Ole Mansfield is back. Finally. And per usual, goes yard with his latest piece. In it, he takes a close look at the tenure of Phil Savage, and wonders why he gets a free pass from the majority of the fan base despite a miserable track record since coming here. After two years, 30 games, 15 draft choices, tens of millions spent on veteran free agent contracts, and two offensive coordinators, the team is neither any better nor arguably positioned to be better soon based on anything more substantive than hope.

"Old Mother Hubbard
Went to the cupboard
To get her poor dawggie a bone,
When she got there
The cupboard was bare
So the poor little doggie got dissed two years later."

I grew up as an adolescent in the Ronald Regan Era. So when I see charts with all of two axis and some plotted points, I just know they have to represent reality in all its complexities.

I wound up as a centrist who usually votes Democratic.

The issue of whether Phil has done a good job or not shouldn't be based on "who inherited the most FUBAR situation in 2005 created between 1999 and 2003". It should be based on who is doing a good job as an NFL General Manager since 2005. And that, my dawgs, is how any discussion related to Phil Savage should be framed. So it is with the annual spin coming out of Berea to rationalize this year's Runaway Train ™ and the latest iteration of a failed front office and coaching staff. Somewhat surprisingly, those at the brother web site of The Cleveland Fan.com, the esteemed Orange and Brown Report of the legendary Barry McBride, a Real American Hero, are echoing this spin. Barry McBride and his able crew have done a thorough job of analyzing The Lerner Franchise’s ™ draft record from 1999 – 2003. If you haven't checked it out,

I highly recommend a look
as grist for the mill. It is quality work. In the end however, it just reverts to the same ole, same ole.

Chris Palmer circa December 2000: “It’s expansion’s fault.”

Butch Davis circa December 2003: “It’s the previous GM’s fault for not drafting well.”

And now, Phil Savage comes up with the creative excuse in December 2006 to explain a season of significant disappointment and ohfer the AFC North: “It’s the previous GM’s fault for not drafting well.”

I’ve seen this movie before. It never ends well.

Let me be clear from the get go: I don't want Phil run after only two seasons, so I'm lock step with the spin and the OBR piece , I suppose. Same with Romeo. Why? Because suck beats rudderless suck. I'm just weary of the same ole, same ole. I think Phil has done an average to poor job at best when the only positive thing that can be said is that he inherited 911 in yo’ town.

I keep pounding home the question with caveman-like single-mindedness: What has Phil done well? What did he botch? Judge accordingly.

I'm not saying Phil is Jerry Krause and dismantled the 90's Bulls.

The team he inherited sucked, which, duh, is how he got a job. Unfortunately, after two years, 30 games, 15 draft choices, tens of millions spent on veteran free agent contracts, and two offensive coordinators, the team is neither any better nor arguably positioned to be better soon based on anything more substantive than hope.

Phil Savage is the master of two steps back, one step forward. Phil came into a bad situation. Rather than build upon the little that was here, he needlessly made the situation worse and he's failed to move it forward nearly enough given the available resources. In exchange, he is still hailed as Cap'n Jesus while Romeo Crennel, somewhat deservedly, wears the big and tall sized bullseye. Enough. Phil's had enough time to accumulate a record. Time to grade Phil. Grade him on a steep curve? Oh hell yes. But grade him instead giving him a free pass? Definitely.

In 2004 when Phil came in as a brash talker, full of confidence, he assured us that The Lerner Franchise has positively no talent. He told us we needed to build from scratch through the draft and this would take time. Given the Runaway Train V 2.0 and its 9 losses in a row in 2004, the drama queen quarterback, the panic attack quitter; as a loyal fan, I bought in as if it were the second coming one Microsoft’s initial IPO back in the day of DOS.

“In Phil We Trust”.

OK, by any estimation, the 2004 Browns weren't loaded w/ talent. Only 13 players from the

2004 roster remain two seasons after Phil has had two years to get in his players. But let's take a look at some guys Phil summarily discarded from this so-called empty cabinet, excluding Bodden, Jones, Davis, Heiden, Roye, Winslow, you know, all the best players on the current team:

Melvin Fowler - C / G - starting 12 games so far this year. In return? Nat Dorsey.

Jeff Faine - C - starting 12 games for New Orleans. In return? Got to move up to secure Nyquil Jackson. Jackson looks like a smaller version of Andra Davis. He’s a good guy, good team player, racks up tackle numbers, but he’s nearly invisible in doing so. An impact Eagle ILB was needed next to a steady producer, not a clone.

Chris Crocker - S - Note: also played CB in college and nickel back as a rookie – Crocker is starting 12 games for Atlanta this season. While safety is not a position of need, if he could have added depth and slid in at corner better than make-me-Ralph Brown, that's big. In return? Leon Washington, a special teams player. The high second round selection by Phil of backup Brodney Poole obviously precipitated this move.

Anthony Henry - CB - Phil really didn't strive to successfully negotiate with him, much like Courtney Brown. There is much reason to believe that Butch’s refusal to negotiate earlier led to this situation, but Phil certainly didn’t knock himself out to turn it around and in exchange got one of “his” players. This makes you wonder how committed he was to rectifying the situation. In exchange? Gary Baxter. Now the injuries are one thing, but the case can also be made that this is a good safety and a not-so-good corner from his time in Baltimore. When briefly healthy, he didn’t show anything in coverage here to favorably compare him to Henry. A Henry / Bodden tandem would have been among the most solid in the NFL.

Michael Lehan - CB – He’s a frequent spot player for the Dolphins, and he's started a game this season. In exchange we get to see Holly play with his back to the ball in the air and make-me-Ralph Brown.

Lewis Sanders - CB - Started 9 games this season for the Texans. In exchange we get to see Holly play with his back to the ball in the air and make-me-Ralph Brown.

We also got the swap of Antonio Bryant for Joe J and Travis Wilson, as well as Jason Fisk and Ted Washington trying to replace Gerard Warren, who is on record as saying he would have stayed and played in a 3 – 4, but wasn’t given a chance. I’ve read nothing negative out of Denver about Warren.

I’ll give Phil a mulligan on the loss of Ekuban, Lang, Brown and Meyers due to scheme change.

Recap?

Phil ran off a pair of solid NFL starting interior offensive linemen so he could spend beau coup free agent dollars on a center. Bad luck is one thing. But creating holes to have to use limited

resources to fill them, instead of filling the real holes he had and therefore still has, is another. (Pay attention to this theme - it'll be on Phil's tombstone in 2007 doesn't get much better.)

Phil was on the clock as a quality starting cornerback signed elsewhere, and he let several quality depth defensive backs go. This allowed him to spend a second round choice on a safety prospect that looks good, but is still the backup safety, instead of Khalif Barnes. Now he has to dress Wal Mart's July employees as starting cornerbacks due to the inevitable NFL injuries. Plus he used two mid round draft choices on depth that could have gone to developmental line players, netting one bust in Perkins and another who is on IR. Bad luck is one thing. But creating holes to have to use limited resources to fill them, instead of filling the real holes he had and therefore still has, is another.

Phil summarily ran off a quality NFL starting interior defensive lineman for public relations reasons. Not that we need defensive linemen.

It isn't that any or all of those backup guys were what you call "good". That is an oversimplification and misses the point. It is that he ran them for next to nada and then had to spend draft resources to replace them that were desperately needed to fill the real holes on the team, especially developmental prospects for the lines. Instead Phil is spinning his wheels with special team players and trying to replenish defensive back depth. And these guys aren't even any good. They may well in fact prove worse than the players they replaced.

I can deal with a bad team being taken over and a new direction established.

I can deal with the reboot button being hit and two whole seasons - 32 games - flushed for development. That's $ 800 in season tickets.

I can be patient if told it will take 3 to 5 years and I see a plan and truly see it being well executed.

What I can't handle is assessing the HERE and the NOW and seeing almost no progress halfway into the plan, seeing very little hope for progress, and watching Phil still hailed as Cap'n Jesus and reading the same lame assed spin that Butch gave us in 2003 and 2004.

And I haven't said word one about the quarterback situation.

The fans of The Lerner Franchise – and God bless our infinite patience, they'd never put up with this in New York, Pittsburgh, Baltimore, Boston or a city with championship expectations - need to be reminded: It's not about where we've been, it's where we are, and where we're headed.

This is what really disturbs me. I think we are seeing ample evidence in many cases that the players Phil is selecting to replace the holes he created are no better than those who he let go who weren't very good to begin with, but in many if not most cases were serviceable NFL spot starters or two deep depth. Butch gave his guys preference and a free ride, sure. That's why so many of his draft picks made the squad, including The Snitch. But despite that, there is ample

evidence that the 2005 draft is nearing the disastrous proportions of infamous 1999 draft, and we were slotted 3rd overall. Edwards looks talented but troubled and has an injury history. Who knows about Marquis Poole? And Frye looks done. The rest of the draft was crap and most of the players are now cut from a team that has 9 wins in two seasons.

If a GM with two full drafts and a shit load of cap space hits the reboot button and creates needless holes, but fills those holes and improves, no blood no foul to me. Hell, show me promise of improvement based on more than "he's good because we drafted him" and I'll show faith. Git er dun. I give Phil a mulligan on LeCharles Bentley. But after that? There's just not enough impact players drafted or signed given the resources available. There are not enough quality starters and not enough depth added given two off seasons with great resources allocated and spent. I don't see how what Phil has done can be considered anything but an average job at the very best, and that average is a kindly given grade based on the team he inherited.

After 2 seasons of carte blanch and doing it his way with complete control, Phil has taken 4 - 12 with a troubled locker room and is on track to give us... 4 – 12 with a troubled locker room. With no foundation. Butch got one 5 win season and most of a 4 win season out of the "woe is me, it was the other guy's fault" spin. Butch earned those two years on his own accomplishments in 2001 and 2002 with Clark's draft choices and free agents before Butch himself went Phil on the 2002 team. It all caught up to Butch in 2004, and the statute of spin limitations expired on him. So I'm left to ask: when will people move beyond Art, the NFL, Policy, Clark and Butch and lay any accountability whatsoever on Savage? When will Phil's "woe is me, it was the other guy's fault" spin statute of limitations expire?