Brady Quinn, JaMarcus Russell, or bust says Tony Lastoria. He sees both of these guys as franchise type quarterbacks and says the Browns must find a way to draft one of them. Tony's take is that the Browns are unlikely to be contenders next season. So you go get your QB, and give him a year to learn, with the goal of starting him in 2008, when we will hopefully be poised to contend. And we can go get our running back or left tackle next season.

I've heard tons of fans since the end of the season claim this team needs to go with an offensive lineman with the first pick in the 2007 NFL Draft. And, for the most part, I can't disagree with that thinking.

But, when the Browns pick comes up at #3 or #4, they need to consider all options and not just pigeon-hole the pick as an offensive lineman. This team has so many holes that it would be an injustice to have such tunnel-vision with the first pick. I don't care if we haven't taken an offensive lineman in the first round since we came back in 1999, or if we ever take an offensive lineman in the first round – we need to keep an open mind with a first round pick.

Which means the Browns should consider numerous players for that first pick, not just projected stud LT Joe Thomas. Others like WR Calvin Johnson, RBs Adrian Peterson and maybe Marshawn Lynch, DT Alan Branch, CB Leon Hall, and QBs Brady Quinn and JaMarcus Russell should all be an option with the first pick. Our need is not just offensive-line, as we need serious help at all of the positions those players are listed at, and really any of them will help.

While it is pretty much a certainty that one of the QBs Quinn and Russell will be taken by Oakland or Detroit with the #1 or #2 pick, it is possible that one of them could slip to the Browns at #3. If the Browns lose the coin flip with Tampa and end up picking #4, it is possible that both won't slip past Oakland, Detroit and Tampa – all teams in serious need of a QB.

That said, if one of the two top QBs Quinn or Russell are available when the Browns pick comes up, they have to take him. While I would probably be fine with any of the players listed above, my preference going into the draft right now would be Russell as my 1st option and Quinn as the 2nd option - and then Thomas and Peterson after that.

Before you roll your eyes at the notion of taking a QB with the first pick, hear me out.

When you are a team that is expected to go nowhere next season, you need to consider draft options geared more for 2008. The Browns will improve (we hope!) this off-season with a bunch of new draft choices and free agent signings. But, let's be real, the Browns are not the only team in the NFL in the draft or that will be participating in free agency. Every other team will have equal opportunity to improve in the draft, and just about every team will be a player for a lot of the top guys in free agency. Plus, our spotty history under Savage the last two years in the draft and free agency don't make me all warm and fuzzy that we'll no doubt make the right choices this off-season and make huge strides to improve.

Next year will be yet another rebuilding season, so why not start building for the future by getting the franchise QB now?

The mantra I've always heard is that "you build your offensive line first and then you go get the franchise QB." To me, that is completely backwards. By the time you get your offensive line and skill players set, then go get the franchise QB in the draft, you need another 1-2 years

before the guy can play since very few rookie QBs play right away. And, usually, the ones that do play right away are not very effective. QBs generally take 1-2 years to develop, and the ones developed right typically sit their entire rookie year with a clipboard. So, by the time the QB is ready to play in 1-2 years, you might start to have issues with the offensive line and skill position players you established before drafting the QB. Those players could be close to free agency, getting older and less effective, injured, etc. Plus, the turnover of players on NFL teams in 1-2 years is significant.

To me, the thinking should be reversed. You get the QB first THEN you get everything else since offensive lineman and running backs usually can play right away. Drafting a franchise QB with the first pick this year, and next season basically being another rebuilding season, will effectively allow this franchise two years to fix the offensive line problems and RB issues before throwing that rookie QB to the wolves in 2008 or 2009. By sitting the QB for a full year, you are provided with two complete drafts and two complete free agent periods to add the pieces necessary to protect him in the pocket, and to provide him with the players to make him effective in the running and passing game.

After taking Quinn or Russell with the first pick in the 2007 NFL Draft, the Browns can then turn their attention to filling some needs on the offensive and defensive lines and other areas with the rest of the 2007 Draft. They can go out into free agency this year and pinpoint a potential franchise lineman like Eric Steinbach and get him in place as part of the offensive line puzzle. Then, next off-season, they can target a franchise RB or LT in the 1st round where they likely will pick in the top 10 again. That RB or LT should be able to start right away.

After the 1st pick in the 2008 draft, you can continue to fill offensive line needs in the draft, and you also have free agency that year as well. So, taking a QB now is not necessarily the worst decision, and it actually may make sense to get the QB first and then make the offensive line a priority later. I mean, if the Browns take a QB with the first pick, then fail to fill offensive line needs the rest of this draft and in the 2008 draft AND fail to do so in free agency in 2007 and 2008, then Phil Savage should be out of a job.

Look at the four QBs playing in this weekend's AFC playoff games: Peyton Manning, Tom Brady, Phillip Rivers, and Steve McNair. Is Charlie Frye or Derek Anderson anything close to those QBs? Does a free agent like Damon Huard or Matt Schaub stack up to those guys?

What's the goal here, to just put a bandaid on the QB situation for a few years, or to find an elite signal caller? If we ever want to dream of being a legit playoff contender, we need to find that franchise QB. In some cases they can be found in the later rounds of the draft like the Patriots did with Brady, but mostly they are found in the first round.

Take what the Chargers did with Phillip Rivers. The Chargers and Giants swapped first round QBs on draft day in 2004, and the Chargers picked up Rivers and a bunch of picks for Eli Manning. In that same draft, they drafted their starting center in the third round, Nick Hardwick, and later in that same draft found their starting right tackle Shane Olivea in the seventh round. To add, they signed free agent guard Mike Goff from the Bengals just before the draft. So, in one off-season, they found three offensive lineman that eventually would anchor their starting line.

The Chargers then proceeded to use the 2004 season to sit Rivers with a clipboard and have him learn on the sidelines, which typically benefits a QB. While I was never a real big Tim Couch fan, this was one of the Browns first big mistakes when they came back in 1999. He should have sat on the sideline for all the 1999 season while Ty Detmer was sacrificed on the field every Sunday. And, the Browns should have then made offensive line a huge priority going forward in the 2000 draft. They made it a priority in free agency in 1999 when they signed Dave Wohlabaugh, Orlando Brown and Lomas Brown, but never really after that.

But anyway, while Rivers sat in 2004, the Chargers offensive line was starting to take shape as Goff, Hardwick and Olivea all worked into the mix in 2004. Also, 2003 undrafted free agent defensive lineman Kris Dielman was also getting into the mix on the offensive line as he was converting from the defensive side of the line. These players all continued to mesh and grow together as a unit in 2005, and then this year when Rivers was ready to take over after Drew Brees left in free agency, they drafted left tackle Marcus McNeil in the 2nd round of the 2006 draft. When Rivers took his first snap of this season as the #1 QB in town, the offensive line in front of him had been constructed while he waited on the sidelines, and all the players were acquired after he was drafted.

The same sort of thing happened with Carson Palmer and the Bengals. The Bengals and Palmer benefited from having their two bookend tackles Levi Jones and Willie Anderson as well as the center Rich Braham already on the team when Palmer was drafted in the 1st round of the

2003 draft. But, the Bengals did sit him for a year and let him learn on the sidelines, and they also did fill the line after he was drafted. Eric Steinbach was taken in the 2nd round of the same draft the Bengals took Palmer, and they signed free agent gaurd Bobbie Williams that same off-season. To add, all of their reserve offensive lineman are from the 2004 draft or later, and taken in various rounds from the 2nd to the 7th round.

Taking a QB with the first pick in the 2007 NFL Draft is not as bad a decision as many think it is. The key, if you take a QB with the first pick, is to demonstrate an understanding that the QB needs to initially learn and develop on the sidelines, and that you need to surround him with the players to protect him and get the ball to in the running and passing game. If Quinn or Russell slip to the Browns, they need to seize the opportunity to take their franchise QB now.