Gary checks in with his post-draft analysis, and says that this past weekend's draft was a classic case of quantity over quality for the Browns, who he felt reached for a center in the first round. Gary says that when this draft was all over, he still doesn't know what this team or the new Browns regime stands for, a problem he says has plagued this franchise since it re-emerged 10 years ago and plagues it to this day.

To those who think the Cleveland Browns overreached by picking University of California center Alex Mack with their first pick on Saturday, you're right. To those who think that for once the Browns were deliberately conservative, focused on actually rebuilding their crumbling franchise by loading up on quantity, you're right, too. And for those who think that the NFL draft is more flash than substance and that there is no way to judge the wisdom of what any team did this weekend, you're also right.

While there may be some basic truths about the draft, with some teams seemingly always drafting better than others, there is far less science involved in the process than anyone officially associated with the NFL would care to admit. Teams prepare reams of data on player after player and yet still make far more hiring mistakes than the shift manager of a local McDonald's. You would think with the stakes so high teams would set their own bars higher. As it is they seem thrilled when their batting average on draftees is north of Asdrubal Cabrera even if south of Victor Martinez.

That makes it a bit dangerous to jump into this abyss without a life preserver. Still, there is a consensus emerging about the Browns' draft in the way that a consensus emerges anytime you get like thinking people together in the same room. Everyone just confirms for each other what they were thinking all along. And what were they thinking? That's pretty obvious. The Browns would be wise to load up on draft picks. Give the Browns draft a "B." Why? Why not?

What isn't being asked enough, though, is exactly what the Browns really set out to do in the draft. Without a clear understanding of the underlying game plan, it's hard to judge whether or not there was success. When this draft was all over, I still don't know what this team or the new Browns regime stands for. That problem has plagued this franchise since it re-emerged 10 years ago and plagues it to this day.

There is no theme. There are no core beliefs. If you want to know what this draft was about, your guess is as good as anyone else's. It may be, for example, that the Browns really did want to load up on draft picks, even at the expense of some veteran players if necessary. It also may be that the deal with the Jets, as well as the other two first round deals, fell into their laps at the last minute and pushed them to go in an altogether different direction.

If you think either general manager George Kokinis or head coach Eric Mangini is going to reveal what they were thinking, then you just aren't paying attention to either's latent paranoia. The only people they trust less than the media is everyone else.

Right now they are constructing this franchise like a new owner rehabs a vacant store. They've put brown paper over the windows and every so often an occasional tear appears allowing you to look inside and see that something's going on even if you're not quite sure what.

It's entirely conceivable, as the Plain Dealer's Tony Grossi essentially theorizes, that the Browns floated out the trial balloons on both Braylon Edwards and Brady Quinn to in order to gauge fan reaction. If that's the case, how exactly did the fans react to those rumors?

For some, it caused a reassessment of Edwards that focused on his possibilities while downplaying his performance. Others simply want him off the team. Quinn was a bit easier. Most fans figure the Browns owe it to themselves, at the very least, to understand his upside before pouring more resources into still another rookie quarterback. I'd be surprised, however, if any of this made any difference to either Kokinis or Mangini. They don't strike me as the kind of guys that would run a franchise by fan acclimation.

What's far more likely, though again we'll never know for sure, is that Kokinis and Mangini took the measure of the team they inherited and weighed it against the draft and decided, "hey, this team needs better players." If that's the case then that's the place to begin your analysis of this draft. Still, it's only a guess.

Assuming quantity with a dash of quality was the game plan, the Browns' draft was clearly a rip-roaring success. They picked up two potential veteran starters in Kenyon Coleman and Abram Elam, a likely starter on the offensive line in the form of Mack, and probably two starting receivers in Brian Robiski and Mohamed Massaquoi. Even defensive end/lineman David Veikune is likely to start.

The real challenge will be to turn what appear to be some temporarily-applied band-aids into more permanent repairs. Maybe Mangini knows something about both Coleman and Elam that the rest of the league currently is missing or else he got suckered into a three-card monte game with the Jets by taking them. Time will certainly tell. But in the interim, if Coleman and Elam end up being only slight upgrades then the defensive line and secondary are still awaiting the long term fixes both need.

If, on the other hand, you are more in the camp of wanting to see quality first, then the Browns are right up there (or right down there, depending on your perspective) with the Oakland Raiders. The Raiders keep drafting players as if they are picking names out of hat while virtually every other team at least appears to be trying something a little more fact-based. With all the draft picks the Browns acquired the manner in which they went about turning those picks into players is bound to strike more than a few of us as a little Raidersesque.

If you're taking a completely unvarnished look at this team, then you just know that it has more holes than Firestone Country Club. The roster Mangini inherited from Savage is far more reflective of the team that won 4 games last year than the team that won 11 the season before. This is a team that needs players at almost every position which means that drafting for need should have been secondary, except in a few instances, such as quarterback.

Frankly, that's the best context in which to even begin the analysis of the Browns' draft. That's not to knock Mack or any of the players the Browns drafted. But it is more than just a suggestion that the Browns could have and should have done better.

In the first instance, the Jets today are rightly crowing about the fact that they were able to move up 12 spots in the first round without having to surrender next year's first round pick. All it really cost them were three players that they viewed as relatively expendable anyway. That's a steal in anyone's book. The only thing that makes that trade seem less ridiculous is the fact that the Browns saved huge money by moving so far down in the draft. It's money they can waste elsewhere. It's the same rationale Bill Belichick utilized when he traded Matt Cassel to Kansas City for "only" a second round pick and then through in Mike Vrabel for kicks and giggles. In some sense, the Browns got taken in that trade, even if it turned into more picks in later rounds.

More important than all of that is the simple fact that Kokinis and Mangini seemed to eschew any pretense of drafting the best player available. Make whatever

arguments you want, but at the end of it all can anyone be convinced that Mack was the best player available at number 17 in the draft? Similarly, given the holes on the team, was there any reason *not* to draft the best player available regardless of position?

If you assume that picking up Coleman, the defensive end and Elam, a safety, allowed the Browns to temporarily check off those boxes on areas of need, then with all that still lay before them, was Mack really the best choice? There were receivers and linebackers galore available as well as a certain running back from Ohio State, any one of which had to be more highly rated than Mack and any one of which also would have conveniently filled an area of need on this team. Does anyone honestly believe that a lineman who wasn't even projected by most as a first rounder was the best available player? Good luck selling that to the fan base.

Fans will never get the straight story on this draft. Instead, they'll be left to sort through it over the next few years as they watch several of the players the Browns bypassed to get Mack go on to accomplish great things. Maybe we'll eventually learn that the Browns were best served by going safe. The real question is what more will transpire in the interim?

If this draft ends up being even a short-term disaster, the fans will become rightfully impatient and owner Randy Lerner may end up finding still another regime in whom to vest his unquestionable trust. At that point this draft will be essentially rendered irrelevant except as a jumping off point to figure out what direction in which Brian Schottenheimer or whoever is running this franchise next will go.