Lord knows there are a number of different ways the Browns can go in the draft on Saturday. In his latest, Gary Benz admits ... Adrian Peterson and Calvin Johnson would be safer selections with more short term impact than Brady Quinn. But Gary says Quinn gives the Browns the best opportunity to begin building the identity they need to compete in the long term.

You could go half blind and fully crazy trying to keep up with all the comings and goings of this year's NFL draft. Maybe it's because unlike many years, there is no national consensus as to who should be the number one pick. Maybe it's because like most years, the Cleveland Browns find themselves in the thick of the top of the draft. Or maybe it's because the NFL draft is the second biggest event in pro football, next to the Super Bowl.

Whatever the reason, one thing is for certain: if you're not yet sick of hearing about the draft you soon will be.

But until most fans grow completely weary of the draft, which should occur somewhere around 6 p.m. Sunday evening, there is plenty to keep one interested. Perhaps the most intriguing aspect of this year's draft is, as mentioned, the lack of consensus number one pick and how this impacts the Browns. As a result, whoever falls to the Browns at number 3 will have been number 1 on someone's mock draft board and, naturally, will demand to be paid like the first pick in the draft.

Though there are nearly as many opinions about the best player in the draft as there are experts making those opinions, one player frequently mentioned as a likely number one pick is Jamarcus Russell, the quarterback from LSU. In a scene reminiscent of the Peyton Manning/Ryan Leaf and Tim Couch/Akili Smith scenarios several years ago, Russell is competing against Notre Dame's Brady Quinn for the honor of being the first quarterback selected. Though he has been knocked around by critics for supposedly not winning enough big games in college, Quinn isn't taking a back seat to anybody. In a story in this morning's Plain Dealer, Quinn said, rather matter-of-factly, that "I'm the most prepared player for the NFL in the draft." If nothing else, you have to admire his confidence.

Although not quite the consensus pick, the conventional wisdom is that Oakland is enamored with Russell and Detroit will do something stupid, leaving the likely scenario that Quinn will be there for the taking at number three. But the real question for the Browns is whether or not a quarterback is even their most pressing need. Frankly, given how poor the Browns line performed last year, it's hard to know if either Charlie Frye or Derek Anderson are legitimate starters or better suited for perennially back-up roles. To the extent, though, that conclusions could be drawn based on the quarterback play of a year ago, you have to assume that in one way or another, the Browns will do something at the quarterback position it's just a question of how quickly.

In many ways, even if Savage believes that a quarterback is among the most pressing needs, that doesn't mean he will go that route. There are safer choices to make, Calvin Johnson and Adrian Peterson, for example. But if Savage sees quarterback as the best option in the first round, most seem to think he prefers Russell to Quinn because of his familiarity with Russell going back several years. The thinking is that if Russell isn't available, then Savage is likely to go in another direction, say receiver (Johnson) or running back (Peterson). But should he? As the old saying goes, it ain't bragging if it's true and in this regard it is true that Quinn is as well prepared for the NFL experience as any quarterback candidate in recent memory. A column written by Pete Prisco for CBS Sportsline, provides some food for thought from a historical perspective.

While it isn't quite perfect, Prisco makes the case that the comparisons of Russell to both Ryan Leaf and Akili Smith are worth making, particularly in the area of experience. Russell, like Smith and Leaf, was a late starter. By the time their college careers came to a close, Russell had 29 starts, Leaf 24 and Smith 11. On the other hand, Quinn and Manning both had 46 starts.

In other words, experience matters. Taken a step further, Prisco notes that the stats that matter, such as touchdown-to-interception ratio, while nearly the same for both players for their career, actually weigh more heavily toward Quinn when you consider only junior and senior years, which seems fair. In that regard, Quinn's ration was nearly 5 touchdowns for each interception while Russell's was slightly more than 2.5 to 1. So much for the argument that Quinn lacks accuracy.

While Russell has a much greater body of experience than did Akili Smith, it is hard to understand exactly why the scouts are drooling over him while simultaneously downgrading Quinn. Russell seems to have a stronger arm, but it's not as if Quinn is a weak sister in that regard. Whatever one thinks of Quinn's arm strength, it certainly is superior to that of either quarterback the Browns currently have penciled in as their starter and backup.

This isn't to make the case solely that the Browns should draft Quinn so much as it is to make the case that should the Browns draft Quinn it would hardly be the biggest mistake they've ever made. Likely, it won't even be in the Top 50. But is that enough of a reason to pay third-pick money to Quinn or can the Browns do better?

Ah, this is where the guess work really comes in because it's not as if the Browns are one or two players away from greatness. And this is really the rub for Browns fans for they so want to believe that whoever the Browns draft first will be the difference maker. If only that were the case.

The NFL draft, in many ways, is like Christmas in April. You get a shiny new present or two and you feel like those trinkets will immediately make all the difference. But the Browns simply aren't allocated enough presents in this or any other draft for it to make an immediate difference. The only way the Browns could assure themselves of getting immediate help is if they had the first 10 picks in the draft and the cap money to pay them all.

But since that isn't going to happen, Browns fans need to fully appreciate that whoever is the pick in the first or the subsequent rounds will merely be pieces in a puzzle that isn't likely to come together for a year or two, at best.

This brings us squarely back to Quinn. For the most part, the NFL isn't a place for rookie quarterbacks. No matter what their preparation was in college, the pro game is much faster than anything they've ever experienced. Knowing that, many fans aren't too keen on drafting a quarterback, even if he has the pedigree of Quinn. But it you accept the fact that the Browns aren't going anywhere next season anyway, then why is Quinn such a bad choice? It could take him a year or two to adjust, but by the time he's ready, the Browns will hopefully have more pieces in place to make it a truly competitive team. And if he really does have the right pedigree, then Quinn may just be that final piece that can put the Browns over the top when they are ready to win.

Look at it this way. Assuming he's there for the taking, if the Browns don't take Quinn, they still will likely select a skill player such as Johnson or Peterson. A slight possibility exists that they would further invest in the offensive line by taking Joe Thomas, but Savage may think it's time to allocate his cap money elsewhere. Despite the skills that Johnson and Peterson seemingly possess, the Browns still won't be any more competitive next year with either in the lineup, even if they improve to 6-10. In other words, the other holes that need to get filled still remain. But as it all comes together in a year or two as Savage envisions, what you have to ask yourself is whether either Frye or Anderson is the right quarterback when that time comes. Probably not.

If you need a comparison, look no further than the New England Patriots. They've managed to do just fine without having elite receivers or running backs, mainly because they have an elite quarterback. In fact, the Patriots have been a series of moving parts in many of their skill positions, except for quarterback.

The point is, if you use New England as the model, and hopefully Savage does, then taking Quinn makes a tremendous amount of sense. Peterson may be the next coming of Ladainian Tomlinson, but the Patriots have been successful with lesser backs. Johnson may be Randy

Moss or Terrell Owens without the character issues but the Patriots have been successful with lesser receivers.

Unfortunately for the Browns, they've not been successful with anything. This draft gives them that opportunity. While Quinn may be, in his words, the most prepared player physically and mentally for the NFL in the draft, he may also be the most likely player that gives the Browns the opportunity to begin building the identity they need to compete in the long term, even if the short term success would be better guaranteed with a safer choice.