

## What Can Joe Banner Do For You, Browns Fans?

Written by {ga=tommoore}

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While many (most? 99.9 percent?) Cleveland Browns fans are excited about the regime change from Randy Lerner and Mike Holmgren to James Haslam and Joe Banner, no one can say they really know what Banner will do in his role as team CEO.

What we do know is Banner spent 19 years with the Philadelphia Eagles, 12 of them as team president. Other than that? Pure speculation (which is not without its merits, of course).

With the Browns on a bye this week, Banner took to the media circuit and, at least on the surface, what he had to say should please most Browns fans. Plus, you don't have to look too hard to make a good guess on what the future holds for certain members of the organization.

First off is the question about the future of coach Pat Shurmur and general manager Tom Heckert, who many people will be replaced simply because of the regime change (or in Shurmur's case for other, more tangible, reasons).

"I'm aware of the perception, and it's not fair," [Banner told \*The Beacon Journal\*](#). "We're going to make an objective evaluation. The outcome is not predetermined. I'm aware that the perception is out there. I can't tell you that's not a possible outcome. But anybody thinking that that's a predetermined outcome is on the wrong track."

Well that won't go over very well with the ever-growing anti-Shurmur crowd, but we need to stay focused on the big picture here – because Banner certainly is.

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“How are they doing in this specific role? How are they with each other? How are they with the rest of their staffs?” [Banner told \*The Chronicle-Telegram\*](#) . “Quality of leadership? The quality of people they’ve hired around them? Can you look two years down the road, one year down the road, five years down the road and feel like we’re building a great organization?”

Banner’s right – just as the Browns shouldn’t keep someone just to claim “continuity,” they also shouldn’t fire someone just to make a change.

Luckily, it sounds like Banner is going to evaluate Heckert and Shurmur on their own merits, rather than look at it as if one stays, the other one must as well.

“There are things about them that you need to evaluate together,” Banner said. “There are things about them that you need to evaluate together because none of us were in the room to know who was for or against what decisions. And then there are independent aspects of different qualities you’re looking for in the positions because they’re two different positions. In one, for example, leadership is a much more important element. Leadership matters in both positions, but in one position, it’s much more important than the other. So there are aspects of it in which they are linked, so to speak, and there are aspects in which you’ll do a very independent analysis.”

So what about Shurmur? Is he staying or going?

“You have a sense of what is it in the most successful coaches currently and historically – what are the qualities about them?” Banner said. “How do they lead? How do they think? How do they strategize? What kinds of players do they like? Do players grow under them? What’s the quality of their staff? So it’s a lot of things you can look at if you look at past successful coaches to see, ‘OK, in a head coach, this is generically, what am I looking for to find somebody who’s really good?’ And then as you watch somebody like Pat in the role, you make a determination in terms of those key qualities, so to speak, how is he?”

Doesn’t sound very good for Shurmur, does it? (Of course, if Romeo Crennel can get four years ...)

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Things sound a bit more promising for Heckert, as Banner sees how the roster has improved from the days of Phil Savage and Eric Mangini.

“I think there’s a foundation in place to move forward,” Banner said. “I think there are some good, young players here. I do think there’s a ways to go in terms of starting to talk about winning the division, advancing through the playoffs, winning championships. There are young players we need to take time to see what they’re going to be. We have a projection but you don’t know.

“But I’ve seen people take over a franchise in which you looked at the roster and you’re like, ‘Oh, my God. There’s nothing here to build on.’ This is not the case here. Exactly how many of those players we can build on, exactly how good some of the younger players are going to be, some of that we have to project, some of that time will tell. But this is certainly not one of those situations where you look at the roster and you’re kind of like, ‘Oh, my God. I’m just starting from scratch here. Or what am I going to do and how long is this going take?’ There’s clearly a foundation of players that you can start to add to and move forward from as opposed to needing to get to begin with.”

The biggest question, of course, is how long is it going to take to get this team turned around? Banner doesn’t have an answer for that – yet – but it sounds like he’s working on it.

“I just know that if we can do the right things to get the team on track it’s just going to be an amazing ride for everybody,” he said. “That’s the good part. And I do feel like there’s confirmation that the team has made good moves and is on the right track and I think everybody also realizes has a ways to go. But the beginning of a foundation to build off of is certainly here.

“Where do we have the right people to kind of plug there to be performing at the level we want to be in a year, two, three years? And where don’t we? Where do we have good people but we need more people? Are there people here that are not in the best department to take advantage of what we want to do and what their strengths are? That’s really almost all of my time the first couple of months.”

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Much of what Banner said to the media mirrors what others have said about him. [In an article in \*The National Football Post\*](#)

, Jack Bechta, an agent in the NFL for more than 20 years, highlighted four key aspects that Banner brings to the table.

Bechta writes that:

*Hiring and firing: Joe will not make a decision without calling 10 to 15 references on hiring a coach or personnel man. Joe's biggest strength is taking his time in making decisions, doing massive amounts of research and getting everyone's opinion. He is shrewd and calculating when it comes to big decisions. When it comes to a firing, he's not afraid to pull the trigger. Joe is credited for hiring good football people. He was quick to pick up top football people who were fired from other positions and have them focus on whatever their strength is.*

*The fan experience: When Jeffrey Laurie took over the Eagles with Joe as his right hand man, one of the first things they did was enhance the fan experience. Jeffrey came from the entertainment business and knows how to put on a show. Joe learned a lot from Jeffrey and was involved with implementing a premium fan experience so I expect this to be a serious focus for Joe and his staff.*

*The media: When you work in the Philly sports bubble and survive as Joe did, you earn your doctorate in media relations. Some football people may say Joe is overly sensitive to the media and is susceptible to being swayed by them. However, after his time in the slicing Philly media blender, I'm sure he will be media friendly and accessible in selling his new blue print.*

*Signing players: Joe's Eagles may have had the best record of any NFL team over the last decade of getting draft picks signed on time and faster than any other team. As for resigning talent, this is one of Joe's pioneering traits in the industry. Joe started a trend in signing young blossoming talent a year or two before their contract was up. Thus, often securing them at a huge discount to their upcoming free agent value. He may have missed on a few players but he did hit on the majority, keeping the best talent for the long term. Even if a player became unsatisfied with his contract, the Eagles still owned them. Expect to see this method implemented for the Browns' young talent.*

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So while we may not know for a few years what the Browns are getting in Banner, on the surface there seems to be a lot to like.

*(Photo by ClevelandBrowns.com)*