Phil Savage has become adept at pursuing and landing premium free agents, but prior to this season Savage had never been forced to retain one of the Browns' own big ticket free agents. He did that twice this off-season, inking Jamal Lewis and Derek Anderson to new deals. In his latest, Nick makes the argument that signing DA was the right move. But now it's time to deal him.

Phil Savage has become adept at pursuing and landing premium free agents, but prior to this season Savage had never been forced to retain one of the Browns' own big ticket free agents. Savage re-upped with star running back Jamal Lewis a week before free agency's onset, and leading up to free agency the big question for the Browns was starting quarterback Derek Anderson.

Mixed signals were broadcast from Berea. Savage first stated that he was optimistic the Browns would consummate a long-term deal with Anderson, but Savage later surmised that if the Browns were unable to reach an agreement with Anderson before free agency commenced, the 24-year old quarterback would likely be headed elsewhere.

Anderson"s situation was understood by the overwhelming majority. As a restricted free agent, if the Browns were to offer Anderson the high tender, which they did, any team that signed Anderson would have to compensate the Browns by sending their first and third round ‘08 Draft choices to the North Coast. This sparked spirited deliberation within the fan base as to whether or not the Browns should offer Anderson only the high tender, or try to sign him for the long term. And if Anderson should sign an offer sheet with another club, should the Browns match, or simply accept the draft picks?

Ironically enough, the entire argument was rendered moot relatively early on. After officially entering the free agent pool just a few hours earlier, Derek Anderson got cold feet, choosing instead to accept the Browns' three-year offer.

Apparently Savage sweetened the deal at the last minute to sway Anderson. Nobody can be completely certain why Savage did so, but supposedly he was concerned about receiving low first and third round picks for Anderson, which Savage considered less than fair compensation. Also, rumors swirled that the Ravens had worked an inside deal with the Dallas Cowboys to acquire Anderson. In said deal, the Cowboys would sign Anderson, give the Browns their number one and number three picks (number 28 in each round), then turn around and deal Anderson to Baltimore in exchange for the Ravens'' first round pick (number eight).

Such a devious pact would essentially mean that the Ravens would obtain Anderson, but would do so by having to yield only their first round pick, not their first and third round choices (in fact, Baltimore doesn't have a third rounder this year). Furthermore, the Ravens would make sure that the Browns, a division rival, would be given two draft choices of significantly less value than if Baltimore had signed Anderson without using a middle man. Dallas would be interested in such a deal because they would in essence be dealing their first and third round picks to move up 18 spots in the first round, perhaps bringing them closer to swinging a deal for the coveted Darren McFadden.

If that were the case - and Savage alluded to such rumors during his press conference announcing Anderson's signing - then his decision was logical. It would have been quite obtuse to let Anderson defect to a division rival, especially if the Ravens were going to hoodwink the Browns into lower compensation in the process. As erratic as Anderson has been, he's still very raw and possesses vast potential. If DA's proverbial light ever comes on, then watch out.

Keeping Anderson from playing a second stint in those repellent purple uniforms was the right choice, but now that the Browns have both Anderson and Brady

Quinn on the roster for the foreseeable future, they may have a serious problem on their hands.

While having a pair of quality quarterbacks is a positive on paper, it's an issue that has the potential to become tremendously divisive. Anderson and Quinn now appear destined to collide. If the Browns don't take evasive action, they could have a potential headache on their hands.

When the Browns re-signed Anderson, Savage declared him the starter in plain English. If Anderson succeeds in training camp and during the preseason, then all is well. However, let's say that Anderson struggles and Brady Quinn continues to tear it up as he did last preseason. Right or wrong, most of the fan base continues to back Quinn. When Anderson shows the first signs of trouble, the fans will begin to call for their golden boy. As passionate as the "BRA-DY" chants were last summer, their intensity would be doubled, not to mention that they would be coupled with fevered booing whenever Anderson would commit the slightest slipup.

If all this comes to pass, how will the Browns and head coach Romeo Crennel react? How will Crennel handle a full-fledged quarterback controversy? Will Anderson play, regardless, simply due to his hefty new salary? Can Romeo Crennel even effectively choose the best quarterback? To say that Crennel mishandled last summer's quarterback derby is a total understatement. It's not difficult to envision a scenario like this, and such a scenario could turn ugly in a hurry.

At this point the majority of the league perceives that Anderson and/or Quinn will develop into quality a quarterback. If Anderson or Quinn flops over the summer, that may no longer be the case. In other words, the values of both Anderson and Quinn may never be higher, and Phil Savage should strongly consider selling high.

It's no secret that the Browns still have to plug significant holes on defense; they have a strong need at linebacker and a moderate need at cornerback. The Browns know what they've got at quarterback, and they presumably know better than anyone else does. Although it's not the most conservative move, trading a quarterback now, when they can acquire one or more first day draft choices, may be the right call. These draft picks could then be used to plug holes at linebacker and/or cornerback.

Not only would the Browns avoid a potential schism in the locker room, on the coaching staff, and amongst the fan base, but they would further solidify their improved defense and cement themselves as a force to be reckoned with in the exceptionally competitive AFC.

Which quarterback should the Browns choose? Honestly, I'm not sure. While Derek Anderson may not be as good as he was against Miami, at St. Louis, and during the Browns' first meeting with the Cincinnati, he's a better player than his lousy games at Cincinnati, at Arizona, and even the second half of the Browns' loss to Pittsburgh at Heinz Field.

Quinn has immense potential and had enormous success in college, but he's still largely an unknown at the pro level. Choosing between the two players would not be easy. What the Browns should do is run their own value analysis on the two players. Based on what they know about the quarterbacks, what they project from each in the future, and what they could command in return for each in a trade, the Browns should determine which quarterback to retain, and which quarterback it would be most beneficial to trade.

Quarterback is the most visible and important position on the football field, that's the nature of the NFL. But the Browns cannot afford to let a golden opportunity to upgrade their fledgling defense come and go. With the offense the Browns have in place, as well as the outstanding talent they have both on the offensive line and at the skill positions, there are numerous quarterbacks who could be successful playing in OC Rob Chudzinski's offense. Whether the quarterback is Anderson or

Quinn, the Browns will still score oodles of points.

Savage can make his decision about the quarterback position this off-season, or he can decide to answer, "pass." But if Savage only postpones that inevitable choice, he will risk seeing a locker room divided, a split fan base, and perhaps most importantly, he will miss an opportunity to maximize the team's potential in 2008.