It is time once again for our esteemed panel of Browns writers here at TheClevelandFan.com to put away their pom-poms and local bias to put down some predictions in print on how they think the Browns fare this season. Can the Browns live up to the hype and expectations? Are they ready for Prime Time? Will Derek Anderson solidify his status as the clear #1 QB, or will he struggle and open the door for a looming quarterback controversy? Did Phil Savage do enough in the offseason, and with the moves he did make were they the right ones? Our writers give their thoughts.

It is time once again for our esteemed panel of Browns writers here at TheClevelandFan.com to put away their pom-poms and local bias to put down some predictions in print on how they think the Browns fare this season. There is no doubt that the level of excitement and anticipation going into this season has been off the charts. For the first time in about 20 years the Browns go into the season as a strong playoff contender, and expectations are as high as they have been in a generation.

Can the Browns live up to the hype and expectations? Are they ready for Prime Time? Will Derek Anderson solidify his status as the clear #1 QB, or will he struggle and open the door for a looming quarterback controversy? Did Phil Savage do enough in the offseason, and with the moves he did make were they the right ones? Will Romeo Crennel make it through the season if the Browns get off to a rough start, or if they fail to make it to the playoffs will he be the fall guy? Can the Browns offense continue to put up big yards and points, and can the defense do just enough for us to win consistently?

All these questions and more will start to be answered today at 4:15 PM when the Browns kickoff the season at home in a nationally televised game against the Super Bowl contending Dallas Cowboys. Our panel opines below:

Mansfield Lucas: The Browns flat out scare me. The schedule is beastie. We play a lot of for real-ass NFL teams. More so, balance wins in this league, and the back seven of our defense is just plain bad.

The DB's have talent and potential at the starting positions, but they are wafer thin behind the starters. Seriously, with Brotney Poole concussed, Mike Adams is a starter. Think about that as a prospect. And behind Adams, there's a whole lot of nothing. Ankles get sprained. Hammies get pulled. Domes get rung. Teams play three WR sets. It is inevitable that on Sunday teams go five d-backs deep. In other words, we're screwed from a matchup perspective. Teams will expose our fatal flaw starting these next two Sundays. It really doesn't matter how good the rest of the squad is. It shocks and awes me that some fans can see this, but the fish wrap media cannot. No worries though, as the linebackers can compensate by shutting down the run.

What's that?

Oh hell.

Never mind.

We will look back at this era and see that the 2006 draft was a critical fork in the road for the Browns. Why? We installed a 3 - 4 defense and I defy you to name me a playoff quality club that ran a 3 - 4 that had bad linebackers. Go on, find one. One. In 2006 we were supposed to get the linebackers who made this scheme work. Phil blew the Wimbley pick after "getting over" on Ozzie. Uh, yeah. Then Phil blew the Jackson pick. Then he missed on Leon. I have a hard time blaming him. On paper in April 2006, Kouhrtney and NyQuill looked good. But these bustas ain't got it. Memo to Phil: ain't gone kill yah to scout the Big 10 for an ILB.

It don't matter if future HOFer JayLew busts off 1,300. Or if DA takes the next step and is consistent. Or if The Souljah catches 100 balls. Or if Braylon is the next TO. Or if the DL is fixed and Shaun Rogers is God's gift to nose tackles. Or if the OL is Gibraltar with lateral movement. We are fatally flawed because Phil failed when it comes to the defensive back seven. Nick Speegle. David McMillon. Beau Bell. Antonio Perkins. DeMario Minter. And don't take for granted it'll all be OK with another draft or free agency off season. We are nearly capped out and Sean Jones and Edwards' contracts are coming up and we MUST keep them. And it has been proven Phil can't do jack with the draft outside of top 5 overall picks save for one full back.

Then there is the "toughness issue". This is why we won't get past The Inbred . This group lacks the physicality to step up and take the division. The players don't have it and the coaches won't or can't demand it. Lack of will. Fred, not Ray, Nietzsche and all that.

This will be the most disappointing Browns' season since 1990. We'll start off 0 - 2 due to

schedule, injuries, and a head coach who gets a squad ready for early battle as well as Mauric e Gamelin
and then we'll find out about this team. Maybe they can rebound.

I hope and pray I'm wrong, but there it is. 6 - 10. Maybe 4 - 12 with injuries will get us Rey or Lil Animal.

Gary Benz: In the NFL, making the playoffs is a combination of two factors, talent and luck. Last season, the Browns seemingly had enough talent, just not enough luck. They choked a few games themselves that could have been difference makers, but they also were unlucky enough to have to rely on the outcome of a game in which the better team, Indianapolis, decided to rest its starters in order to get ready for the playoffs. Usually, though, the luck needed comes in the form of avoiding key injuries and playing the tough teams on the schedule at just the right times.

Again this season, the Browns seem to have enough talent to make the playoffs, but whether or not they will have enough luck is the real question. Already it doesn't look good. The off-season injury to Daven Holley was just the start. On Thursday, the Browns placed starting linebacker Antwan Peek on injured reserve. Brodney Pool, the starting safety, is still suffering the effects of a concussion. Jamal Lewis, Derek Anderson and Josh Cribbs enter the season banged up. The offensive line is a little thin at the moment because of injuries. If this is as bad as the injury situation gets, the Browns can probably survive. If it's just the beginning, look out. A precipitous drop from last season's break out season, and the attendant national embarrassment, could be at hand.

When you look at the schedule, it's still hard to see how it will play out. Teams that look good early fade late and vice versa. But starting off against Dallas and Pittsburgh is a huge task and will go a long way toward setting the tone for the rest of the season. Winning each game would be preferable, a good show is a must. If they get embarrassed as they did against the Giants in preseason, that too could be as difficult to overcome as injuries. Given the added burden of trying to satisfy the increasing expectations heaped on them from every corner, and despite what I feel were Phil Savage's best efforts to continue to improve this team, I'm still not convinced the Browns are completely ready for prime time and thus will finish at 8-8 and miss the playoffs again. If that does happen, it will be difficult for Savage to stay the course with Romeo Crennel and will make it easier for Savage to move Derek Anderson in the off season and turn the reigns over to Brady Quinn.

Jeff Walcoff: As I mentioned earlier this week in my column, offensively, the Browns success is going to depend heavily on health. With Joe Jurevicius out until at least Week Six and very little depth at the receiver position, the Browns need Braylon Edwards, Donte' Stallworth and Kellen Winslow to stay healthy and keep options on the field for Derek Anderson. The same goes for the offensive line, where the club is suddenly thin after Rex Hadnot's recent injury and Lennie Friedman's move to injured-reserve. With what be brings both as a starting guard and a backup option at tackle, Ryan Tucker's return is now vital for the team's success. Most importantly, however, Jamal Lewis must stay healthy for the Browns to succeed. Jason Wright or Jerome Harrison just can't carry the team's running game for any extended period of time the

way Lewis can and will.

Defensively, the team's new defensive line should do a lot in terms of stopping the run and increasing the pass rush, therefore taking pressure off the secondary. But, ultimately, the success or failure of the defense will depend upon the fate of the cornerbacks, who looked lost in the preseason. How well those guys come together as the season progresses and how well Mel Tucker schemes to keep them from having to do too much on their own will determine the defense's success.

Overall, I think Browns will finally beat the Steelers, but will finish 8-8 and one game shy of their archrivals in the standings.

Mitch Cyrus: The Browns start out 2 -5, struggling for wins against Baltimore and Cincy before embarrassing back-to-back road losses at Washington and Jacksonville signifies the end of the Derek Anderson Era. Brady Quinn takes advantage of the weaker half of the schedule, including a shocking upset at home against Indianapolis and a win at Pittsburgh on the final week, as the Browns finish 9 - 7 to win the AFC North.

Pittsburgh finishes at 8 - 8, a combination of a brutal schedule (they get New England and San Diego, where Cleveland gets Buffalo and Denver), along with a collapse due to their poor offensive line. Sales of Iron City beer and reports of spousal and animal abuse in Appalachia spike.

Cincinnati fires Marvin Lewis after game 6, and Mike Brown replaces him with OJ Simpson's legal team. Chad Ocho Cinco legally changes his first name to Shirley.

Baltimore plays half the season using the Single-Wing, as they run out of quarterbacks. Coach John "the talent-less brother" Harbaugh goes missing after week 4. Ray Lewis denies any connection to a limo seen speeding away from the practice facility in the dead of the night.

Derek Anderson is traded in the offseason to the Detroit Lions for their third round draft pick and Leigh Bodden.

Brian McPeek: I truly appreciate the opportunity to embarrass myself again with a prediction. I'm the guy currently waiting on the Tribe to go 'Colorado Rockies' on the American League so that they can win the World Series title that I predicted for them back in March. They're not mathematically eliminated yet so.....

Anyway, I will not be making that mistake again. Despite their rise in the national media's favor (which came prior to the preseason from Hell), being exposed to this team everyday all year long has me a little less enthused than many people. This team has holes. We all know about the linebackers and the secondary but I'm also concerned with some of the supposed strengths of the club. I still believe Derek Anderson will be prone to the big mistake. I still believe that behind Jamal Lewis lies..... well.... not enough. I still am not convinced that Romeo Crennel is the man to lead men when the heat and expectations get ratcheted up a bit.

The bottom line is that, to me, this team is still a year and a couple dominant defenders away from being a bonafide playoff-caliber team. Combine some weaknesses we know about with some weaknesses I fear will present themselves and add in what appears to be a brutal schedule and I see 7-9 more often than I see 10-6 or better. This team did improve talent-wise up front but it's not quite enough right now. I'd rather have last year's roster and softer schedule than this year's improved roster and more difficult schedule.

8-8. How's that for hedging bets?

Erik Cassano: The Browns won't do better than 8-8 this year. The schedule is just a total bitch, there's no other way to say it. A more experienced team could probably handle week after week of the Cowboys, Steelers, Giants, Colts, Jags, etc. with more grace under fire, but if the preseason is any indication, the Browns just aren't ready for the level of prime time they're going to see this fall.

Derek Anderson, with the blessing of good health, will start all 16 games, but he won't do enough to shove Brady Quinn out of the picture. The same concerns we have about DA right now are the same concerns we'll have in late December, and it will all add up to a very difficult, pivotal decision for Phil Savage this offseason -- but a decision that could allow Savage to nab a first-day draft pick in a trade.

The Browns' 2008 offensive MVP will be Braylon Edwards, who will drop a few too many balls as he always does, but will still make the circus catches on balls thrown too high, too low and too late -- a very important factor when DA is your quarterback.

The defensive MVP will be Shaun Rogers. He won't be able to do a lot to mask the deficiencies of the secondary, but for the first time in a long time, the Browns might actually look competent at stopping the run. Which means teams will go to the air and pick at the secondary even more. Good times!

On the coaching front, Romeo Crennel will feel some heat if the Browns get off to a slow start, but it probably won't be enough for him to get the axe midseason. If the Browns tank and go 4-12, maybe Crennel gets the boot. But 8-8 or 7-9 is probably a good enough record to justify keeping RAC around for another year.

Hiko: The Redskins sucked in the Preseason. They played in their first Regular Season game, and they still sucked. Why do I mention this? Because unless you have a veteran team with a track record for success, they can't just "flip the switch" because the games count. The Preseason hangover will lead to a slow start, and the schedule won't allow for a late run. The Browns will be in the Wildcard hunt for a majority of the season, but will probably fall just short at about .500.

All that said, the 2008 Browns will be a better team than the 2007 version, and the step back record-wise will only prepare them for the leap forward in '09.

Jesse Lamovsky: For the Browns, the word "concern" starts with a two-fold

"S": secondary and schedule. Acquiring Shaun Rogers and Corey Williams to address the defensive front might not matter to the fortunes of Cleveland's defense, because you don't necessarily have to establish the ground game in the NFL- and teams will bombard Cleveland's callow, shallow pass defense with gusto.

Last year, the Browns got healthy at the expense of the weak NFC West and (outside New England) AFC East. This year, they have to go up against possibly the two deepest, strongest divisions in football in the NFC East and AFC South. Throw in five prime-time games, and it's easy to see why pundits are calling Cleveland's 2008 schedule one of the toughest in the league. The Browns could be a better team in some ways- against the run, in terms of offensive efficiency- yet post results that are inferior to the 10-6 mark of 2007. I think that's exactly what's going to happen.

Rich Swerbinsky: Browns go 9-7, but we win the division on a tiebreak due to a sweep of The Inbred. A LOT of high scoring games, even against this schedule. Kardiac Kids redux. Still think Quinn will QB ten games, either due to DA ineffectiveness or injury. Quinn will hold his own, DA will be elsewhere next season.

Big year for Braylon, 18 TDs. Think Jamal will miss some time and Wright and Harrison will fill in admirably. Offensive line will again be one of the best in all of football.

Defense will force more turnovers, but give up a lot of yards, faring better against the run, but very poorly against the pass.

Browns win a 2OT thriller at the Stadium over Favre and the Jets, invoking memories of the '86 classic. Then go west to San Diego and get pounded.

Cris Sykes: I can't believe it is here. I had seriously started to wonder if we would ever get to the point of actually having a legitimate chance to enter a season with a positive outlook. For the first time since "The Return", the Browns will head into a season with legitimate playoff aspirations. I plan on riding that wave. What is the worst thing that happens? I end up disappointed? I will take disappointed. It has to be better than the numbness of most of the last eight years.

I have the Brownies winning the AFC North. They got over the hump of beating SOMEONE in the North under Romeo in 2007, now it will be time to get over the Squeeler hump. A 5-1 record against our divisional rivals will put enough distance between us and the second place Cincinnati Bengals to ensure our first division title since, gulp, 1989. That should be enough to get them the third seed and avoid New England until the AFC Championship Game. Which they end up losing, 31-28.

I have the Browns winning a little bit of individual hardware as well. First and foremost is Shaun Rogers winning Defensive Player of the Year. I also think we will nearly match the number of players we sent to Hawaii last year, with Joe Thomas, Eric Steinbach, Braylon Edwards, Kellen Winslow and Shaun Rogers all getting their tickets punched.

Nick Allburn: Let's get one thing straight, the Browns are very capable of knocking off the Steelers, but I'd be a homer if I picked them to win the North. The Browns and Steelers both have significant question marks, but the Browns have more. The secondary is green and banged up, the linebackers are still mediocre at best, Shaun Rogers is injury-prone, Corey Williams is struggling to adapt to the 3-4, the offensive line's depth has been nullified due to injury, and an injury to Braylon Edwards or Kellen Winslow could cripple the offense. Until the Browns knock off the Steelers, I can't pick against them.

Tony Lastoria: The Browns are a better team in 2008 than they were in 2007. Unfortunately, their record this year won't show it. After going 10-6 last year against one of the softest schedules in NFL history, the Browns will follow that up with a 7-9 performance this year against one of the most difficult schedules in the NFL this season. Talking schedule strength this early in the year is usually nonsense, but in the case of the Browns' schedule there is no mistaking that the NFC East and AFC South is loaded with most of the premiere teams in the NFL.

Thankfully, the Browns division looks to be one of the weakest if not the weakest in the NFL. Unfortunately, the Browns undoing will be yet two more losses to the hated Steelers which seals their division fate where 8-8 in the AFC North could very well get it done this year considering the brutal schedules all teams in the division will play this year.

The Browns offense will not nearly be as explosive as they were last year when they tore apart defenses ranked in the bottom third of the league for more than half the season. There inevitably will be a quarterback controversy at some point this season due to the drop in production from the offense. The defense is improved, but the linebackers and secondary are far from championship caliber and will be an area the Browns look to address next offseason to "finish" this team off to be a legit Super Bowl contender in 2009. The Browns are better this year, but they take a step back only to make a giant leap forward into 2009 which may be our year if the team can stay healthy and make the right moves this upcoming offseason.

Mansfield Lucas

Gary Benz

Jeff Walcoff

Mitch Cyrus

Brian McPeek

Erik Cassano

Browns Record

6-10

8-8

8-8

9-7

8-8

8-8

AFC East

Patriots

Patriots

Patriots

Patriots

Patriots

Patriots

AFC North

Steelers

Steelers

Steelers

Browns

Steelers

Steelers

AFC South

Colts

Jaguars

Colts

Colts

Jaguars

Colts

AFC West

Chargers

Chargers

Chargers

Chargers

Chargers

Chargers

AFC Wildcard

Jaguars

Colts

Jaguars

Jaguars

Colts

Jaguars

AFC Wildcard

Broncos

Titans

Broncos

Jets

Titans

Jets

NFC East

Cowboys

Cowboys

Cowboys

Giants

Cowboys

Cowboys

NFC North

Bears

Vikings

Vikings

Packers

Vikings

Vikings

NFC South

Bucs

Bucs

Panthers

Panthers

Saints

Saints

NFC West

Seahawks

Seahawks

Seahawks

Seahawks

Seahawks

Seahawks

NFC Wildcard

Giants

Giants

Giants

Cowboys

Bucs

Giants

NFC Wildcard

Lions

Eagles

Lions

Saints

Packers

Redskins

Super Bowl

Patriots over Cowboys

Chargers over Cowboys

Cowboys over Patriots

Colts over Cowboys

Patriots over Saints

Patriots over Cowboys

Hiko

Jesse Lamovsky

Rich Swerbinsky

Cris Sykes

Nick Allburn

Tony Lastoria

Browns Record

8-8

8-8

9-7

11-5

8-8

7-9

AFC East

Patriots

Patriots

Patriots

Patriots

Patriots

Patriots

AFC North

Steelers

Steelers

Browns

Browns

Steelers

Steelers

AFC South

Jaguars

Jaguars

Colts

Colts

Colts

Jaguars

AFC West

Chargers

Chargers

Chargers

Chargers

Chargers

Chargers

AFC Wildcard

Colts

Colts

Jets

Jaguars

Jaguars

Colts

AFC Wildcard

Bills

Jets

Steelers

Jets

Bills

Broncos

NFC East

Cowboys

Cowboys

Cowboys

Cowboys

Cowboys

Cowboys

NFC North

Vikings

Packers

Vikings

Packers

Vikings

Vikings

NFC South

Saints

Saints

Saints

Saints

Saints

Saints

NFC West

Seahawks

Seahawks

Cardinals

Cardinals

Seahawks

Seahawks

NFC Wildcard

Giants

Eagles

Giants

Eagles

Giants

Eagles

NFC Wildcard

Packers

Vikings

Panthers

Giants

Packers

Bucs

Super Bowl

Vikings over Jaguars

Colts over Cowboys

Cowboys over Chargers

Patriots over Saints

Chargers over Giants

Jaguars over Cowboys