During Saturday's Heisman Trophy presentation, ESPN college football analyst and former Ohio State quarterback Kirk Herbstreit took a rare public interest in one of his home state's pro football teams. The Browns, he told millions of nationwide viewers, would "be crazy" to pass on newly-minted Heisman winner Troy Smith if he is there when the Browns make their almost-certain Top 10 selection next spring. Papa Cass chimes in on the Troy to the Browns debate, making some great points as usual along the way.

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Smith is a native of one of the poorest areas of Cleveland's near East Side. Nothing would give him more satisfaction than to return home as a conquering hero, Herbstreit reasoned.

Even a month ago, I would have outright rejected the idea. Smith is a bit short, and has been spoiled by playing behind one of the best offensive lines in the nation the past three years. It would be way too easy for the undersized Smith to come down with a chronic case of happy feet playing behind the Browns' nightmare of trench warfare.

The "hometown boy made good" angle is a bit overrated, too. When it works, as it has with LeBron James, it gives everyone in town a warm, fuzzy feeling. When it doesn't, as has been the case with LeCharles Bentley, Clevelanders jump on the "You asked for it, wanting to come back here" bandwagon with unmatched verve. Clevelanders will turn on their hometown boys too, if they don't produce wins.

But even with all the reasons to be skeptical of choosing Smith, I'm starting to find it more and more difficult to make a case against it. Maybe it was all of the pre-award hype surrounding Smith. Maybe it was the win over Michigan. Maybe it was the Browns' blowout losses to the Bengals and Steelers.

Maybe Smith is just winning me over with his play. But in Smith, I'm starting to see a person and a player who exhibits a lot of the qualities the Browns, as a team, are lacking.

The Browns need leadership. The Browns need someone who has experienced greatness. The Browns need someone who understands what football means to Clevelanders, and how we take wins and losses to heart like few other cities.

The Browns need someone who has been to the bottom and worked his way back up to the top. The Browns need someone who is a model of perseverance. The Browns need someone who really understands what winning is all about. And, above all, the Browns need someone who has the talent to back it all up.

Troy Smith is that person.

But it isn't as simple as drafting Smith and watching wins sprout out of the ground like Dutch tulips. We know better. The Browns have a long history of damaging careers with their botched handling of players.

To draft Smith is to commit to him. To draft the competent offensive linemen that will protect him. To surround him with receivers that are more interested in catching passes than talking trash. To put a coaching staff in place that has a clue about offense, and has the presence to deliver the necessary discipline to make their lessons stick.

To draft Smith is to change how your organization conducts itself. Otherwise, there is no point in drafting Smith or any other difference-making player.

Smith has been meticulously prepared for the NFL by a pair of top-notch coaches in Ted Ginn Sr. and Jim Tressel. Over the past eight-plus years, by his own admission, he has learned the lessons that turned him from a would-be street punk into a potential NFL franchise cornerstone.

It has been an amazing metamorphosis to watch.

If the Browns can match all of the hard work that has gone into making Troy Smith the man he is today, I encourage Phil Savage to draft him. If the Browns are going to keep conducting business as usual, they should pass on him.

Smith, the man of perseverance, the national title contender, the Heisman Trophy winner, deserves better than that.