Mansfield checks back in this morning with the latest installment of his "Opie's Opus" series, where he's takes a detailed look at the Browns current roster for us here at The Cleveland Fan. Part II examined some of the deeper areas of the team. Today, in Part Trey, he addresses some of the areas on the team with some concerns ... most notably the defensive line and cornerbacks. T Minus 25 days till Draft Day.

Iz Good, no? Eh, Not so much.

So the free agent feeding frenzy is over and we're getting really close to the draft. When as a fan the playoffs are something you watch on TV and get acquainted with the better teams in the league, there is no better time of year than now. No one, and I mean no one, who is a Browns fan should watch the first two rounds alone.
It's Christmas in April, except maybe it'll be 60 degrees and you can drink outside. Then again it might snow in C-town in late April, so it'd be like the same damn thing as Christmas, only it's Randy who gets the bills months later. Either way, it is the day we all get crazy optimistic and tell ourselves this is when we build our dynasty. We tell ourselves after beer 5 that come September we'll storm through the AFC North and revive the spirit of the true Marty Era Dawgs and reach the lofty heights of, ahem, 9 and 7. Have another beer.

In my last installment , which was far too long ago since these people who pay me for my day job actually expect effort and results, we reviewed where we were well positioned, or at least had the potential to be well positioned if things broke right. Today, we hit the not-so-heights. Like the last time, we're going to stay focused on the two-deep and the rotational players, so please don't be scouring the piece or email asking "what about Babatunde", which I believe, by the way, is a chick's show ala Gray's Anatomy on network TV that has resurrected the career of

Kelly Kapowski. Cocaine. It’s a hell of a drug. I’m just sayin’.

Areas with concerns:

Defensive Line

Starters:

Orpheus Roye

Ted Washington

Robaire Smith

Depth:

Shaun Smith

Orien Harris

Ethan Kelley

Simon Frazier

J’Vonne Parker

Granted, Robaire Smith was signed after I finished installment two, and you can make a case that this unit has the potential to be good. I wouldn't throw my body in front of that train. But dang this unit is old. Old in a way that make you think if they face the 10th play in a drive the starters are gonna be comin' off the field lookin' like Fred Sanford after shocking news, calling for 'Lisbeth. Roye has suffered injuries and played gamely, and Ted tires palpably. Robaire Smith has had a few seasons where he's been banged like an old screen door in a thunderstorm, or in other words, Anna Nicole. Maybe I'm just looking for trouble here. I can't really recall when we had a DL where all three starters were bona fide NFL starters since the days of John Teerlink spitting all over the sidelines. But the way I see this thing, the backups will need to get no less than 35 – 40 % of the reps.

Shaun Smith is the only player in this group that I have faith in as a solid backup, and the Bengals had him inactivated for the last 3 games I think. Maybe he was close to hitting a performance bonus and SOP Mike just can't let go of old ways, or maybe he's not all that good. What he is, is a mammoth of a man. So the nose tackle rotation at least has a similar player in place. Orien Harris is an interesting guy. He comes from Miami, a program that for a while was to defensive linemen what Penn State was to linebackers in the 70's and what USC is to QB's now. He's young, big, has some talent and has a shot to develop. He'll compete with Parker and Kelley unless we pick up another kid defensive end in the draft, which I think, is very likely early on day two. Simon Frazier lacks the strength to play NFL defensive end in a 3 man front two-gap system.

Because the starters appear to be older and / or have an injury history, and the depth is untested, I have concerns this unit will improve enough to make this defense what it needs to be. A some point in the next two years, we need to draft a lineman in the first round, and compliment him with a pick or two on the first day. Until we do this, I don't think we'll even know what we have in the young linebackers. I suspect the Patriots have this thing correct: pick stud defensive linemen and you can have a few versatile, smart, linebackers who will look much better than they really are.

Defensive Backs

Growing up in Cleveland in the 1970's before you were old enough and cool enough to know what FM was and wax your muscle car in the metroparks listening to Billy Bass meant one thing: CKLW. WIXY was on it's death bed and WGAR was there as well playing pure bubblegum, but anyone who was anyone in grade school and junior high tuned their transistors and clock radios north of the border. CKLW was pop jack shuffle before the term was coined nearly 30 years later. They were the broad in "broadcasting". In the same 30 minute segment in

about 1974, you could hear The Sweet's "Fox on the Run", Barry Manilow's "Could it be Magic", Kiss and "Rock and Roll All Night", The Polish Prince, Bobby Vinton, doing "Uma Paloma Blanca", Kansas' "Carry on my Wayward Son", a little soul and Earth, Wind and Fire's "Shining Star" and Frankie Valli's comeback "My Eyes Adored You".

"So close, so close and yet so faaaaaaaaar" still croons thorough my Sirius infused dome even now.

That's our defensive backs.

Safeties:

Sean Jones

Brodney Pool

Justin Hamilton

Cornerbacks:

Leigh Bodden and a scat of thousands, including:

Ralph Brown

Daven Holly

Kenny Wright

Jereme Perry

DeMario Minter

Antonio Perkins

There's big talent with the top three athletes to be sure. I am not being a wide-eyed optimist when I say that a healthy Leigh Bodden and Sean Jones should receive pro bowl consideration. Oh, I know that Butch left the cupboard bare and poor Phil had no talent left over so we need 12 years to get any good (chortle), but these two are studs. If the Browns play well at all, these two get a nod to Maui in February.

Brodney Pool is another one of those guys who will define Phil. I recall shoving wings in my wing hole and gulping brewski's yelling "Khalif Barnes!" to anyone who would listen that April day, only to see us pick up an underclass safety from OU the year after we just took Sean Jones. I didn't get it then, and I don't get it now. But that's all just water under the barn door being closed and the horses are out riding waterslides under the bridge, or however that cliché goes. I understand the cover two concepts. You've got interchangeable safeties taking half the field that have to be able to both cover and play run support. I get that. But Sean looked like a pro blower in run support, and Poole coming into play 3rd safety as a linebacker was really effective. When Russell was hurt and both played together, they didn't look good. They struggled in coverage mightily. Things looked out of synch. So in order for this to work, Poole has to step up to show he can be a starter and cover, Jones has to step up as lead dog quarterbacking the secondary as the under-appreciated Russell did pretty well, and Justin

Hamilton, who the Browns really like, needs to step up as well to fill Poole's role he played so well last season. I haven't seen so much stepping expected since "Breakin' Two: Electric Boogaloo" came out. God forbid an injury. I would expect a safety taken in day two this year in the draft. I hope this works. The Browns have heavy coin invested in the safeties.

Corners? After removing Leigh from the company of Kent, Mohammed and Jugdish, switch into Neidermeir voice: ***This is the franchise of Hanford and Frank. Of Erich Barnes and Walt Sumner and even Ron Bolton. You're a GD DISGACE! Ralph Brown, what kind of man does that to pass coverage? You're all worthless and weak. Now drop and give me 20!***

This group is just bad and we're hurtin'. If we don't get a real corner to start opposite of Bodden, then you can take your DL spending spree over the past two seasons, you can take all the draft resources thrown at linebacker and safety, and you can flush them straight to where we know all fecal waste ends up, Pittsburgh and Ann Arbor (take your pick). When NFL offensive coordinators speak in terms of match ups, this is what they mean. Did you enjoy the Stillers' loss at home? This is what we're probably getting because we failed to address this position. As much as we need help elsewhere, we need a corner on day one of the draft.

As far as I'm concerned, Kenny Wright and Ralph Brown are the same guy. Devon Holly is like a Daylon McCutcheon with no instincts whatsoever. The next time he recognizes the ball is in the air covering deep running with a receiver will be the first. Jereme Perry is a long shot athlete, sort of like a latter day Rico Smith, but at corner. The best hope may well be that DeMario Minter is a find who has used a full off season to study and condition. The only hope is that based on sheer numbers alone, and that it is possible for a second round choice to start and play somewhat well as a rookie, that someone will somehow step up and not waste the talents of Poole, Bodden and Jones. My best guess is that Kenny Wright makes the start and it is more of the same until a kid can unseat him. That's too bad.

Next and last installment on the state of the Browns' roster will be an analysis of the offensive line and the quarterback position titled:

GET ME A FREAKING TOURNEQUTTE - NOW!