

Worst Day Of My Life: Shaun Smith Edition

Written by {ga=davekolonich}
Saturday, August 08 2009 7:00 PM -

This one wasn't hard to see coming. Take an underachieving, annually overweight, mouthy backup defensive tackle and insert him in the radar sights of an ultra-authoritarian, no-nonsense head coach and the results were predictable. In a new era of accountability and de-emphasis on the individual in Berea, Shaun Smith is unfortunately the first casualty of the Eric Mangini regime. Dave Kolonich is bummed ... if only for the endless column material he provided. I guess I had to see it coming. Take an underachieving, annually overweight, mouthy backup defensive tackle and insert him in the radar sights of an ultra-authoritarian, no-nonsense head coach and the results were predictable. In a new era of accountability and de-emphasis on the individual in Berea, Shaun Smith is unfortunately the first casualty of the Eric Mangini regime.

While Smith's release seems to be the most natural move Mangini could have made in the early weeks of August, the symbolism of his departure speaks volumes about where this team is headed, and where it has been.

Uncle Romeo

The most striking example of the polar shift in coaching and leadership philosophy between the current Browns boss and his predecessor has to be the dramatic change in culture currently unfolding in Berea. While Romeo Crennel's Browns camps featured a tentative, proactive approach to keeping players healthy and happy, Mangini's camps are a brutal exercise in determining the heart and endurance of every player on the roster.

Perhaps the likes of Shaun Smith would have survived another Camp Crennel, shuffling through drills and mouthing off to coaches, players and fans alike. However, in the new Mangini era, Smith's act quickly grew tiresome.

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Steve King [sums](#) it up.

But Smith seemed to legitimately be in the mix for a roster spot until he tried to show up defensive line coach Bryan Cox, who is tight with Mangini after having served as an assistant under him the last three seasons with the New York Jets, and played for Mangini when he was an assistant with the Jets and New England

Patriots. That was all Mangini needed.

The simple lesson to be learned from Smith's actions and subsequent departure is that under Mangini, the Browns finally have an atmosphere that demands full effort and accountability. Gone are the days of locker room assaults and petulant half efforts in practice. And let us usher in a new era where the whole of the team comes before its individual parts. In the Mangini era, players are disposable. Uncle Romeo, where have you gone?

Mangini cut Smith for sloughing his way through a drill and failing to jog off the field with the rest of his teammates, but Crennel didn't even discipline Smith for taking a swing at a quarterback who was a first-round draft choice in 2007. That says it all.

So, I guess this means that Braylon should cancel his upcoming helicopter reservations.

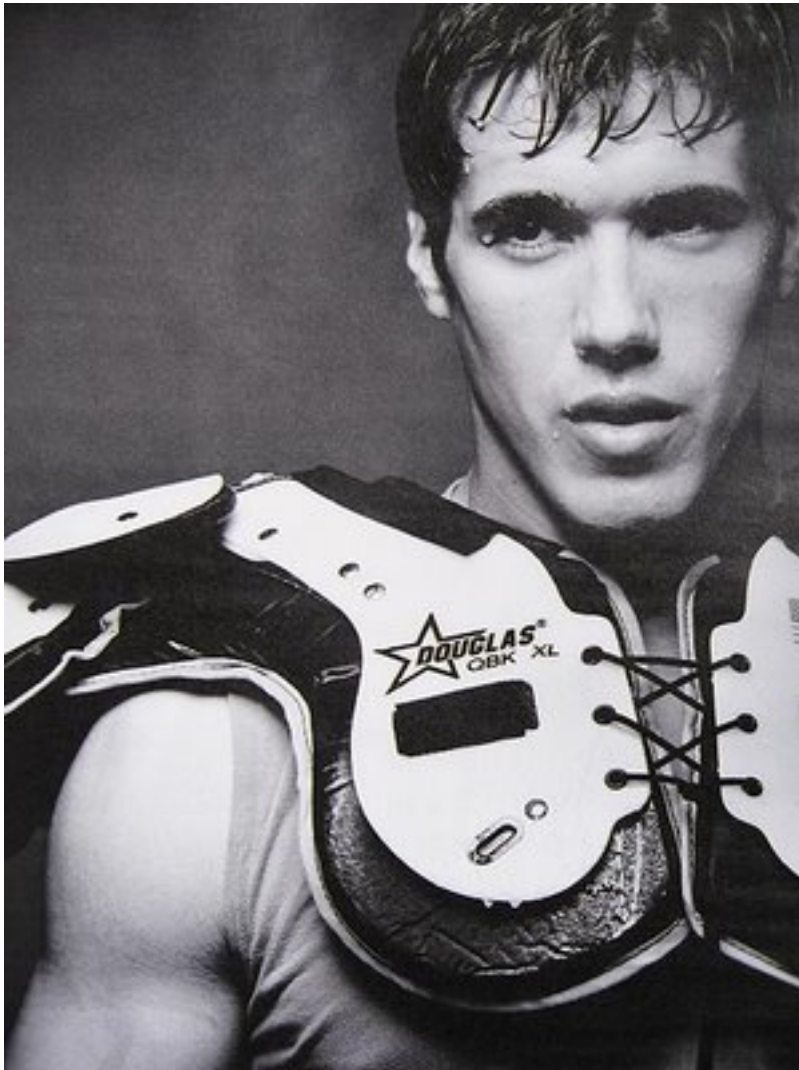
While I wholeheartedly welcome this new approach to football management in Berea...actually, I welcome any form of football management to a team owned by the continental and laissez faire Randy Lerner...I have to admit that this is a bittersweet day for me. While never fully convinced that Shaun Smith was a quality defensive linemen, as he only occasionally reached the limits of his potential, I will miss having Shaun having around simply for the endless material he provided me.

Brett Ratliff Does Not Have to Worry About Being Accosted in the Showers

Regardless of how the revamped Browns perform in 2009, I was gearing up for the inevitable post that highlighted Shaun Smith sitting on Brett Ratliff's face as punishment, after the second year QB won the team's annual ping-pong tournament in late November. Thanks to Eric Mangini and his team-first approach to leadership, I have been deprived of this wonderful opportunity.

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And speaking of leadership, although it has been reported that Mangini did not take into account the 2008 punching of Brady Quinn in his decision to release Smith, it has become obvious that one of the two players had to go before the 2009 season kicks off in September. Installing Quinn as the starting quarterback and keeping Smith on the roster could create the kind of lingering drama that Mangini has seemingly refuse to tolerate. In terms of true team leadership, last year's incident would be a stain on the team going forward.

Keep Your Mouth Shut

The one constant throughout Browns camp so far is that Mangini is clearly the boss. The overall noise level of camp, with the exception of blaring music, has been notably low. Player chatter is at a minimum and the usual boasts of professional athletes have been replaced with a quiet, focused intensity. Clearly, there is one voice in camp that rises above all.

In Smith's case, the naturally boisterous D-linemen couldn't figure it out quickly enough.

Although Smith had shed some weight in the offseason and was active during drills and simulated practice, his was one of the only voices to project itself over all others. Although most of Smith's talk was innocuous, his presence as a backup tackle, at best, made him stand out in camp in a mostly negative manner. For a coach who is intent on installing his own personality and brand of football upon Cleveland, the presence of Smith was a distraction, and his value was not enough to keep around.

Resources

Besides the symbolic value of releasing the mouthy Smith, the Browns save a cool million dollars through his release. Since Smith didn't have a huge signing bonus, the Browns actually come out ahead by jettisoning the veteran tackle. In terms of overall savings, a million dollars is a drop in the bucket. However, with the likes of several key players wanting new contracts, every little bit helps.

More importantly than the financial savings Smith's departure creates, this move affirms the depth along the defensive line. The overall position appears to be stronger heading into 2009 than at any time in the past. After the likely starting group of Shaun Rogers, Robaire Smith and Kenyon Coleman, the Browns will

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have several backups to fill in the rotation, including Ahtyba Rubin, C.J. Mosley and Corey Williams. Having a quality rotation of backups makes the Smith move even easier to swallow.



Now What?

So...thanks a lot, Mangini.

While you have clearly delivered a huge statement to your team that

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insubordination and sucker punching teammates will not be tolerated, you have left me with a comic void that will not be easily filled. Basically, Shaun Smith was comic gold for me.

From muff-diving a bucket of chicken after a workout, to becoming a deterrent to regular showering and finally from hiding a cumbersome tape recorder in your buttocks, Smith has consistently delivered the goods. In an endless offseason of column filler, Smith was the gift that kept on giving.

While Smith will likely catch on somewhere, either this year in injury-plagued Carolina or next year, wherever Mike Shanahan shows up, unfortunately, now I have to do some soul-searching.

Who is left on the Browns roster that can fill the void? Certainly, Ryan Tucker's manic behavior will make some appearances, along with Brady Quinn's ambiguous penchant for bodybuilding, but these are just too easy. With Syndric Steptoe now out for the year, I have been reduced to slumming for my material.

For the sake of...well, me....let's hope Isaac Sowell survives the final cut....then flops into a kiddie pool filled with celebratory cooking lard.

Uncle Romeo, where have you gone?