on paper and makes a couple big plays. I'll pay market for the guy that makes tough first down catches, and is willing to do the little things to help the team win.

The Browns will have to replace Bryant, and there are several intriguing options out there in free agency. Preference one for me would be to bring Joe Jurevicius back home. His sure hands and ideal size would be the perfect complement to our talented young wide receiver and tight end. Other options are David Givens (NE), Brandon Lloyd (SF), Nate Burleson (Min), Koren Robinson (Min), Kevin Curtis (StL), and Shaun McDonald (StL). All are unrestricted free agents.

And while the draft is weak at the top at receiver, it's reasonably strong in the middle ... most likely where the Browns would look to target a wide out.

Antonio Bryant has #1 wide receiver type talent, but his inconsistency and attitude makes him a decent #2 or a very good #3. Yet, someone will pay him on scale with his talent alone. And I hope that team isn't the Browns.