In the wake of the LeCharles Bentley injury, it was hard to have positive thoughts about the 2006 Browns. One injury took a fan base that was as positive as they had been in years, and turned them right back into gloom and doomers. LeChuck or no LeChuck, this is going to be an improved football team this year with a very good defense. And I'm starting to get excited.

With the tearing of one anterior cruciate ligament, the entire outlook of this fan base did a complete 180.

The vibe was so positive heading into training camp. The Browns were heading into year two of the Crennel/Savage era and had made a serious impact in free agency in the draft this off-season. Coming off a six win season, fan expectations were for between eight and ten wins, and serious contention for a playoff spot was expected.

Then, on the first day of traning camp, LeCharles Bentley tore his ACL. The Browns most prized free agent signing since Andre Rison fifteen years earlier was lost for the season on a non contact play, which also happened to be the very first snap of camp. Optimism faded, and the general tone of the fans I talked to was "here we go again". The front page poll on this website shows that 48% of all Browns fans now expect the team to finish at or below the six win total of a year ago ... pessimistic prognostications based on the loss of one man. A man we didn't even have last year.

The Bentley injury sucks. Let's not sugar coat it. However, the team improved itself in many other areas this off-season. And how much worse can Ross Tucker and Lenny Friedman really be as compared to the 2005 version of Jeff Faine?

The Browns are once again going to have a good defense, potentially one of the better ones in the league if Daylon McCutcheon and Gary Baxter can return and stay healthy. They've added two things this defense has sorely lacked in previous years. An upper tier run stuffing nose tackle (Ted Washington) for the middle of the 3-4. And a legitimate edge pass rusher (Kamerion Wimbley) to help pressure the quarterback.

The linebacking unit as a whole has me very excited heading into the season. The hallmark of the great Patriot defenses that Crennel constructed and coached was a deep linebacking unit featuring eight players that saw time in the rotation, almost all of whom could play multiple spots and brought different skill sets to the table. Wimbley, Willie McGinest, Andra Davis, and D'Qwell Jackson has the potential to develop into one of the better units in the league as soon as the latter half of this season. And behind them is the athletically gifted trio of Chaun Thompson, David McMillan, and Leon Williams. With veteran Matt Stewart likely leading the race for the last linebacking spot on the team.

Offensively, the Browns have to stay healthy to have a chance to be good enough to help this team compete for a playoff spot. The team lacks depth at QB and WR, and the Bentley injury affected the depth there, in addition to leaving a gaping hole in the middle of the teams offensive front. But if Charlie Frye, Reuben Droughns, Braylon Edwards, Kellen Winslow, and Joe Jurevicius stay healthy ... this will be the most talented set of skill players this franchise has had since the days of Bernie, Mack, Byner, Slaughter, Lanhorne, Brennan, and Newsome. We'll see less dink and dunk, and more creativity in featuring these talented playmakers. And hopefully, we'll see better production in the red zone, an area where this team was impotent last year, resulting in the lowest points scored total in the league.

There's alot to be excited about this season, and my enthusiasm hasn't been as tempered by the Bentley injury as most. However, how healthy this team stays from this day forward will have as much of an impact on how many games this team wins in 2006 as anything.