Browns traning camp starts today out in Berea, and we continue our look at the 2007 Cleveland Browns at TCF with a look at the defensive line. The team signed a couple of Smiths in free agency, inking Robaire to start opposite Orpheus Roye at DE, and Shaun to platoon with BIG Ted Washington in the middle. Erik Cassano analyzes the entire unit for us this morning.

Synopsis

Bob Golic might as well have suited up for the Browns last year.

The defensive line was that old.

With 38-year-old Ted Washington, 33-year-old Orpheus Roye and 28-year-old Alvin McKinley starting in Romeo
Crennel's
revamped 3-4 scheme, soon-to-be 50-something
Golic
would have fit right in.

The results were about what you would have expected: No interior pass rush, minimal run-stopping penetration and a glaring lack of being able to recover and make tackles after getting blown off the line on the snap.

The defensive front's advanced age and obscene lack of athleticism were the primary reasons why, once again, the Browns had trouble containing opponents' rushing games.

2007 looks like a transitional year for the defensive line, as Crennel and Phil Savage attempt to shift from big and slow to smaller and quicker. It's probably going to take a few years and a couple of high draft picks to resolve the line's identity crisis.

The offseason

Unfortunately, the oldest and slowest parts of the line -- Washington and Roye -- are still in position to start. Savage added former Texan and Titan
Robaire
Smith through free agency to plug the spot vacated by Alvin McKinley, who became the latest Cleveland defensive lineman to bolt for Denver.

Shaun Smith was also added to the mix via free agency. The ex-Cowboys, Bengals, Cardinals and Saints journeyman figures to add a smidgen of depth to the nose tackle position, where 2006 draft pick Babatunde Oshinowo had been the only true backup.
Oshinowo
spent almost all of '06 on the practice squad.

The Browns selected Chase Pittman in the seventh round. At 6'-5" and 275, he has the dimensions to stick in the NFL, but unless he was a diamond in the rough unearthed by Savage, don't expect him to add any actual depth this year.

The major players

DT Orpheus Roye: He's been among the most productive free agent signings the Browns have made since returning to the league. By itself, his age, now 34, wouldn't be as big of an issue. When paired with the borderline-ancient Ted Washington, it becomes a pressing concern.

We've likely seen Roye's most productive years in a Browns uniform come and go. Within the next year or two, finding a new anchor for the defensive line is going to be paramount.

NT Ted Washington: The Browns Web site lists Washington at 375 pounds. If that's actually the case, Washington joined NutriSystem For Men when we weren't looking, because when we last left Washington in early January, he was 375 plus
Verne Troyer
in a weighted vest.

If Washington was surrounded by hyper-athletic, explosively-fast pass rushers and run-stoppers, he'd likely still be effective as a huge boulder in the middle

clogging the rushing game. Surrounded by other tortoises like himself, he just looks like ... well, another tortoise.

DT Robaire Smith: With all the hype heaped on the Browns' offensive acquisitions this spring, the signing of Smith kind of flew under the radar. But Smith might become the biggest difference-maker on the defensive front this season.

The former sixth-round pick of the Titans is a self-made starter with 17 career sacks and back-to-back 100-tackle seasons in 2004 and '05 with the Texans. With an aging D-line and another first-round draft pick now two years away, Smith might end up becoming a very important part of the Browns defense in the coming years.

DT Shaun Smith: Even the Browns don't seem to know a lot about this guy. His player profile on the team's official site can't even agree on how many games he's started.

DT Simon Fraser: With flowing red locks and a college history that includes scarlet and gray, Fraser couldn't help but become a fan favorite after signing with the Browns several years ago.

The good news for Buckeye/Brown lovers is that Fraser's role increased last year, and he figures to be a major bench piece for the defensive line this year. If he continues to impress, he might eventually start. He has the size (6'-6" and 300 pounds) to do it.

By the way, you knew he has a university named after him , right?

DT Ethan Kelly: You have to admire a guy with the pluck to survive in this league

after appearing in just one game in his first two years, getting cut by the team that drafted him (New England) then playing his way into three starts with Cleveland in two years.

Kelly is like the Browns D-line answer to the Indians' Jason Michaels: He might not be uber-talented, but he hustles and plays hard. Coaches love that.

NT Babatunde Oshinowo: He's a project player who has some work to do, both on his game and in the weight room, but I love the fact that the Browns have a backup nose tackle who is A) working on a master's degree in electrical engineering at Stanford and B) has parents who loved him enough to name him Babatunde
Oluwasegun
Temitope
Oluwakorede
Adisa
Oshinowo
, Jr.

Up next: The linebackers