Erik Cassano says it shouldn't have come to this. It really didn't need to come to this. Braylon Edwards shouldn't have failed in Cleveland. But what began with such promise four and a half years ago has now ended in true Browns fashion: with the team failing the player and the player failing the team ... culminating in today's trade that sent #17 to the Jets. Erik Cassano talks about Braylon's tenure with the team in his latest.

It shouldn't have come to this. It really didn't need to come to this. Braylon Edwards shouldn't have failed in Cleveland.

Other high draft picks had their reasons for failure. Tim Couch came from a pass-happy system that inflated his college numbers at Kentucky, and was physically abused playing behind a Swiss cheese offensive line for the better part of five years with the Browns.

Courtney Brown's knees started to deteriorate the instant he suited up for the Browns. Gerard Warren was drafted to be the next Warren Sapp, but never possessed the skills or motor to dominate inside. Kellen Winslow came with warning tags when he was acquired by Butch Davis on draft day 2004, and promptly flipped himself over the handlebars of a high-performance motorcycle, severely injuring his knee and forever altering his career.

Edwards had his issues, but nothing that would make you think his road to NFL stardom would be curtailed. He was a certified top-shelf playmaker at Michigan. He was arrogant, but in the way that all star NFL receivers seem to embody arrogance. Unlike Winslow, he wasn't self-destructive.

He was very good and had the drive to become better. In short, he looked like the kind of star-in-the-making the Browns sorely lacked when Phil Savage made his first draft selection as Browns GM with the third overall pick in 2005.

But what began with such promise four and a half years ago has now ended in true Browns fashion: with the team failing the player and the player failing the team.

Most of us can recite verbatim the ways in which Edwards failed the Browns: every time he dropped a pass. He was never able to overcome his war with the dropsies. He could make twisting, diving catches in traffic, when he had time to simply react. When he had time to think about a ball headed straight for his jersey numbers, that's when it clanged off his body and fell to the turf.

Whether he didn't concentrate enough or concentrated too much, it was maddening to watch.

Edwards didn't do the Browns many public relations favors away from the field, either. When things went badly for the team, things went worse for Edwards. When he gets frustrated, he has a nasty habit of not keeping his mouth shut. He stated a belief that Cleveland fans were rooting against him because he played for Michigan. He once wondered aloud if LeBron James even wanted to play in Cleveland. When Coye Francies reportedly threw a bucket of ice at Brandon McDonald a few weeks ago as retaliation for a prank, Edwards was overheard saying "Welcome to the Browns locker room."

Edwards was even a footnote to Donte' Stallworth's vehicular manslaughter conviction. Edwards had reportedly been drinking with Stallworth prior to last spring's accident, in which a legally-drunk Stallworth hit and killed a pedestrian in Miami.

All of the above are forgivable sins when taken individually. Even the dropped passes, if they're not eliminated outright, can be reduced through coaching and sports psychology.

But the Browns, through their own organizational instability, failed Edwards as well. For his entire time in Cleveland, Edwards was surrounded by poor coaching, a carousel of quarterbacks, front office plans gone awry and repeated doses of infighting, in the locker room and higher up the ladder.

Edwards has his attributes. Maturity and leadership are not among them, at least right now. It's OK to have a Braylon Edwards on your team, but he'd better not represent a part of your cultural backbone. If the team backbone is already

comprised of stable veterans who set the standards of conduct and police the locker room, someone like Edwards can thrive within that. Put Edwards in an unstable environment, and you'll bring out the worst in him. That is what the Browns have been way too good at for the past decade: highlighting the worst aspects of their players.

It became a snowball effect. Edwards arrived in Cleveland with a boatload of talent but in need of a stable team environment that would promote his maturation. The Browns didn't give him that, so the game-day brain cramps and questionable behavior started building on itself. Essentially, Edwards never progressed past his college years in terms of maturity.

He had a pro Bowl season in 2007, mostly because he finally had a quarterback in Derek Anderson who could get him the ball, and another receiver who could command double teams in Winslow. But in the Browns' system (or lack thereof), it was never anything that Edwards, or the Browns' offense, was going to sustain.

the '07 season was a blip on the radar. The other three-plus years were Edwards' Cleveland reality. Which brings us to the last straw. The chain of events that began with Edwards allegedly punching a friend of LeBron outside of a nightclub in the wee hours of Monday morning and ending with his trade to the Jets on Wednesday morning.

Edwards will probably go on to play at a much higher level in New York, where he'll grow in a much more stable organization. If that is the case, it will certainly look like the Jets hosed the Browns in giving up receiver Chansi Stuckey, special teamer Jason Trusnik and two conditional draft picks for Edwards.

But the real tragedy isn't that the Browns bought high and sold low on Edwards. It's not that Eric Mangini couldn't or didn't unload Edwards for a better haul during the season. The real tragedy is that this relationship was probably doomed from the start, like so many other Browns draft picks.

The real tragedy is that Edwards and the Browns could have been good for each other. They should have been good for each other. But they were terrible for each other. Wednesday's parting of ways was a long time in coming.

Want an even more sickening thought? This probably won't be the last time this happens to the Browns.