The Browns have been beset by a siege of injuries to the secondary in years past, but no unit on the team has greater potential this season. In Leigh Bodden, Eric Wright (pictured), Sean Jones, and Brodney Pool ... the team has a solid young quartet of defensive backs that could invoke memories of the Dawg Days back at Municipal Stadium. Erik Cassano continues his position by position look at the 2007 Cleveland Browns.

Synopsis

You think the offensive line has had the worst luck of any Browns unit? Close, but no cigar.

The O-line is a major contender in the bad karma arena, but even they get nudged out by the secondary.

In the past year, while LeCharles Bentley was attempting to recover from one ruptured patellar tendon, Gary Baxter was recovering from two ruptured pa tellar tendons, sustained on the same play versus the Broncos last October.

The other starting cornerback, Leigh Bodden, is a tease of Lee Suggs proportions who can stick like glue to Chad Johnson, but only when he's healthy, which isn't often.

The cornerbacks' inability to stay healthy magnifies the frustration for fans (and I'm sure the coaches) because this could be one of the deepest and most talented

areas of the team at full strength.

In the wake of the injury to Baxter, Daven Holly came out of nowhere and played well enough to warrant another look in training camp. Justin Hamilton pulled a Mason Unck, performing well enough on special teams to get a longer look in defensive sets. Sean Jones and Brodney Pool began to stabilize the safety positions, though it remains to be seen whether either will morph into a skull-cracking hitter who dissuades receivers from venturing over the middle.

The offseason

The loss of safety Brian Russell is arguably the biggest personnel blow the Browns received this spring. When Russell left, he took the closest thing the Browns had to an intimidating presence in the defensive backfield with him. Now the pressure is on Jones and Pool to fill that role.

Phil Savage stoked the coals of the cornerback corps once again this offseason, adding Eric Wright and Brandon McDonald in the draft, and signing nine-year veteran Kenny Wright in free agency.

After burning this year's second-rounder to acquire the 22nd pick and draft Brady Quinn, Savage traded back into the second round to draft Eric Wright from UNLV. Wright transferred to UNLV from USC due to some off-the-field issues, and many football writers believe he would have been a Top 15 pick had he entered the draft out of Pete Carroll's program.

Needless to say, a lot is riding on Wright to become the shutdown corner who can smother the opponent's top receiver each week.

The major players

CB Gary Baxter: No player has ever recovered from two ruptured knee tendons to have a productive post-injury career. Baxter is trying to break new ground, and it looks like he just might do it.

An offseason of intense rehabbing has gotten Baxter back to the field. Barring any setbacks, it appears likely he'll see game action at some point during the preseason.

There's no telling on what level he'll be able to contribute, but like Bentley, if he can give anything, it will be a major boost to his unit.

CB Leigh Bodden: Who can stop 85? Bodden can stop 85. Bodden's reputation as a Chad Johnson stopper is preceding him, and got him a starting gig.

He's not an elite cornerback, but if Eric Wright develops the way Savage and Romeo Crennel think he will, a starting corner pair of Wright and Bodden seems capable of sticking around here for a while, to say the least.

CB Eric Wright: He just might start right away. He's easily the most athletic player in the secondary.

CB Daven Holly: Carpe diem. Holly, a virtual unknown at this time last year, took the baton and ran with it after Baxter's injury. Now he's looking at major playing time in '07. Still, if he's starting games, it's not good, because it means everyone listed above is either injured or underperforming.

CB Kenny Wright: A veteran of 56 NFL starts, Wright can add some very real depth to the cornerback situation. As important is the leadership Baxter and Wright can provide to the young guys in the secondary.

S Sean Jones: A Butch Davis holdover, Jones had a breakout season a year ago, starting all 16 games and tying for the team lead with five interceptions. He has stud potential as a safety, but with only 32 games under his belt, we need to see more.

S Brodney Pool: It's shine time for Pool, who will be a full-time starter this year. Shine or watch Savage draft your potential replacement next year.

S Jusitn Hamilton: The safety position lacks significant depth, so the opportunity for someone like Hamilton to jump in and see playing time is there. Actually, the Browns need Hamilton to step up, because the rest of the safety unit is either inexperienced or unfamiliar with the Browns' system.

Up next: Special teams, coaching and the front office