

Eric Mangini. Your new head coach of our Cleveland Browns. Happy? Indifferent? Angry? In his latest Browns Outsider, Hiko gives us his thoughts on the hire, and also begins immediate analysis of the general manager candidates that could join The Mangenius here in C-Town. Pioli? Kokinis? Heckert? McKay? Hiko talks about all the GM candidates, and also talks about the head coaching candidates we passed on.



A View From The Cheap Seats 2008 Season Over

It was bound to happen.

I waited and I waited because it seemed that things would go down quickly, and I didn't want to write an entire article and have it invalidated the next day. First, it was with Pioli. Then it was with Mangini. But, finally, it seemed like we'd hit a lull, and I felt I could wait no longer.

Sure enough, I wrote a 10 page article, then 10 minutes later the news came down that Eric Mangini was the new coach.

Well, let's see how much fat I can trim without having to re-write this whole sucker.

I must admit that I am glad it's over. I was sick of the melodrama. I was weary of the Cleveland Browns Soap Opera, which could be named any of the following:

As Berea Turns. The Young and the Coachless. All My Candidates

And...

Cleveland Clinic

(a spinoff of

General Hospital

featuring weekly staph epidemics).

ESPN has become a male version of Soap Digest.

Listen to the promo: Evil boss Phil Savage (even his name is Soap-ish) is fired, and then kindly scapegoat Romeo follows him. Former arch-enemy Bill Cowher, known in previous

episodes as "The Chin", is begged to return as savior, but he declines. Then gawky Mayor Lerner turns to Scott Pioli, Assistant Sheriff of another town, stepson of powerful Lord Parcels, and associate of the mysterious Mr. Mumbles. It seems inevitable that Pioli will join Berea as Sheriff, but Pioli demands kickbacks.

Meanwhile, the Mayor interviews recently deposed Colonel Mangini and is reportedly "enamored". But Pioli and Mangini had a falling out in recent years regarding some video footage, and it is unknown whether the two men can work on the same police force, even though they were once friends.

Enter into the picture a man known only as The Rat, released from some secret government ops program in Denver. His level of power supercedes that of either Pioli or Mangini, but his level of competence has dropped in recent years, and it is rumored that he left his post under questionable circumstances and might need time to re-acclimate himself to civilian society. Mayor Lerner reaches out to The Rat, but he disappears, and no one knows if he will return.

The Mayor supposedly gives Pioli a deadline, but then maybe he didn't. Pioli supposedly wants to hire a private eye from college as his Deputy, but the Mayor remembers what happened the last time they brought in a private dick to man the

force - the riots burned down half the town. This and the Mayor's alleged love for the Colonel force him to cool the jets on Pioli.

Then Lord Parcels finds a loophole in his contract and might leave his indentured servitude and come to Berea, but then decides to stay in Florida.

Mayor Lerner talks to everyone he can, including Josh McDaniels, local high school hero and youthful super genius who is learning the arts of Mr. Mumbles, Steve Spagnuolo, councilman for the town that won last year's *Most Beautiful City Award*, local mall security man Mel Tucker, and militia man Jim Schwartz... but wait, Schwartz became angry when he suspected that the Mayor had already gone to bed with the Colonel and declined the interview.

Now that Pioli and Lerner had cooled, the Mayor decided he'd better look for a different Sheriff. He is set to interview Sheriff Rich McKay, but then he can't because the Sheriff is in a beauty contest, or maybe he's not interested. Desperate, the Mayor turns to the Colonel, and Mangini suggests his personal confidant, George Kokinis, as the new Sheriff, despite the fact that Kokinis has never even held a gun before.

So now the Mayor must make a terrible decision: The Colonel and the man that never so much as arrested a jaywalker, or Sheriff Pioli and the man that works at a college parking lot? Or perhaps he should wait and see what's up with The Rat?

Or maybe just wait a whole year for The Chin? Maybe the town can self-police itself for a season.

It's gotten so bad that some have even suggested the Mayor release exiled former Mayor Schottenheimer from prison for assistance.

Then, finally, Mayor Lerner justified his love. The Colonel is the new boss.

And outside Town Hall are thousands of angry citizens, holding up torches, each chanting a different name. "The Rat! The Colonel! Sheriff Pioli! McKay! McDaniels! Heckert! Bernie Kosar! Henry Kissinger!" they scream.

Gotta love the ride.

~~~That's what we like to call sarcasm.

---

~~~And you people out there, yes, you, the ones that are getting married left and right to a specific candidate(s) like you know any more than anyone else... stop it.

The Browns will make their selection. Many of you probably won't like it, and some of you will whine all the way to training camp, even though you have no idea what happened behind the scenes, how the interviews went, what was requested by the candidates, etc. etc. etc.

And you're going to be a Browns fan anyway. So save yourself months of angst and - whatever the decision - accept it before it destroys you. Screaming through the Summer that you want a new owner if less useful than pissing in a tornado.

Besides, no one in Atlanta was doing backflips when they got Mike Smith and Tom Dimitroff last year. Let's hope the 7 fans of that team didn't exhaust themselves bitching all the way to 11-5.

~~~In an orderly fashion now, people, let's review who the remaining candidates are:

### **General Manager**

Lerner has reportedly no interest in guys like Floyd Reese or Tom Donahoe. It seems to me he wants a younger GM that can breathe life into the position and remain in power indefinitely alongside and in harmony with an equally young and vibrant coach.

Scott Pioli - it once looked like he was destined to be here, but his association with Kirk Ferentz may have done him in. Pioli was my first choice too, but if he indeed was set to hire the Iowa Coach to the Browns, it certainly diminishes his attractiveness. He interviewed with KC on Monday, and all indications at this

point seem to be that he will return to the safety of New England. Can he put aside his grievances and work with Mangini?

George Kokinis - who heard of this guy before a week ago? Director of Pro Personnel for the Ravens, Kokinis has never managed a draft, and certainly has never had anything near as much power as he would get if he came to Cleveland, because he'd have to have personnel power to pry him away from the purple. He's Mangini's good friend and personal selection, and, yes, it would be nice to have harmony in the front office, but this guy scares me to death. Lerner would be taking a big chance by hiring him, hoping to strike it rich. And they'd have to surround him with lots of scouting talent - layers and layers of advice. Which isn't necessarily a bad thing.

Rich McKay - pretty much a dead candidate, but you never know. I doubt the Browns even talk to this guy at this point.

Tom Heckert - he's technically Philly's GM, but can be hired away because he does not have personnel power with the Eagles. His resume is just as strong as anyone's, and the coaching candidate he has been linked to is Steve Spagnuolo, who was with Philly before moving to the Giants to become their Defensive Coordinator. Whether or not he and Mangini can co-exist is a mystery wrapped in a riddle wrapped in an

enigma.

## Head Coach

I think we all assumed that Lerner's game plan was to first try and get Cowher, and if that didn't work then hire a GM to run football operations and hire the coach. But then Randy started interviewing anyone that walked into his office. He supposedly got advice from NFL sources stating that the Coach was the more important hire, and he has interviewed most of the following already (with whose input, we have no clue).

He found the guy he liked early on, or so it seems. And now there are no candidates, just the new Head Coach. Here was (and is) my take on Mangini:

Eric Mangini - he's young, experienced, and has 2 winning seasons in 3 tries before getting fired by the Jets. Popular belief has him the fall guy for a Favre-induced collapse. The Jets spent big money in Free Agency this year, and if big money doesn't equal big success, then someone's head has to roll. The knock on Mangini is that he supposedly isn't overly friendly with the players and is hard on his coaches and isn't good with the media - all knocks that Bill Belichick had in

Cleveland. The fact that he will have learned from the mistakes of his first go-around is one of the most appealing things about this guy. That, and the fact that he had the stones to call Favre out for his mistakes, which is supposedly why Brett didn't like him.

Besides, if the players hated him so much, why did so many go out of their way to [praise him](#)? Why did Favre claim he gave Mangini a hug and told him "it was the players' fault"? Sounds like they just loathed the dude.

And here was my assessment of the gentlemen that didn't make the cut:

Kirk Ferentz - in fairness to Ferentz, it can't be easy to get top-notch recruiting classes at Iowa. It's not like he was the captain of a 1<sup>st</sup> class college. Still, going 70-53 (43-37 in the Big 10) over 10 years is not overly captivating. It doesn't say to me "Hot damn, we really need to bring this guy to the Pros". Almost all college coaches suck in the NFL, and nothing about Ferentz's career makes me think he'll be different. Still, if he's the choice, then God bless him and the only victory that the Big 10 could scrape together this Exhibition Game season.

Josh McDaniels - talk about young... the Patriots' Offensive Coordinator is only 32 years old. Still, he ran the most potent Offense in the history of the NFL last season, and was able to make soufflé out of dog shit this year with Matt Cassel. Supposedly super bright, my only worry with this guy is that his age will not lend him the respect he needs, and that his 1<sup>st</sup> job will be his learner job.

Steve Spagnuolo - also fairly young and highly successful, all teams will have to wait a while (most likely) to get this guy's name on a contract, seeing as he's the D-Coordinator for the Giants. I don't know if Lerner is willing to wait that long. Another negative is that Spags runs a 4-3, which means a Defensive personnel overhaul. Still, now that Heckert is in the mix, we have to assume that Spags is a possibility once again.

Mike Mularkey - I'm throwing him out there as kind of a sham, even though there is a possibility. He works with Rich McKay, and Tony Grossi randomly

threw his name into the mix in an article last week. But the addition of this candidate is hardly saliva-inducing.

---

~~~You will notice one conspicuous absence: Mike Shanahan.

"How can you leave Mike Shanahan out???!!!"
you wail.

Easy. He wasn't coming here. He wasn't interested.

When he was first let go and Lerner contacted him, Shanahan informed him that he was going on

vacation for two weeks and would not be reachable during that time. Doesn't sound like a guy eager for an interview.

He's getting paid buku bucks to sit back and wait for a better job than the Browns, the Lions, the Rams, or the Jets.

He told [Peter King](#), *"Unless there's a perfect situation out there, I'd rather sit out the year and return next year* ."

Now, the Browns might be a more attractive situation than the other vacancies, but certainly not perfect. Pretty damn far from perfect.

My guess is that he's waiting for that Dallas job. He wasn't coming to Cleveland.

"How can you know unless you try???!"
; you wail.

True. You can't know unless you try. I'm pretty sure that I can't lift a bus, but I'll never know unless I try.

This is my advice: Due to his comments, you should've abandoned your hopes for this guy. He had no intention of coaching the Browns in 2009. No amount of pining or hand-wringing will make it so.

Even if he was tops on the Randy Lerner wish list (which I doubt he was), he still wasn't coming. I don't think Randy can land an A-List Coach like him. Not even if you give Shanahan complete control of the organization - which he shouldn't get anyway after his personnel blunders over the years (who can forget Mo Clarett in the 3rd Round, for God's

sake)? His Denver teams have been consistently deteriorating under his GM watch.

If it were possible to get him here under a strong GM that had the say-so on personnel, then that would've been super. Shanahan is a great game-day coach. And I know that's what many of you dreamed about since he was "technically" available.

But, like Cowher, Mike Shanahan was not coming here. Make any rationalization you want - it 'twas not to be.

~~~For the record, I want to state my combo preferences in this order:

Mangini/Pioli

McDaniels/Pioli

Spagnuolo/Heckert

Mangini/Kokinis

McKay/Morris

McKay/Mularkey

Ferentz/Pioli

You will notice that Mangini tops that list. Most likely, Pioli will not be the other guy, and Kokinis will. That drops the pairing down to the middle of the pack.

Hope Randy knows what he's doing.

---

~~~Also for the record... I am very happy with

the hiring of Eric Mangini. He's the perfect candidate, young, second job, somewhat successful in his first gig. If it came down to just the Head Coaching candidates that were a ctually available (no Cowher, no Shanahan), then he was at the top of my personal list.

Which probably means he will make Butch Davis look good.

~~~I want to thank the Cleveland Browns for ruining sports for me.

Every time I watch a game any more, I turn it off at the first sign of duress. I don't want to watch it because I'm sure the team I'm rooting for is going to blow it, just like the Browns always do.

I was watching Utah in the Sugar Exhibition Game. They leap out to a 21-0 lead, but it's 21-17 at Halftime. &quot;*They're gonna blow it!*&quot; I say and turn the channel.

I was watching Ohio State vs. Texas. I spent the whole game saying &quot;*They're gonna blow it* &quot; Sadly, they did.

Even the Cavs are hard for me to watch anymore. I just expect the worst. Any team I care about, any game I have a decided rooting

interest in... when the going gets tough, I expect them to blow it.

The case is getting more and more acute all the time, but the roots of this disease can be found in January 1987 on a cold day in Cleveland against a team with stupid horses on their helmets.

---

~~~I was going to write you a farewell note, Romeo, but too much time has passed since your demise, so I'll make it short and sweet.

You're a good man. You're just not a good

coach.

I think it's weird that you would want to come back to the Browns in some capacity next year. I understand that you are loyal to your players, but this represents some of the spinelessness that hampered you as coach. It's OK to tell your former employers to go bleep themselves. You can keep up with your ex-players on Facebook.

Honestly, I don't want you back as Defensive Coordinator. Your passiveness scares the crap out of me. Maybe if you want to be D Line Coach or Quality Control or something like that...

Anyway, have a good one. I've never liked a

fired coach more as a person, so at least you got that going for you, which is nice.

Bye.

~~~I don't have the same platitudes for you, Phil Savage. Your incompetence in the area of people skills is just glaring.

If you haven't read [this article](#) about Phil's tenure by Pat McManamon of the ABJ, then you should. Here are some tidbits:

*&quot;Lerner conceded Monday morning that former GM Phil Savage had final say in the hiring of assistant coaches .&quot;*

*&quot;Savage gave Crennel a list of assistant coaches he had to fire. Savage then hired the replacements .&quot;*

*&quot;This had coach Romeo Crennel in a position of leading a team of players he didn't choose or draft and working with coaches that were not his. Consider a head coach working with two coordinators he did not hire. That's what Crennel did this season .&quot;*

*&quot;The coaching staff, for instance, did not favor the drafting of linebacker Beau Bell or tight end Martin Rucker. Savage decided to do*

*so, and even traded a future draft pick to acquire Rucker. As the season went on, neither played. Because the coaches did not think they could* .&quot;

*&quot;Guys like Antonio Perkins, Babatunde Oshinowo, David McMillan, DeMario Minter and Isaac Sowell were carried for two or three years because the guy who drafted them decided on the final roster* .&quot;

*&quot;Crennel never went public with his concerns. He also never demanded changes in the structure - even after he learned that alleged statements and questions Lerner asked through Savage were never actually voiced by the team's owner* .&quot;

That last one takes the cake. What kind of Junior High bullshit is that? Savage reminds me of Dwight from The Office.

There is little doubt that Savage is leaving the team more talented than he found it. But there is also little doubt that he needed to go.

In the end, if you didn't trust the Head Coach's judgment on either coaching or players to that extent, then why the hell would you keep him on? That alone shows awful leadership from Mr. Savage.

Let's hope whoever takes his place has the presence of mind to stay away from fan e-mail.

---

~~~So, after firing Romeo and Phil, Randy Lerner threw a press conference, but no one saw it, because Randy is afraid of cameras.

What? You're one of the 2% richest people in the US, and you're afraid of CAMERAS?

Know what? I appreciate that Randy really does want to win. I believe he does. I don't think for a second that the fact that he owns a Soccer team in England has anything to do with his dedication. It's stupid to think that it matters.

But when you're trying to build a professional franchise from the top down - a business structure - you have to present yourself thusly (professionally). Like you know how to run a business.

Randy didn't do that.

Mr. Randy... CHOOSE A COURSE OF ACTION.

HAVE A PLAN.

Interviewing everyone at once is not a plan.
Saying *"I'm going to hire the GM first, and let him hire the Head Coach* &quo

t; - that's a plan. Saying "
*I'm going to hire a Head Coach first, then hire a
GM that works well with him*
" - that's a plan.

Doing both at once is not a plan. What the hell
were you thinking?

You, sir, are a prototypical dude born unto
riches. You never had to form your own identity
because Daddy provided it to you upon birth.

The fact that Randy Lerner is supposedly such
a big fan of the Cleveland Browns might just be
a huge liability to us, professionally speaking.

Maybe we need a guy who just wants his investment to yield a profit. Rich people may "love" this or that, but their greatest love will always be their wallet. Get a rich guy in here that didn't inherit his treasure. Maybe he'll know what it means to build an empire.

~~~According to the Rooney Rule, every NFL team with a Head Coaching vacancy must interview a minority candidate.

Personally, I am not a big fan of rules like this. Making race an issue of such a policy only helps to emphasize the racial differences which we are trying to eradicate. However, it is hard to argue with the proponents of the Rooney

Rule that point out that NCAA football - without the equivalent of the Rooney Rule - has only 6 black Head Coaches in Division 1 - a vast inequity.

So, the theory goes, if left to itself, the powers that be won't govern themselves.

Like I said, I'm not a huge fan of legislation of this nature, but I can understand both sides of the argument, and seeing as it is NFL policy, then there are 2 ways to adhere to this Rule:

1. Scoff at being made to do anything you don't want to do and interview a minority candidate who has more of a chance of growing gills than getting hired for the job.
2. Interview the top minority candidates out

there. You have to do your due diligence anyway; what can it hurt to give some lesser-known coaches a shot?

The minority candidate that Randy Lerner chose to interview was Mel Tucker. I have more of a chance of becoming the next Browns Head Coach than Mel Tucker. My girlfriend's cat has more of a chance of becoming the next Browns Head Coach than Mel Tucker. But that was Randy's supposed "candidate";

I imagine the interview went something like this:

**INT. OFFICE - DAY**

Randy Lerner, a middle aged man that looks not unlike a Muppet, sits in his office, watching the open door. After a few minutes, he sees Mel Tucker, a young minority coaching candidate with a striking mustache, walk by.

Randy (calling): *Mel!*

Stopping, Mel pokes his head into the room.

Mel: *Mr. Lerner?*

Randy: *Mel, can you come in here for a minute?*

Mel looks confused, but shrugs and walks into the room.

Randy: *Can you shut the door?*

Once again, Mel shrugs and shuts the door. Randy motions for Mel to sit down across the desk from him, and Mel complies.

Randy: *Mel... would you like to be a Head Coach in the NFL some day?*

Mel (brightening up): *Certainly, Mr. Lerner. It's my goal.*

Randy: *That's good... good to have goals...*

Randy pushes a piece of paper towards Mel.

Randy: *Can you sign this?*

Mel (confused again): *What is it?*

Randy: *It's just a little form that I need signed that*

*states that you and I sat down and we had a formal interview.*

Randy begins to whistle nonchalantly and stares at the ceiling.

---

~~~Honestly, it's a slap in the face to Mel Tucker. Mel might have a future as a Head Coach in the NFL, but it's not after only 1 season as Defensive Coordinator, and especially not with that Defense.

I really don't see the harm in interviewing viable minority candidates such as [Leslie Frazier](#) (D-Coordinator, Vikings) or [Raheem Morris](#) (D-Coordinator, Buccaneers). They both have

excellent credentials and come from the Tony Dungy coaching tree. Pittsburgh gave a minority candidate with similar credentials an interview a couple years ago, were markedly impressed, and Mike Tomlin seems to be doing fine now.

~~~Willie McGinest was interviewing players for the NFL Network after the SD-IND playoff game.

I just have to say, Willie, if that's your backup plan, maybe you should consider coming back and playing next year.

---

~~~Someone e-mailed me this:

"What? You're not even going to watch the game (Browns vs. Steelers)? What kind of journalistic integrity is that?"

Ahem. I am not a journalist. I do not pretend to be a journalist. I do not have a press pass, nor sources, nor contacts within the organization. I get my info from the same place you get yours. I am a Fan. I write about what I see - you get to choose whether or not to share it with me.

And after you watched that game, do you feel better somehow? Like you put in your time, did your penance?

Bully for you.

~~~Truth be told, I did turn on the game 3 times. I just couldn't stay away for the whole thing. 2 times I turned it on, Pittsburgh immediately scored a Touchdown, which underlined why I didn't want to watch it in the first place. The 3<sup>rd</sup> time, Ben Roethlisberger was lying motionless on the grass, getting strapped to a stretcher.

*&quot;Well, if nothing else comes of this season, at least they killed Roethlisberger*,&quot; I told myself.

Nope. Couldn't even do that right.

---

~~~My last comment on the game: Bruce Gradkowski threw for 18 yards.

That's all we got, 18 goddam yards?

"*You can't say goddam in your article.*"
ot;

Don't worry, nobody is listening anyway.

~~~Texas is claiming that they should be the AP #1 and couldn't be beat by anybody right now?

Well, I can think of one team that *could* beat them. Had 'em dead to rights just a couple days ago. They just didn't finish the job.

That same team played USC earlier this season and got blown to smithereens.

Texas, you wouldn't even be in my Top 5 come Sunday.

~~~I picked San Diego, Atlanta, Philly, and Baltimore last week. Only missed one (though I missed it by a lot) - Arizona beat the Falcons.

See? I even pick against my Adopt-A-Team. No confidence, I tell ya...

My picks this week? Well, all 4 visiting teams have a real shot at winning. But I'm only going to pick one, and it is the worst one possible, since it will set up the worst Conference Championship in the History of Man.

PHI at NYG - Philly can easily win this game, but I think their lack of Running attack does them in, and the Giants know how to play these big games now. NYG in a fairly close one.

ARI at CAR - If Arizona shuts down Carolina's run game the way they did against Atlanta, then the Cardinals have a realistic opportunity. But they won't. CAR by 7 to 10.

SD at PIT - Jeezus, I want to say that SD pulls this one off. They certainly have enough talent and momentum to do so. But something will happen where Pittsburgh will pull the win out of their asses in the end and I will curse and swear and tear out my hair. PIT by the hair on their chinny chin chin.

BAL at TEN - Honestly, and this pains me to the depths of my soul, no one in the NFL is playing better than the Ravens are right now. Never mind that their QB wears mascara or their Middle LB is a murderer. Baltimore will shut down the Tennessee run game, and then Kerry

Collins will make a turnover. Low scoring, but depressing nonetheless. BAL by 6 or so.

Next Up

~~~The Offseason.

You'd think that the Browns would match up well against the Offseason, but what with Cowher saying no and Pioli losing interest, we've already given up a couple scores. Mangini would be a Touchdown, but his probable GM knocks it down to a Field Goal.

When it rains it rains hard.

## *Offseason 14, Browns 3.*