

It's Too Late To Apologize

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Tuesday, September 15 2009 7:00 PM -

It's too soon to tell, of course, whether the Eric Mangini regime will be any better than the others, but with all the apologizing coming out of Berea at the moment, you do get the sense that they know the drill. Tease the fans for 30 minutes, lay an egg for the next 30 and then apologize, promising not to do it again. In Gary's latest, he touches on some of the comments made at Monday's press conference, and also talks about the fans expectations for the 2009 season.



Cleveland Browns fans may never rise to the level of battered spouses, but they show every characteristic of having the syndrome. No matter how much or for how long they've been pushed around by the various owners, coaches and players for these many decades, the love affair with the team continues to thrive. Thank you, sir, may I have another.

Sure, Browns fans will call the talk shows to bitch from week to week. And, yea, they'll write some pretty negative comments on the various message boards that dot the internet. But they show up each Sunday nonetheless, at the Stadium, in the bars, on their Lay-Z-Boys, thinking that maybe just this time they'll be treated right.

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There was Mangini positively effusive, for him anyway, on all the miserable things he did wrong on Sunday. He says he didn't communicate effectively with the team at halftime, apparently believing that a group of professional football players need to be reminded on the length of a NFL game.

He also took the fall for one too many times running Josh Cribbs out of the "wildcat" "flash" or whatever they're calling a rather predictable set where the center snaps it directly to Cribbs and he, you know, runs straight ahead.

Then there was everyone's favorite teammate, Braylon Edwards, stepping up and accepting blame for Brady Quinn's interception, saying that he was on the wrong page with his quarterback. Edwards didn't say much about first missing a key block and then following it up with an illegal block, but we'll give him the benefit of the doubt that he's really sorry about that, too. Maybe Mangini needs to have a word with the position coach on the role wide receivers play in a team having a decent running attack.

The funny thing is, for once Browns fans aren't looking for apologies. You'd have trouble finding one knowledgeable fan who thought the team had a fighting chance on Sunday anyway. With expectations lowered for all the reasons we already know, fans seemed actually upbeat about Sunday's performance. All in all, it wasn't that bad, certainly not as bad as they thought it could be.

The fans that email me on a regular basis we're far more willing to see the glass half full than half empty and even more willing to cut Mangini a break and not rush to conclusions. Fair enough. They gave Chris Palmer a break. They gave Romeo Crennel a break. The least they can do is cut Mangini a little slack one

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game into the season.

So much of what happened on Sunday is hardly the responsibility of Mangini anyway that his taking the blame is meaningless, even if it was sincere. The overarching reason the Browns lost on Sunday was that they are far less talented than the Vikings. Mangini and George Kokinis just got here. There's only so much they could have done since last January to change that basic fact.

There's no need to chronicle all the missteps of the previous Browns' brain trust, but a few underscore the task Mangini inherited.

For example, the Browns had a chance to draft Adrian Peterson but chose not to. It's hard to say they were wrong on that because they did get Joe Thomas. Great left tackles aren't minted every day and when you have a chance to get one, you should. But in doing so sacrifices get made and in this case it cost the Browns a stud running back. They still are without one.

The Browns' previous brain trust also was responsible for both drafting Brady Quinn and then burying him on the bench for two seasons. Their theory was that Quinn needed to serve an apprenticeship even while other rookie quarterbacks have been able to make the transition in their first season. It's a theory that's grown ever more quaint as more and more rookie quarterbacks enter the league and jump rather successfully into starting roles. Was Quinn coming out of college really that far behind Joe Flacco, Matt Stafford, or Mark Sanchez?

The Browns' previous brain trust also was responsible for drafting Edwards third overall. He's been the best of his draft class, but that's damning with faint praise. It was a poor year for drafting wide receivers. In fact, 2005 was a poor year for first rounders so, in that sense, Edwards is just holding serve.

It was the Browns' previous brain trust that recklessly threw away draft picks to

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get both Paul Hubbard and Martin Rucker, the former now sitting on the Oakland Raiders practice squad and the latter mostly sitting and watching Robert Royal become Quinn's favorite receiver. Hubbard has raw speed but even rawer skills and Rucker had good college stats. Neither has translated well into the NFL at the moment. You get the sense that Mangini would never make those kinds of trades.

That doesn't give Mangini a full pass, however. If he wants to take the blame for something, he probably should start with an ill-conceived strategy designed, supposedly, to reveal a starting quarterback, but executed in a way that made the entire offense almost completely unprepared for Sunday's game.

This is where Edwards' mea culpa comes in. Giving Edwards the benefit of the doubt on his sincerity, what the heck?, he can talk all he wants about how everyone is a professional and chemistry, essentially, is for college punks, but repetitions matter.

It's not as if almost everyone didn't see this coming. Edwards and the rest of the Browns rather thin corps of receivers were probably the biggest victims of Mangini's shell game with the quarterbacks. And while we're on that subject, let's talk about Sunday's false start penalties by the second biggest victims of Mangini's preseason strategy, the offensive line.

In some ways false starts are evidence of a lack of discipline, but the lineage of Sunday's problems can be traced directly to two factors: the Vikings rather talented defensive line and, you guessed it, the lack of repetitions with Quinn. Offensive linemen are always looking for an advantage. They know the snap count and are prone to jump it at just the right time to get leverage. When you're playing a team like the Vikings you need all the help you can get.

But for it to work well, the linemen need enough repetitions with their quarterback to get used to his cadence, particularly under game conditions. When the line and

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the quarterback are in sync, they should be able to finish each other's sentences. Mangini denied them that chance in preseason and now can hardly blame them for an entirely predictable outcome.

Mangini is right. These things can get corrected and eventually they should once Quinn and his teammates have a few more games under their belts. Until then, expect more struggles.

There are a million ways to deconstruct Sunday's loss, and many of them useful as the necessary step toward long-term improvement. But apologies were hardly necessary. Browns fans aren't all that upset at the moment; they understand more than Mangini why the franchise is currently in the state it's in.