As the CBA litigation migration plods on towards the inevitable appeal process, the NFL news has screeched to a silent halt. What new information is out there regarding professional football is either rehashed draft debate or dull discussions about the non-negotiations dipped heavily in lame legalese.

I would like to say that I take no sides in the owner vs. player battles. I don't care for either party or their "problems".

Neither group consists of individuals that I identify with or feel sorry for.

As far as I'm concerned, this is a Battle of Dueling Douchebags.

However, in the Players' perfect world they could just go wherever they want whenever they want, running up salaries as the richest owners outbid the less-rich, which would inevitably destroy the NFL as we know it. In the Owners' perfect world, player salaries and freedoms are tightly controlled to maintain an even playing field, which would help to ensure that mid-market teams like the Cleveland Browns don't eventually end up at a severe talent and resource disadvantage every year like the Cleveland Indians.

So, sorry Players - I hope the Owners break you. Got no love for the Owners as individuals at all - a bunch of old rich men whom I wouldn't cross the street to save from a rabid schnauzer - but their "winning" is what's best for the Game, and the Game is all I care about.

I know it's every Employee's dream to run the show, but that just ain't the way the world works. And, yes, you are just Employees.

The Game is the product - not you.

You die tomorrow, someone will take your place.

Yes, even you, Tom Brady.

Plus, I just don't like DeMo Smith. He strikes me as a dude with a serious Napoleonic complex, someone that will be a dick in a given situation just because he can.

Regardless of who "wins" (and it's highly doubtful either side "wins" in the end), we the fans are powerless in this struggle. Not much to but sit back and bemoan how my paper-triangle flick football team desperately needs a more accurate kicker from the third leaf of my dining room table.

Now, the first big court date in this disgusting process is pegged for Wednesday, and either the court will grant the Players the injunction to lift the lockout or it won't. Whichever way it goes, there will likely be an immediate appeal by the "losing" side.

That might be followed by another appeal.

And another.

By taking this from mediation to litigation, the two sides have made it ever-so-much more likely that this process will drag into August and September, at which point a team like, oh, say, the Browns would be pretty much f-bombed for 2011.

However, there is a slight, miniscule, smaller-than-Mark-May's-soul chance that the Players "win" both the April 6 hearing and the appeal (I've heard it'd be about 3 weeks after April 6) and the doors are re-opened and the players walk back in and the Free Agency period will begin. T here's no guarantee that the owners might not conveniently decide (individually, of course, elsewise that
might
be seen as collusion) to not sign anyone this year, but just in case...

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Regarding Free Agency

Yeah yeah, we all know that great teams aren't built through Free Agency. Thanks so much for the reminder.

But when you have so many holes in your roster that Creationism makes fun of you, you'll need to plug some of those gaps with Free Agents. Last season, Free Agency brought us Scott Fujita (good pick-up), Tony Pashos (incomplete due to injuries), Jake Delhomme (pretty poor value for what he was paid), Alex Smith (inconsequential cost and value), and Ben Watson (great sign). If Pashos had stayed healthy, that's 4 opening day starters, 2 (and possibly 3 with Pashos) that were significant upgrades at what had been there before.

So if you can plug 3 holes with Free Agents in 2011, then maybe you don't have to somehow manufacture 13 draft picks whom all become starters instantly.

Let's be honest: The Browns are more than one offseason away from fixing this thing. In a perfect world they'd have a new Right Tackle, 2 or 3 new Wide Receivers, a new 3rd Down RB, a new 2nd/3rd Corner, 2 new Defensive Ends, 1 new Defensive Tackle, probably 1 or 2 new Linebackers, and a new Safety.

And, depending on how a couple of last year's Rooks pan out, we might need a new RG and a

new QB too.

Ugh.

With that many holes, a rookie Head Coach, a new Offensive system, a new Defensive scheme... if you think that the Browns won't be completely screwed without lube should this labor dispute drag into September, you crazier than Charlie Sheen.

We've got time, so we'll do one position at a time...

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Regarding Wide Receivers

Just so we understand each other, let me reveal to you the Key. "U" means unrestricted. "5" and "4" means that's how many years they have under their belt.

They might be unrestricted, they might be restricted... it all depends on the new CBA.

Santonio Holmes (U) - I don't see any way in Hell that the Jets let him get away, but if they do, he should be at the top of anyone's list. So happy the Steelers gave him away for nothing.

Vincent Jackson (U) - Vincie got Franchised again by the Chargers, so it is unlikely that he will be available through Free Agency. He could, however, be had through a trade - for the right price. And that price will likely be ridiculous.

So cross him off your list.

Terrell Owens (U) - Yeah, I know that he had a pretty decent season in 2010. But he doesn't belong on a young, building team that is likely to struggle.

Would be a mistake, and I doubt that Heckert gives him a second thought.

Randy Moss (U) - Same as above, minus the decent 2010 part.

Braylon Edwards (U) - I'd rather eat an old shoe filled with afterbirth than have Braylon back, even if he would come back (which is less likely than world peace). Besides, someone will pay him way more than he's worth to make 2 catches a game.

Donte Stallworth (U) - I crack myself up.

Plaxico Burress (U) - I know a lot of you don't want to touch this guy with a 10 foot pole, but nothing breathes humility into a man like some incarceration. I don't see him in

the same Buyer Beware category as TO and Moss.

Plax is a big target who's been hugely productive in this league.

He's older (he'll be 34 by the start of the season), but he's had a couple years to let his body mend, so you might be able to squeeze 2 more good seasons out of him.

And, with Eric Mangini's Morality Wall no longer in place, the Cleveland Front Office might be willing to take a chance on a guy like Plax.

TJ Houshmandzadeh (U) - Ehhhhhh... I dunno. He's been pretty much useless the last 2 years.

He'll be 34 this year too, but he's a
used-up-I-got-paid-a-couple-years-ago-and-I-ain't-bustin'-my-ass-anymore 34.

Probably not what a team like Cleveland needs.

Santana Moss (U) - He'll only be 32 this year, so he's a spring chicken. It seems like Moss has been tailing off over recent years, but that's really only because Washington is so bad year after year. He had 93
catches for 1115 yards and 6 TD's last season - not too shabby.

In the last 8 years, his WORST year was 790 yards receiving, a number that it normally takes Browns' Receivers 3 or 4 years to reach.

Not sure what he's looking for financially, but could be worth a look if the price is right.

Andre Davis (U) - I honestly didn't know he was still in the league. Good for him; that's a pretty

long career for a guy that never was/never will be very good.

Mark Clayton (U) - This is someone that we should keep our eye on, because he was with Shurmur in STL last year and was having a surprisingly good season until he went down with a knee injury in Week 5. In the first 4 games, he had 300 yards receiving, which would extrapolate to a 1200 yard season (if you feel compelled to do such things).

Enough cannot be said for him knowing the Shurmur version of the WCO, especially with the shortened offseason a-comin', so do not be at all shocked if the Browns have serious interest in him should his knee be up to snuff.

Lance Moore (5) - Very productive, but ultimately is a 3rd WR on a good Receiving corps. I have a feeling that he'll stay in New Orleans, but if he's set free, you can't really turn up your nose at someone as productive as he is (depending on cost, of course).

Malcolm Floyd (5) - I'm somewhat wary of this guy. He's never been overly productive, and he seems to get hurt every year (although he did make it through all 16 games in 2009).

Still, he's a big target, and likely an upgrade on what we already have.

Sidney Rice (4) - Rice might be the prize of the WR FA market, and therefore it is highly unlikely he chooses to come to Cleveland. If you look at his stats, he had that one

wicked-awesome year in 2009, but hasn't done much else.

Granted, last season was severely hampered by injury, but I have serious doubts whether he'll be worth the insane amount of cash-eesh it would take to get him to become a Brown.

Steve Smith (4) - To me, this is the better option. He'll still cost a pretty penny, have no doubt, but I see him as more solid overall. His career path has been very similar to Rice's, but he's perhaps more durable.

Again, it will be very tough to get him to come to Cleveland, and it's difficult for me to believe the Giants will just let him walk, but you never know...

James Jones (4) - If this dude could catch the ball consistently, I'd say he should be the Browns' Numero Uno prey. He knows the WCO, plays in shitty weather, he's got size and speed... everything a growing boy needs but the ability to hold onto the pigskin.

Still, I'd be very interested at the right price.

Steve Breaston (4) - Everyone caught 150 passes in Arizona when Kurt Warner was still there, so a more accurate measure of his skills might be found in his numbers with the - um - less than stellar QB's in 2010: 13 games, 47 catches, 718 yards, 1 TD, 15.3 avg. as a #2 WR. Not really that bad considering his passers were even worse than Cleveland's and that the Browns' #1 WR (Mo Mass) only had 483 yards receiving.

Devin Aromashadu (4) - Every year, someone in my league drafts this guy as their "fantasy sleeper", and every year they drop him by Week 4. He's never done much, never distinguished himself even amongst a very pedestrian WR corps in Chicago.

I don't see him as an improvement on even the guys we already have.

Mike Sims-Walker (4) - Sims-Walker is one of those "nice" players. Nice size, not great. Nice speed, not great.

Nice production, not great.

If you go out and nab a guy like MSW, do you solve your #1 WR problem?

No.

Certainly not.

But he could be a very solid #2.

Laurent Robinson (4) - If we learned anything from the 2009 influx of ex-Jets, it's that new Head Coaches like to bring in players from the former teams. They know the players, the players know them, they know the system... it's helpful in many ways.

So a sort of under-the-radar guy like Robinson might be a likelihood:

He knows the Coach and System, and Cleveland will probably lay more attention on him than anyone else (especially for someone of his limited productivity).

If you find yourself apt to freak out should the Browns go out and sign him early, please start working it into your reality now so that your blood pressure will be below the danger level when/if this should come to pass.

Early Doucet (R) - I am not wont to add many Restricted Free Agents to these lists, since they're so hard/expensive to sign away. A lot of people seem to like this guy's potential, though, so I'm tossing his name into mix anyway.

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Regarding Randy's Move

Randy Lerner is apparently getting divorced and moving back to Northeast Ohio (a situation I can identify with).

Some see this as a good sign, that Randy will be more involved with the team now or something.

Personally, I don't give a damn.

Unlike many, I have no huge beef with Lerner. Sure, he's made some poor hires, but he probably shouldn't have been making those hires in the first place.

He's not a football guy.

But I think he's got it straight now - let Mike Holmgren run all football operations, stay out of the way, sign the checks.

So I don't care whether or not Mr. Lerner lives in Cleveland or New York or Bolivia, whether or not he owns soccer teams or hockey teams or sumo wrestling teams, whether or not he wears scarves or bandanas or thongs for men, just so long as he keeps signing the checks.

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People I Like Aaron Goldhammer More Than

Pity-Seeking Steelers Fans

So, every year I go to the Indians' Home Opener with the same 3 guys. 2 of them are my old friends, dating back to High School, and the 3rd (let's call him Sven) is a (now former) co-worker of one of them. I see Sven on this one day only each year.

It's not like I have a problem with him, he's a good guy, but he lives/works in the Cleveland area and I live/work in the Akron/Canton area, and I don't get out much as it is.

He does have one severe flaw, however - he's a Steelers fan.

Anyway, driving to the stadium, I'm talking to Sven, asking him how things are going. Somehow we got on the topic of football, and he mentions the Super Bowl, closes his eyes in hurt, and tells me how painful the loss was to him, how hard he and his family took it.

"*They won the Super Bowl 2 years ago. They've won 6 in your lifetime*," I told him.

"*Yeah, but this one I really wanted. I couldn't talk about it for days*," he replied.

Now I'm just staring at him. "*Yeah, it must be hard being a Steelers fan. I don't know how you guys can take the disappointment.*

I mean, it's been 2 whole years since your last championship, and then they go and lose in the Super Bowl.

Can't believe you guys aren't lining the 480 bridge, falling like black and yellow hail on Valley View.

Are you seriously wanting me to pity you?

You and your [expletive]-wad team?

You've gotta be freakin' kidding me.

No amount of torture is enough for that team and its fans.

They can't get [expletive] enough times, as far as I'm concerned.

I laugh at your pain.

I mock your pain.

My only regret is that I didn't send you a picture of my ass with a Green Bay sticker on it right after the game.

I hope they never win again.

The Steelers can burn in [expletive] hell for all eternity, and it still wouldn't be long enough
."

His eyes were wide. "*Wow. If the Browns got to the Super Bowl, I'd root for* them."

"*Not if they spent the next 30 years kicking the Steelers asses year in and year out, not if the Browns won 6 Super Bowls and the Steelers reached the playoffs only once a decade, not if the city of Pittsburgh bled Brown and Orange every damn Fall, no you wouldn't* ."

He thought about it for a sec. "*Yeah, no I wouldn't*."

Damn right you wouldn't.