



## Cleveland Browns fullback Lawrence Vickers shows up at OTAs without a deal, but with optimism for season

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**Tony Grossi, The Plain Dealer**

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Lynn Ischay / The Plain Dealer

There was nothing but a positive energy from restricted free-agent fullback Lawrence Vickers during his return to the Browns' practice facility on Monday. "I have to be better than last year," Vickers said (after this friendly moment with head coach Eric Mangini). "Last year was just a start. I'm picking up where I left off."

BEREA, Ohio -- Lawrence Vickers rejoined his teammates Monday for the first time since becoming a restricted free agent.

He arrived with a purpose.

"I'm gonna make them pay even more," the Browns fullback said after his first organized team activity

practice. "They're gonna pay. Each year, I get madder and madder."

Now hold on. Vickers wasn't talking about making the Browns pay for not offering him a long-term contract. He still hasn't signed the club's one-year tender offered to each of its restricted free agents. But he was in a joyful mood, smiling throughout his first 90-minute off-season workout.

No, Vickers was talking about making opponents pay for leaving him off their Pro Bowl ballots last year. He thought he earned the recognition.

"So it's not my fault when everybody be on their backside," Vickers said. "It doesn't matter who we're playing against. I have to be better than last year. Last year was just a start. I'm picking up where I left off."

Such talk has to be sweet music to the ears of running back Jerome Harrison, who benefited from Vickers' linebacker-crushing blocks in the last month of the 2009 season. And it should be, too, to newcomers such as rookie back Montario Hardesty and quarterback Jake Delhomme.

All Vickers did in the last four games was pave the way for the Browns to pace the NFL with 900 rushing yards. They averaged 45 rushing attempts and 5.0 yards a rush in those four wins. Three came inside Cleveland Browns Stadium with the frigid Lake Erie winds howling.

"I think it was just a demonstration of [coach Eric Mangini] trying different things and seeing what worked for us," Vickers said. "Once he saw it, I guess he just said, 'Let my man get the job done.'"

"I've shown in previous years that I can run and I can catch. Last year, they just wanted me to be a linebacker-busting machine. Whatever's needed of me, I can do it. I'm your guy."

There is some curiosity about the direction the Browns' offense is going, whether they will try to run more of a West Coast offense because of the addition of President Mike Holmgren and his long-time offensive coordinator Gil Haskell. In fact, they are throwing the ball at OTAs much, much more than a year ago.

But the identity they created in the last month of last season is not going to disappear completely.

Mangini said Monday of Vickers, "I thought that he played really well, especially at the latter part of the season, so I'm looking for that same level of performance."

"I thought that he really grew in the system a lot and was a big part of why we ran the ball so successfully

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at the end of last year."

Vickers admitted he was a bit rusty in his first practice of the new year, even though he worked out three times a week at his old high school in Houston to prepare for camp.

"Nothing can get you prepared for out here [physically]," he said.

But, mentally, he said he didn't miss a beat. "I'm always studying the game. Today I came right in without a notebook and knew exactly what to do. That tells you about me," he said.

He said he finally came in after missing nine previous sessions because "I missed my teammates. I wanted to be back with those guys. I saw them on the Internet having fun. I missed it a lot. And my guys missed me."

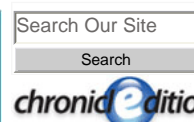
It was also time for Vickers to start getting a feel for integral new additions to the offense such as Hardesty and Delhomme.

Of blocking in front of the 225-pound Hardesty, Vickers said, "You know what, it's one of those things that he does what he does and I do what I do and we meet in the middle. It's repetition. We're talking already. You can see the chemistry coming. You've got to gain your relationship with each of the backs. Each one is different. Therefore, it's up to me to adjust to each one. That's what I'm in here for."

His quick take on Delhomme?

"I love him. He's smooth. He's an easy-going guy. He's a veteran. He knows how to handle the huddle," Vickers said.

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US

## Browns' Lawrence Vickers upbeat despite contract

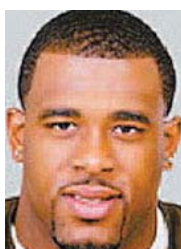


Filed by **Scott Petrak** June 8th, 2010 in **Browns Notes**.

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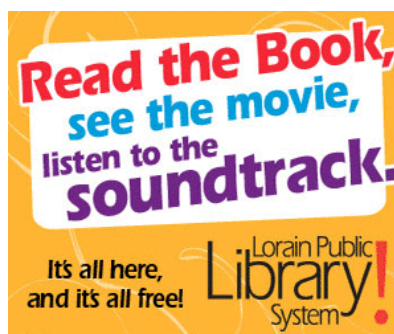
BEREA — The no-pads, no-hitting practices of May and June aren't designed to showcase a fullback. But Lawrence Vickers' return to the practice field after a three-week absence was obvious Monday during organized team activities.



Vickers

When Vickers wasn't involved in a drill, he sprinted from sideline to sideline by himself. It wasn't punishment for missing the voluntary sessions, just his way of getting back into the groove.

"Nothing can get you prepared for what you actually do out here," he said after practice. Vickers is one of five Browns restricted free agents who've yet to sign the second-round tenders for 2010. He signed an injury waiver in order to practice and said he'll stick around through mandatory minicamp, which runs Thursday through Saturday and concludes the offseason workouts.



"I was ready to work," Vickers said. "I missed my teammates. I wanted to be back with those guys. I saw 'em on the Internet having fun and I was ready to come back."

Vickers didn't get a carry in 2009, yet repeatedly showed his value by clearing the way for the running back. If the dominant running game that made the season-ending four-game winning streak possible had arrived earlier, Vickers might have received the Pro Bowl trip he thought he deserved.

The Browns rushed 180 times for 900 yards during the streak. That's 45 carries a game for 225 yards.

"I love it. I want that all the time, but it's not my team," he said. "If I have to sit back and wait to December, I'll do that."

"He played really well, especially at the latter part of the season, so I'm looking for that same level of performance," coach Eric Mangini said. "He really grew in the system a lot and was a big part of why we ran the ball so successfully at the end of last year."

Vickers is like the other restricted free agents — running back Jerome Harrison, linebackers D'Qwell Jackson and Matt Roth and safety Abram Elam. He wants a long-term contract, instead of the one-year, approximately \$1.76 million that accompanies the tender, and has no leverage other than to skip OTAs.

Harrison returned to practice without signing the tender the last two weeks, but was absent Monday. Agent Charles Tucker expects him back for the minicamp.

Vickers left no doubt he'd be there.

"I'm gonna let my agent and the front office handle that," he said of contract issues. "I just want to play football. It was time for me to come."

Vickers has switched agents to Drew Rosenhaus. But even the high-profile super-agent will have a hard time getting the Browns to budge.

New general manager Tom Heckert said he and new president Mike Holmgren want to see the players up close before committing longterm. If the free agents don't sign the tenders by June 15, the Browns can substantially reduce the offers.

"It's going to handle itself," Vickers said. "It's out of my hands. All I have to do is get on the grass and do what I do."

Because the restricted guys haven't signed the tenders, they can't be fined for skipping the mandatory minicamp. Mangini said he or his assistants have been in communication with the players to keep them posted on what they're missing and is hopeful they arrive for minicamp. Jackson has been quoted as saying he'll skip minicamp but be ready for the season.

"I'm optimistic that most guys will be here," Mangini said. "We will just have to see how it goes. It keeps opening up some reps for other guys, which isn't a bad situation to have. Hopefully everybody will be here."

Vickers returned to a crowded backfield that features tailbacks Harrison, rookie Montario Hardesty, James Davis, Chris Jennings and



tailback/ fullback Peyton Hillis.

"Every back is different. It's up to me to adjust to how they run," Vickers said.

Of the five restricted free agents, Vickers might be the most important to the Browns. He was the only fullback on the roster last year, Hillis isn't a full-time fullback and Vickers is in the top five in the league at his position.

"Last year they wanted me to be a linebacker- busting machine," he said. "Whatever's needed of me, I can do it. I'm your guy.

"Pro Bowl? I'm gonna make 'em pay even more this year. Each year I get madder and madder I don't go. It's not my fault when everybody be on their backside."

But making the all-star team isn't Vickers' primary motivation.

"I'd rather have team success," he said. "So if I never go and we win, I'd be happy with that." Vickers said he spent his time away from OTAs working out at his high school in Texas. The players in Texas get "fifth-period football" to practice, so Vickers would work out with them, then study the playbook on his own.

"It was motivation to see the guys trying to get where I am," he said. "It only got me going more."

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Sports

## VIDEO: Vickers back to work despite no contract

Tuesday, June 8, 2010

By JEFF SCHUDEL

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**BEREA** — Fullback Lawrence Vickers, Jerome Harrison's best friend during the last month of the 2009 season, returned to practice Monday even though he has yet to sign his one-year contract tender as a restricted free agent.

Vickers missed most of the OTAs and offseason conditioning program. He had to sign an injury waiver to practice Monday and said he plans to participate in the mandatory three-day minicamp starting Thursday.

"It was time," Vickers said. "I was ready to work. I missed my teammates. I saw them on the Internet having fun, so I was ready to come back.

"I'm leaving the contract stuff to my agent. I'm going to be here the whole week. I'll be here for minicamp and everything. I'm ready to work."

Vickers was the lead blocker when Harrison rushed for 651 yards in the last three games last season. He said he thought he should have been in the Pro Bowl.



The backfield is going to be crowded in training camp. Peyton Hillis, acquired from the Broncos in the Brady Quinn trade, can play fullback and running back. Harrison, rookie Montario Hardesty, James Davis and Chris Jennings are running backs.



The coaches really like Hardesty, judging by the practice time he gets during the OTAs. He weighs 225 pounds, 20 pounds more than Harrison, and could end the starter despite Harrison's strong finish.

Day for the defense

Rookie safety T.J. Ward intercepted a pass thrown by Jake Delhomme over the middle and Nick Sorensen intercepted a deep pass thrown by Delhomme after it was tipped.

Early in the OTAs the quarterbacks had the edge, but in the last two sessions open to the media the defensive backs have been batting some passes down if they don't intercept them.

### **Cradle the ball**

So far the surprise of OTAs has been sixth-round draft pick Carlton Mitchell, the wide receiver from South Florida. Mitchell caught a pass from Brett Ratcliff in the back of the end zone Monday while sliding on his knees. The pass was low and Mitchell had to catch it against his chest, but he gained control before his momentum carried him out of bounds.

### **Kicker needed**

Phil Dawson continues to miss the OTAs. The 12th-year kicker wants a new contract. His current deal expires after this season. Dawson is 35.

The Browns signed a veteran kicker, Shaun Suisham, at the start of OTAs last month. If the plan was to put pressure on Dawson by signing a kicker who has been around the plan isn't working. Suisham on Monday missed three kicks wide right and was short on another try.

### **Free agent update**

Coach Eric Mangini said he is confident the unsigned unrestricted free agents will be in Berea on Thursday for the start of minicamp. Aside from Harrison and Vickers, who are practicing despite being unsigned, that group includes linebackers D'Qwell Jackson and Matt Roth plus safety Abe Elam. Jackson is on record saying he will not attend.

"I'm optimistic most guys will be here," Mangini said. "We'll have to see how it plays out."

Mangini said he and his coaches have been in communication with the unsigned free agents to keep the players updated on what is being installed and on how the players can get the information of they want it.

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Posted: June 8, 2010

bam. ... I've just got to see the whole picture."

## Lions' LB Jordon Dizon learning to think more, react less

BY NICHOLAS J. COTSONIKA  
FREE PRESS SPORTS WRITER

Young **NFL** linebackers typically need to get up to speed. They need to learn the game to the point where they don't think anymore. They just react.

**Jordon Dizon** has been trying to slow down this spring, to react less and think more.

"A lot of people think way too much," said Dizon, whom the Lions drafted in the second round in 2008. "They overthink, overanalyze, which makes them really slow and late to the play. But for me, I underthink. I see one thing, and I'm gone."

It's not that Dizon is dumb. He carried at least a 3.5 grade-point average every quarter at Waimea High on Kauai. It's just his go-go-go personality.

"Everything I do is superfast -- ADD, or whatever you call it," Dizon said.

It helped him make 463 tackles at Colorado, eighth-best in major college history, but it has hurt him at times versus more complex NFL offenses. Maybe he would see a guard move one way, read the key and take off, but miss what the quarterback and **running back** were doing. Maybe he would overpursue.

"My problem was, I would get out so fast, see something and go, but it would be the wrong thing," Dizon said. "My whole deal was, slow down -- slow down your backpedal, slow down your reads, get comfortable, drop and just see everything -- rather than see one thing and just

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