For all of us that have been reading Mitch's "Random Thoughts" column all season, we know he's been on record as saying Jamal Lewis is likely best kept as a one year rental, and that Derek Anderson should be dealt this off-season to make way for Brady Quinn. The last couple of games have changed Mitch's mind, and in his latest column, he makes the plea to Phil Savage to sign both of these guys to contract extensions this spring.

No need to double check the byline.

Yes, this is the same idiot who has been on record multiple times in my "Random Thoughts" columns about how Jamal is only good for one year, and how Anderson is a fake, and should be allowed to run off to some other team as a restricted free agent, garnering the Browns a first and third round draft pick in return.

But in the words of the immortal Sheriff Buford T. Justice ..."hold up on that carwash!"

After looking back at the last several games, it is becoming clearer and clearer to me that I have been 100% wrong about the future in Cleveland of both Derek Anderson and Jamal Lewis. The out-of-nowhere success of the Cleveland Browns in 2007 are in no small part due to the great years both of these players are having...Anderson coming out of nowhere and Lewis fighting back from the scrap heap he was tossed upon by Baltimore. Both players are free agents next year, although Anderson is restricted and can be retained.

Phil Savage needs to make sure they are both wearing Orange and Brown in 2008 and beyond.

One of the great things about the length of the NFL season is that it gives you the time to evaluate people over several months. Unfortunately, it also tends to lead to snap judgments during the early part of the year, and during those early games, I was convinced of certain things that have turned out to be untrue as Summer has long past, and now Autumn turns to Winter.

Jamal Lewis

The early thoughts about Jamal Lewis is that it was a marriage of convenience for both sides. Jamal was upset with the fact that Baltimore didn't want him back, and he was unable to find ANY team willing to give him a fat, multi-year contract. So in what appeared to be the perfect "F-you" to his former employers, he signed a single year contract with one of Baltimore most bitter rivals, the Browns...the team that had been his personal whipping boy for several years.

For the Browns, Lewis was a no-risk stop gap measure. Signing him to a one-year deal would keep the heat (somewhat) off from Phil Savage for not drafting Adrian Peterson, as Savage knew full well that no matter how much Hall of Fame potential Peterson possessed, if the offensive line, particularly left tackle, wasn't fixed, Peterson could well turn out to be Cleveland's version of Ki-Jana Carter.

So if a running back was not on Savage's draft wish-list, what to do? Rueben Droughns may have been the first 1,000 yard rusher for the Browns since Kevin Mack with his effort in 2005, but he clearly was nothing more than an adequate backup, and relying upon Droughns to provide the power for Rod Chudzinski's complex offense was something Savage knew just wouldn't work.

So Jamal was signed, and everyone pretty much accepted this as a one year rental. In fact, many of us were convinced that Jamal would never last through the year, certain to continue his recent history of missing most of the year due to injuries, and having an average yards per carry in the 3.0 range.

This looked to be true when Lewis went down for two games in the early part of the season with an minor injury. But by that time, it wasn't considered that big of a loss, as the passing attack was in full gear, and Jason Wright and Jerome Harrison were proving themselves to be adequate replacements.

But then the schedule got tougher, the weather and field conditions got worse, and Jamal Lewis turned into the beast that he was four years ago. He has remained healthy, is 15 - 20 pounds lighter than last year, and he has turned into exactly what is needed in the AFC North in December; a punishing runner who is still quick to the hole, and tends to pick up his game in the second half. His TD run against the Jets was a clip that should be tagged to the definition of "power running", and his performance in the snow last week against Buffalo will be remembered for a generation.

So what now? Jamal is 28, but was said to be "an old 28", meaning he had taken a pounding for too long, and his career was nearly over. But he has proven that he is far from done. He reported in the best shape of his life this past year, and there is no reason to think that he can't do it again. Should he get a five year, big dollar deal? Of course not. But it would be a set back to this offense to go into 2008 with anyone but Jamal.

The Browns don't have a first round draft pick. In a deep draft for running backs, it is quite possible to find a good one in the second round...but the Browns really need to use that pick to improve their awful defensive line. Michael Turner of the Chargers would be a great option, but he will have all kinds of suitors, and the cost to sign him would make the $$$ spent on Eric Steinbach last year look like chump change in comparison.

Jamal won't be cheap either, but he won't be anywhere close to Turner's cost. A three year, incentive laden contract with a nice signing bonus would be perfect for both sides. Jamal would remain the focal point of the running offense for 2008 at least, and then could possibly shift into the Jerome Bettis type role of the hard yardage carrier if the Browns can cultivate their own Willie Parker for the speed runner (Jerome Harrison, anyone?)

Derek Anderson

I will admit it...I have been prejudiced against DA and for Brady Quinn from the beginning. I was enamored with Quinn's potential, especially after his performances in the pre-season. I loved his college pedigree, which has only been enhanced this season as Notre Dame has proven by their ineptitude that Quinn almost single handedly carried them into multiple bowl games.

And yes, the fact that he WANTED to be a Cleveland Brown tugs at my heartstrings, as the last time this happened, it was Bernie Kosar, and every Cleveland fan on the planet would love nothing more than to have someone who could carry that heavy mantle.

But then a funny thing happened on the way to the coronation. Quinn held out, and the oft discussed Charlie Frye/Derek Anderson "competition" in training camp resulted in nothing other than dread. The Pittsburgh Fiasco and the Tuesday Trade followed, so there we were on the morning of September 16th, dreading the coming Cincinnati game, awaiting the coming implosion of DA, the bye week firing of Romeo for being 2-4, and Brady's ascension to god-hood.

Anderson had other plans. But no matter how well he has played, the critics have always been on his case, seemingly waiting with glee for him to foul up.

I was one of the worst of them.

"He makes too many stupid mistakes!" "He's too inaccurate!" "Once team scout him out, they'll figure out how to neutralize him!"

But after going back and reviewing his play over the last eight weeks, what I now see is a 24 year old quarterback with the potential to be a star in this league for years to come.

All Anderson has managed to do has been to lead his team to the cusp of the playoffs while putting up numbers not seen since the Kosar and Sipe years while having a TD:INT ratio of nearly 2:1. He is poised in the pocket, possessing an uncanny instinct to avoid contact, which combined with a lightning quick release leads to one of the least sacked QBs in the league (and yes, the improved O-Line deserves a great deal of credit as well). He has one of the strongest arms I've ever seen, and when you combine that with the speed and hands of Braylon Edwards and Kellen Winslow, it is a terrifying combination for opposing defensive coordinators.

His lack of touch has been lambasted by me and others for some time...but I seem to have conveniently ignored the fact that as a 24 year old..."touch" is an ability that can be learned. And there is no reason to believe that Anderson can't.

Anderson should continue to grow as a QB. He's already grown as a

leader, and that cannot be ignored.

Here is what also cannot be ignored: The Browns are a playoff caliber team NOW. With the need to revamp the defense next year, can they really expect to continue to improve if they go into 2008 with an untested QB and a new RB? I think it would be very difficult to do so, and we as Browns fans have gone too long without hope to risk regression.

What about Quinn?

What about him? He's signed for at least five years, and why do we have to act like both can't exist on the same team. As has been proven this year, QBs go down with injuries. A lot. Carolina has started four different QBs this year. Chicago, Atlanta, Minnesota, Baltimore, San Francisco, Miami, and St. Louis have started three. What happens if Quinn is the QB and gets injured while Anderson's lighting it up in Chicago? I prefer having Quinn ready to step in if Anderson gets injured.

Steve Young waited for years behind Joe Montana for his chance. Brett Favre waited in Atlanta before his chance. Tony Romo waited. Aaron Rogers is still waiting, and he may end up being a very good one as well.

One thing NOT to do would be to hastily trade Quinn away, a la Matt Shaub. Think Atlanta's not kicking themselves now for that decision?

Quinn counts next to nothing against the cap, and trading him away would make less sense than trading Anderson. The last thing I'd want to see in 2008 would be a Ken Dorsey or David Carr taking snaps for the Browns.

The Browns are in a position of strength. Yes, a trade of Anderson might yield some much needed defensive help...but is it worth the risk?

In 1972, the Browns traded away a Hall of Famer, Paul Warfield, for the potential of a "can't miss" college QB.

Mike Phipps is a name that to this day induces groans from Cleveland fans.

That risk can't be taken for 2008.

2009? That's a different story, and by then the Browns will have enough of a body of work to make a more educated decision...even if the decision is to keep things exactly as they are.

They aren't at that decision point now...and both Anderson and Lewis have EARNED the right to receive a huge payday and job security for what they've given us this year.

Make it so, Phil.