

Lingering Items - Bills Edition

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It turns out that the seething hostility and bad judgment that Cleveland Browns' general manager Phil Savage exhibited during the Kellen Winslow/staph infection incident was the mere tip of the iceberg. Good 'ole Phil went and dropped a f-bomb on a fan via e-mail earlier this week, an act he has already publically admitted to and apologized for. You know Gary has some thoughts on this one. And he lays them out for us in this week's Lingering Items.



It turns out that the seething hostility and bad judgment that Cleveland Browns' general manager Phil Savage exhibited during the Kellen Winslow/staph infection incident was the mere tip of the iceberg. Now comes word that Savage indeed went all Dick Cheney, in writing, to a fan that had the temerity to question the product on the field. If Savage survives this incident it will only be because owner Randy Lerner is completely indifferent as to whom he has guiding the franchise on a daily basis.

For those just getting up to speed on this one, Deadspin.com reported on Wednesday that a particularly angry Browns fan, hardly in limited supply these days, had the absolute audacity to write to Savage during Monday's game suggesting, among other things, that Savage was the worst general manager in the league and that the coaching staff should be fired. It wasn't a profane email by any stretch but neither was it particularly polite. A short time after the game ended, Savage responded with a terse "go root for Buffalo-f#@* you." Classy.

It seemed unlikely that Savage would actually do something so unprofessional but on Thursday the Browns, through Crennel and not through Savage, confirmed that Savage did indeed respond just as quoted. Crennel, exhibiting the one skill he has in abundance, apologized saying that it was unfortunate but in tough times

tough things happen.

If you're thinking that Savage's conduct was a tad more detrimental to the franchise then, say, Winslow's popping off about the excessive number of staph infections on this team, you're probably not alone. If you're also thinking that Savage isn't likely to fine himself for such conduct, you're probably not alone in that either.

The interesting spin being put on all of this is that this conduct is so out of character for Savage. Really? Let's recap. You can almost establish a drinking game over the various times Savage let his emotions boil over publicly. The Winslow incident had to set some type of record alone. But what of the other times he's held testy truncated press conferences to essentially attack the fans that he claims are dragging the team down by all their negativity? Savage has a short fuse and limited patience for anyone that doesn't see the world through his rose-colored glasses. In the end all it really shows is that Savage simply does not have the temperament to handle the responsibility he's been given by an owner who apparently doesn't know better.

That Savage's conduct was unprofessional on literally any level imaginable is beyond question. That some would defend his actions anyway is likewise beyond question. Maybe there's a populist appeal when the head of an organization tells a fan what he really thinks, but then you have to remember that Savage, by default, is the face of this struggling franchise. And because it's struggling, the last thing that anyone associated with the team needs to do right now is feed into the problems that are undermining it in the first place.

If Savage didn't think for one minute that his competency would be questioned at some point in his career then he's either the most naïve executive in the history of professional sports or the most delusional. He put himself in the public eye by taking the millions that Lerner graciously shoves his way and now seems bothered by the fact that some in that public might not be completely enamored with him or the team he's put together.

What this really tells us is that Savage is completely incapable of setting the proper tone for a franchise that seems hell-bent on alienating its fans as much as possible. There's a leadership void ingrained in this franchise starting with the owner on down and through the locker room. All Savage has done now is prove that when it comes to that void he's part of the problem not the solution.

The ramifications of his actions are pretty obvious. How, for example, could Savage rightly fine any player who decides to flip off an obnoxious fan after a game when Savage has already done the same thing in an even more direct and personal way? And by the way, doesn't he owe Winslow an apology if not a refund for whatever fine money he wrongly extracted?

Whatever plusses Savage has at this point are getting harder to see because of all the distractions he has placed in front of them. If he can't maintain calm during the storm he shouldn't expect emotionally immature players to do likewise and he sure as heck shouldn't expect a beleaguered coach with a mile-high list of problems of his own to have his back. It should be the other way around.

Savage has once again embarrassed a franchise that continues to plumb new depths of embarrassment each day. Savage, to no credit, did issue an apology. It's to no credit because, as usual, it was far from complete. Instead of just admitting that he was wrong and that his actions were unbecoming of a general manager of a NFL franchise, he implies instead that he was justified by carefully pointing out that the fan has apologized to him as well. Frankly, the fan didn't have anything to apologize for but Savage as is his wont just can't ever leave well enough alone. He has to have the last snarky word.

Even with this latest incident Savage probably doesn't need to worry about his job security. It's likely to be just another sorry footnote for a franchise where character and integrity are just words in a dictionary, not values to uphold.

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Phil Dawson's 56-yard field goal on Monday night was not only a game winner but also the longest of his career. If it seems like Dawson is getting better each season, it may be that fans are just finally starting to appreciate how talented Dawson has always been.

Kicking field goals is a very tricky business, especially in a stadium along a lake shore with natural gas. Wind and weather can play havoc on a kicker's accuracy. Yet Dawson has been amazingly consistent throughout his career.

For his career, which began in 1999, and through Monday's game when he went 5-5, Dawson has converted 84% of his field goal attempts. He's made 97% of his extra point attempts. Now in his 10th season, Dawson has had only two relatively mediocre seasons, 2002 and 2006. In 2002, he converted only 78% of his kicks while in 2006 he sunk to a career low 72% with nearly all of his misses coming in that critical 40-49 yard range.

At the time, many wondered whether Dawson's days were numbered. They weren't. In the first place, that season was a statistical anomaly in context of the years that preceded it. Since then he's proven that there's still plenty of life left in his leg. For example, in the last two seasons he's attempted 11 field goals in the 40-49 yard range and missed only 1. But even more telling perhaps is the fact that he's remained pretty accurate from the 50 yards + range, hitting 4 of 7 attempted. For his career, he's 10-14 from that range.

To put this in some perspective Dawson is 6th in career field goal percentage among all active kickers and is 7th

among all kickers, just ahead of Matt Stover. In fact, the only kicker with a similar number of years experience as Dawson and ahead of him

on the career field goal percentage list is Mike Vanderjagt. For further comparison purposes, Lou Groza, as revered a figure in Browns history as anyone, is 143

rd
on the all-time list with an accuracy rate of just over 54%. Matt Bahr is 66

th
on that list at 72% while Don Cockroft is 102
nd

with a 66% conversion rate.

In a season, indeed in many seasons, where so much has gone wrong for the Browns, Dawson has been the team's single most steady presence. In case you're wondering, and unless Savage outsmarts himself on this one, it looks to stay that way for several more seasons. In 2005, Dawson signed a 5-year contract extension.

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It's a little distressing to hear that Brady Quinn suffered a broken index finger on his right hand, but not for the reasons you'd think. It's distressing because it just complicates life for Crennel who already has enough complications to manage. For example, if Quinn can't go and backup Derek Anderson comes in and plays well, Crennel is likely to go into information overload mode. Having been told personally made the

decision to start Quinn, a good performance by Anderson in relief would undoubtedly get Crennel thinking once again, which has proven to be a very dangerous proposition this season.

While the list of "the last thing this team needs" is getting longer by the hour, another quarterback controversy would seem to be right in that mix. Yet because Crennel has never publicly backed Quinn, except reluctantly and rarely by name, you almost get the sense that Crennel would hardly need an excuse to go in a different direction. But if anything has been clear from Quinn's two starts, it's that he deserves to start. He exudes a calmness and presence that Anderson just doesn't have. If nothing else, in just 8 quarters of play he's stabilized a position that's been shaky all season. No matter the extent of the injury, now and for the foreseeable future is not the time to revisit a decision that was correct though reluctantly made.

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So many questions, so little time. In honor of the Houston Texans' visit to Cleveland on Sunday, this week's question to ponder is: Which team will get to the Super Bowl first, Houston or Cleveland?