It's getting to that point in the year Browns fans. You know, early November, when we start to talk NFL Draft. And that's exactly what Hiko does in this week's edition of The Browns Outsider. As it stands, the Browns would have the #9 pick, and there should be a couple of pretty notable outside linebacker's sitting there at that selection. Hiko also reviews last Thursday's trainwreck, looks at which Browns will be free agents this winter, and previews the Bills game.

A View From The Cheap Seats

Week 9 - Cleveland vs. Denver

When a team reaches the shantytown that is 3-6, big broads be bellowin' from every rooftop.

I imagine it as a Python-esque dance number, with Rueben-esque ladies in flowing skirts dancing in harmony as empty steel mills belch smoke into the atmosphere in time to the music.

Nimble for their girth, they flip and cartwheel their way across the stained shingles of Northeast Ohio.

What's that they're singing?

Say say Two Thousand Zero Eight, party over, oops, out of time.

So tonight we're gonna party like it's 1999.

(I was dreaming when I wrote this - forgive me if it goes astray.)

Why are these hefty honies crooning thusly? Because it appears that the Browns are poised to hit the re-set button for the 4th time in 10 years.

The season was over a couple weeks ago, but, now, everyone finally realizes it. We can all just relax now and let the healing begin.

The Cleveland Browns are in far greater trouble than even unrepentant pessimists such as I could have imagined. The Defense which looked improved for a while there has come apart at the seams. It has fallen and it can't get up, no matter how many times it hits that Life Alert button. The Offensive Line has looked *bl eh*
, which is Latin for mediocre.

The Run Game is stillborn.

The Receivers need mass lobotomies.

The Coaches are a bunch of zombies (dead men walking).

And we will start the 2009 season probably still not knowing what we have at the QB position.

Yes indeed, this year we're gonna party like it's 1999.

Pregame

Our benevolent benefactor Rich Swerbinsky had a get together for some of the writers at House of Blues, and I did attend. Sadly, the game began while the meal was just beginning, and, lacking a TV in our immediate vicinity, there was a constant stream of men running back and forth from the room showing the game.

I basically returned to the table only to snarf down another course or adult

beverage.

After dinner, we retired to the bar area to watch the remainder of the contest. Ang st has nothing on 15 TCF writers drinking and watching their team implode yet again.

It's everyone else's fault but mine.

First Quarter

It has come to my attention that no one reads this section. So no one will notice if I throw in some randomness like the secret that I have left a suitcase with $2 million in T-Bills buried under the tire swing at Jackson Park in Canton, OH.

I don't know why I did this.

I guess it seemed safer than a bank.

On the opening possession, Denver drove down, but missed a Field Goal. Brady Quinn's first foray into starting resulted in an Anderson-ish 3 and Out.

Jay Cutler then sliced and diced the Broncos down the field for an easy TD on a 1 yard run by Ryan Torain.

Broncos 7, Browns 0.

Cribbs had a good Kickoff return, Quinn hit Glass Flyswatter for 18, Jamal Lewis had a 29 yard run, and Brady got his 1st ever NFL TD on a nice pass over the middle to Kellen Winslow on 3rd and Goal from the 5.

Browns 7, Broncos 7.

Denver got the ball back, drove a little bit, but got stopped and punted.

End of 1st: Browns 7, Broncos 7.

Second Quarter

In the year 3535, ain't gonna need to tell the truth, tell no lie. Everything you think, do, and say is in the pill you took today.

The Jerome Harrison show began, as he almost single handedly moved the ball deep into DEN territory. But a couple bad passes near the End Zone held the Browns to a FG. ***Browns 10, Broncos 7.***

Cutler got picked by Brodney Pool when he and Brandon Marshall had a miscommunication, and Winslow caught a 3rd Down pass from Quinn, broke a tackle, and waltzed in for the 16 yard score.

Browns 17, Broncos 7.

Denver came right back, moving all the way to the CLE 17, but Cutler, under pressure for one of the few times all night, made a horrible throw across his body that was almost picked and drew the Offensive Pass Interference, killing the drive. ***Browns 17, Broncos 10.***

Quinn again moved the O efficiently, but the Browns got stopped at the DEN 35, so Phil Dawson came in and kicked a 52 yarder that first sliced, then hooked. I think I've done that to golf balls before, but they

usually landed in water. ***Browns 20, Broncos 10.***

Denver tried to quickly get a FG of their own, but at the CLE 45 with 12 seconds left and no Time Outs, Cutler inexplicably ran a sneak. He got tackled, and time ran out on them.

If Romeo had done that, he'd be crucified by midnight.

Halftime: Browns 20, Broncos 10.

Third Quarter

I have been told that if you use your left hand, it's like someone else is doing it. T his is a damnedable lie.

Another nice drive by Quinn, including a nifty avoidance of the pass rush on 3rd and 8 and floating the ball to Stallworth for 19, and a nice Flash package run by Cribbs.

However, they had to settle for another FG, keeping Denver on life support.

Browns 23, Broncos 10.

Cutler displayed equal ease driving the Broncos to the CLE 12, but McDonald broke up the TD attempt to Marshall, forcing a FG. (I felt I had to say something

nice about my boy McD). ***Bro wns 23, Broncos 13.***

The Browns ran efficiently, converting a 4th down, and running the last 5 ½ minutes off of the 3rd Quarter clock.

End of 3rd: Browns 23, Broncos 13.

Fourth Quarter

"*There's long spells - three days, years - when you can't see a thing, know where you are only by the speaker sounding overhead like a bell buoy clanging in the fog." -* Ken Kesey.

The fog began immediately with 3rd and 6 at the Denver 41. Quinn rolled right and made a gorgeous conversion to Braylon, but Winslow got nailed for Pass Interference far away from the play, and a punt ensued.

Starting deep in their own territory, Cutler heaved a long ball up to Eddie Royal, who beat McD for a heinous 93 yard TD. Befor e the play, McD could be signaling Sean Jones to back him up (he had no help), and so was unprepared at the snap, quickly got beat, dove for the ball without looking back, missed, and it

was all over.

Browns 23, Broncos 20.

Quinn made a great throw to Winslow on 3rd Down, but Kellen fumbled. After the turnover, sensing the game slipping away, the D finally brought the heat, forcing a bad throw - a pick which McD flat dropped.

Naturally, several plays later, D'Qwell Jackson and Mike Adams completely whiffed on Daniel Graham on 3rd and 11, and the lead was gone just like that.

Broncos 27, Browns 23.

I don't want to say DA chokes in situations such as these, but he certainly doesn't thrive. Quinn did fine, accompanying a long end around by Cribbs with a 30 yard pass to Winslow and an 18 yard toss to Lewis.

Jamal finally plowed in from the 1.

Browns 30, Broncos 27.

Then began The Drive II - Electric Boogaloo. Under 5 minutes left, Cutler marched his team 80 yards, featuring a 4th and 1 where DEN RB Peyton Hillis should have been stopped twice, but carried Sean Jones just past the marker.

Soon after, McD slipped while guarding Marshall, and Denver got the easy 11 yard TD pass with 1:17 left.

Broncos 34, Browns 30.

Attempting an amazing comeback, Quinn hit Winslow for 9 on 1st Down, but the next two passes were incomplete. On 4th and 1, Winslow let the pass go *right through his hands* .

Party over, oops, out of time.

Final: Broncos 34, Browns 30.

Offensive MVP: Brady Quinn. Eh, why the hell not? It would've been Kellen, but he killed one drive with his Offensive Pass Interference, another with his fumble, and the last one with his drop.

Pissing in a bottle of Glenlivet nullifies the quality.

Defensive MVP: Not Brandon McDonald. I still like the guy, and I think he can overcome.

But the way he plays big Receivers right now is scary not good.

Conclusion

~~~564 yards is a lot of yards to give up to a team without its top 17 Running Backs.
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~~~There are many reasons why this Defense has begun to fail, but the single most crucial reason is this: Without pressure, a Defense cannot succeed.

The Cleveland Browns do not get pressure on a consistent basis.

Even their blitzes are only intermittently successful.

Every QB has more than enough time to view the field and hit the open Receiver. There is no Defense - I don't care who your Corners are - that can maintain coverage as long as the Browns are asked to do.

By my count, the Browns pressured Jay Cutler only 7 times, hit him only twice, and got only 1 sack. He dropped back to pass 42 times.
~~~

What can be done about this? Not much. There's no one in reserve that will rush the passer any better than those that are already there.

One could argue Alex Hall, but he already gets his fair share of playing time (although he needs more).

I know Defensive Coordinators are loath to blitz constantly, but if that's the only way you can effectively muster QB pressure, then you do what you must. Dying by numbers is not much better than giving up the occasional 93 yard TD pass.

~~~Shaun Rogers leads the team in sacks with 4.5.

4.5 is not a lot of sacks for a team leader, and the team leader should not be the Nose Tackle.
~~~

And despite Rogers' significant presence in the middle, teams run on the Browns with ease. Ryan Torain was averaging 5.7 yards a carry before getting injured (thanks a lot, Torain, I kept you on my fantasy roster for 8 weeks for NOTHING!)

Opposing RB's always always ALWAYS seem to be 3 or 4 yards down the field before they get touched.

Further testament to the egregious lack of penetration by the Front 7.

~~~PS - Move Wimbley out of that Right DE position over the Left Tackle. He's useless there.
~~~

~~~The dilemma that is the Cleveland D pretty much negates the entire QB discussion for this week. Sure, Brady Quinn played well. But it is clear that this team has far more issues than can be cured by a simple QB change.

Quinn was a little conservative in his decisions, and, against the Denver D, Anderson could probably have played just as well. But the characteristics that Brady demonstrated during this game are why I believe that he will be more successful than DA against tougher Defenses.

Quinn is much quicker. He drops back quicker, he's more elusive in the pocket, and he makes quicker decisions. These rapid decisions often lead to him checking down and
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"taking what the Defense is giving him", but I think the longer passes will come with experience. Quinn doesn't throw those gorgeous deep balls like DA can, but he also isn't prone to the horrible passes/choices that Anderson is.

And his touch on the short balls is markedly superior.

Despite the competition, this was Quinn's first NFL Regular Season game, and he played like a veteran. He threw the ball 35 times, and I would term only 4 of those as Bad Passes.

If there was anything positive to be stolen from this abortion of a game, it was the play of The Golden Boy.

~~~The Denver Defenders really need to stop spazzing out. No matter what happened on the play, they were jumping around and posing and preening like they were the '85 freakin' Bears.

Especially # 59, that Woodyard guy. Shanahan , please check that dude's meds.

There's gotta be some reason why - after every play - he's flipping out like a 5 year old with ADD who drank a pot of coffee, dropped six tabs of acid, and set his testes on fire.

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~~~Have you seen the Braylon Edwards commercial for the *5 Hour Energy* drink? It's scintillating.

Braylon basically talks to the camera about the product, saying &quot;
It gives you energy... about 5 hours or so
.&quot;

What an ad! I was thankful to Braylon for describing the product so succinctly, because I was wondering what *5 Hour Energy* was for. T
he name is so ambiguous.

Hopefully, this will lead to future marketing campaigns for Mr. Edwards. Like for *5 Hour Hands*.
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~~~Following the game, Jamal Lewis and, to an extent, Josh Cribbs called out their teammates, claiming some of them &quot;quit&quot;. To quote Lewis:

&quot;This is the NFL, you can't call it quits until the game is over, but it looks to me like some people called it quits before that. Denver was down, but they didn't call it quits. They kept their heads up and they finished. We didn't do that two weeks in a row -- at home.&quot;

&quot;Some people need to check their egos at the door and find some heart to come out here and play hard. This is a man's game. The way we went out there and played two weeks in a row, finishing the same kind of way, it's not there. I think there are
~~~

some men around here that need to check their selves, straight up. That's it."

"Honestly, I've never seen anything like it ever in my life as long as I've been playing. I'm not cut from this kind of cloth. I play physical football, and I come out here and give it my all. I give it my all all week. To come out and be up by whatever -- this is the NFL. You can't call it quits until the game is over."

First, I appreciate Jamal taking this stand. This team sorely lacks leaders - respected veterans that have come from winning organizations and don't accept mediocrity lightly.

And the fact that he called his teammates out

without naming names will prevent locker room disharmony while shaming those that feel he might be talking about them.

And he couldn't be more right about checking the egos - there's a couple egos on this team in serious need of a trim.

However, I don't buy that the team quit. Everyone was trying as hard as they could - they just weren't good enough to succeed.

One could argue they were trying TOO hard, like in Winslow's case, picking up a completely useless Offensive Pass Interference way the hell away from the action.

Regardless if they quit or not, the message was clear to the team, as it should be clear to Romeo Crennel and Phil Savage: *Man up or get the hell gone.*

~~~And while we're on the Jamal Lewis topic... I hate to say it... he's lost the step. He's not as effective as he was last year.

In the 2nd Half of the Broncos game, he was pretty much useless - and that's not a great Run D he was facing.

He no longer has the speed to get outside, so he has to run between the Tackles. But he needs the holes to stay open longer than what he has.
~~~

The step he lost is accelerating from snap to hole, and losing that step is the difference between "hole" and "wall of flesh".

Honestly, I think he should be utilized more like Jerome Bettis was at the end of his career, splitting carries with a shiftier, speedier back like Willie Parker, or Jerome Harrison. Harrison - at this point of their careers - has much better moves.

He runs with underrated power in the middle, and can bounce it outside and cut back much more quickly than Jamal can.

And every time Harrison touches the ball,

you get that sense that *this could be the play where he breaks it all the way*

.

With Jamal, you get the sense that *this could be the play where he breaks it for 15*

.

I'm sure that taking away the unquestioned starter's job from Jamal will not make him happy, and his leadership and goodwill is key. But sticking with an eroding vet to the detriment of the team isn't the answer either.

That's why coaches get paid the big bucks -

they've got to be able to walk the line.

~~~Since we're on the cusp of a complete overhaul, let's examine what the Browns actually have on this team at this time.

Free Agents (all Unrestricted): *Jason Wright, Sean Jones, Darnell Dinkins, Seth McKinney, Lennie Friedman, Willie McGinest, Shantee Orr, Andra Davis, Mike Adams, Daven Holly, Travis Daniels.*
~~~

McGinest is going to retire. The rest are unlikely to come back except for maybe McKinney, Friedman, Adams, and Holly.

And, yes, that includes Sean Jones, because it's probably implausible the Browns are willing to pay him as much as he might get on the open market.

Also likely part of Cleveland Browns history are Derek Anderson and Donte Stallworth, who have loophole contracts that allow the team to escape.

So what does that leave us?

Quarterbacks:

Key Players - *Brady Quinn*

Depth - *Ken Dorsey*

Running Backs:

Key Players - *Lawrence Vickers*

Marginal Starters - *Jamal Lewis, Jerome Harrison*

Depth - *Charles Ali*

Not Enough Data - *Allen Patrick*

Wide Receivers:

Key Players - *Braylon Edwards* (yes, still), *Josh Cribbs*
(special teams)

Marginal Starters - *Joe Jurevicius*

Depth - *Syndric Steptoe*

Not Enough Data - *Steve Sanders, Paul Hubbard, Lance Leggett*

Tight Ends:

Key Players - *Kellen Winslow*

Marginal Starters - *Steve Heiden*

Not Enough Data - *Martin Rucker*

Offensive Line:

Key Players - *Joe Thomas, Eric Steinbach*

Marginal Starters - *Hank Fraley, Rex Hadnot, Ryan Tucker, Kevin Shaffer*

Depth - *Seth McKinney, Isaac Sowells, Scott Young, Lennie Friedman*

Not Enough Data - *Eric Young*

Who? - *Travis Leffew, Kurt Quarterman*

Defensive Line:

Key Players - *Shaun Rogers, Corey Williams* (haven't lost faith)

Marginal Starters - *Robaire Smith, Shaun Smith*

Depth - *Louis Leonard*

Not Enough Data - *Ahtyba Rubin, Santonio Thomas, Christian Mohr*

Too Much Data - *Melila Purcell*

Linebackers:

Key Players - Uhhhhhhhh...

Marginal Starters - *D'Qwell Jackson, Kam Wimbley*

Depth - *Kris Griffin* (special teams)

Not Enough Data - *Alex Hall, Beau Bell, Antwan Peek*

Too Much Data - *Leon Williams*

Who? - *Titus Brown*

Cornerbacks:

Key Players - *Eric Wright*

Marginal Starters -*Daven Holly*

Not Enough Data - *Brandon McDonald, Gerard Lawson*

Too Much Data - *Terry Cousin*

Safeties:

Key Players - *Brodney Pool*

Marginal Starters - *Mike Adams*

Depth - *Nick Sorensen* (special teams)

Who? - *Hamza Abdullah*

Special Teams:

Key Players - *Phil Dawson, Ryan Pontbriand*

Marginal Starters - *Dave Zastudil*

Yes, sports fans, that means that (in my opinion) we only have 13 key/core players on the squad that will be returning next season. That's not a lot.

And 2 of those 13 are the Kicker and Long Snapper. *Bleh.*

Hopefully, some of the players will develop.

Hopefully, some will be acquired.
Good teams probably have 25-30 key/core players, and the Browns have a ways to go to get there.

Draft Update

It's a new feature here at Browns Outsider, and only necessary because as our poor team's record plummets, their draft position rises. Thr ow in the fact that they actually have some picks this year and the fact that they really need... well... almost everything, and really this is the most hopeful section of the article.

This week, Cleveland is slated at # 9. 7 teams have a worse record, and the Houston Texans have an identical 3-6 record, but the Browns superior competition positions them at the higher slot.

I'll be using a different 2009 Mock Draft each week, and today I'm using a Mock Draft from WalterFootball.com

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They have the first 8 picks going thusly:

1. Detroit Lions: Matt Stafford, QB, Georgia
2. Cincinnati Bengals: Michael Oher, OT, Ole Miss
3. Kansas City Chiefs: Brian Orakpo, DE, Texas

4. San Francisco 49ers: Eugene Monroe, OT,

Virginia
5. Oakland Raiders: Darrius Heyward-Bey, WR, Maryland
6. Seattle Seahawks: Michael Crabtree, WR, Texas Tech
7. St. Louis Rams: Andre Smith, OT, Alabama
8. Houston Texans: Taylor Mays, S, USC

NOTE: For the record, WalterFootball.com does not have Sam Bradford, Mark Sanchez, Josh Freeman, or Colt McCoy declaring.

For the sake of argument, let's say that the Browns take a player projected to go within the next 10 picks, from 9 to 18. Here are the options:

Rey Maualuga, ILB, USC - Height/Weight: 6-3/250

Vontae Davis, CB, Illinois - Height/Weight: 6-0/204

Chris Wells, RB, Ohio State - Height/Weight: 6-1/237

James Laurinaitis, ILB, Ohio State - Height/Weight: 6-3/240

Malcolm Jenkins, CB, Ohio State - Height/Weight: 6-1/201

Greg Hardy, DE, Ole Miss - Height/Weight: 6-4/265

Sen'Derrick Marks, DT, Auburn - Height/Weight: 6-1/288

William Moore, S, Missouri - Height/Weight: 6-1/230

Tim Tebow, QB, Florida - Height/Weight: 6-3/232

Ciron Black, OT, LSU - Height/Weight: 6-5/314

Obviously, my first choice would be Rey Maualuga, who would be an ideal Inside Linebacker for a 3-4, and would also fill the greatest position of need.

But I wouldn't mind a big cover Corner, as Brandon McDonald - a small Corner - has trouble with big Receivers. Keep Wright on one side, Davis or Jenkins on the other, and move Brandon back to the Nickel.

This would greatly solidify the secondary.

I also wouldn't cry to get a Safety like Moore to replace Sean Jones should his asking price get too exorbitant. And getting a guy like Marks to play the Right DE position would also be an upgrade, not to mention increasing the depth at that vital spot.

Running Back is inevitably a need for this team, but I'm not sure I like Beanie Wells at 9. He gets hurt too much for my taste, although his running style would be effective in the AFC North.

I've seen Laurinaitis play many times, and while I feel he is a good player, I don't necessarily like him as a 3-4 ILB. He doesn't have the size.

Hardy would be too small to play DL in a 3-4, and converting college DE's to NFL OLB's is always a dicey proposition, especially this high in the draft (see: Wimbley, Kamerion).

In my opinion, Tebow is going to be a helluva QB, but if the Browns are drafting him, then the

fans in Berea will all be clogged with the shit that hit them.

And Ciron Black plays Left Tackle, probably the position of least need on the team. Perhaps he could switch to Right Tackle, enabling Ryan Tucker to move inside to Right Guard.

Perhaps not.

With all the Browns' needs, this would likely be an unwise project for them to undertake.

In my mind, I don't see Maualuga still there at # 9, but if he is, he's the clear-cut choice. But the more I watch this Defense, the more I see gaps everywhere.

It will take almost a perfect Draft and Free

Agency to shore that unit up, a feat that is unlikely to be achieved in one offseason.

It makes me want to heave.

Next Up

~~~The Buffalo Bills.

Offense: PTS - 21.3 (20th), YDS - 303.8 (24th), PASS YDS - 213.8 (12th), RUSH YDS - 90.0 (28th)
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Defense: PTS - 21.0 (13th), YDS - 309.2 (13th), PASS YDS - 205.3 (16th), RUSH YDS - 103.9 (15th)

Unless the name is Cincinnati Bengals, I'm not picking the Browns to beat anyone left on their schedule. Not only are they out of the playoff picture, they are starting to get that "swirling down the toilet" look in their collective eye. This could turn into a runaway train in a damn hurry.

The Bills have also recently experienced a crash and burn, losing 4 of their last 5 to drop from 4-0 to last in the AFC East.

Trent Edwards' production has taken a

nosedive as of late - many blame it on the deficiencies of the Buffalo Offensive Line, which hasn't produced enough of a run game to scare opposing Safeties. Their Defense is solid, but not good enough to win a game.

Really, when the Bills were 4-0, they got exposed as frauds by my Arizona Cardinals, who beat up on them on both sides of the ball to the tune of 41-17. Since then, Buffalo has struggled game in and game out to look like an upper echelon team.

But they're playing at home, and they still have something to play for. So I'm not getting my hopes up that Cleveland will come into the Home of Wings and get the W.

Bills 31, Browns 26.