

## The Coronation Of Napoleon

Written by {ga=davekolonich}  
Saturday, April 25 2009 7:00 PM -

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After our proud organization crashed for the third time since 1999, Browns fans were screaming for the likes of a messiah such as Bill Cowher to deliver the team back to its long forgotten greatness. Instead, Randy Lerner surprised many by deciding on Eric Mangini, and doing it rather quickly. Exactly what Mangini will do this Saturday is up in the air. However, what is certain is that the Browns are his team and they will never look the same again. This Saturday, Mangini will be crowned.



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After our proud organization crashed for the third time since 1999, Browns fans were screaming for the likes of a messiah such as Bill Cowher to deliver the team back to its long forgotten greatness....of whenever that was, like 50 years ago. If Cowher or another top coach was not to be had, then fantasy contingency plans were created involving the likes of Scott Pioli and Marty Schottenheimer. The team needed structure and leadership, from the top down and the onus was on Randy Lerner to finally make the right decision. After dismissing Phil Savage and Romeo Crennel hours after the season finale, Lerner had a head start on the rest of league in attempting to find the right person to lead the franchise.

And then this happened.

### *Browns Hire Mangini*

Wow. This move was fascinating on so many different levels.

First, the level of outrage amongst Browns fans peaked beyond the traditional three-year Northeast Ohio affective disorder cycle/new Browns rebuilding plan when Lerner announced his move. The passion emanating from Browns Nation awakened emotions not usually seen in the winter months, as needless to say, Mangini was not the people's choice. If the desired effect was to get fans talking about the team again, then mission accomplished.

Next, Lerner's decision seemingly came out of nowhere. Although there were whispers that Lerner was intrigued by Mangini, the actual delivery of the news was stunning. Considering that at the time of Mangini's hiring, no other teams were actively pursuing him, or even hiring any other coaches, the move was simply stunning. Lerner had nothing but time to make the right choice, and considering how badly his last hire ended, this move was critical to the team's existence. In this instance, patience was not a virtue.

And finally, Eric Mangini? Really? What is it about Mangini that struck Lerner hard enough to commit to him so quickly? Mangini had some success with the Jets, but was also just days removed from being run out of town. Mangini's Jets suffered a Derek Anderson-sized meltdown in the final month of the season, both on the field and in the locker room. Besides missing out on the playoffs, the team commenced a nasty case of finger-pointing, both at their sometimes tyrannical coach and their self-obsessed good ole boy QB who seemed to be operating from a different playbook than his teammates.

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With the future of his father's franchise hanging in the balance, why did Randy Lerner move so fast to hire Eric Mangini?

The answer is simple: power.



### THE CARETAKER

Now that we have a longer reflection of recent Browns history to study, we can begin to cobble together a theory that explains why the team is eternally rebuilding. Besides inept drafting and unbelievably bad luck with injuries, the team has suffered from a lack of direction at the top. In the most simplistic terms possible, a rational Browns fan has to realize the following: Carmen Policy, Dwight Clark, Butch Davis, John Collins and Phil Savage all failed. Through poor personnel evaluation, internal power struggles, a maniacal desire for control or just plain incompetence, each of the above names has contributed to the Browns demise. However, in their defense (except for Clark, who was just pathetic), they all suffered from a lack of vision, structure and leadership at the top of the organization.

Because Randy Lerner could or would never clearly define any executive roles in the organization and practically state the floors and ceilings of each position, the Browns' front office has been a complete mess. If you view the Browns management through this perspective, the struggles between Clark/Policy and Davis, Savage and Collins, and Savage and Crennel make a lot more sense. Because there was never a clear leader in the organization, or a boss, if you will, the Browns continually spun out of control while everyone was grabbing for power, yet no one was assuming leadership.

So again, why Mangini?

Looking at Mangini's NFL experience, two things jump out at you. First, Mangini comes from the Bill Belichick coaching tree, which is clearly desirable considering his great success in the league. Second, and probably because of his Belichick upbringing, Mangini is known as a no-nonsense coach who desires both total control over a franchise, as well as complete loyalty from his players. In short, Mangini, like most NFL coaches, craves total control over his team. He wants to be the leader and cannot properly function without possessing complete power.

In coming to Cleveland, Mangini inherits a team held by one of the weakest owners in sports.

Randy Lerner seems to have been spared the wrath of the Cleveland sports media and fans simply because of one reason: he's not Art Modell. Any Cleveland owner following Modell has to be given a 10-year grace period, simply for not

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stabbing the throats of the fans who helped build the team's legacy. Also working in Lerner's favor is the fond memories of his father Al, who helped to bring the Browns back to Cleveland (after assisting in moving them to Baltimore). Because of Lerner's name and because he seems like a good guy during any rare interviews, Browns fans have given him a pass.

However, much like an overpriced PSL, all things must expire. The team's continual struggles have to eventually be traced back to Lerner's conscious decision to not be a "hands-on" owner. Because Lerner is incapable or unwilling to assume a leadership role in the organization, the team has continually not had any real focus over the past decade. So when Lerner met with Eric Mangini back in January, I think what he discovered was that he was hiring more than just a coach. He was hiring someone who not only wants to be a leader, but is consumed by having complete control over an NFL franchise. For the weak-willed Randy Lerner, meeting a little Napoleon was a match made in heaven.



### NAPOLEON OF WESLEYAN

Obviously, this isn't the first time Mangini has had a taste of NFL power. After a terrific coaching job in 2006, Mangini was beginning to assume total control over the Jets. After the team stumbled in 2007, Jets GM Mike Tannenbaum and Owner Woody Johnson went on a free agent shopping spree that ended with the signing of future Hall of Famer Brett Favre. Reports out of New York suggested that the moves were not orchestrated by Mangini, whose front office role had diminished due to the team's struggles.

After the December collapse of the 2008 Jets, Mangini was fired in what appeared to be a front office power play that was won by Mike Tannenbaum. Although Mangini probably did not have much time to reflect on the events that led to his departure, considering the speed in which Lerner grabbed him, one thing has to gnaw at Mangini's pride as an organizational leader: his team was essentially hijacked from him.

Looking at the 2006 and 2007 Jets, Mangini's fingerprints are all over the team. Mangini helped to orchestrate a terrific draft that solidified New York's offensive line and added some playmakers. Mangini's teams overachieved and he looked to be the next NFL golden boy of coaches. However, after his power slipped away in 2007, the Jets were no longer "his" team. For a coach who expects consistency and smart play, watching Brett Favre (who Mangini clearly did not want) heave interceptions had to be devastating. Along with the ill-advised drafting of workout phenom Vernon Gholston, Mangini now had to suffer with what he had been given.

In Cleveland, Mangini now has the opportunity to rebuild without any obstacles in his way. I can only imagine Mangini's interview with Lerner. I suspect it went something like this:

**Mangini:**

*"I want total control. My players, my coaches, my general manager."*

**Lerner:**

*"I love you, Eric."*

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## ACROSS THE GREAT DIVIDE

For the Browns fan still pining for Bill Cowher or Mike Shanahan, get over it. Like it or not, Mangini is here to stay. If you can't accept Lerner's decision, at least understand the logic behind it. While fan reaction towards Mangini is still generously characterized as lukewarm, the optimistic notion remains that perhaps Mangini has changed in his ways, or better yet, has learned from his mistakes. In case no one was watching the Jets in 2008, Browns fans holding this sentiment better wake up.

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If anything, Eric Mangini will become more of a power-hungry monster than he ever was in New York. Simply because Mangini lost control of his power with the Jets, he should become more obsessed in Cleveland with taking and not relinquishing total control. In Cleveland, there is no way Mangini will ever allow a GM and owner to override his power. With a sedated lapdog like Lerner, this is no concern. And George Kokonis? Please.

Consider the timing of Mangini's hire. After hearing Lerner speak of hiring a GM first, then a head coach, he pulled the trigger on Mangini. Sometime later, new GM George Kokonis appears.

Guess who Kokonis works for?

The Kokonis hire was more a validation of Mangini's power than an affirmation of Kokonis's skills. Even Lerner could recognize that the jump from a Personnel Assistant to General Manager is a steep one, even if the hire is coming from a successful Baltimore system. Much like Lerner, Kokonis doesn't have any real power in Cleveland. Of course, he'll be making the phone calls on draft day and interviewing prospects, but in the end, only Mangini will make the decisions.

Throughout Browns Nation, the initial shock of the Mangini hire has seemed to have worn off, or possibly been replaced with apathy, as some fans seem to be in denial about Mangini even being in charge. Of course, it's slightly possible that Cleveland is becoming a basketball town, as LeBron James and Co. are kind of good this year. However, this weekend, the full power bestowed upon Eric Mangini by Randy Lerner will be on display.

The 2009 draft is only the beginning of the Mangini reign in Cleveland. Considering that Lerner has finally found "his guy", a leader willing to assume total control of the franchise, this will be the first of many Mangini drafts. Regardless of Mangini's success on the field, it is more than reasonable to assume that this could be Lerner's last hire in Cleveland.

And because Lerner feels he is putting the franchise in the capable hands of Mangini, our new leader is going to make a huge statement with his first draft. After Mangini asserts his power this weekend, one thing will be shockingly clear. Not only is this Mangini's team now, but this is Mangini's team for the future.

The most pronounced statement of Mangini's power will be found in the

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staggering changes made to the roster. It is very likely that the Browns will enter 2009 with a new starting quarterback, running back, wide receivers, defensive end, linebackers, corner and safeties. It is even more likely that Mangini will also be drafting Browns starters for the years 2010, 2011 and beyond.

Trading the likes of Brady Quinn, Braylon Edwards and Derek Anderson is only the beginning. If you seriously consider the power Mangini will exert just this weekend, consider what the roster will look like 3-4 years from now. Besides Joe Thomas, can you envision any of the current Browns still on the team? Imagine 3-4 years of Eric Mangini blessed with complete power from Randy Lerner.

Exactly what Mangini will do this Saturday is up in the air. However, what is certain is that the Browns are his team and they will never look the same again. This Saturday, Mangini will be crowned.

Maybe this is a good thing.