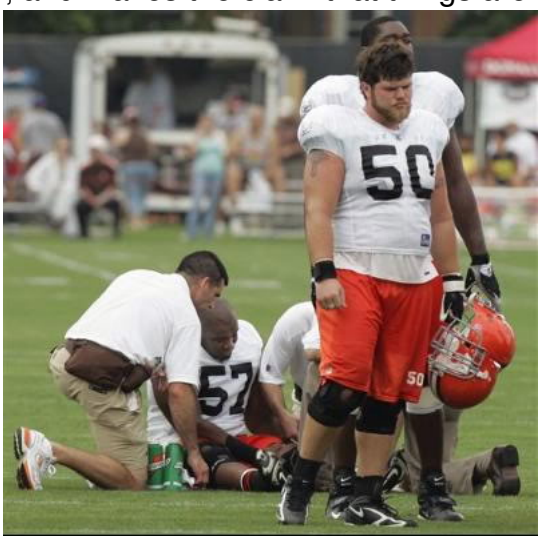
Now that the initial shock has passed, and the horror of yesterdays events have had time to set in ... Papa Cass calms down to take a rational look at the Bentley injury. In this piece, he takes a look at the injury from the bright side, and makes the claim that things aren't as bad as the fan base is making them out to be today.



Visit the Papa Cass weblog at http://papacass.blogspot.com/

LeCharles Bentley is out for the season. There's nothing you, I Romeo Crennel or Phil Savage can do about it.

In retrospect, it's something that was probably bound to happen. Bentley has had numerous knee problems over the course of his career. The accompanying widely-ciruclated picture shows him wearing a rather large knee brace on his non-injured right leg.

Something was probably bound to tear, break or rupture in one of his knees sooner or later.

I know we're all crying "Cleveland curse" right now. It sure seems too strange to be true that Bentley was injured on the first play of the first 11-of-11 practice of training camp, a non-contact drill.

But let's look on the bright side. As Matt Sussman points out, given the choice between losing LeCharles and another Cleveland athlete whose name starts with "Le," you'd take LeCharles every time.

It sucks, but now that we've spent about 24 hours moping, let's count our blessings.

The timing of the injury allows the Browns to regroup.

By the time the first preseason game rolls around in two weeks, the initial shock will be over and Browns will have accepted the fact that 2006 will not include Bentley in uniform. New starting center Bob Hallen will have been taking snaps with the first team for a while, and the offensive line will have formed the cohesion with Hallen that they would have formed with Bentley.

That's not to say the loss of Bentley isn't still huge, but cohesion is more than half the battle

with a football line.

The early date of the injury also allows Savage time to find another veteran lineman. This is a true test of Savage's GM skills. Can he root through the clearance rack and find a serviceable veteran lineman who can at least plug the role Hallen is now vacating as the backup guard/center? If the Browns can lose Bentley and Savage can still put together a solid offensive line, he deserves Executive of the Year consideration.

Bentley will still be there.

It's not like Bentley is packing up and going home for the year, or at least he shouldn't be. The Browns can still make use of his infectious energy and team spirit, something that has been missing from the Browns' locker room pretty much since the team re-entered the league. Hopefully Bentley emerges from surgery today with his big smile and go-getter attitude intact. If he does, his teammates should be exposed to him as much as possible.

The Browns' backs will be to the wall from Day One.

How is that good? Look at the Indians, who got fat and lazy in the offseason and are now paying the price. Bentley's injury should drive home to the Browns' players that this team isn't good enough to take plays off, and had better bring the energy for 60 minutes, every Sunday. This is a good litmus test for how tough this team can be.

Curb your enthusiasm.

Admit it, Browns fans are loyal like dogs. Lure us with a Milk Bone nine times, squirt us with the hose nine times, and we'll still come back a 10th time.

It doesn't take much for Clevelanders to get their hopes up, especially when it comes to our beloved Brownies. Usually, those hopes are met with a sledgehammer and we are left kicking our TV sets, feeling like suckers.

Bentley's injury is a reminder that this team is still a minimum of two years from serious contention, maybe more. Instead of getting suckered in with some sexy free-agent signings and feeling like a dope in November, the Bentley injury should offer us a chance to step back and take a wait-and-see attitude with this team. Does a team that went 6-10 a year ago deserve anything more?

We've dodged other bullets.

Anything that can go wrong doesn't always go wrong in Cleveland. It just seems that way. The 2005 Indians dodged some major bullets. Kevin Millwood signed a one-year deal after spraining his elbow. Cleveland logic says he should have destroyed his elbow in spring training. Instead, he won an ERA title.

Bob Wickman needed Tommy John surgery in 2002, then re-injured his pitching elbow in

2004. Cleveland logic says his career should have been over. Instead, he saved 45 games last year.

LeBron James has pulled himself up numerous times after writhing on the court in pain and having every Cleveland fan thinking "This is it. He's done."

Larry Hughes broke his finger, needed additional surgery, and still made it back for the playoffs. His effectiveness was compromised due to rust, but there were no signs of crippling arthritis or bone joint disease.

Maybe with Bentley, it was time for us to pay the piper.

There was no sign of Carmen Policy at training camp yesterday.

Or Butch Davis, or John Collins, or Dwight Clark, or Pete Garcia, or Chris Palmer, or Jeff Garcia.

In other words, the Browns are now in much better hands. The spin doctoring and mollycoddling is out. We at least know Crennel and Savage will deal with Bentley's injury and the subsequent fallout in a straightforward, realistic manner that gives this team the best chance to emerge stronger. That's about all you can ask for.

And, no, Zach. Reuben Droughns did not fumble on the play.