



Just because there was much to answer for doesn't mean that much would actually be answered for. It's the Cleveland Browns, after all, the team that perennially overpromises and underdelivers.

Browns owner Jimmy Haslam and club CEO Joe Banner stood before a group of incredulous Cleveland-based reporters on Monday and spoke from the usual script such types speak from after they've just fired a head coach. They talked about needing to improve. They talked about understanding the fans' frustration.

They talked about making sure they get the next hire right.

What Haslam didn't talk about was why Banner isn't being held accountable for first gushing over his hire of Rob Chudzinski less than a year ago and now trashing him as if he was the worst hire since, I don't know, Eric Mangini? Pat Shurmur? Butch Davis? Chris Palmer?

Another thing Haslam didn't talk about was why he has such confidence that Banner is the right guy to lead the search for another head coach. On the scale of wrong decisions, which is worse? The decision to hire Chudzinski or the decision to fire him?

Haslam didn't talk about that, either.

Haslam, all square jawed and serious, came across as sincere but aloof. For a supposedly smart businessman, assuming you put aside the major legal mess his business is in, Haslam struck just the wrong tone just as he was thinking he was hitting all the right notes.

Particularly wrongheaded was his supposedly “candid” admission that Browns fans have a right to be skeptical at this point. Haslam has a lot to learn. These fans aren’t skeptical as that would imply some deep held belief that this team, despite its stumbles, still possesses the ability to “get it right.”

These fans simply don’t believe a word they’re told and no amount of Haslam prostrating himself on the altar of candidness is going to change that.

And what of Banner, who admitted because he had to that he really doesn’t have an appreciation for all the fertilizer these fans have been fed for years? For his account Banner wasn’t into taking the responsibility for singlehandedly setting this franchise even further back than the several miles it already trailed the rest of the league.

Instead, he was much more about furthering a narrative that fans should applaud the boldness of the move to replace a head coach so quickly after he was hired.

The sad part of it all is that Banner really believes that the fans should be happy that he took the action now instead of waiting another season before the true awfulness of the hire revealed itself. If you accept the underlying premise, that the hiring of Chudzinski was an awful mistake, then there’s something to be said for his manner of thinking.

What’s lost in Banner’s thinking is that fans don’t accept his premise especially when he won’t accept even for a moment the perfectly reasonable but counter premise that it’s difficult to assess Chudzinski’s performance given the awful mess he inherited and then had thrown at him by the front office as the season wore on.

This really is the nub of the issue and why the divide between the Browns fans and the Browns front office has never been greater. The fans who stayed with this team for the entire year simply don’t accept that this roster was capable of showing improvement week over week.

They saw all that Banner did to sabotage the team this season in favor of a better showing in 2014 and then rightfully wonder why suddenly it’s Chudzinski that has to be held accountable

for that decision instead of getting the chance to coach a theoretically better team in 2014.

Banner said that it was fair to hold Chudzinski accountable for the lack of improvement as there were at least 3 other teams in the NFL that were in similar circumstances as the Browns entering the season and yet found a way to make the playoffs. He wouldn't offer up who exactly he was referencing so we're left to speculate.

It isn't that hard, but I could only find two. The only NFL playoff team with a rookie head coach is the Philadelphia Eagles led by the guy that Banner wanted and couldn't get, Chip Kelly.

On the surface, it looks similar.

The Eagles were 4-12 in 2012 and 10-6 this season.

But the Eagles also have two guys, quarterback Nick Foles and running back LeSean McCoy, on their roster that are better than anyone on the Browns playing similar positions.

Even more to the point, the reason that Kelly went to Philadelphia instead of Cleveland is that he could assess the rosters of each and determine which held the bigger upside. The Eagles' 4-12 season in 2012 was an anomaly.

It was their first losing season in 6 years.

The Browns' 5-11 season was the continuation of a long pattern.

Couple that with the fact that Andy Reid, who was fired at season's end, was saddled with significant family problems that kept him distracted and suddenly things get a little clearer.

It didn't take a genius, it didn't even take Kelly, to see that the Eagles were simply a team that had temporarily lost its way while the Browns were a team that was simply lost.

I suppose Banner could have been referring to the Kansas City Chiefs who were 2-14 in 2012 and 11-5 this season. Like the Eagles, the Chiefs have two players, quarterback Alex Smith and running back Jamaal Charles, that are better than anyone on the Browns playing similar positions.

refused to do.
Smith.

The Chiefs also did something in the offseason that Banner
They signed a credible starting quarterback in
Banner stood pat with Brandon

Weeden and brought in Jason Campbell and Brian Hoyer as the backups.

Finally, the Chiefs hired one of the most experienced and successful head coaches in the league in Andy Reid.

Banner could have made a run at Reid or Smith and didn't.

In other words, Banner isn't just wrong he's disingenuous when he suggests that Chudzinski should be held to at least the standards of Kelly and Reid this past season.

Usually when a coach gets fired he carries a scarlet letter at least for a few seasons. That probably won't apply to Chudzinski.

No one in the league holds the Browns in high regard or respects their decision making abilities.

And that, actually, is why it will be so hard for the Browns to improve.

Banner was asked why anyone would want to come to this franchise given the shabby treatment Chudzinski endured. Banner brushed the question aside by talking about his track record with Reid, suggesting that it was an act of abject courage to stick with Reid after he went 5-11 his first season without mentioning that this was two wins better than the previous season.

He then made vague reference to Haslam's track record at Pilot Flying J forgetting to mention how quickly Haslam hired and then fired within a matter of months the CEO of Pilot Flying J.

Banner can brush aside such questions and be so convenient with the truth because he knows that someone will take the job as head coach of the Browns. There are plenty of desperate coaches out there who want to add NFL head coach to their resume even if it's with the league's worst run franchise.

What Banner can't so easily set aside is that the chances of his "getting it right" with the next hire comes down to dumb luck. Banner ended up with Chudzinski because the guy or guys he wanted (Kelly, perhaps Bill O'Brien) turned him down. He'll end up with the next iteration of Chudzinski this time, too.

A good coach with options, and there are plenty of better openings available, would never consider the Cleveland job on simply its merits.

It's not just the mess of a

roster.

It's the mess of a

front office and an ownership that is still under federal investigation.

It will take above market money and a long term guaranteed contract and even that may not be enough.

Not everyone chases the last dollar.

Haslam bristled when it was suggested that his team is being run by the Three Stooges. If only.

At least the Three Stooges drew laughs for the right reasons and always landed on their feet.

These stooges just draw derisive laughs and keep falling on their backsides.

Haslam also said that it galls him when the media writes that it's just the same old Browns.

He better get a higher gall tolerance.

Nothing that came out of the press conference gave any one any reason to expect anything more than the same old Browns.