Let's face reality. Ain't crap happinin' with the Browns from now until training camp. This time is basically vacation. With the salary cap increasing, the June 1 releases just aren't what they used to be. All we are left with until the frenzied signing period just before training camp starts in July is the calm before the storm. We're in The Horse Latitudes of the NFL's season without end.

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Back before rock and roll died and before hip-hop was on life support for the corporate crap that passes off Rich Boy as a real MC and 3 Six Mafia as anything but a less talented adolescent 2 Live Crue, there actually used to be creative elements that went into making music. This was before millions confused *American Idol* as something more than *The Gene Carroll Show*. A wild concept, I know. For the three of you who don't know, *The Doors* were such a group a million years ago, even before my old ass time. Some of their joints were crazy ass good, others were just crazy. More of their riffs should be sampled for remixes so you could have more phresh jams like Nas and WillIAM's

Hip-Hip is Dead

.

One of their songs that is more whack than awe-ite was called *Horse Latitudes*. Word is it was based on a poem JD Morrison wrote when he was in his early teens. Believe it or not, it was before he discovered peyote and LSD. Somehow it came into my mind when I was thinking about this time of the season, and then when I read it again, it sorta reminded me of how every BrownsTNG season has gone for us fans, except 2002.

It goes a little something like this:

When the still sea conspires an armor
And her sullen and aborted
Currents breed tiny monsters
True sailing is dead
Awkward instant
And the first animal is jettisoned
Legs furiously pumping
Their stiff green gallop
And heads bob up
Poise
Delicate
Pause
Consent
In mute nostril agony
Carefully refined
And sealed over

I hope that isn't the case for the 2007 season. But in these Horse Latitudes of the off-season, what are the biggest factors that will define whether or not our breathing the frozen December air will result in the sweet smell of near .500 victory or the mute nostril agony of another 4 win season as we watch Jerry Jones grin like Jimmy Carter?

Are The Kids All Right?

We are in year four of the Savage Era and he's had three full off-seasons to stock this roster with his players and craft it in his own image. Let's tell it like it is. Phil has spent a significant amount of time rationalizing, whining, and blaming Butch and Dewey for the roster up to now. The statue of limitations has run out for such finger pointing. The kids are no longer kids and have to start stepping up and forging their potential into actual performance on Sunday, or the fact is Phil can't draft any better than Butch.

We read a lot about concepts such as core players and foundation positions. According to Phil, these include wide receiver and pass rusher. Braylon Edwards, whether he shuts up or not, needs to stop dropping balls and put up at least 80 receptions, 1100 yards, and 10 touchdowns or he's nothing more than Quincy Morgan. Our own Gary Benz made a great point on the Cleveland Fan Browns’ forum recently that even if Edwards plays better to the realistic extent he can, he'll never be worth his cap impact as a third overall unless he puts up Chard Johnson or Roy Williams numbers. Those just don't seem to be within his reach given the talent

level he's shown. But he should be able to achieve at a level somewhere between Jericho Cochery and Lee Evans. Is that asking too much?

Kamerion Wimbley had a nice start, but he, too needs to get better. He needs to step up to be a disruptive force who requires game planning, makes those around him better, and make plays with sacks and turnovers, not just get close. Given his character and ethic I like his chances if he stays healthy. But the bottom line is that he must blow up rather than just be good given that Phil's other top choices have been Edwards and Joe Thomas. Edwards is wet gunpowder and not even Anthony Munoz "blew up" as an impact player.

In the next tier, Brodney Pool is facing a huge fork in the road this season. Phil passed up a lot of good players to take this guy as high as he did, and we've been treated to the "he'd have gone top 15 had he stayed for his senior season" rhetoric by Phil long enough. Meanwhile, Romeo played Brian Russell over him as long as he was allowed to do so. Pool must be Sean Jones' bookend, and a more than solid player to justify the 2005 draft as anything but Garcia-tastic.

The kid linebackers will also dictate the immediate future. Will Nyquil Jackson be a clone of Wali Rainer and Andra Davis, or will he be an impact player? Will he make plays in the first five yards of scrimmage, or will he compile meaningless tackle statistics? The latter is just unacceptable if the Browns are to take the next step.

Day two draft choices are long shots at best. But good NFL teams take enough long shots and develop them into meaningful players to make a difference. Phil came away with nothing in 2005 and pretty much mortgaged away 2007 to land Easy E. He may as well not even have shown back up for day two. Leon Williams from 2006 looks like he could be That Guy. It is imperative that he is a contributing player, especially if Jackson doesn't get stronger and react more quickly.

Travis Wilson is also a player who needs to show something. A third rounder could have been spent differently and been extremely valuable at other positions, and Barry Coffield, a guy many Browns fans called for real-time, could be making a big impact here. Instead, in the tradition of KJ, Cutt, Dawson, Morgan, and Davis, we couldn't help ourselves and took yet another day one wide receiver. With Cutt gone and Cribbs not showing much with good opportunities last year, Wilson needs to step into the third wide receiver role now. The inability to do

so will be fairly damaging and require yet more resources expended. Wasted picks on receivers and defensive backs have been the bane of the Cleveland BrownsTNG as surely as blown number one draft choices.

This year's trio of top picks will also be in the limelight, but as rookies they'll get more breaks from fans. Still, JT must start and play better than Robert Gallery and Tony Mandarich this season or it will represent a disaster. Eric Wright needs to get into something at corner as a rookie over Kenny Wright and Devon Holly or it will be obvious he can't play. If Brady Quinn gets looks over the other young quarterbacks, he needs to show something promising within reason. And in general, I didn't even address the importance of one of these young quarterbacks stepping up short-term, and later long-term, as I figured you already could figure that one out on your own.

The kids don't need to generate a lot of W's this season, but each and every one must show growth and potential or we're stuck in neutral.

Can this Offensive Coaching Staff Get 'er Done?

Think back to all you learned about Stalinist

Soviet History. OK, never the hell mind, but the concept was dude would get pissed for the shortcomings of his radical communist system and backward assed country, and when peeps did anything less than kiss his ass either real or imagined in his psycho, paranoid dome, he'd just off cats like he was, well, a totalitarian dictator.

Not sayin' Phil is Stalin by any measure, but look at the offensive coaching staff in the wake of the Great Moe Schism of 2006. They offed 'em like they was all wire wearers and this is La Cosa Nostra

.

The guys they brought

in are all lacking in solid resumes for

their positions, and the worst instincts in this fan suggest that Romeo has a reputation as a guy who may be next, so they were limited in who we could attract. Steve Marshall, Anthony Lynn, Dave Atkins, Alfredo Roberts, Rob Chudzinski, and Frank Verducci? Remember the opening scenes to *Major League* when the two fans were talking and reading off the names of the Indians' players on a roster the owner assembled as she was trying to destroy the team to move them to Florida?

I guess you gotta give 'em a chance, but wow. Just wow. Somehow, this just

doesn't remind me of Jim Lee Howell's New York Giants' staff.

Defense! Defense!

I expect the O to struggle with the young quarterbacks, a whole new O line from the first play of last training camp, and yet another new coordinator. The defense is intact and only changes for the better. They have coaching continuity, a head coach who is of defensive origin, and have addressed their weakest links by drafting a great corner prospect, augmenting depth, and adding two solid vets

to the defensive line. If this defense can't step up by game one, then this will represent the single most discouraging long-term meaningful setback to the credibility of Phil Savage Era. Like A-1, yeah, it's that important. Think about it. **What chu Talkin' Bout Chud?** I think Tony Grossi pointed this out in a recent "Hey Tony" piece in The Morning Monolith ™. Chud talks about his

offense in terms of taking chances, going deep, and utilizing the talent at hand. Braylon Edwards describes that same offense as a west coast style system?

Huh?

Now I'll be the first on the block to accept that as usual Edwards is just talking out his corn hole. I mean, dude could do that ESPN commercial. But when it comes to new offensive coordinators as saviors compared to the last guy we've run out of town since Lindy, I am beyond jaundiced and cynical. I have no idea

what first year NFL Coordinator Rob Chudzinski will show, but it best relate to things that can be executed, give the team an offensive identity, and reduce turnovers. One salient point in a recent interview is that Chud told us they will be working on things in the exhibition scrimmages that charge fans full ticket prices to the

point where they will show their hand for the regular season. So if we sputter and stumble around, spare me the “we’re really not seeing the offense until the regular season” takes, cause you’ll be witnessing WYSIWYG

.

Do the Vets Care?

We get to hear all about how the previous regimes screwed the pooch on draft day and that's why we have no veteran core. While there's no making good for all of that failure, the idea is that

if you aren’t paying THOSE guys to eat up your cap space, you can go out and sign OTHER guys who are vets who will. For some reason, we don’t spend a lot of time in press conferences

analyzing that.

Yeah, the Bentley TCE ™ injury was a killer. But let's examine the other veteran signings of the Savage Era: Dilfer, Fisk, Russell,

Coleman, Andruzzi, Fraley, Washington, McGinest, Baxter… When you live in The Crystal Palace, you ought not throw stones at the pervious owners' cribs.

Jurevicius' poorly chosen way to make his point last season notwithstanding, he seems to get it. He needs to lead more forcefully in his own position group though. I don't know if Wes Chandler can

coach a lick, but he should be one new coach to bring credibility and between these two they need to get Braylon and Travis Wilson up to speed.

If Jamal Lewis gives a flying freak and the line gels and stays in one piece, I am convinced we win 7 games. If he runs tentatively to stay healthy for a contract year or goes into the funk he spend most

of the last three seasons in, or is just worn down, we win about 4. That's how crucial I think he is to the effort with nothing behind him.

Willie McGinest, aka "The Glacier", needs to get in shape, angry and focused or get retired. Period.

And Ted, Orpheus,

and Robaire Smith will set the tone for the entire young defense and their younger understudies. As they kick ass, so too will the young defense kick ass. Or not kick ass.

If these high priced vets Phil has signed can't make more of an impact than they have offered so far, we will likely remain mired in rudderless suck as too great of a burden is once again placed on

young players unprepared to shoulder the load. And just like the failed kids from the 99 and 00 expansion era wilted, and Butch's drafts from 01, 02, and 03 that started

with some promise in some cases, the Savage Era draft prospects will try like hell to swim like those horsies in the ocean, and despite their best efforts flounder and go under. And the

galleon that is the Browns ship will again bob up and down without a rudder, mired in a sea of suck.