Of all the things people could focus on when it comes to the Cleveland Browns, the things they are focusing on at the moment are safety T.J. Ward, the hit he put on Jordan Shipley in Sunday's game against the Cincinnati Bengals, and the aftermath.

If the email I receive from readers is any barometer, sentiment is running high that Ward got a raw deal from the NFL, the Bengals should quit yapping and that anyone who thinks differently is some sort of effete liberal who probably cried during dodgeball in high school.

It's an understandable attitude, well all except the whole effete liberal thing, because Ward plays for the Browns and football's a violent sport. It's also a convenient attitude because the person doing the hitting plays for the Browns. If Bengals' cornerback Leon Hall puts a similar hit on Josh Cribbs and knocks him out for a game or two I suspect that these same folks would be calling for Hall's suspension.

Ward was one of the best draft choices the Browns have made in 10 years. He's played well this season and he seems to have a great upside. But none of that can change the simple fact that he hit a defenseless receiver after the play was essentially over. Ward's hit wasn't necessary to break up the pass. It served only to send a message and cement a reputation Ward's been cultivating since middle school about being a hard hitter.

One cheap shot doesn't make one a cheap shot artist any more than one fumble make a running back a fumbler. To this point it's only one questionable hit in Ward's brief career in Cleveland so for now it's just a lesson he has to learn and not a reputation he has to overcome.

There is a fine line between a hard hit and a cheap shot and Ward is going to have to figure out how to straddle that line if he's going to be successful. He's also going to have NFL officials watching every one of his tackles for the rest of this season, at least. Given the nature of the hit

on Shipley, Ward doesn't have any margin for error, at least if he doesn't want to start parting with his any more of his hard-earned money.

Ward has an opportunity to be a player in the mold of Ronnie Lott who, early in his career, had a reputation for making questionable hits, only to overcome that on his way to a Hall of Fame career. Lott, like Ward, was known as a hard hitter coming out of college and carried that into the NFL. There were plenty of times when opposing teams and their fans were screaming for Lott to be fined and/or suspended because one of their receivers had just been lit up. A few of those hits happened on Browns' receivers.

Lott remained one of the league's most feared safeties up until he retired but he eventually overcome a reputation that perhaps a few too many of his tackles were a little late, a little cheap. As he progressed in the league he learned to play within the rules and still make receivers pay for venturing into his territory.

I think Ward will learn the same lessons without losing the best parts of his game. But all that shouldn't obscure this particular situation. What Ward did was wrong and he was rightly fined a substantial amount and simply pointing that out doesn't make one a traitor to the cause.

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It was interesting to read Colt McCoy's take on the Ward/Shipley incident given McCoy's friendship with his former college teammate Shipley. McCoy, as would be expected, sided with his current teammate and not his former.

What makes this interesting is the contrast between a similar situation in 2006 when Browns' safety Brian Russell lit up Chad Ochocinco (who was still just plain Chad Johnson at the time) with a questionable hit after a Leigh Bodden interception in a game the Browns lost 34-17. Ochocinco's helmet flew off and he suffered a pretty nasty gash to his chin. Russell wasn't flagged for the hit and Ochocinco mostly joked about it afterward.

Fast forward 10 weeks and the next Bengals game. In ways that only the tortured synapses in

serial miscreant Braylon Edwards' brain could fire, he chimed in publicly that he thought Russell's hit was bullshit. Edwards called out Russell's hit as a way of illustrating a larger point about receivers being targets.

Edwards' comments didn't sit well with then head coach Romeo Crennel, who, after probably giving Edwards' a fatherly lecture and then sending him back home without a cookie from the training table, chimed in publicly to basically tell Edwards to shut up, pointing out that Russell's hit on Ochocinco was legal.

Edwards' comment was as inappropriate then as McCoy's comment was appropriate now. Nothing good is ever accomplished when you take sides against the family. Ask Fredo.

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The Browns' trade for Minnesota Vikings defensive end Jayme Mitchell is as understandable as it is perplexing.

While defensive end Kenyon Coleman had a decent game against the Bengals on Sunday, the defensive line overall has not been able to generate much pressure on opposing quarterbacks. Defensive coordinator Rob Ryan continues to try to cover up those shortcomings by blitzing as if the Browns' are the German army and the opposing team is Poland.

So in that context, getting any one that can help is understandable. What makes the trade for Mitchell so perplexing is the acknowledgement that Mitchell has never played in a 3-4 defense.

If Mitchell can figure out the plot to Inception, he can eventually learn the 3-4 defense. But he isn't going to learn it in a day or a week. There's a learning curve and right now he's at the very beginnings of it.

If you were following the Albert Haynesworth soap opera with the Washington Redskins, at its core it was about the fact that Haynesworth feels he's better suited for the 4-3 system he grew up in and not the 3-4 system that head coach Mike Shanahan favors. Part of Haynesworth's whining is likely due to what he feels are fewer opportunities to sack quarterbacks in a 3-4 defense, although that's debatable. But playing as big a part is simply the difficulty of teaching an old dog an entirely different system. It's still football, but so is the single wing and nobody playing it is going to easily adapt to a spread offense on command.

I wouldn't expect Mitchell to bring Haynesworth-level drama with him given his relatively low status on the NFL totem pole. But that doesn't mean that Mitchell won't struggle in the new system just as Haynesworth has struggled.

Mitchell will help this team mainly because another new body on that unit couldn't hurt. But don't look for immediate contributions from Mitchell, which means that you should look for the blitzkrieg to continue.

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It appears that Jake Delhomme will be back starting for the Browns this week. He isn't the future of this team anyway, which leads to this week's question to ponder: Given the manner in which both Delhomme and Seneca Wallace were brought to this team, why is Delhomme the assumed starter?