

The Process

Written by {ga=jb}

Monday, January 05 2009 7:00 PM -

Well, if it's January and you're a Browns' fan you know what to expect. No, we don't talk playoff matchups this time of year in C-town. Around here in the offseason, we talk draft prospects, potential free agents, who we blame the most recent season's failures on and who we want off the team, and once about every three or four years, we talk about a new head coach and general manager. In Mansfield's latest column, he talks about the candidates to be the next coach/GM of the Browns. And talks about the process Randy Lerner is going through in selecting them.



Well, if it's January and you're a Browns' fan you know what to expect. No, we don't talk playoff matchups this time of year in C-town, unless you are one of the [Inbred traitors](#)

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It is a nearly unique existence to be a Browns' fan, but at least the Lions, Raiders, and a handful of other rudderless franchises seemingly on endless reboot cycles keep us company so we're not like Will Smith in [I am Legend](#). So now the good old internets' forums are lighting up again with impassioned opinions about who "must" be the next coach and GM or else we're doomed. I got news for you crews; you don't know what you're talking about. I am fairly certain of this because I know that I don't know what I'm talking about either. It doesn't matter how much of a snotty know-it-all you are. It doesn't matter how well you are connected. It doesn't matter how clueless you are. We're all in the same life boat. There is no way that you can look into the future five years from now and know if Mike Shanahan is Hank Stram in New Orleans or Dick Vermeil in St. Louis. Or Eric Mangini is Bill Belichick after Cleveland or Herman Edwards in KC. Or whether Kid McDaniels is the next John Gruden or Lane Kiffin. It is all a

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crapshoot depending upon so many factors. No one can fully master fate and circumstance. All one in charge can do is have the best people make the best decision possible based on the best advice and knowledge. So while this all might just turn out for the best no matter how decisions are made, I'm really preoccupied with evaluating the decision making process and whether or not it is sound instead of pontificating nonsense.

All that really matters in our critique right now is the process of how the next GM and head coach of the Cleveland Browns are being selected.

It has been almost a week since the latest humiliation at the hands of [Jethro](#), [Cletus](#) and their [wives and sisters](#)

(same thing). If I hear correctly, and it is too dismal to do the actual research, so y'all feel free, but I think this make it something like 0 and Romeo, 1 of the last 18, and something completely mesmerizing like 2 of 28 going back to the real Browns starting the slide in 1990. But this ship was so sunk that Randy Lerner didn't even wait for the latest installment in suck. He axed Phil Savage unceremoniously the night before with a lack of grace and attention that he probably deserved; although he did it outside of a news cycle and clandestinely (does Randy operate any differently at any time?). He handled the more classy man, Romeo Crennel, with the dignity he probably deserved, although Lerner was unwavering in the axiom that reasons are not excuses, and this applied even to Coach Crennel aka *The Great Enabler*

. So the right accountability-based moves were made swiftly, decisively, and Randy obviously has a plan ready to roll given the events that followed.

First up was the non-candidate who was the great polarizing force, none other than the Appalachian native turned Browns captain / coach turned The Great Satan Himself. Would Lucifer really think about becoming an un-fallen angel and strapping wings back on for the sake of redemption (and becoming richer than he ever imagined?) Nope. Better to rule in hell than serve in heaven apparently, and he was still burned out and not interested in football blah-blah-blah. No Bill Cowher, no way, no how. To his credit, Randy Lerner moved on quickly to Plan B,

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Patriots "Is-he-the-real-GM-or-is-he-Bill's-administrative-assistant"; [Scott Pioli](#)

. I've tried, really. But if there is a more logical and rational candidate than Scott Pioli who is available, I'm all ears to hear the argument. The only real questions are; how much decision making did he actually do compared to Bill? How much did he help establish the organizational culture and set the tone for the Patriot way? What role did he play in drafting players like Vince Wilfork and Richard Seymour and picking Mike Vrable off the scrap heap, or is that all Bill? In sum, is this guy a full partner who's been there/done that or just another fronting remora who is going to be a disaster, like the guys who just got cashiered? That is the \$ 64,000 question. I'm going to hope it is more of the former, and nothing I've read suggests it isn't. After all, when Sooper-Genius BB had Mike Lombardi in that role, Belichick often looked like a mess with perhaps the most talented coaching staff since the

[1950's New York football Giants.](#)

[Rich McKay](#) had a great record in Tampa and built a very good team for the long-haul punctuated with a world championship, and set it up for a nice soft landing once the core left. Then he left Tampa for Atlanta, where the most successful thing he did was to prevent Reggie Bush from wearing number five while on the NFL competition committee. He built the franchise around a single wing tailback that also happened to be a felony conviction waiting to happen. Oops. And that was a smarter move than hiring [Bobby Petrino](#) . So Atlanta kicked him upstairs because he's an old boy, gave him a gold watch, and let the new guy from New England, Pioli's understudy, turn the team around completely in just one season with some astute moves -- and an easy schedule. So to say that Rich McKay has a mixed record is an understatement. But unlike Dwight Clark and Pete Garcia, at least it is mixed.

[Floyd Reese](#)

, formerly of the Houston/Memphis Oilers and the Nashville Flaming Thumbtacks is said to be another possibility if Pioli and McKay say "no thanks". He took a team with a flakey owner in tumultuous circumstances, hired a great young coach, and built a team that came within a half-yard of a title. He also helped write the manual on how to develop young quarterbacks, ironically allegedly losing out to Jeff Fisher over the disagreement of which successor quarterback to draft after a season when the franchise stumbled and needed a rebuild. You could do a lot worse than Floyd Reese.

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But my questions are now related to the timeframe we're dealing with, what it could mean, and who is calling the shots. Randy started out of the gate like a rocket on a hell-bent pace, but as of Friday evening he has yet to close on a GM, and his top candidates may well be interviewing elsewhere after being interviewed by Lerner. So far he gets [neither the trip to Hawaii nor the set of steak knives](#) and will never see the Glengarry leads. Those are for closers. Why? All we hear are rumors. Not many are good and they all allegedly hint at Randy placing conditions on the position that are driving candidates away. There are some that indicate Randy has a core group of people helping him with the actual interview process, but no one who knows reports who they are. Do they have non-football positions in the organization? Are they the ex-players he sometimes hangs out with and with whom he keeps counsel together? Who is interviewing the GM's and making the decisions? This is all a big black box. The fact the guy who gave Butch Davis czar-like power and then forced Romeo Crennel on Phil Savage at the same time he allowed an organizational structure that neutered an NFL head coach is making the call once again makes me as nervous as a cat in a room full of rocking chairs, and I ain't no

[Ohio U mascot](#)

neither. Why in the world should we fans have any faith whatsoever in a guy whose tenure as Browns' owner makes

[Robert Nardelli](#)

look like a turnaround genius? Sometimes the decision makers
are

the process. Wouldn't you all feel a lot better if you knew there were actually some NFL experienced football men openly giving Randolph some help? Remember meddling Art Modell who fancied himself a team president-type to the point of micromanaging and firing coaches? He couldn't win jack-squat until he got so old he had to turn the reigns completely over to Ozzie Newsome.

The coaching search situation is even murkier. This is where the process appears most flawed, with this one caveat. If this is, as per some accounts, a done-deal where Pioli is already on board and Kirk Ferentz is the guy and they are just waiting until after bowl season and dotting some 's', then this is all null and void. My bad. But if 'they', and again, we have no idea who 'they' is, are actually interviewing head coaching candidates before a GM is formally in place leading the coach search process, then Randy Lerner learned nothing from his previous mistakes. Not a damn thing.

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What qualifies Randy Lerner to set up and guide a process to evaluate an NFL head coach? His stellar record by giving all football authority to Butch Davis? His choice of, snicker, Romeo Crennel? Please. Now even a blind squirrel finds nuts once in a while. I'm not saying Lerner won't through dumb luck find a great combination that sets up a championship organization. What I am saying is that I'm nervous he's chosen the exact same road as before where he actually feels qualified to make these decisions. Maybe it's just my jaded Cleveland ExperienceTM

fan collective unconsciousness at work and a "woe is me" attitude. Then again, to paraphrase The Boss,

["I'm still here, they're all gone."](#)

Maybe I have a clue that I've seen this movie before and the odds that the same process led by the same guy is not really likely to conclude with a different ending.

Here's the 411, the straight up dope, the [ballistics kick](#) as Ice T used to say in the day; **W**

When we need a team president, Randy Lerner wants to be an owner. When we need an owner, Randy Lerner wants to be a team president.

The man has to make a decision. What does he want to be? Being team president means no more living in NYC. It means no more side projects like

[Aston Villa Futbul](#)

. It means delegating to others the worthy foundation projects. It means having real press conferences yourself instead of sending out quarterbacks with two starts in two years out to answer questions as if they are the face of the franchise. It means having your derriere in Berea, Ohio about fifty weeks a year. It means treating that like a full-time job. It means being, um, qualified? Now truth be told, I'd rather just have Lerner be an owner. Ideally, he should live his great life and write really big checks and the fates' willing, show up to hoist gaudy, oversized, trophies In January and February instead of running football coach searches. Somehow, I think these occurrences are mutually

exclusive for Randy Lerner.

I like Randy Lerner. From all I can tell he seems like good people. Sure, he's a card carrying member of the lucky sperm club, but he is in no way loathsome, and I don't judge anyone for the gifts they've been given, only how they use those gifts. But here's the deal. Randy done screwed the pooch twice. He needs to let it go; this whole grail thing to honor the legacy of a good man who has passed. He needs to hire an organizational president before the team does anything such as hire a GM, or God forbid, actually hiring a coach or even having significant input other than just veto power if the successful candidate is like a pedophile or dog fighter or something equally outrageous. Just write some huge checks and go enjoy life. Watch some soccer. Enjoy a carriage ride in Central Park. If a logical choice like Bernie Kosar doesn't do it for him, find someone else. His late father was brilliant and successful beyond what any of us can hope to accomplish not just because he was whip-smart and worked his butt off like a peasant, but because he knew what he didn't know. He hired the best as he was given the ability, circumstance and judgment to acquire the best and then he got out of the way. This is a really good example for Randy Lerner to follow.

If the vision for the organization by Randy Lerner is to skip the whole team president role because John Collins embarrassed him, or because of some sense of family mission that begets a type of hubris making him think he is qualified, this is a less than ideal set up for the next GM, but perhaps with the right man in charge it is not fatal. But that new GM must have organizational abilities that far and away transcend the ability to run a football organization. He must be able to run a multi-million dollar enterprise worth over one billion dollars like a corporate CEO. Good luck with finding that combination in a man who also know football

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talent like a draft nerd. And this is a flaw in the process of establishing the new organizational talent structure.

This doesn't even address the process of hiring of a head coach without a GM running that show from curtain rising to curtsey. This is a really bad idea in the history of bad football ideas. If you are reading this, I doubt I need explain why. But you couldn't find a better example than the cluster-freak arranged marriage between Phil Savage and Romeo Crennel. A coach and a GM are the life blood of any football organization. They must have a [simpatico](#) approaching a conjoined Siamese twin to succeed. This isn't a case where John and Paul at each others' throats is going to result in productive creative tension. The one in charge of football operations must bring the other into the fold, period. This whole balance of power theory as if Randy is some sort of modern day NFL [Metternich](#) is a flawed premise. Deeply flawed. We just came from there.

And this brings us back to square one. The names being bandied about all make sense. There's no dang-fool candidate. A sense of urgency seems there. So why am I angst ridden? Why am I nervous we seem to be fighting the last war by either avoiding giving a coach or GM significant, adequate authority? Why do I sense that the whims of a non-football man, albeit a smart and good person, who seems completely disinterested for years at a time who shirks the public accountability of holding even one legitimate press conference, are once again trying to force an arranged marriage destined to end like the bride is Cher?

Why do I have a sixth-sense as a long-time Browns' fan that while the names make sense and we could stumble into something good, and

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only time will tell, that the process is flawed, and it just feels like the man at the helm has either not learned the lessons of the past, or is misapplying those lessons by turned the ship's wheel in a pattern of overcorrection? Why does the destination seem safe from all reports, but the journey has me [channeling Harrison Ford as Han Solo talking to Mark Hammill](#) ? Has this organization really instilled this degree of dread and paranoia, or am I onto something (or just on something)?

[Think about having a take here](#) , even if you're a long-time, first-time. After all, it's what we do best in January around here. It's all we do.