The NFL Draft is still almost four months away. But since when has that stopped us from talking NFL Draft? Shoot, we've been knee deep in it since late September. In my latest, I take a look at the seven players that are most likely to be the Browns next high first round draft choice. I try and make the case for all of them, explaining why each would make the most sense once the Browns go on the clock in late April.

It's what we do best Browns fans. Talk NFL Draft.

Lord knows we've had our share of practice. Eight years of a substandard product on the field have consistently thrust us into draft banter well before Halloween. By the time the season ends? We're knee deep in our discussions and analysis before most other NFL fans across the country have even paid their first thoughts to the event.

This year has been no different. On September 24th, just three weeks into the season, the Browns playoff hopes were all but shot after losing to Ravens to fall to 0-3 on the year. The team eventually stumbled to an abysmal 4-12 mark, and will pick either 3rd or 4th in this year's draft, which will be decided by a coin flip between the Browns and the Buccaneers, both of whom finished with the same record and an identical strength of schedule.

And now, with the Browns' draft position all but established, and fans fresh off seeing most of the top tier prospects play one last time in their bowl game … the debate is set to intensify. The Browns have several needs. Chief amongst them are both lines of scrimmage, quarterback, and running back. And there is no shortage of attractive "top of the draft" candidates in all of those areas.

By this point in the game, many fans already have a horse in the race. Either based on their philosophy as to how to build a football team or a personal infatuation with one of the players I'm going to list below … there's a segment of Browns fans that have already made up their mind as to who they're backing to become the latest high first round selection of the team. And then there's the fans like me, who want to learn a little more about these guys, and want to see how free agency plays out before deciding which candidate they are going to endorse.

In this still early stage of the game, there are seven players that currently jump out at me as likely candidates to be the Browns first draft selection at #3 or #4 overall in the first round. These seven players are listed below, in order of my perceived likelihood of being the selection when the Browns go on the clock about four months from now.

In doing so, I'll try and make the case for each of these guys. I'll ignore their flaws, and explain why each would make the most sense for this franchise.

RB Adrian Peterson, Oklahoma

Peterson is a franchise back. After passing on LaDanian Tomlinson to select Gerard Warren, the Browns have a chance to make things right by selecting Peterson this season. And there's only one way to acquire a franchise back, and that's by drafting them. Superstar runners never hit free agency, and the statistics on what happens to runners once they approach age 28-29 is frightening.

Guys like AP come around once every 3-4 years. He's big, fast, tough, and gets better as the game goes on. He will be the no-brainer best player available if still on the board when we select, and the comparisons to Eric Dickerson and Eddie George are spot on. The Browns have been unable to run the football since they returned to the league, and this is an identity they have long wanted to establish.

Guys like Joe Thomas, Brady Quinn, and Alan Branch may be star players. Peterson is guaranteed to be one.

LT Joe Thomas, Wisconsin

The Browns can have all the flashy skill players in the world. It won't matter. This team will never succeed until they start winning the trench wars. Joe Thomas is the best offensive lineman in this draft, and the offensive line has been this team's biggest weak spot going on forever. They must bite the bullet, do the right thing, value common sense over sex appeal, and select left tackle Joe Thomas from Wisconsin.

Thomas is the prototypical left tackle. He's 6'8, 330 lbs, with the type of frame that can take more pounds. Dominant in the run game. Feet like a tight end in pass protection. You can pencil this guy in to be your left tackle for the next ten years, and move Shaffer over to right tackle where he belongs. An elite left tackle makes the whole offensive line better, and the Browns haven't had that since the days of Tony Jones.

Do the right thing Phil. Select Joe Thomas.

QB Brady Quinn, Notre Dame

I'm not stupid. Quinn is very likely to be selected #1 or #2 overall by Oakland or Detroit. If not, he's an absolute no-brainer at #3, and the Browns should aggressively try and move up in the draft to select this kid and not foolishly pray he falls to them.

Brady Quinn is the prototypical NFL quarterback, and is as much of a lock to be a star NFL signal caller as Peyton Manning and Carson Palmer were when they left school. There's certain guys that you just know will be superstars, and Quinn is in that class. He has ideal size and smarts, is as strong as an ox, and has a Grade A cannon that can make every throw in the playbook. He is as NFL ready as they come, playing in a pro offense under Charlie Weis, and should be able to start from day one.

Charlie Frye and Derek Anderson are not the answers. Brady Quinn is. Do whatever it takes to get this kid.

DT Alan Branch, Michigan

All this talk about the offensive line. What about the defensive line? The Browns have been one of the worst teams in football against the run for the past several years, and there's not one player on this defensive line that is a lock to be back next season. There is no area of this team in greater need of an upgrade. Ted Washington is washed up. Orpheus Roye is breaking down. Alvin McKinley has never been very good.

Alan Branch is a beast. He's an impact defensive lineman, ready to wreak havoc at the next level from day one. He's smart, has a great motor, is dominant against the run, yet quick enough to also get to the quarterback. He's an ideal fit for the 3-4 defense, as he could play the nose, or one of the defensive end spots. If we ever moved to a 4-3, he'd be a great defensive tackle.

Branch is a much better pro prospect than Joe Thomas, and much more of a sure thing. And the defensive line needs addressed even worse than the offensive line.

WR Calvin Johnson, Georgia Tech

Best player available. Hands down. If you don't think so, be sure to watch the highlights of yesterday's Gator Bowl. Adding Johnson to Braylon Edwards, Kellen Winslow II, and Joe Jurevicius would give the Browns the most lethal wide receiving corps in all of football, and it would be impossible to guard this group down in the red zone.

Not only does Calvin Johnson have freakish talent, but he's a great person and would have a big impact on Winslow and Edwards. He has Marvin Harrison's demeanor, and more natural talent than Randy Moss, Larry Fitzgerald, or Roy Williams.

Johnson will constantly be dismissed and overlooked by Browns fans as the draft approaches. But when it comes time to make the pick, he will be one of just 2-3 guys Phil Savage will be seriously considering. He's just too talented not to be.

QB JaMarcus Russell, LSU

Right outta the gates, lets establish two things. One, Brady Quinn is going to be gone when

we pick, and trading up for him is not a realistic option. Two, JaMarcus Russell is leaving school early, and is a no-brainer to be a top five pick in this year's draft.

Russell is going to be a superstar in this league, it's that simple. He's 6'6, 260 lbs, has the strongest arm in all of college football, and fires the ball with frightening accuracy. In other years, he'd be the #1 pick of the entire draft, and still may be this season. He is tough, heady, immensely talented … and will be the best player of this entire draft class once it's all said and done. And this team desperately needs a quarterback.

When the Browns pick, Russell will be the best quarterback on the board. He is a once in a generation type talent. They can't afford to pass on him.

QB Troy Smith, Ohio State

You can take your measurables and shove them up your ass. Troy Smith is a winner. He's from Cleveland, and went to Ohio State. He is going to be an elite quarterback at the next level, and if the Browns pass on him … they will be haunted by it for the next fifteen years, just as the Texans will be as a result of passing on Vince Young.

People act like Troy Smith is 5'6. He's 6'1, incredibly well built, his football IQ is off the charts, runs like a tailback, can make all the throws, and has all the intangibles. He's publicly stated that he wants to play here, where he grew up, and that he is still a huge Cleveland Browns fan. And since when do you have to be 6'6 to be a great NFL quarterback? And who forgot to tell Drew Brees that?

With where this franchise is at, they cannot afford to pass on Troy Smith. The other quarterbacks may be taller, but none will be the player Troy will be at the next level.