

# SPORTS WEEK

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## Baker is better than I thought

As we head into the 2021-22 NFL football season, I began to think about the quarterbacks in the league that could make the move to being superstar players. There are a couple that are really good and with another great season under their belts, they could be considered elite by some.

We all know who the elite guys are, but there are a couple of quarterbacks that are still young and need to string together a few more quality seasons to join that elite status. One of those guys who has an opportunity to join the ranks of the top 10 is Baker Mayfield.

Last season, Mayfield led the Browns to the playoffs and their first playoff win since the early '90s. The Browns are expected to be one of the contending teams in the AFC this season and Mayfield will have a lot to do with that.

I will readily admit that I was not a big Mayfield fan when the Cleveland Browns took him number one overall in the 2018 NFL draft out of Oklahoma. For me, he reminded me too much of former Texas A&M quarterback Johnny Manziel, who was also selected by the Browns with the 22nd overall pick in the 2014 draft.

Mayfield and Manziel were both brash and arrogant young men who seemed to be really cocky on the field and were not shy about letting people know how good they felt they were. Both also had a couple of run-ins with law enforcement in college that sort of gave them a bad boy image. I could dive more into that, but I'll save that for another column.

Mayfield did win the Heisman Trophy as a senior in 2017 and there was a lot of talk about where he would be drafted. There were other players and a couple of other college quarterbacks I felt were better than Mayfield. For one, I thought Josh Allen, Sam Darnold and Lamar Jackson were better players as far as quarterbacks are concerned. The jury is still out on Darnold, but Allen and Jackson are bona fide stars in the NFL.

My feelings on Mayfield were that he was more than likely all hype with little substance to back up that trash talk. The image that was stuck in my mind was the disrespectful gesture he did during the Kansas vs. Oklahoma game in November of 2017.

The NFL has a way of exposing pretenders pretty early and Mayfield got the opportunity to show what he had pretty early. Mayfield stepped on the field for the first time during the regular season after then-starter Tyrod Taylor was injured. With the Browns down 14-0 and having lost 19 games in a row, expectations were not high. To his credit, Mayfield threw for 201 yards and led the Browns to a victory.

By season's end, Mayfield had a very impressive stat line and led the Browns to a 6-7 record as the starting quarter-

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Photos by Alphonso Abbott Jr.

BY TIMOTHY RAMSEY  
THE CHRONICLE

Mt. Tabor was hoping to get their season off to a good start after winning the state cham-

pionship last season, but unfortunately fell in their opening game to the Richmond Raiders out of Rockingham. The Spartans put up a great effort, but the Raiders early lead was too much for Mt. Tabor to overcome, losing 56-41.

This game was a good measuring stick for the Spartans and this early loss might galvanize the team. They could turn this negative loss into positive motivation.

## 'The League' crowns summer league champion

BY TIMOTHY RAMSEY  
THE CHRONICLE

After a tough and arguably best season of The League, Team Laabwork walked away with the summer league championship and bragging rights. Laabwork defeated Team Lee Gang 93-81 to capture the victory and Walt Baxley was named MVP for his efforts during the game.

"From the jump, Laabwork started off strong with MVP Walt Baxley dropping 10 of their first 12 points," said Steve Nivens, the league commissioner. "It was a lot of confusion with Lee Gang because their head coaches were not there and the assistant coaches did not know how to adjust, because on paper the matchup was good, and I think more in favor of Lee Gang."

"Skill-wise and depth, Laabwork was just too strong and powerful for them and they were balanced. They played together and it was too much for Lee Gang to overcome the deficit they were in."

According to Nivens, Laabwork dominated the game from start to finish.



Photo by Alphonso Abbott Jr.

Laabwork defeated Lee Gang 93-81 in the championship game of the summer of The League.

Any time Lee Gang attempted to make a run, someone from Laabwork would "step up" and hit a big shot to end it. Nivens stated that many of the guys from Laabwork work out together, so their chemistry was already in place before the season even started.

"They had a good feel for one another and the camaraderie they had by playing together made it that much more special," Nivens said about Laabwork. "They never folded,

they never argued with each other, they handled what they needed to do, they listened, and they were coachable."

Nivens says that Baxley was the MVP not only because he was the leading scorer for Laabwork, but more for the intangibles he possessed. Baxley is the type of player who relishes the pressure of the big moment, he uplifts his teammates, and ignores trash talk from opponents.

Jamaal Fowler was the announcer for The League

this season and he is also an avid sports fan. Coming into the game, Fowler anticipated Laabwork would win because of their coaching that included Whit and Travis Holcomb-Faye. Fowler says with the talent being almost equal on both sides, it was coaching that made the difference.

"Basically, to me, the team with the better coaching won the game and that was Laabwork," said Fowler. "What I mean by better coaching, they got guys on the team that

coached and played, that have won championships. They know what to do in certain situations, whereas Lee Gang's coaches were not there."

Fowler stated that one of the problems for Lee Gang was their constant rotation of players. He stated Lee Gang substituted players every few minutes and that never allowed their scorers to get into a rhythm.

"They have gotten by, because that's just part of their game and the players on their team are used to it, but when you play a team like Laabwork, you can't keep subbing players in and out like that," he said about the game.

From the start of the season, Fowler thought that Laabwork had a great shot at winning the championship. They only lost one game during the regular season and their talent was comparable to just about every other team in The League.

Fowler says Laabwork had control of the game from the jump ball. They built a double digit lead early and he feels Lee

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