The Browns have finally renegotiated with special teamer extraordinaire Josh Cribbs. Cribbs' new deal is for three years (through 2012), will pay him $7.5 million guaranteed, and could be worth as much as $20 million if he hits all of his incentives.

The specifics of Cribbs' incentives have not been made public at this time, but in Mary Kay Cabot's Plain Dealer report , Cribbs' agent described the incentives as, "really attainable numbers. If he performs at 2009 levels, he's likely to receive the maximum value of the contract." If Cribbs performs at 2009 levels, then the Browns will be more than happy to pay him, too.

Cribbs' new contract will essentially overwrite his existing deal, which also had him signed up through 2012. What's the difference? Cribbs was only pulling down about $1 million annually under the terms of that old contract.

This is something of a non-story, as the fact that Cribbs had three years left on his contract and appeared to love playing in Cleveland made it extremely unlikely that he would be on a train out of town.

It actually makes sense that the Browns didn't pay Cribbs until now. Cribbs signed his original long-term contract when he was very young, had recently gone undrafted, and was pleased to

have some financial security and peace of mind. If Cribbs thought he was going to explode on the league like he did, he shouldn't/wouldn't have signed a six-year contract. The multiple regime changes which have taken place during Cribbs' tenure in Cleveland also meant that Cribbs has largely been trying to renegotiate with management personnel who had made no promises to him and owed him nothing.

In fact, it was a little surprising that Cribbs was paid as much as he was considering that his agent didn't have much leverage in the negotiations. Although it's something that I don't usually endorse, to some degree the Browns are probably rewarding Cribbs for past performance. Considering how grossly underpaid Cribbs was over the last two seasons, I guess that's acceptable.

Although Cribbs was under contract for three more years, the Browns were smart to get this done. Cribbs is a big part of the team and is probably the most popular player with the fans. This deal sets a good precedent, showing players that if you produce at high level, then the Cleveland Browns will gladly reward you. It also might help offset some "nobody wants to play for Eric Mangini" press, whether players really feel that way or not.

Corey Williams traded to that state up north

On the first day of the 2008 free agency period, the Browns traded a second round pick to the Packers for Corey Williams and paid him more money than God. Two years later, the Browns shipped Williams and a seventh round pick to Detroit in exchange for a fifth rounder. That gives you an idea of how poor a fit Williams was for the Crennel/Mangini 3-4 system.

Williams' cap number was just under $8.9 million last season and he was signed up through 2013, so unloading him should save the Browns some serious cash. This brings me to one of the benefits that having (hopefully just) one uncapped year will have for NFL management teams: they can get rid of bad contracts without suffering the cap ramifications.

We all know that NFL contracts aren't guaranteed like NBA or MLB contracts, and that's why guaranteed signing bonuses have become paramount. That bonus money is prorated over the length of the contract (e.g. a 5-year contract with $10 million up front counts $2 million against your cap each year plus the yearly salary). When a team cuts or trades a player with years remaining on his contract, the remaining bonus money is accelerated and counts against the cap that season. For example, trading Williams will accelerate what's left of his $16.3 million

signing bonus onto the Browns' cap figure for 2010.

Having one uncapped year basically gives teams a Get Out of Jail Free card for any lousy contracts that they didn't want to absorb all at once. That could make for a very active trade market. It also could mean that some quality players who were simply overpaid could be released, which could in turn create an interesting secondary market.

Boldin dealt to Ratbirds

Cardinals' receiver Anquan Boldin became the newest member of the Baltimore Ravens on Friday afternoon. The Cards sent Boldin and a fifth round pick to Baltimore in exchange for the Ravens' third and fourth rounders. As part of the deal, the Ravens gave Boldin a three-year contract extension that included a $10 million bonus. Boldin is now signed through 2013, and is due $28 million over that time frame.

As a Browns fan, this trade makes me sick. A second round pick seems like a fair price for Boldin, and this deal seems like a real coup for the Ravens. Boldin is 29, so he should be in his prime right now, and the former Seminole has cracked 1,000 yards in five of his seven seasons. The only silver lining for Browns fans is that Boldin has only played in all 16 games twice in his career.

Haden's slow 40 time

The NFL Scouting Combine recently took place in Indianapolis, and it's certainly an interesting event. The degree of scrutiny players experience at the Combine is borderline laughable, and the process itself is somewhat polarizing. It seems like there are two camps: those who anxiously await combine results and watch the sessions on NFL Network, and those who think that the very concept of the Combine is a joke, considering that we've seen most of these players on the field for two to four years.

I guess I fall somewhere in the middle. While you can't discount anything that's done on the field, I appreciate that the Combine provides an objective measure of a player's physical

dimensions (height/weight/40 times disseminated by colleges are often anything but accurate), as well as things like speed and strength. The Combine is the one time that you don't have to evaluate players within the context the competition that they're playing against – everyone's actually on the same field together. For certain positions, something like a bad 40-yard dash time can be a major red flag.

On the other hand, you have to be wary of guys who drastically shoot up or plummet down draft boards based strictly on their Combine performance. The Combine is still basically a gym workout, and it doesn't tell you how guys will play between the lines or how well they might fit into your system.

Basically, the Combine is another evaluation tool. It is a tool that shouldn't be ignored, but it also shouldn't be over-emphasized, either.

Heading into the Combine, Joe Haden was the consensus pick for the Browns at number seven overall. Haden was expected to run a 40 time in the low to mid 4.40s. Instead, Haden ran in the high 4.50s (4.58 as recorded by friend of the site Scott Wright at DraftCountdown.com), and probably cost himself (tens of) millions of dollars. Such is life as an elite NFL prospect.

Haden should still be a quality player, but that 40 time is worrisome enough that it might knock him from the top 10 to the early 20s, and the Browns shouldn't be considering him anymore with the 7th pick.

With Haden out of the picture, it's unclear who the Browns will be looking at. The team has so many needs that almost any top prospect is going to be an instant and dramatic upgrade (that includes Haden, by the way).

Personally, I think that if Eric Berry slips to number seven, that's a layup. I also would have no problem with 'Bama product Rolando McClain. The Browns definitely have the most immediate need in the defensive back seven, but Heckert/Holmgren could sell me on tackle like Brian Bulaga or Anthony Davis to pair with Joe Thomas. Wideout Dez Bryant is extremely talented, but I think a receiver would be a little bit of a stretch given the club's needs on defense.

Other than defensive line, the one position I do not want to see addressed in round one is quarterback. Both Jimmy Clausen and Sam Bradford have way too many question marks for the Browns to roll the dice on either of them. This pick needs to be a sure thing, not a gamble.

Slow start

The Browns have typically been big spenders in free agency, and when we're talking about the Browns' history in free agency, Phil Savage's first epic free agency weekend definitely comes to mind.

In stark contrast to that historical precedent, the first day of the inaugural Walrus-run free agent period was quiet, with exception of scheduling a Saturday visit with Saints free agent linebacker Scott Fujita. That's fine by me. The fact that you almost always overpay for free agent talent has turned free agency into a supplement – a way to put a team over the top, or add one or two crucial pieces – not an effective way to build a team.

Tony Grossi reports that the Browns are burning up the phone lines attempting to make one or more trades, and supposedly they're trying to add one or more (!) quarterbacks. That makes sense. Derek Anderson will almost certainly be released before his $2 million roster bonus is due on March 19th. Anderson has run his course in Cleveland (and then some).

The rub for Holmgren is that this is a tough off-season to find a long-term solution at quarterback. In the draft, neither Bradford nor Clausen excite me, and there aren't any viable options in free agency except (and this might be a stretch) Jason Campbell, who the Redskins might not let go, and who would cost the Browns their first round pick if he were allowed to walk.

If the Browns are really trying that hard to swing a deal for a passer, then Mike Holmgren must not be particularly enamored with Brady Quinn. Can you blame him? He didn't draft Quinn, and the apparent incumbent has done nothing to make us believe that he can be a consistent, accurate pro. Holmgren is probably open to moving Quinn, but Quinn has top-notch intangibles and a club-friendly contract, so don't be surprised if he sticks around as a backup.

We've heard plenty about Eagles' passers Donovan McNabb and Kevin Kolb, and without any knowledge of what the Eagles would want in return, my preference is definitely Kolb. I wouldn't be opposed to McNabb, either. McNabb is definitely on the back nine of his career, but he can probably give you consistent quarterback play for the next two to four seasons, and we haven't seen that kind of stability at the position since the Kosar era.

Seahawks backup Seneca Wallace has also been mentioned as a possible trade target. Wallace is a guy who was developed by Holmgren in Seattle and would probably have a lower price tag than Kolb or McNabb. Unfortunately, Wallace isn't a long-term solution, and I don't see him as a significant upgrade to Brady Quinn. Rather than signing Wallace, I'd prefer to add a veteran backup and just give Quinn the 2010 season. If Quinn pans out, then you've got your man. If he doesn't, then you're back where you started in what will probably be a better off-season to find a quarterback.