

Crazy Like A Fox

Written by {ga=jerryroche}

Sunday, August 30 2009 7:00 PM -

What if Browns head coach Eric Mangini decided, way back in April or May, that Brady Quinn would be his starting quarterback for the 2009 season opener against Minnesota -- but he never admits it publicly? What if he concocts a "quarterback competition" to serve the team's best short - and long-term interests, but a competition never really exists? Such a hypothesis -- that Quinn has been Mangini's guy all along -- is not out of the question. Jerry Roche explains in his latest column.



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Such a hypothesis -- that Quinn has been Mangini's guy all along -- is not out of the question. Having him and Derek Anderson go head-to-head during training camp and the pre-season could have several outcomes, all of them good for both the Browns and Mangini.

Scenario 1

In pre-season games, Quinn looks like a deer in the headlights and bombs out. Anderson throws high, wide, short and long, plus a few of his aerials find their way into the waiting arms of opposing defenders.

In this scenario, Mangini has every right simply choose the QB who is most likely to give the Browns a chance to win some games (in his mind, Quinn) -- which is what he claimed publicly that he'd been doing all along. The loser in this QB competition, based on his sad performance (Anderson), would simply have to admit that he wasn't starting material and have no option than to settle for being the back-up.

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At this point, it would be clear that neither QB is a long-term answer, and Mangini could start making plans for the 2010 college draft. The issue -- at least for the long term -- is settled.

Browns win. (Maybe not this year, but Mangini isn't being graded on the team's won-loss record this year, anyway.)

Scenario 2

Quinn looks like a world-beater while Anderson struggles mightily. Quinn, as Mangini privately knew all along, becomes the No.1 quarterback, and Anderson has no alternative but to accept his role as No. 2.

No, Mangini can't publicly brag about his estimable player evaluation. But at least he's now got himself a quarterback for 2009 and beyond, and a former Pro Bowl back-up who's battle-tested.

Browns win.

Scenario 3

Anderson looks like a world-beater while Quinn struggles mightily. Uh-oh.

In this scenario, Mangini can change his mind without any fans or members of the media knowing that he'd at least initially misjudged Quinn. Anderson is named the starter, and the head coach emerges from "the competition" smelling like a rose. If he still believes in Quinn, he can use the former Notre Damer in a relief or mop-up role during the season to see how accurate or inaccurate his original judgment of the situation was.

Browns now have a definitive hierarchy at QB for the 2009 season. They win -- and Mangini looks like a coaching savant for holding an open competition.

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Scenario 4

Quinn and Anderson both show that they are more than capable of handling the reins of an NFL team. Wow! Surprise, surprise!

Now Mangini can name Quinn the starter and have the courage of his convictions. He can call Anderson into his office and tell him that he's been traded to San Francisco, or wherever, where he'll be the starter. In the trade, the Browns get Nate Clements or Michael Spurlock and a second- round draft choice. Everybody's happy.

Mangini uses Bret Ratliff as the back-up QB, while the team fortifies its defensive backfield or receiving corps and gets an extra draft choice to boot.

Browns strike it rich.

Scenario 5

Neither Quinn nor Anderson has an especially impressive performance, but neither bombs out, either. They're both mediocre.

This is the current situation in which Mangini finds himself. Now he can, with clear conscience, name "his guy" -- Quinn -- the starter. If Anderson balks at settling for the back-up role, general manager George Kokinis can start looking around for teams that are in dire need of a quarterback (there are a few, including and besides San Fran) and jockey for a trade that might help the Browns in their other areas of weakness. Anderson might not bring a lot in a deal, but just about anything is better than having a disgruntled back-up quarterback trolling the sidelines every Sunday afternoon.

Browns win.

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It's difficult to believe that Mangini, after viewing videotapes of last year's games over and over, hadn't already selected Quinn as the team's best hope before training camp began.

Quinn is steady. He's composed. He makes good situational decisions. He can "command the huddle." His passes -- especially those up to 15 yards -- are accurate. For a guy who hasn't had a lot of on-field experience under NFL game conditions, he shows a lot of promise. His talent fits precisely into the mold of the kind of ball-control offense that Mangini has historically favored.

Anderson is mercurial. One play, he looks like a reincarnation of Daryl Lamonica; the next, he's Spergeon Wynn. In the 35 seconds between plays, he is often flabbergasted. If he can't hear the play call in his helmet phone, it's almost always an automatic delay-of-game penalty. He too often tries to thread a needle with a high-velocity pass when there's no needle to thread.

Last season, Mangini lost his job when Jets quarterback Brett Favre went into a late-season funk and threw more passes into the waiting arms of defenders than he threw to his own teammates. So it would be almost impossible to believe that he (or any NFL head coach in his right mind, Romeo Crennel excepted) would even give a second thought to handing the reins of the offense to Anderson, who routinely makes bad on-field decisions and thus suffers more debilitating, confounding interceptions than your average, run-of-the-mill NFL QB.

Eric Mangini knew back in April or May that Brady Quinn would be his starter against the Vikings. By not publicly revealing that fact and instead letting training camp appear to play itself out, he was being crazy like a fox.