

Drama For Drama's Sake

Written by {ga=davekolonich}
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With the official start of training camp less than a week away, the storylines heading into the initial Camp Mangini are full of intrigue. At the base of this foundation of intrigue is the controversy at quarterback, which finds the Golden Domed, Alpha Male Brady Quinn trying to wrest the starting role from the likes of the slack-jawed, mercurial Derek Anderson. In honor of what seems like our 10th straight Browns QB Derby since The Rebirth, Dave Kolonich takes some time out to remember some of those recent Browns QB battles.



With the official start of training camp less than a week away, the storylines heading into the initial Camp Mangini are full of intrigue, if they are not downright scandalous. Some media titans have expressed concern regarding the health and well-being of the Browns precocious rookies under the ruthless, dictatorial watch of Mangini, while others are convinced that the franchise is headed for irreparable ruin. In a related note, the national media is largely ignorant of the sweeping changes occurring in Berea.

At the base of this foundation of intrigue is the controversy at quarterback, which finds the Golden Domed, Alpha Male Brady Quinn trying to wrest the starting role from the likes of the slack-jawed, mercurial Derek Anderson. On the surface, this battle pits two contrasting personalities, styles and backgrounds, which at the least, should provide fans with plenty of entertainment in the coming weeks. However, while this competition is significant in terms of establishing where the Browns are headed in 2009, the long term effects of this battle may not register as vital to the overall direction of the franchise.

For the sake of comparison, let's take a look at some other recent Browns quarterback battles. Perhaps we'll realize that history will indeed repeat itself, yet again.

BRIAN SIPE and PAUL MCDONALD

Before questioning the scope of my perspective as a Browns fan, please consider that my earliest Browns memories are vague traces of the strike shortened 1982 season, which register as mere teething moments in my Browns fandom. My memories of Brian Sipe and the Kardiak Kids were shaped more by my Dad's recollections of the team and countless viewings of old NFL Films footage of the 1980 season, which combined gave me the impression that the Browns were the greatest sports dynasty in existence.

This wonderful legacy forged by Sipe and Sam made the inclusion of Paul McDonald in the Browns quarterback derby of the early decade completely puzzling. One of my earliest Browns memories is being at Lakeland and seeing the quarterbacks emerge for two a days. A fan behind us yelled out for Sipe and McDonald, asking "who's going to be the starter this year?" The overconfident McDonald quickly affirmed that he was the guy, while Sipe just grinned and shrugged, albeit knowingly. Sipe's reaction either suggested that the young left-hander was full of himself, or possibly he knew that his time with the Browns was coming to a close.

The winner of this early 80's derby was eventually McDonald, but possibly based more on financial means than anything else. After regaining the starting job in 1983, I remember being shocked hearing my Dad lament that Sipe was headed to the USFL, leaving the still untested McDonald as the Browns quarterback of the future. Of course, that future ended quickly, as McDonald's Browns struggled mightily in 1984, paving the way for Marty Schottenheimer to right the team's course, which of course included the Robin Hood-esque theft that resulted in Bernie Kosar.

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Much like Sipe's USFL tenure, the reign of McDonald barely lasted a season. Nearly three years of quarterback drama left the team exactly where they started.

Of course, history took a different turn, as the Browns featured competent front office management and were able to land a legitimate quarterback of the future.

TIM COUCH and KELLY HOLCOMB

The aftereffects of the Browns 2002 playoff run are strikingly similar to the feelings many Browns fans shared just a year ago. The surprise of the league in both examples, the Browns featured a dynamic passing game and experienced the rarest of Cleveland phenomenon...getting lucky. The 2002 version of the team, led by playoff injury fill-in Kelly Holcomb, offered a unique array of weapons, as the team's stockpile of second-round receivers finally began to produce. However, as we all are painfully aware, the 2002 Browns came within one Dennis Northcutt drop of advancing to the second round of the playoffs.

Heading into 2003, Browns coach Butch Davis had a full-blown quarterback controversy on his hands, as the entire city debated the merits of career backup Holcomb versus the revamped organization's first overall draft pick, Tim Couch. While Holcomb offered a certain degree of mystique, primarily based on his record-setting playoff performance, Couch's physical skills and pedigree were a more natural fit as leader of the franchise. Adding to the debate was the argument that Holcomb was limited as a deep passer, while Couch was considered to be undecisive as a passer.

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Butch Davis allowed the drama to painfully draw out, which tested the limits of both quarterbacks. The camp battle of 2003 began to eat away at Couch, as the overall number one draft pick was critical of the process, if not the man orchestrating it. After all, Couch led the team to the playoffs the year prior, only to

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watch Holcomb cement his legacy against a weak Bill Cowher Steeler secondary. In the end, the job was Holcomb's, but of course, the decision was anything but final. Couch started half of the games in 2003, but a series of lingering arm injuries and confidence issues had taken their toll.

The end result of 2003's quarterback drama ultimately ended with the signing of another ill-fated Browns quarterback, Jeff Garcia. Garcia and Davis never meshed in Cleveland, while Couch's 2003 performance would prove to be his NFL swan song. Holcomb moved on to Buffalo and Minnesota, while Davis himself flamed out in 2004.

HEADS or TAILS

The revisionist history of Romeo Crennel's Browns tenure is still underway. So far, Crennel has been viewed as both toothless and clueless, while remaining a classy, albeit overmatched head coach. Crennel's contribution to the Browns recent history of quarterback drama remains his executive decision to flip a coin to determine the team's preseason starter in 2007. Stating that the battle between Charlie Frye and Derek Anderson was so even heading into the season, Crennel assumed that the only logical, if not fair way to determine the starter was entirely left to chance.

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And of course, after getting tossed around by the Steeler defense in Week One, Charlie Frye was never heard from again...and the legacy of Derek Anderson, one that was derailed in 2008, was created.

LONG TERM EFFECTS

In viewing the results of these recent Browns quarterback battles, the looming question is this: Will history repeat itself? Or, does it even matter?

On one hand, the winner of the Browns 2009 quarterback battle assumes the mantle of team leader under new czar Eric Mangini. However, if you view the Browns 2009 offense as a work in progress, which is a generous characterization, considering the depleted depth at wide receiver and running back, the winner of this year's quarterback derby is not exactly inheriting a fortune. The winner of this year's sweepstakes will certainly struggle through the growing pains of a young offense. While I view this as an obvious development, what is not as certain is whether the new coach will stick with this year's starter in the coming seasons.

Looking at the Browns future under Eric Mangini, a smart fan must take the long view and realize that there is a distinct possibility that neither Quinn or Anderson will survive the tenure of our new coach. If history has shown us anything, it is that change, much like drama, is a constant in Berea.