

Friday Best: Browns Breather Edition

Written by {ga=davekolonich}
Thursday, August 06 2009 7:00 PM -

There's a massive reconstruction of the Cleveland Browns franchise going on in Berea right now. And Dave Kolonich is soaking up any and all scraps of information on the rebuild ... and there's a lot of it floating out there right now with training camp now underway. In Dave's latest, he has taken a whirlwind run around the web, and has mined out some of the most interesting stories and news items from the last couple days on our Cleveland Browns ... who play their first preseason game in Lambeau one week from tomorrow.



I hate to sound like a spoiled American, but after suffering through the gaping void of NFL news that constituted the past few months, I've reached the point of information sensory overload. In the past week, I've developed an almost compulsive need to check TheOBR.com and (shudder) the Plain Dealer for any and all scraps of news regarding the massive reconstruction occurring in Berea. And considering that both sources have been pumping out an alarming amount of information, I now know what porn addicts and online stock traders must deal with on a daily basis.

My Browns news addiction has reached such unhealthy levels that I'm almost starting to feel guilty for taxing my neighbor's Internet connection in such an extreme manner. But then again, this year's version of Browns camp has already laid the foundation for a polar shift in the team's philosophy and overall franchise direction. The atmosphere that Eric Mangini has laid under his new team's feet has resulted in probably the most physical, competitive and certainly newsworthy Browns camp in years.

As an attempt to ease myself from the wealth of information currently available regarding the Browns, and to hopefully alleviate these nagging unrealistic visions of Paul Hubbard contributing in 2009, let's take a look at some other links from around the Inter-Web.

And then tomorrow, I'll get back to my man crush on Noah Herron's potential as a special teams demon.

[Frank DeFord on ESPN](#)

Everytime I hear Frank DeFord on NPR, I have the exact same reaction:

That guy's still alive?!

Perhaps ever fading childhood memories of watching DeFord on NBC and reading his Sports Illustrated takes have convinced me that he must be...like 95 years old. Or, perhaps more correctly, in this new media age where anyone can become a reporter, [Laveranues Coles on Mangini](#), the reemergence of a traditional journalist like DeFord always seems to jolt me into recalling a time when ESPN was not the fulcrum of the sports universe.



DeFord's latest return from new media exile was sparked by ESPN's recent refusal to allow anyone associated with the monolithic company from commenting on the recent sexual allegations levied towards Ben Roethlisberger.

A couple of weeks ago, ESPN initially refused to report the news that was everywhere else headlined - that Pittsburgh's Super Bowl quarterback Ben Roethlisberger had been accused of sexual assault. The network's excuses were too noble by half, because there's a double standard, and ESPN is known to cozy up to the very superstars it purports to cover.

Just suppose that CNN regularly had cutesy commercials for CNN starring Nancy Pelosi, John McCain and Rahm Emanuel. Well, that's the equivalent of what ESPN regularly does with top sports personalities. The practice is, simply, a journalistic disgrace, and, because ESPN is so powerful, it diminishes the integrity of all sports journalism.

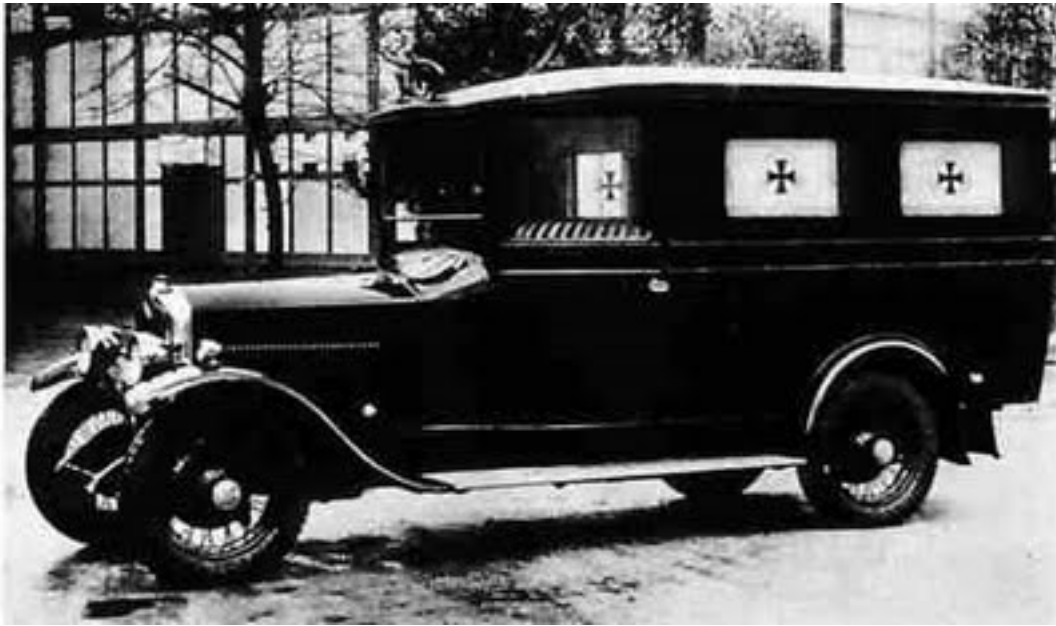
That last statement pretty much speaks volumes about journalism in general, much less the infotainment/multimedia synergy that has come to mark ESPN in the 21st century. As DeFord astutely points out, ESPN long ago stopped being a network that promotes real journalism. Despite pathetic attempts such as Jeremy Schapp and *E60*, the company now is simply a tool for outstanding marketing and cross promotions. There is little wonder why ESPN would refuse to acknowledge a scandal involving one of its most marketable and high profile stars.

Much like how the national press and cable news networks' reporting is clearly designed to gain and maintain access with the country's most powerful leaders, rather than objectively cover them, ESPN's mission is to simply drive up ratings and create different channels of revenue by featuring athletes on its programming. Any negative publicity towards the likes of Roethlisberger could jeopardize ESPN's relationship with the Super Bowl champs.

And in the meantime, fans and viewers who crave objective journalism suffer. Most have to search through the [rumor mongering ghettos](#) of the Internet to find what it is they are seeking, or just give up and settle for [meaningless drive](#)

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And speaking of overemotional...I thought K2 had turned a corner. I really did.

[Winslow's Emotional State](#)

Now, months after the fact, coach Raheem Morris is figuring out that Winslow is, as Morris reportedly put it on Thursday, "too up and down emotionally."

The comments come courtesy of our friends at Pewter Report; per the report, Morris has spoken to Winslow about the situation.

Based on Winslow's college and pro career, should Morris have been surprised by this?

What's surprising to us is that the rookie head coach has opted to call Winslow out in the media for being "too up and down emotionally." It suggests that Morris' efforts to get Winslow to change by keeping the matter private haven't been successful, and that Morris hopes taking the situation public will get through to him.

But maybe Morris should have talked to former Browns G.M. Phil Savage before pulling the pin on that specific grenade.

What?! Where did this come from? They must not be talking about our beloved K2.

As for the Bucs rookie head coach, who is only six years older than his star tight end, Raheem Morris is showing the kind of bold approach that evaded Romeo Crennel for four long years in Cleveland. Calling out Winslow is certainly a gutsy move, and one that could pay off in the short term, at least in terms of Morris establishing himself as the leader of the Bucs.

But then again, considering that we are talking about Winslow, the entire situation is likely to become more explosive in the coming weeks. Thanks to a huge new contract, there is little incentive for Winslow to simply calm down and become a rational adult, or at the least, a somewhat professional acting football player.

Taking a quick look at the Buccaneer roster heading into 2009, I can safely assume that this is one of the few teams in the league that is currently undergoing a more dramatic change than our Browns. From a highly unsettled quarterback situation to a change in offensive and defensive philosophy and the departures of several key veterans, Tampa Bay is likely to struggle in 2009.

While Morris may be the right man for the job in Tampa, he is about to suffer through some serious growing pains in 2009. Adding to his problems is the mercurial and eternally injured Winslow, who may not be exactly pleased that his near virgin coach just publicly called him out. The dispatches from Tampa should be intriguing in the coming days.

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As for another Ghost of Browns Past...

[Savage: I'm Willing to Do Most Anything](#)

This story features an early entry for the *Reboot Media Hall of Fame 2009 Special Recognition for an Accidentally Conceived Sexual Connotation Regarding a Former Browns Employee Award*

So...Phil, when you say

anything

, do you mean...

anything

?

Deposed former Browns G.M. Phil Savage is taking the Mike Shanahan route for staying involved NFL: he's taking a training camp tour.

Like Shanahan, Savage plans to visit about five teams to learn how things are done across the league.

Savage indicated, though, he may accept a lower position than G.M. for a chance to return to the league.

'I was an Indian a lot longer than I was a chief, so I'm willing to do most anything,' he said during his recent visit to Saints training camp.

So, based on Savage's quote, I'm now envisioning him playing the part of 'the Indian' in the coming concert reunion of the Village People. Although, I've always viewed him as more of the biker with the handlebar mustache for some reason...reasons that I just realized I don't want to further explore.

Anyway, it should be interesting to see where Savage ends up in 2010. Currently, he has signed on to broadcast Alabama football, which was probably a result of his long-time relationship with Tide coach Nick Saban. While Browns fans have plenty of ammunition regarding the collapse of the Savage regime in 2008, even the most rational of the team's followers can admit that the former GM did elevate the overall talent level of the team.

It is conceivable that Savage takes a step back in a potential return to the NFL,

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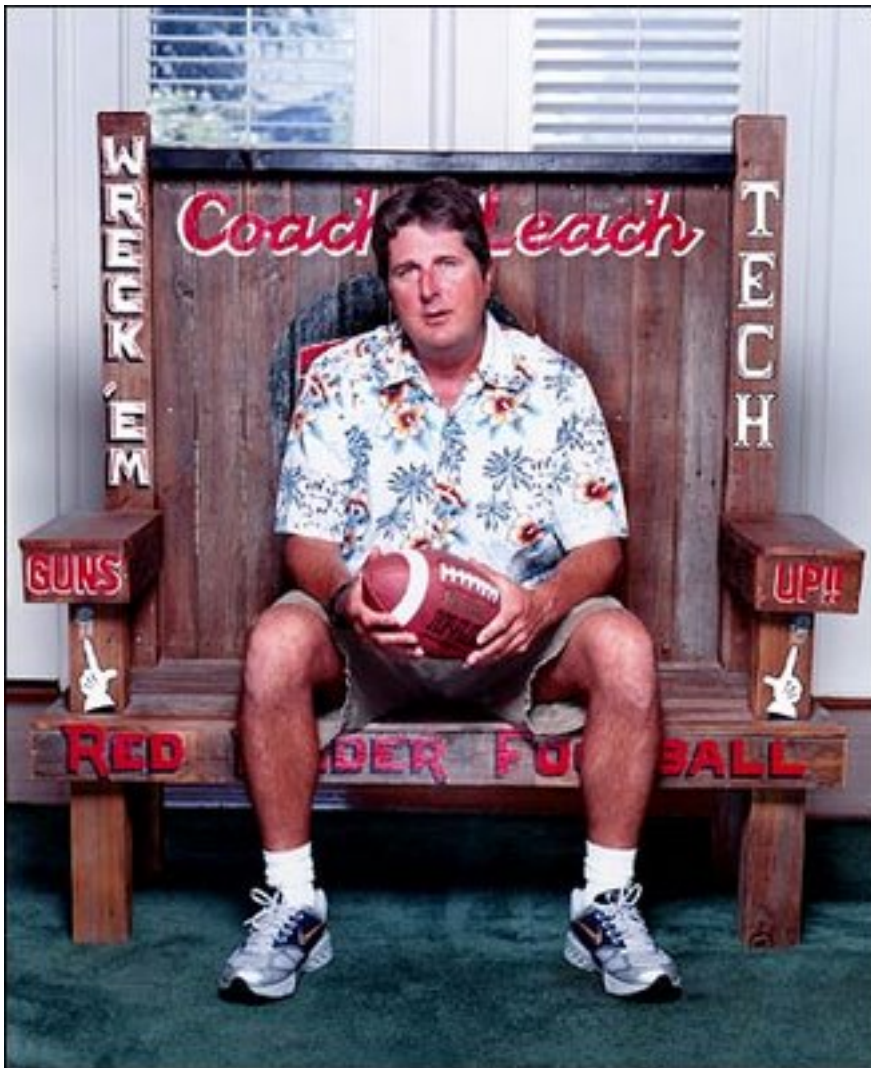
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most likely by assuming the type of role he performed in Baltimore. Savage is a fairly good talent evaluator, and realistically is destined to remain on the scouting end of things. However, knowing the doomed fortunes of Cleveland, it is probably more likely that Savage becomes the GM of a future Super Bowl dynasty.

And finally, in terms of scouting and general football smarts...

[Smart Football - How Mike Leach Keeps Producing Prolific Passers](#)

[Smart Football](#) is one of those Internet gems that makes you realize just how far the likes of ESPN has fallen in recent years. Working with what appears to be a Reboot sized budget, the author of Smart Football continually produces incredibly detailed articles regarding coaching trends.



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Smart Football's look at Texas Tech's Mike Leach and his innovative camp drills is something that the Worldwide Sports Leader would leave on the cutting room floor in favor of yet another drooling look at Tim Tebow's recent Jesus work on death row.

As for Leach's practice drills, the current crop of Browns quarterbacks could certainly benefit from some of these techniques. DA, I'm looking in your direction. But then again, we all need to remember that Leach and Mangini are probably not on speaking terms after the pre-draft Michael Crabtree debacle. And speaking of this particular subject, here's another link from friend of Reboot, Don Delco at [No Logo Needed](#)

Settle-noose: This is basically a warm-up drill. The receivers begin out quarter speed and shuffle between two cones, "settling" nearer to one than the other, as if they were two zone defenders. The quarterback takes a drop -- again, reduced speed --and throws the ball, aiming for the receiver but away from the nearer "defender." The receiver uses good catching form and bursts upfield after making the catch. You can see how this simple drill sets up the entire theory of their offense, which relies on finding seams in the zones and quarterbacks throwing between defenders.

However, that part about "good catching form" may trip up some current Browns. Speaking of which, the great Steve King of TheOBR.com has continually remarked on how polished Brian Robiskie has been in camp so far. Of course, being a nearly finished product was essentially the pre-draft scouting report on Robiskie. However, what has really impressed me during my time at camp has been the rookie's amazing body control while running routes. While not the fastest player at the position, Robiskie's technique allows him to get in and out of cuts in a very smooth manner.

Anyway, enough about the Browns. This next Leach drill could certainly benefit the likes of Brett Ratliff. Who knows? If Mangini adopts this drill, the Browns could discover the next Matt Cassell...or even the next Richard Bartel.

Routes on air: Probably their best drill. The coaches line up garbage cans or bags or whathaveyou where defenders would drop for a zone. Then all five receivers and/or runningbacks line up, and they call a play. Five quarterbacks (or four and a manager, etc) each drop back and throw the ball to a receiver. Here's the deal: if

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you're the QB who should throw it to the first read, you drop back and throw it to him. If you are assigned to the third read, well you drop back, look at #1, then #2, then #3 and throw it to him. Same goes for #2, #4, and even #5.

Moreover, every receiver who runs the route catches a ball and practices scoring. Then the quarterbacks rotate over -- i.e. if you threw it to #2 now you throw it to #3, etc --and a new group of receivers steps in. This way quarterbacks absolutely learn all their reads and practice it every day (how many reps like this does the third or fourth string guy at another school get?), and they also practice throwing it to all their receivers.

What could the harm be in at least trying something like this in an NFL camp? In the Browns particular case, 2009 would be the perfect opportunity to get all the camp quarterbacks more reps. Outside of Joe Thomas, Shaun Rogers and possibly D'Quell Jackson, the entire depth chart is pretty much a work in progress. With a new coach in town who has already quickly established his rule, something like "routes on air" could help bring even more competition to a team in transition.

Speaking of which, the morning practice just ended. I'll be online if you need me.