

A Reason For Hope

Written by {ga=davekolonich}
Friday, September 25 2009 7:00 PM -

The New York Jets are the darlings of the NFL right now, off to a 2-0 start after impressive victories over the Texans and Patriots. Of course, the Jets are the former property of Browns head coach Eric Mangini. And Mangini, along with Mike Tannenbaum, helped to build the franchise into the solid team that it currently appears to be. In Dave K's latest, he takes a look at some of the young players brought into New York by Mangini, and why it should give Browns fans a reason for hope in a season gone south. The overwhelming tone of reader comments in recent days are swirling with negativity towards the new Boss of Berea, Eric Mangini. After two performances that could be generously characterized as "mostly dead", the current state of emotions attached to most Browns fans lies somewhere between depressed and deceased. And those that are still bleeding Cleveland orange, or brown as it were, are clinging to some hope-tinged anger that is surely a harbinger of dark days to come.

For example, here's a great reader comment...

I wholeheartedly agree that it's soon going to be time to start infusing the young guys into more of the action. Crennel stubbornly refused to do this and therefore we'll never know how good Martin Rucker might have been had he got some quality playing time to develop. The Eagles are reportedly looking at him. This also retarded the development of Brady Quinn and Jerome Harrison and we may be paying the price for that now.

All the '09 draft picks need to start getting playing time. By December, one would hope to see Veikune starting at ILB, Alex Hall on the outside instead of Bowen, Coie Francies on the island opposite Eric Wright and Brandon MacDonald back in the slot where he played pretty well a couple of years ago, Massaquoi at #2 WR and Robiskie at #3 (with Furrey in some 4 WR sets), James Davis and Jerome Harrison getting most of the RB time, and Hank "Toast" Poteat back on the street selling insurance.

Near the end of this season we'll have games against Detroit, Oakland, Kansas City, and Jacksonville. By that time, let's hope these young guys are starting and developing well. Our 2010 draft picks should be in the top 5 of each round. A couple more trade downs and stocking 2nd and 3rd rounders and this thing could START turning around next year.

For now, let's all just watch the young guys develop. Either they're the ones who'll form the corps of the future Cleveland Browns you'll be rooting for in a few years, or this team will be playing in Los Angeles by 2011.

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And of course, a rather chilling vision there at the end...both for us and the residents of Los Angeles. Look out, L.A., you don't want any part of what's unfolding here.

But in an attempt to at least offer a diverging viewpoint and perhaps a little hope, I will once again defend Mangini, and not on the basis of him being unfairly portrayed as the media's whipping boy, but rather on his skills as a talent evaluator...with the Jets.

Hey, it's something.



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Before the Jets were annointed Super Bowl champions last week after defeating a one-dimensional Patriots last week, and before the team was christened as Rex Ryan's after two games, the Jets were once the property of Eric Mangini. In most respects, Mangini, along with Mike Tannenbaum, helped to build the franchise into the solid team that it currently appears to be.

Of course, the national media being what it is - don't expect Mangini to get a sniff of credit for the Jets' current success. That is, unless you credit Mangini with the delivery of Mark Sanchez to New York. But that's another story.

However, in an attempt to brighten the current bleak prospects of Browns fans as we face yet another rebuilding effort in Berea, the following names should offer some encouragement for the next few years. All of the following are Mangini-drafted players and all have made an impact for a resurgent Jets franchise.

Nick Mangold
D'Brickashaw Ferguson
Dustin Keller
Darrelle Revis
David Harris
Leon Washington

Six players may not seem like much, but if you can embrace the logic of how Mangini helped to build the current Jets, it's not a stretch to suggest that the Browns of today may be walking down a similar path.

As Mangini has stated in the past and proven with his selections of Ferguson and Mangold, upgrading a team's offensive line is of paramount importance. Along with the selections of these two almost stellar linemen, Mangini also added Alan Faneca and Damien Woody, two quality veterans who helped balance the line, which quickly became one of the team's strengths.

If history truly repeats itself, witness Mangini following his own blueprint in 2009 with the selection of Alex Mack, followed by the short term "solutions" of John St. Clair and Floyd Womack. While Mack looks to be a keeper, obviously the 2010 draft will serve as a continuation of Mangini's vision of building a quality line.

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Dustin Keller is emerging as one of the better tight ends in the league, and again he is another Mangini pick. Although the Browns have far more serious problems than tight end at the moment, adding an athlete along the likes of Keller could be effective in the coming years. And before anyone cries out the name of Kellen Winslow, the Browns truly need a tight end in both mind and body. Considering the weak state of the right side of the line and passing game, adding a player like Keller could help to alleviate several offensive problems.

As for the state of the cornerbacks, [as I have mentioned several times](#) in the past, the Browns pretty much have number two and number three corners with the likes of Eric Wright and Brandon McDonald. What this team desperately needs is a premier cornerback in the mold of Darrelle Revis, another Mangini pick who is quickly establishing himself as one of the best in the league.



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Consider that through two weeks of the season, Revis has effectively shut down the two best receivers in the AFC, Andre Johnson and Randy Moss. Revis can cover, is physical and can stuff the run. Let's hope Mangini again follows tradition and finds his Cleveland version of Revis early in the 2010 draft. Imagine how much more effective Eric Wright could become playing opposite a true number one corner.

The inclusion of David Harris could be the most welcome sign that Mangini is serious about improving the overall defense of the Browns. Harris was another solid Mangini pick, as he has helped to strengthen the interior of the Jet defense. While it may appear that David Veikune could become the Browns version of Harris...in time...it is more than obvious that the Browns linebackers are in desperate need of an athletic boost. Outside of D'Quell Jackson, the Browns lack lateral speed, which has been exposed by Adrian Peterson, Knowshon Moreno and all people, Correll Buckhalter.

And finally, despite all the offseason talk of Jerome Harrison becoming the Browns version of Leon Washington, the running back depth that the Browns sort of possess could also use a nice injection of talent in the coming years. While James Davis could certainly become a nice player in the future, the Browns desperately need to add a playmaking back...something the team hasn't had since the occasional flashes of Eric Metcalf, or even since the days of Earnest Byner.

While all of this is mere speculation on what Mangini will actually deliver to Cleveland in the coming years, at least there is some promise to be found in looking at his Jets blueprint. Regardless of your opinion of Mangini, at least you can acknowledge that his fingerprints are all over the current division leading Jets.

Let's hope that Mangini can deliver similar results for the Browns future.

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And to close with a little blast from the past...literally - how depressing is this?

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Remember When - Browns-Ravens, 1999

The last time the Ravens faced the Cleveland Browns in the third game of the season at M&T Bank Stadium was in 1999, after the Ravens started the season 0-2 with losses at St. Louis and to the Pittsburgh Steelers. But nothing cures a losing streak like the expansion Browns coming to town. It also happened to be the first win of the Brian Billick era, a 17-10 victory Sept. 26.

I knew I shouldn't have went here...Terry Kirby, Stoney Case, Brian Billick, Tim Couch and Matt Stover...the expansion Browns...a struggling young quarterback...a roster depleted of real NFL talent...blind optimism...

...an offense that actually scored a touchdown?

Wait, maybe it wasn't so bad after all. Remember the good old days?