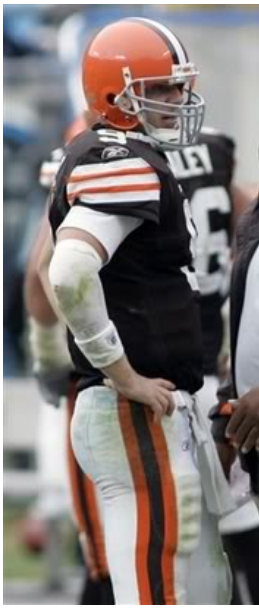
Browns fans are frustrated, and The Hornless Rhino is no exception. He takes a look at the remaining schedule, and finds it hard to project too many more wins for this team, which stands at 1-4 on the season. In his latest, The Rhino assesses the Browns start to the year, and looks at what they can possibly do to escape football purgatory the rest of the way in 2006.



*Visit the Vinny & The Hornless Rhino weblog at http://www.vinnyandthehornlessrhino.blogspot.com/*

Since the Browns are coming off a bye, I guess it's time for everybody to weigh in with their thoughts on the team. So, for what they're worth, here are mine. The Cleveland Browns stink, and I hate them. Okay, I don't hate them, but in recent years, being a Browns fan has been about as much fun as a root canal--and they do stink.

It may be unfair to dismiss the Browns with a comment like that, but I'm a pissed off season ticket holder, so what are ya gonna do ? I will acknowledge that the schedule the Browns have been handed is absolutely brutal. The Browns' losses have come against teams that are a combined 16-7. Unfortunately, it doesn't get any easier. I hope they've had a relaxing bye week, because they now get to face the Denver Broncos, whose defense has allowed one touchdown this season . In fact, the only teams on their schedule with a sub .500 record right now are the Chiefs, Bucs, Texans and the Steelers. Does anyone really think the Steelers are a sub .500 team?

Offensively, the Browns strengths start and pretty much end with the team's receivers. Winslow and Edwards have to be accounted for by every team that the Browns face. Dennis Northcutt doesn't, and with Jurevicius healthy, I share the view of many others that the Browns need to make him the third wide. Jurevicius isn't a burner, but he scores touchdowns, and along with Winslow, he gives the Browns two receivers who are effective red zone threats.

The most glaring weakness on the offensive side of the ball is the offensive line, which if not the worst in football, is damn close . Most of the Browns' other offensive shortcomings are attributable in large part to how terrible the offensive line is. The magnitude of the line's problems is illustrated by the way that Julius Peppers made mincemeat of the guy generally

regarded as the team's best lineman (Ryan Tucker).

The Browns don't have a lot of great options along the offensive line, so at most, we're talking about putting a band aid on a gash that needs at least 30 stitches. My guess is that the most positive impact can be made by taking Joe Andruzzi out of the lineup. He was a really good player, but I think he's been beat up pretty bad and it shows. As others have observed , the only viable fix is to do something with Friedman or Fraley. Both have some experience at the guard position, and either is probably preferrable to rookie Isaac Sowells. My vote would be to keep Fraley at center, give Friedman a shot at guard and hope for the best.

What about a trade? The deadline is tomorrow, but if you want to play guts ball, Leonard Davis is reportedly available . Davis has a big reputation, but he makes over $9 million and will be an unrestricted free agent at the end of the season. I doubt very much the Browns want any part of that.

The QB position is a mixed bag. Frye's a great leader with good athletic ability and toughness, but he tries to do too much and makes bad decisions with the game on the line. The coaching staff needs to manage Charlie Frye. He's got the heart of a lion, but the judgment of a teenager, and they need to convince him that Doug Dieken was right a couple of weeks ago when he said that sometimes throwing the ball away and taking an incompletion is the best outcome. I guess that's goes double when your coordinator is Maurice Carthon, huh?

As for the running game, Droughns got off to a slow start, the team has been unable to figure out what to do with Harrison and the play calling has been predictable and uninspiring when it hasn't been laughable. Improving the play of the offensive line will probably make the greatest contribution to improving the Browns' rushing attack. When you can't get your basic running game going because nobody is throwing a block, it's pretty hard to throw in a guy like Harrison. Change of pace players are nice, but you have to have established a pace to change from, if you know what I mean.

There is one X factor that could be added to the Browns' attack, and that's Joshua Cribbs. He's a potentially explosive player who has earned the right to be something more than a fifth receiver. Hey, Maurice, just a thought--how about using a former college QB the next time you want to throw a halfback pass? Cribbs has proven that he's fast, tough and can run through traffic. Give him the ball every now and again. If I were a defensive coordinator, he'd scare me a lot more on third down than Harrison.

Defensively, I think the Browns have been surprisingly strong against the pass and surprisingly weak against the run. McGinest and Washington have been somewhat disappointing, but I think the defense is improving overall. Kamerion Wimbley and D'Qwell Jackson look like they are going to develop into something. I actually feel fairly positive about the direction of the Browns defense. They played well against Baltimore and Carolina, and did a nice job during the second half at Oakland. The most important thing that I think they need to do is get healthy.

So, let's say the Browns do everything that everyone has suggested, and even replace Maurice Carthon. Does that get them a better record than last year's 6-10? I doubt it. Let's face

it gang, the bottom line is that we're destined to spend a lot more time in football Purgatory. What fun.