The Phil Savage era has been marked with at least one early signature signing in free agency each year; 2005 brought us Joe Andruzzi and Gary Baxter, in 2006 the Browns corralled LeCharles Bentley, Joe Jurevicius, and Kevin Shaffer, and last year Savage stole Eric Steinbach. But when free agency opened at 12:01 Friday morning, the available free agents on the defensive front seven, the Browns' primary area of need, amounted to little more than scraps. So Phil engineered a trade. For Green Bay's Corey Williams. Nick tells us about it.

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But when free agency opened at 12:01 Friday morning, the available free agents on the defensive front seven, the Browns' primary area of need, amounted to little more than scraps. As Mansfield Lucas so eloquently stated yesterday , teams employed the franchise tag quite liberally this off-season, retaining several linemen and linebackers who could have helped resuscitate the Browns' beleaguered front seven. With only a few bologna sandwiches available, Phil Savage had to get creative to land himself a steak.

That proverbial steak came in the form of Corey Williams, a defensive tackle from the Green Bay Packers. Savage dealt the Browns' second round draft choice to Green Bay in exchange for Williams.

Williams played his college ball at Arkansas State before becoming a sixth round pick of the Packers back in 2004. At 6' 4", and tipping the scales at 313 pounds, Williams has the size the Browns need for their 3-4 defense, which

requires beefy linemen capable of clogging the running lanes and occupying multiple blockers to let the havoc wreaking linebackers run free. Williams, 27 years old, has played four seasons in the NFL, posting seven sacks in each of the last two seasons, impressive numbers for an interior lineman. It's also worth mentioning that Williams sports Ricky Vaughn's number 99; always a positive.

Now the Browns need to determine where Williams will line up. It's probably safe to assume that, barring injury, the opening day down lineman will be incumbents Robaire and Shaun Smith, teamed with Williams. At 314 pounds, Williams is the lightest Browns lineman, as Robaire and Shaun weigh in at 320 and 325 pounds, respectively. So although Williams played defensive tackle in Green Bay, it appears most likely that he will be moved to defensive end, opposite Robaire Smith, with Shaun Smith likely acting as the nose tackle. While Shaun Smith spent the majority of the season at defensive end, he thrived when presented with the opportunity to play at the nose, and hopefully he can carry that momentum into the ‘08 campaign. Needless to say, the Browns will try to add some depth on the defensive line via free agency and/or the Draft, but it seems extremely unlikely that they will add another big ticket lineman by way of free agency or another trade.

With Savage shipping away the Browns' only remaining day one draft choice, let"s play the ever-stimulating speculation game. It's not all that far-fetched to believe that Savage swapped away that second round pick because he believes that another team will sign Derek Anderson to an offer sheet, allowing the Browns to wave *bon voyage* to Anderson, which would net them the first and third round picks of whichever team snaps up DA. Savage had a good point when he said that if Anderson didn't sign the Browns' three-year offer (reportedly in the $20-21 million range, with approximately $10 million guaranteed), which he didn't, his agents are probably confident that he will receive a larger deal from another team.

If Anderson signs with another team and the Browns decline to match the offer (an ever more likely scenario), then Savage would most likely enter the free agent market for a backup quarterback. Three names I like: Cleo Lemon, Josh McCown, and to a lesser extent, Billy Volek.

The Browns appear likely to address the linebacker position in free agency, even if the guy they really wanted, Baltimore's Terrell Suggs, is unavailable due to the franchise tag. The hot name for the Browns right now is Arizona linebacker Calvin Pace. Pace is a beast at 6' 4", 272 pounds, and while he may not be the playmaker the Browns are looking for, he would definitely be an upgrade, and he's an option the Browns should explore. Two lesser-known commodities that the Browns may consider are Clark Haggans of the Steelers, and Victor Hobson of the Jets.

The final position where the Browns should look to make a big splash in this year's free agent pool is wide receiver. At 33, Joe Jurevicius is no spring chicken, and he suffered his share of nagging injuries last season. The Browns can count on Jurevicius for one more year, but after next season he may ponder retirement. By signing a quality receiver during this free agent period the Browns can address their lack of depth at wide receiver and also choose their heir-apparent to Jurevicius at the starting split end spot opposite B-17.

Bernard Berrian or Bryant Johnson would certainly look good in seal brown and burnt orange, but neither is likely to be cheap. If the Browns are in search of more cost-effective options, Jabar Gafney of the Patriots is a possibility. And don't rule out a second Cleveland stint for Andre Davis, who would be a nice fit as the slot receiver. Most importantly, the Browns must add a free agent receiver so they don't have to spend one of their early draft choices on a receiver in April.

Phil Savage may not bring us the free agent fireworks of years past, but this signing period is nonetheless crucial to the success of the ‘08 Browns. And if there's one thing we know about Savage, it's that he will leave no stone unturned in his quest to improve upon the team's 2007 deficiencies.