



98.5 WNCX *Cleveland's Classic Rock*

Apparently no one associated with the newest, latest version of the Cleveland Browns believes that less can be more. When it comes to the Browns and their recently announced radio broadcast rights deals, more is more under the theory, I suppose, that there is no limit to how much Browns related programming can be absorbed. Actually we're about to find out as the Browns flood the airwaves over the next year with 1,000 hours of stupefying shows.

It's easy to conclude that the unique deal the Browns signed with WKNR and its rival station, WKRK, The Fan, was all about the money. And of course, that conclusion is always going to be well justified when it comes to sports. It was about the money. But I think there's more to it as well, which we'll talk about in a minute.

First, let's talk about the overblown deal that was announced. Clear Channel and its local outlet, WTAM, are for the first time since the Browns returned the odd station out. It still has the Cavs and the Indians and in some ways it seemed to treat the Browns like second class citizens when the seasons overlapped so it makes sense that the Browns wanted to find a more dedicated partner.

The Browns did that and more by essentially finding two dedicated partners. The two rival radio stations colluded combined in a joint bid whereby each of the stations will get to broadcast the Browns' weekly march toward one 4-12 season after another. Two of the stations, WKRK and WNCX, are on the FM spectrum, the other, WKRN, on AM. So wherever you may be driving, or if you just prefer to watch the broadcast but listen to Jim Donovan and Doug Dieken instead of Ian Eagle and Dan Fouts, it should be pretty easy to find someone broadcasting the game.

Broadcasting games on the radio is still a pretty big deal. It's carries with it a certain amount of cachet for the stations involved and it's just that cachet that the Browns dangled in front of two

Lingering Items--Radio Nowhere Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Wednesday, April 03 2013 10:00 AM - Last Updated Wednesday, April 03 2013 7:19 AM

stations desperate to break from the numbing sameness that is terrestrial radio.

The bigger part of the deal though is the ancillary program that each station agreed to. WKNR has agreed to dedicate 4 mind-numbing hours to the pregame, which means the pregame will last, on average, an hour longer than the actual game. Then when Doug Dieken completes his post-game "interviews" (the process by which Dieken makes a statement like "you had to be happy with the blocking today" and then waits for whoever is on the other end of the mike to agree with him), there will be two hours of post game on WKRK.

Then there will be the midweek shows. And Oh! the midweek shows. Vic Carucci, who carries the title of Browns senior editor for the Browns-owned web site will host a two hour a day chatfest, sponsored by Liberty Ford, which is one of the ways that the stations in turn recoup the money they paid the Browns. Meanwhile new head coach Rob Chudzinski will host a weekly show. So in addition to all the Rick's from Brunswick that call in anyway to talk about the Browns, fans will get official Browns-dedicated programming two and sometimes three hours every single day.

What the Browns have done here is actually quite brilliant. The Browns now control the messaging on the city's two dedicated sports talk radio shows and didn't have to pay a nickel for it. Indeed they are being paid millions for the privilege of making sure that the stations most likely to foment discord at their dysfunctional operations will instead present the more positive aspects to why still another regime change is in order. Why bitch about coverage from the local media when you can just control it instead?

This is why Jimmy Haslam is a genius and Randy Lerner is an idiot. Haslam is a billionaire on his way probably to being a raging gazillionaire because he understands business and isn't afraid to work at it. Since buying the team, he's dispensed of Mike Holmgren and his unique brand of lethargy, he's sold the naming rights to the stadium, and he's found a way to tightly control the team's messaging and getting the local media to fund their own sellout..

Lerner is a billionaire (maybe) by birth who has essentially become Arthur but without the ever-present vodka tonic. It may be hard for Lerner to actually squander all the cash he was given but you can pretty much guarantee that he isn't going to stop trying. I wonder if Greg Kokinis is still being paid by Lerner?

Lingering Items--Radio Nowhere Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Wednesday, April 03 2013 10:00 AM - Last Updated Wednesday, April 03 2013 7:19 AM

That the Browns changed radio partners may not seem like a big deal to the fans but when they can't find a radio host to beat the drums over why this team needs to make that move, they'll begin to understand that it's because the media no longer represents them, they represent the team.

**

The expansive control that the Browns now lord over the local media by virtue of their radio deals (coupled, as it is, with the local TV deals it has with those who broadcast their preseason games) is really the next phase of what Dallas Mavericks owner Mark Cuban identified as the next logical step in the shakeout of dying local print and electronic media.

As you may recall, Cuban started to limit media access to his team in favor of having in house "journalists" (an oxymoron if ever there was one) interview the players post game and distribute the quotes to the media. Cuban came under the predictable criticism for it but wondered aloud, well, he did more than wonder, he came out and basically said that the time is near if not at hand where teams will write their own game stories and supply their own quotes. He called it an efficient use of resources in a time where independent media outlets are struggling to fund themselves. I'd call it propaganda. When the only perspective is that of the people running the operation, the only stories you're going to get are those favorable to those running the operation.

Yet for all the criticism Cuban got, there hasn't been a peep out of the local media in Cleveland about the more stealth version of Cuban's business model the Browns have created. Part of that is because the radio reporters aren't going to complain publicly on the airwaves of those that the Browns have paid for and the print reporters covering the Browns are lazy from years of being spoon-fed by the Browns' PR department. But part of it is because most people don't consume media the way they used to anyway. People run to the internet for their "news" and are pretty indiscriminate about where they get it from. If the Browns are running a propaganda operation and using once independent radio stations for their outlets, so be it. Who cares? Really, who cares?

There's also no question that newspapers are on the decline. Pick up a copy of your local Plain Dealer or Akron Beacon Journal and see how much of their copy is actually local anymore. Not as much as you'd think. Newspapers are run by shadow staffs and they tend to fortify their online presence by utilizing local bloggers who, if they are paid at all, are paid very little. The

Lingering Items--Radio Nowhere Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Wednesday, April 03 2013 10:00 AM - Last Updated Wednesday, April 03 2013 7:19 AM

competition for stories isn't particularly robust.

Teams on the other hand have somewhat expanded their own in house operations. Carucci is a former print journalist who got out just in time to join, first, NFL.com and then the Cleveland Browns. His title is senior editor but don't think for a moment that he has free reign to do anything other than tow the company line, something that he's more than comfortable with by the way.

I'm not criticizing Carucci for finding a steady paycheck in a dying business and I'm not criticizing the Browns for wanting to control how their product is reported. But just keep both of those in mind as you read stories on the Browns' web site or listen to all the hours of new programming on the radio.

If you doubt this, just consider the words of Alec Scheiner, the Browns' new president. He told Crains Cleveland Business that the Browns will "work with their new partners in deciding the on-air talent" for the pre and post game programs. I wonder what it takes to get those jobs?

It's a disturbing but inevitable trend. The deal with the devil that WKRN and WKRK made was that their ratings and hence their advertising revenues would soar by becoming, essentially, extensions of the Browns. They're probably right. The only thing more voracious than Browns' fans appetites to talk about the game about to be played is Browns' fans appetites to talk about why the Browns lost the game they just played. There is no nuance too small or insignificant to escape scrutiny. Everyone has an opinion about what the Browns need to do to win and it's equally valid to make before or after a game.

**

Meanwhile over at WTAM, despite still having the Cavs and the Indians, the loss of the Browns still has to hurt. But if there's one thing you can count on it will be that Mike Trivisonno, the weekday talking troll, will suddenly turn into the biggest Browns' critic on the planet.

When the Browns were on WTAM the only thing as funny as listening to Trivisonno fawn over a

Lingering Items--Radio Nowhere Edition

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Wednesday, April 03 2013 10:00 AM - Last Updated Wednesday, April 03 2013 7:19 AM

Browns' official is listening to Trivisonno fawn over Cavs and Indians officials. Trivisonno may be a no talent boob of the highest order but he isn't as dim as his opinions would suggest. He knows how the bread gets buttered which is why he wouldn't criticize Randy Lerner, Eric Mangini, Pat Shurmur, Mike Holmgren or anyone else associated with the Browns until the word "formerly" appeared before the words "associated with."

But with the Browns elsewhere it wouldn't surprise me if Trivisonno is already railing against the team or its management in one inane fashion or another. WTAM lost some prestige and given that the Browns' rights aren't up for bid for the next several years, there's no reason for Trivisonno to hold back with his unique blend of non-sequiturs. Of course to test my theory on Trivisonn you'd actually have to listen to Trivisonno, something I don't recommend to anyone who values their brain cells.

**

Given that the Browns will essentially be choosing the on-air "talent" for their pre and post game lovefests, this week's question to ponder is how many ex-Browns do you think will end up with those jobs?