Leading into the NFL Draft, Joe Thomas was the guy most Browns fans wanted to see the team take off the board. And one of the things I consistently heard from Thomas backers was that he was a safe pick for a team that couldn't afford to miss. But is taking a tackle in the top five picks really safe? We sent Jesse Lamovsky to find out. In Jesse's latest, he does a comprehensive analysis of all tackles taken in the top five picks ... dating back to 1967. A superb read from Jesse.

Well, surprise, surprise. With a passable, well-compensated incumbent at left tackle, and the amount of salary cap money already invested in the offensive line, I didn't expect to see the Browns draft Joe Thomas with the third overall pick- hence, the concentration on running backs and quarterbacks only in the first two top-five analyses. As it turned out, I was wrong, much to the delight of the line-famished Browns Nation, and much to my own delight as well- after all, I already had the template for a tackle analysis. Less work makes for a very happy writer.

Qualifications for Boom-Hood

- A long career, a decade or more. Interior linemen generally play longer than other positions as it is.
- One or more Pro Bowl appearances
- Team success, at least to a certain extent (this isn't a hard-and-fast rule by any means

Qualifications for Bust-Hood

- A relatively short career; five years, or whereabouts. As durability is a hallmark of linemen, a lack of durability should be penalized, to an extent it wouldn't be in, say, running backs
- A failure to stabilize the position, to provide a long-term answer. If a team is looking for a first-round tackle to replace the one it drafted just a few years early that spells bust.

One important note: in creating this list, I've named all tackles taken in the top five since the first Common Draft in 1967. Some of these players were left tackles; some were right tackles, and of course, the two positions entail different responsibilities. Several players, drafted as tackles, spent part or most of their careers playing other positions on the offensive line altogether. So, frankly, it's a question as to how much useful information can be gleaned from this list, as opposed to the lists for quarterbacks and running backs. In short, this article can be classified as being for entertainment purposes only. So much for hard-core analysis.

1968

#1- Ron Yary, USC (Minnesota)

Yary started at right tackle for fourteen seasons in Minnesota, made it to seven Pro Bowls, and was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2001. He is also one of seven Vikings to start in each of that franchise's four Super Bowl losses. **Boom**

#4- Russ Washington, Missouri (San Diego)

Like His Class of '68 counterpart, Russ Washington was the portrait of interior-line durability: drafted when the Chargers were in the AFL, he was still a stalwart at right tackle for the Air Coryell teams of the early '80s. He made four Pro Bowls in his fifteen-year career, spent entirely in San Diego. **Boom**

Best tackle in the draft- Art Shell (3rd round, 80th pick)

1969

#2- George Kunz, Notre Dame (Atlanta)

Kunz went to five Pro Bowls in six seasons in Atlanta, before the Falcons traded him and a first-round pick to Baltimore for the draft rights to Steve Bartkowski. Acclimating just fine in the AFL, Kunz went to the Pro Bowl in his first three seasons as a Colt, and his outstanding play helped Baltimore's offense become one of the most lethal in the NFL. **Boom**

Best tackle in the draft- Kunz

1972

#3- Lionel Antoine, Southern Illinois (Chicago)

Antoine failed to make a Pro Bowl in five ordinary seasons with the Bears and was out of the NFL by the time Walter Payton hit his prime. **Bust**

Best tackle in the draft- Stan Walters (9th round, 210th pick)

1977

#4- Marvin Powell, USC (N.Y. Jets)

Powell went to five Pro Bowls in eight-seasons as New York's right tackle, including in 1982, when the Jets won two road playoff games and advanced to the AFC Championship Game. New York also selected Wesley Walker in the second round and Joe Klecko in the sixth, making 1977 a veritable mother lode for a franchise that hasn't exactly drafted brilliantly over the years. **Boom**

Best tackle in the draft- Powell

1978

#4- Chris Ward, Ohio State (N.Y. Jets)

Hoping to compliment Powell and safeguard the future of young Richard Todd, the Jets spent their second consecutive top-five pick on a tackle, but this time, their fortune went south. Ward never fulfilled his potential in seven seasons with the Jets, although he was good enough to start at left tackle for playoff teams in 1981 and ’82. **Bust**

Best tackle in the draft- Mike Kenn (1st round, 13th pick)

1980

#3- Anthony Munoz, USC (Cincinnati)

Almost without question, Munoz is the best player in the history of the Bengals franchise, and has more than a few defenders for title of greatest tackle in the history of the NFL. At the time he was picked, however, he was the subject of concern regarding his durability, in the wake of injury problems he encountered at USC. **Boom**

Best tackle in the draft- Munoz

1983

#4- Chris Hinton, Northwestern (Denver)

Traded to the Colts for John Elway six days after he was drafted, Hinton went on to earn seven Pro Bowl berths, going to Honolulu as a left tackle, a right tackle, and a left guard. Having spent his college years with one of the worst teams in the history of Division I-A football, he was used to performing at a high level in a bad situation; thanks in no small part to Chris Hinton, the Colts of the mid-80s were one of the top rushing teams in football, despite being generally awful. **Boom**

Best tackle in the draft- Hinton. Jimbo Covert went with the 6th pick; Don Mosebar with the 26th.

1984

#2- Dean Steinkuhler, Nebraska (Houston)

The Outland Trophy winner and owner of the Fumblerooskie was the third of three straight first-round offensive line selections for the Oilers and, along with Mike Munchak and Bruce Matthews, helped anchor a line that became one of the league's best and protected Houston's combustible offense of the late '80s and early '90s. Houston GM Ladd Herzeg was committed to building through the line, and although Steinkuhler was never quite as dominant as expected, he was still better than adequate. **Boom**

Best tackle in the draft- William Roberts (1st round, 27th pick)

1985

#2- Bill Fralic, Pitt (Detroit)

The first of five tackles selected in the top twelve of the ’85 Draft, Fralic became a four-time Pro Bowler with the Falcons and made the All-Decade team for the 1980s as a guard. **Boo m**

Best tackle in the draft- Lomas Brown (1st round, 6th pick)

1988

#4- Paul Gruber, Wisconsin (Tampa Bay)

Gruber (who began his career as a center) played eleven seasons, started 183 games for the Buccaneers, and at one point went 35 consecutive games without committing a holding penalty. Largely unheralded because the Buccaneers were terrible for most of his career, he provided exactly what a team needs out of a tackle- solid, mistake-free performance over a long period of time. If Joe Thomas has a career like that of his fellow Badger, we’ll be very pleased with the choice. **Boom**

Best tackle in the draft- Gruber

1989

#2- Tony Mandarich, Michigan State (Green Bay)

Always high on “biggest draft flop” lists, Mandarich actually had two NFL careers- a disastrous three seasons with the Packers, and several years later, three seasons with the Colts in which he was a quiet, unspectacular performer. **Bust**

Best tackle in the draft- Andy Heck (1st round, 15th pick)

1995

#2- Tony Boselli, USC (Jacksonville)

Boselli was the very first pick of the expansion Jaguars, and he was a wise choice: in a career shortened by injury to seven seasons, he went to five Pro Bowls and made the NFL All-Decade team for the ‘90s. With the former USC All-American providing the foundation, Jacksonville became the most successful team in the history of NFL expansion, reaching two AFL title games in its, and Boselli’s, first five seasons. **Boom**

Best tackle in the draft- Boselli

1996

#4- Jonathan Ogden, UCLA (Baltimore)

An almost sure-fire Hall of Fame selection, Ogden has reached ten Pro Bowls in his eleven-year career. Baltimore had two first-round selections in 1996; the second, the 25th pick, was Ray Lewis.
Boom

Best tackle in the draft- Ogden

1997

#1- Orlando Pace, Ohio State (St. Louis)

The first tackle ever to go number-one overall, Pancake Pace has made seven Pro Bowls in ten seasons and protected the blind side of the St. Louis offense machine that scored more than 500 points three straight years from 1999 to 2001. **Boom**

Best tackle in the draft- Walter Jones (1st round, 6th pick)

2000

#3- Chris Samuels, Alabama (Washington)

The fourth consecutive top-five tackle hit after the Mandarich disaster, Samuels has been to

three Pro Bowls and provided maybe the number-one attribute for a tackle- stability- while the chaos that is the Washington franchise swirls around him. **Boom**

Best tackle in the draft- Samuels

2001

#2- Leonard Davis, Texas (Arizona)

Davis has proven to be a solid, if not overpowering, starter. He's no Anthony Munoz, but you can do a lot worse. **Boom**

Best tackle in the draft- Davis

2002

#4- Mike Williams, Texas (Buffalo)

"A lot worse" would be Williams, Leonard Davis's Texas teammate, who flopped in four unproductive seasons with the Bills, failing to improve that team's dismal offensive line play from either the tackle or the guard positions. **Bust**

Best tackle in the draft- Levi Jones (1st round, 10th pick)

2004

#2- Robert Gallery, Iowa (Oakland)

An almost can't miss prospect coming into the '04 Draft, Gallery has missed, badly, as he has lacked the physicality to became a great or even particularly good NFL tackle. Perhaps the signature play of his disappointing career was his devastation at the hands of Sean Jones during last year's Cleveland-Oakland game (a de-cleater which, alas, can no longer be found on Youtube). **Bust**

Best tackle in the draft- Shane Olivea (7th round, 209th pick)

To Be Determined…

2006

#4- D'Brickashaw Ferguson, Virginia (N.Y. Jets)

D'Brick started as a rookie for a Jets team that improved by six wins over its previous year's record and made the playoffs.

2007

#3- Joe Thomas, Wisconsin (Cleveland)

20 tackles taken in the Top 5 of the Draft since 1967

Booms: Fourteen

Busts: Five

Too Early to Tell: One

Hall-of-Famers: Two (pending Jon Ogden's future induction)

Best Tackle in Draft by Year: Nine of 18 years

One thing seems evident- if you want to find a good tackle in the draft, you'd do best to look in the first round. Most of the best tackles in a given year of this analysis were first-round picks, if not top-five picks. The two notable exceptions, Stan Walters in 1972 and Shane Olivea in '04, weren't and aren't superstars themselves, and turned out to be the best of rather weak tackle classes overall. To be sure, I didn't survey every single year of the common draft, but

the results from the years surveyed are telling in themselves.

Also, the “boom” factor is considerably higher for offensive tackles than for quarterbacks or running backs. There is a much better-than-average chance that a top-five tackle will at least turn out to be serviceable, if nothing else. It is a low-risk, high-reward investment, for the most part. Barring injury, a good tackle can provide solid service for a decade or more. Even if Joe Thomas doesn’t turn out to be the second coming of Tony Boselli, if he’s the second coming of Leonard Davis, we’ll take it and run with it.

But man, we sure could use a Tony Boselli around these parts.