There are a lot of holes in the Cleveland Browns 52-man roster. They need help all over the football field, which is not exactly ground breaking journalism. Their offensive line is a sieve. Their quarterback play has been some of the worst in the NFL for the last 8 years. They have had ONE, one thousand yard rusher in over 20 years. They are one of the least physical teams I have ever seen.

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The defense can't get off the field, and the offense can't keep them off the field. Their defensive backs have succumbed to nearly every injury imaginable.

Their linebackers are good tacklers, but bad at stuffing holes.

Their receivers are more likely to tip a ball into the welcoming arms of the other team than they are to catch it themselves.

So, if I was Phil Savage, this is what I would do over the next few months, to begin the building of this franchise to the level it once was. I am willing to accept that it is much easier for me to type away a plan than it is for Phil to actually execute one.

In some cases, there will be some crazy bidding wars.

Their current teams may franchise some of my targets, making them untouchable.

That is why it is a lot more fun to do this from my living room, with none of the actual pressure that Mr. Savage is under to get all of this done.

Free Agency

This is where the building blocks must begin. Coming off the momentum that was the 2006 free agency class, the Browns need to continue to strengthen the lines.

My first target is Cincinnati Bengal defensive end Justin Smith.

Smith has been a model of consistency since being a first round choice for the Bengals.

Smith has been between 5 and 8.5 sacks every season, playing for a thoroughly putrid defense most of those seasons.

He is coming off a career high season with 81 tackles and is one of those high motor defensive ends that can play the run and the pass.

The next goal is to finish off the starting front on the defensive line with Cory Redding of the Detroit Lions. Redding, listed as a defensive tackle with the 4-3 Lions, could easily make the move to the end of the line in Romeo Crennel's 3-4 alignment. Pairing him with Smith will give Cleveland a pair of bookend defensive ends that can play both the run and the pass.

The final addition to the defense would be a solid cover corner, who is also very adept at supporting the run. Fortunately for the Browns, this man does exist and is an unrestricted free agent. Corner Nate Clements fits the mold of exactly what the Browns need to become an attacking defense, which is a pre-requisite for being a winning football team in the AFC North. Throw in the fact that Clements is another native of Northeast Ohio and it seems a natural fit for the Browns to go aggressively after him should Buffalo not decide to franchise him.

The last piece of the free agency puzzle is another Cincinnati Bengal, but this time on the

offensive side of the ball. Eric Steinbech would give some stability to an offensive line that has had anything but stability over the years. If LeCharles Bentley is able to recover from knee surgery in time for the 2007 season, he could team with Eric to provide a solid interior of the offensive line that has been lacking in Cleveland since the inception of the forward pass (at least it seems that way).

Draft

The Cleveland Browns picking near the top of the NFL Draft has become common since 1999.

They have drafted a wide receiver, a tight end, a quarterback, a running back, a center, two defensive linemen and a linebacker with their last 8 first round picks.

Only the center and running back came outside of the top 10, and neither is still with the team.

Of course, the quarterback and both defensive linemen are gone as well.

So to say the draft has been unkind to Browns fans could be construed as a slight understatement.

I hope this is the year they get serious with building the one-day strength of the team, the offensive line, with the selection of Joe Thomas, left tackle, from the University of Wisconsin. Joe is the type of left tackle that can dominate in the NFL.

After tearing his ACL in the Badgers bowl game in January 2006, Thomas came back for his senior season and won the Outland Trophy as the most outstanding offensive lineman, as well as first team All-American by the AP.

Thomas, a former tight end, stands 6’8” tall and is athletic enough that he spent some time filling in on a depleted Wisconsin defensive line during the 2005 season.

My only other concern for this draft is the Browns adding depth to both lines and a running back to come in and take most of the load off Ruben Droughns. I am hoping that running back is available at the top of the second round, and his name is Michael Bush.

Michael Bush is a beast of a running back, being 6’2” and close to 250 pounds.

He would surely have been competing with Adrian Peterson for the top back in the country had he not broken his leg during the first game of his senior season.

Before breaking his leg, Bush was able to run for 130 yards on 17 carries and 3 touchdowns.

I think the key to our Cleveland Browns to begin their climb back to respectability has to begin by addressing both lines of scrimmages. By keying on the defensive side of the ball in free agency, you will allow yourself to finish of the off-season by shoring up the offense.

I believe it is a lot more feasible to win in the NFL with a stout defense and a weaker offense than vice versa. When you play a majority of your games in a division built on defenses, and in weather that can change a game plan all by itself, the ability to shut down your opponent only becomes more critical. By adding a couple of multi-dimensional defensive ends and a shut down corner to go with a pretty solid group of linebackers and safeties your defense can easily be the pride of this city.

Building the offensive line can go a long way to helping the offense sustain some long drives and giving the defense a rest. A stronger offensive line will also lead to more production from the couple of skill players that are present on the offense. A strong running game and a top-notch tight end have been shown to win in this league on a yearly basis, when they are paired with a strong defensive unit (unless they are coached by Marty).

Of course, I am not Phil Savage. This could all be some kind of pipe dream. We could very easily strike out in free agency and then watch Brady Quinn get pummeled into a Tim Couch-like state of happy feet.

Then we can all sit around next year and wonder if that is the time we build the offensive line.