

The One That Sorta, Kinda, Almost Feels Like It Counts

Written by {ga=jb}

Thursday, August 27 2009 7:00 PM -

Two down, two to go. One unmitigated disaster, one really good showing mitigated by the fact that it was the 0 - 16 Lions with a brand new coaching staff starting a raw rookie quarterback who excelled in college mostly on talent rather than savvy. If you read our Browns forum last week, you know Mansfield was pretty down on the team after the disaster in Cheesehead-land. So what does he think now, after the solid showing against the Lions? He tells us in his latest.



Two down, two to go. One unmitigated disaster, one really good showing mitigated by the fact that it was the 0 - 16 Lions with a brand new coaching staff starting a raw rookie quarterback who excelled in college mostly on talent rather than savvy. Welcome to the NFL, kid. Still, to be consistent, if X season is all about how a team looks and plays in terms of leading indicators such as tackling, cohesion, fundamentals, and basic execution rather than just results on the scoreboard, we saw real progress Saturday. The Keystone Kops at least looked like [The Rookies](#) . (Coach Mangini looks a little like Lt. Ryker, doesn't he?) Progress means hope.

And so here we are at X game three. One of the more hackneyed and annoying clichés in a sport renown for the trite expression is that the third exhibition game is the "dress rehearsal" for the regular season. That has always given me visions of [LeRoy and Coco](#) more than 300 pound men trying to crush, but that's my problem. Of course, it still means precisely jack squat in the two columns that count. But for this team, this year, as we wait with baited breath for that precious commodity that Browns' fans trade like fine Columbian in the slums of [Medellin](#) , namely "hope", this third data point will be another in the string we

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construct to determine whether we are headed out of the desert. Remember, those whining, pampered, Israelites only wandered the Sinai for an alleged 40 years. It's been almost 45 seasons for we Browns' fans to thirst in the burning wasteland without milk and honey.

One of the things I've enjoyed the most about following Coach Mangini is how he tries to use as much of each and every opportunity to serve as game simulation rather than half-ass "drills" where players coast. To that line of thinking, I really hope we see a marked departure in exhibition game three from what we've seen so far in terms of playing time allocation and play calling. I hope this one really does serve as a dress rehearsal, so the last thing I want to see is more of the same from games one and two.

Here's what I'd do if I were Mangini...

First of all, I'd get myself to a reputable hair professional and bust my wig into something that looks a little more contemporary than my 2nd grade class photo. Do something, anything, but lose The Dockers' Opie Cut
TM

. Try rocking the Caesar. Try a

[1990's suburban Caucasian Rasta](#)

meets the short modern dreads look. Rock the Ted Kitchel 80's perm fro. Or the Quinn Snyder wedge. Hell, go for the

[Robert Smith Goth](#)

pout and be the first coaching

[Emo](#)

. Do something, anything, that doesn't make you look like you are receiving your first holy communion. Then I'd loose the hefty bag for something that doesn't look like I'm trying to completely copy

[my mentor turned dime droppee](#)

. Maybe take a non-hoodie sweatshirt, maybe a waffle weave thermal, and wrap duct tape around it or have it dunked in that vinyl coating they use for fences. This would sauna me up like that hefty bag, look every

bit as crappy, and yet be phresh in its 21

st

century hair shirt anti-fashion genre. Under Armor would buy the rights in a week. Then I'd get down to it. Right after I bring in Rik Flair to follow up Teddy Atlas. I think about this stuff a lot.

Fine, you want to play games with everyone outside of the Berea basilica about who the starting quarterback is? Go for it. More power to yah. But whoever it is - and I don't want any DA bots out there a holleran that I'm anointing BQ - settle it in secret now and play that man for three solid quarters this Saturday. Play him behind the starting offensive line that you should also settle on N-O-W. Play him with your top three wide outs and a handful of 4 receiver sets the entire time. Play him with some looks for James Davis so the kid gets some reps with the real players and not just the future UPS drivers. We may need him very soon. Rinse, lather, repeat for three and a half solid quarters this Saturday before its Ratliff Time. Resist the temptation to get cute situationally. Resist the urge to use every X season minute as evaluation for the roster bottom. You can do that next weekend. With a possibility of six new starters on offense, two young quarterbacks with fewer than two full starting seasons between them, and a new coaching staff, cohesion is not going to just come together on September 13th through osmosis or by accident. It will be tough enough this first year while you instill a new culture strategically and new schemes tactically. It will be tough enough as players blend and you evaluate starting talent for the future. Don't make it tougher. Please give them one nearly full exhibition game to simulate an

actual game (remember, we're fond of simulation, right?) regardless of what the veteran Oiltans do in response.

While you were dodging media paparazzi masquerading as sports' journalists and cursing at traffic in New York, let me bring you up to speed on a few things. Last year, Coach Romeo ran Camp Snoopy for whatever reasons he and Phil the Shill had. He used the exhibition season in a traditional manner like as if we had a veteran club. On game one, the Dallas Cowboys, the ultimately 9 - 7 no playoff playin' Dallas Cowboys, made us look like clowns. The year prior, it was pretty similar, except we had that ole quarterback competition crap thing again, and the hated Appalachians came into our house with all of their damn, dirty hills-have-eyes mutants (aka their fan base) in tow and humiliated this team. All I am suggesting is that it might be a very good idea to take this third exhibition game and play it like it counts. Do it because this group of individuals trying to become a team needs the reps. Do it because four probable new starters on defense need to know who is playing next to each other in their new schemes. Do it because after all the melodrama, the real quarterback [who ought to be standing up right now,](#) needs some dang reps with the starting receivers. Do it because John St. Clair needs to play 30 minutes of

football so he's not Freddie Childress. Do it because you have a legion of once proud and loyal fans with bags packed and one way tickets to Apathyburgh to attend Bengalstock waiting for a reason to head onto the jet way. Another season opening ass kicking where the team plays like 22

[Lloyd Christmases](#)

will have these former fans fighting over the overhead baggage compartments. Do it because your team still needs to get a lot better. Just Do It

TM

.

Anyway, I'll be there broham Eric, cheering you on. Did I mention that last year the Mohawk made a roaring return as a dumb jock fashion statement? Sort of like those cro-mags wearing a shirt that reads, "A day without a fight is a day without sunshine" but on the dome? I guess you could do that, but then again no self-respecting Wesleyan University alumnus wouldn't be that easily defined.

Other random musings....

So what is your personal theory as to the Shaun Rogers situation? Injury? Precaution? Post Shaun Smith pouting? Punishment? Protest? Veteran perk? Alex Mack psyche preservation program participant? We'll never know from the media. Chortle and balk balk and all that.. We can only all hope that our sole pro bowl quality defender isn't hurt. Myself? I kind of like him being held out. I'd like to see the Browns find their three best defensive linemen without counting Rogers. If, for example, Ahtyba Rubin is a legitimate nose tackle, I'd love to see big Shaun move to left end on running downs and plug the strong side. Or move to right end on third downs and allow us to overload that side and maybe, just maybe free up Kam-rahm Wimbley from the dreaded single man blocker who takes him out of plays regularly (or maybe Bron would like to resurrect his football career?). Or put Shaun on the overload side of the 46 defense to let the linebackers roll in free of blockers. You get the idea.

"Brodney, how many fingers am I holding up?"

I feel sorry for Pool. But in reality, if he is concussed again, this is strike four. I hope he as a young man does what is best for himself. However, this makes us more than thin at safety and further highlights the error of letting a decent player in Sean Jones walk. The perennial playoff Eagles thought he was good enough to serve as depth on defense, but apparently not the Browns. To me, this may be Cris Crocker and Brian Russell all over again. Neither were all pros. Both are legit, bona fide NFL starters who were needlessly let go for inexplicable front office reasons, exposing depth problems on a bad team. Another season of Mike Adams and Nick Sorenson looks probable. Mark my words, and hear me now, believe me later. Safety play will really hurt this defense this season. And no, I am not willing to go all lobotomy this season and start humming the words ["Taylor Mays"](#) to myself over and over believing that coaching can't make any positive difference or that it is talent level and not

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organizational culture, that is the poison that flows through this team's veins. Besides, how is Taylor supposed to take that big of a pay cut from USC and be happy in the NFL if we draft him?