



Since the Browns debuted their underwhelming sequel in 1999, Bernie Kosar has been the team's most conspicuous extra.

He's never been given even a supporting role in the organization, but despite his lack of any official football-governing capacity, he's been active and involved. He frequently appears on local radio and TV stations from the start of training camp through the end of the season, offering his analysis and opinions. You can find him at the stadium on many a Sunday, chatting with players, coaches and executives, obliging media requests – doing anything to stay close to the game he lived and still loves.

The fans reciprocate Kosar's devotion to the Browns and football. Despite never leading the Browns to the Super Bowl, despite the fact that his career prime lasted all of two years – he was never the same after his elbow was injured in the 1988 season opener – despite the fact that he is quite possibly the fourth-most-accomplished quarterback in Browns history behind Otto Graham, Frank Ryan and Brian Sipe, the fans have elevated Kosar to folk-hero status.

Part of it is his local ties, having grown up a Browns fan in Boardman, Ohio, just outside Youngstown. Part of it is the fact that he declared for the 1985 supplemental draft specifically so the Browns could select him. And part of it is grasping at the strands of what little we have had

to cherish about the Browns over the past quarter-century.

Other than the Kosar years, it's been quite ugly, which makes those gritty Browns teams that were thrice eliminated by Denver on the Super Bowl's doorstep look all the more legendary.

That's why Browns Nation is so quick to circle the wagons around Kosar, deflecting criticism and assailing detractors. And now it's happening again.

Kosar has been the primary color commentator on Channel 3's preseason telecasts since 2007. Despite the fact that his concussion-induced slurred speech and his appearance – often appearing something like haggard or sleep-deprived – drew criticism and jokes, Kosar's intellect has remained unquestioned. He is extremely knowledgeable and perceptive about football, and can break plays down like a coach reviewing game film. You are a better fan for having listened to Kosar talk football.

But there is that other part to Kosar. The part that might explain why, despite his very obvious football acumen, he has never been given the opportunity, by any of the revolving-door Browns regimes, to take a more prominent role in the organization.

It's the part that has dealt with post-concussion brain trauma, an embattled personal and business life, and the effects of alcohol abuse. It's that aspect of Kosar that should have people stroking their chins after his behavior during last Thursday's Browns-Rams telecast, wondering aloud if it might be in the best interest of Kosar and the team to keep their relationship strictly casual moving ahead.

In ripping the quality of the Rams receiving corps, he was stating the obvious. Isaac Bruce and Torry Holt are not walking through the door in St. Louis. Those salad days went limp and brown a long time ago.

And maybe Kosar was simply delivering a raw truth when he knocked the play of Rams third-string QB Kellen Clemens. His first name isn't Roger. His last name isn't Winslow. The only way he'll get into any hall of fame is with a purchased ticket. That's not breaking news.

Maybe he was just trying to be funny when he mocked an apocryphal story about Clemens autographing the mitre of Pope Benedict XVI, which was tied to a true story about Clemens' daughter receiving a blessing from the pope, relayed by Kosar's broadcast partner, Jim Donovan.

And maybe Rams coach Jeff Fisher was just being a big crybaby about all of it during his postgame remarks, when he said he "lost a lot of respect" for Kosar. Fisher's team did lose, after all.

Besides, what's the big deal? So many talking heads mindlessly gush superlatives and sing high hosannas to athletes, it's refreshing to have someone in the booth who gives you his blunt, unvarnished opinion.

But every facet of that argument sidesteps the fundamental truth that Kosar was working on behalf of the Browns. One would assume that, like every other team broadcaster in sports, he was on the payroll, therefore acting in the capacity of a team employee on a team-sanctioned broadcast.

When Kosar made his remarks on the air, he wasn't just speaking on behalf of Bernie Kosar. He was speaking on behalf of the Browns organization. That changes the rules a bit, and mandates a bit more respect be shown the opponent. It's not an afternoon talk show. It's a game telecast.

Joe Banner, as is often the case, gets cast as the bad guy for reprimanding Kosar. But that's Banner's job. If he thinks his organization's reputation has been sullied, he needs to take steps to make it right. He's the one who has to meet face-to-face with other team executives at league meetings, not Kosar.

Kosar wasn't removed from his perch. He'll remain the team's TV color guy for the remainder of the preseason. But after that, Banner will have another decision to make: Defining Kosar's role with the team moving forward. And that's a prickly topic.

Kosar would likely jump at the chance for a role that allows him real authority within the Browns organization. Plenty of people around Northeast Ohio think it's a travesty that the Browns have never given him that chance. But football head knowledge is only part of the equation.

Kosar has always been an opinionated person. But there is a time to express an opinion, a time to soften the blow and time to keep your mouth shut. Navigating that hair-trigger minefield can mean the difference between focusing your attention on your job, and lost man-hours cleaning up public relations blunders and attempting to repair your organization's reputation.

It's not outside the realm of possibility to question whether Kosar's personal and professional history, which have not been kind to his brain, have clouded his judgment to the point where you can't trust him to make the right call with regard to decorum.

Heck, it's hard enough for some people to hold their tongue when they haven't been subjected to repeated brain trauma. Remember the email that ultimately cost Phil Savage his job?

Banner has to decide whether he wants Kosar representing the Browns in any official capacity after the preseason ends. Knowing that Banner is generally unsentimental and extremely bottom-line driven, Browns fans and Kosar loyalists might not like what they're going to hear.

But perhaps it's for the best. Kosar will still be free to appear on local TV and radio, talking football while speaking on behalf of himself, and only himself. The Browns will be able to protect an image that has already been dragged through the mud way more than necessary over the past decade-plus, and still isn't out of the woods, as Jimmy Haslam continues to deal with a large number of justifiably-angry trucking companies down in Tennessee.

If you can't say anything nice ... save it for afternoon drive time.