

## The Process

Written by {ga=davekolonich}  
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There has been a mad wave of fan backlash in the wake of the Browns latest, and most embarrassing loss. Fans are calling for the head of Eric Mangini, and petitions are circulating over the internet, asking for Randy Lerner to sell the team. Dave Kolonich says this is a lot of wasted energy. Randy isn't selling. And Eric Mangini isn't going anywhere. So, with the most optimistic, yet brutally honest manner he can surmise, Dave offers the following regarding what Eric Mangini will bring to the Browns over the span of the next several seasons. And it's not pretty. But at least it's something. If you blinked at any time during the past decade, you may have missed the fact that 2009 is essentially the eleventh consecutive year that the overall reconstruction process of the Cleveland Browns has occurred. Spanning four head coaches, two official general managers, two pseudo GM's, hundreds of players, millions of dollars and enough fan frustration to power the globe, the Browns are no closer to competing in 2009 than they were in 1999.

With all of this time and effort exhausted on alternately creating and fixing a once proud franchise, you would think that the finished product would be of a sterling variety. But then again, in case you haven't noticed during the first weeks of the 2009 NFL season, the Browns are once again rebuilding...within the overall reconstruction...which can only signal that the team has once again hit bottom in their attempt at climbing to the top.

Following a strict adherence to recent Browns history, the rule of thumb for team management is to leave things far worse than they found them. Much as Dwight Clark set the franchise back years in a little over 20 months, the reclamation project started by Butch Davis begat the Phil Savage era, whose flames are slowly being doused by the apple of Randy Lerner's eye, Eric Mangini.

Again using history as a speculative guide, how can Mangini possibly help to finally reverse this decade long, downward spiral that the Browns organization is helpless to fight against? Everything in the Browns recent past, including inept ownership, undefined front office authority, poor talent evaluation down to plastic playcalling, a lack of talent, general instability and just plain bad luck has essentially killed every positive aspect of this organization, with the exception of traditional fan support, which after Sunday, is clearly waning.

So, what can Mangini bring to the Browns organization that others before him could not?

Sorry for the pause, I was trying to figure that out myself.

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Instead of providing a clear answer to the question, I offer this instead...the harsh reality of the situation is that Mangini is more than likely Randy Lerner's last hire in Cleveland. And no, I do not believe that Lerner is going to sell the team, basically because much like his life as a whole to this point, Lerner has inherited a cash cow that requires very little effort on his part.



If you consider that Lerner is simply the league's most inept owner in terms of desire, business acumen, football knowledge and effort - which sadly, the national media has not quite figured out yet - you can completely fathom the idea that a

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control freak such as Mangini has been brought in to do all the things that Lerner cannot and will not do..

...such as run a professional football team.

So in saying this, it is evident that Mangini is here for the long run. And in coaching years, &quot;the long run&quot; roughly equates to 3-4 seasons. Randy Lerner knows this. Eric Mangini knows this. And unfortunately, most Browns fans do not know this...which explains the sheer contempt a lot of die hards are thrusting towards Mangini after the team's dismal 0-3 start.

So, with the most optimistic, yet brutally honest manner I can surmise, I offer the following regarding what Eric Mangini will bring to the Browns over the span of the next several seasons. And it's not pretty. But at least it's something.

## The Process or The Military Approach to Better Football

### TEARING DOWN

So what does fining a player some 1700 dollars for walking off with a bottle of water have to do with regularly missing tackles on Sunday afternoon? Everything, if you are unlucky enough to inhabit Mangini's football universe.

Basically, it appears that what Mangini is doing right now is not trying to win games, but rather trying to identify the types of players that he can count on in the future. This is a process that will likely not be stained by a long string of regular season losses, fan discontent or management disagreements. Again, the Browns are now Mangini's team and he is the chief architect who will decide how the foundation is constructed.

And paying for hotel water is basically the equivalent of shoveling dirt.

But before Mangini can actually begin to build his version of the Browns, he must first tear down the existing structure. And in case you haven't noticed, the process has already begun.

Watching the first three games has reminded me of some enlightening, yet chilling comments from Laveraneus Coles. [I was fortunate enough](#) to talk with the ex Jet

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---

and current Bengal during Bengals training camp a couple months ago and his comments regarding Mangini have become increasingly relevant during the past few weeks.

*"Mangini's first camp, really, his first couple seasons is just him getting a feel for guys. The thing about Mangini is he wants to find out which players are with him, which guys are about his philosophy. His camp is about pushing, breaking guys down to their lowest point, then pushing you further. That's how Mangini weeds guys out. He wants to find his core guys, then build his team around his guys."*



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---

Much like the military process of stripping a recruit down to his or her bare essentials, then rebuilding them as a soldier, it appears that Mangini's version of boot camp is beginning to test the limits of just how much abuse a player can take.

However, in a strange twist on the usual formula, it seems that Mangini may be discovering the emotional depths of his players, rather than their physical prowess. Three embarrassing losses will do that to the most proud of players. Or, in other words, if the Browns season continues to spiral out of control, which current players will keep fighting throughout?

Now, I'm not totally suggesting that Mangini is more concerned with his process than he is with winning - although I'm also not advocating that he is not - but through the swamp of the past two games in particular, the new Boss of Berea certainly has begun to determine which players are "his guys." I can only imagine Mangini poring through game film to see who was hustling during the final minutes of a 31 point loss to Baltimore.

Adding to the process is the emergence of tests, which include such situations as pulling your starting quarterback, the one who endured a near year-long battle to win the job, as well as fining a player for an innocuous infraction. In both Brady Quinn and Abram Elam's case (allegedly), Mangini will certainly discover the mental and emotional threshold of each player - then possibly make a determination regarding each player's role on the team going forward. Are they truly "his guys?"

But of course, this is merely the easy part of Mangini's grand vision. It doesn't take much to destroy an NFL franchise - just ask Dwight Clark - and the current level of talent amongst the Browns has certainly contributed to the cause. Basically, after three games, two of which were laughably one-sided, it doesn't appear that the Browns can sink much lower.

Right?

No one ever said this was an easy process...or a quick one.

Phase Two of the Military Approach to Better Football states that once the team is completely stripped of its confidence, then they are reprogrammed in a more efficient manner. In terms of the Browns, the Mangini Process should be reflected

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in how the individual players play the game, which could be measured in bigger terms of overall, season-long production, or simply based on how effectively a player ties their shoelaces. And yes, Mangini has gone on the record before stating that this is a key priority for players to embrace.

So, if Mangini is truly willing to go to such lengths in an effort to rebuild the Browns, a few questions pop into my mind:

1. Really? Tying Shoelaces?
2. If tying shoelaces is involved as one of the first steps in the process, then when does this process actually begin?
3. Or, following the process, when do we truly hit bottom?

Here's a chilling thought...if the Raven game was not the "bottom", then what is? Derek Anderson throwing 5 interceptions? Brady Quinn completing 20 passes for 47 total yards? The defense having to stay on the field for an entire game? 0-16?

Some of you may be scoffing at the direction I'm taking this, but could Mangini be willing to accept a 2-14 or 1-15 season...or worse...in order to establish the ultimate breaking point for his players? And using Coles' logic from earlier, this would mean that even after setting another record for futility, the worst is yet to come. Don't you just love being a Browns fan?



### **BUILDING UP**

So, let's say the Browns actually reach this alleged breaking point. Then what?

Obviously, there is only one direction to go and of course, Mangini will be navigating the course. And if the remaining players, who have ultimately been stripped of their pride, confidence and raw emotion are indeed still willing to buy into Mangini's process, then how does the Boss of Berea essentially &quot;reprogram&quot; them?

Maybe there was more to that offseason trip to Hartford than we know. Perhaps the Browns players were actual camp participants, rather than coaches and mentors.

Or, another question to ask is how many of the current Browns players will actually survive to realize this process? In barely half a year, Mangini has already turned over more than half of the roster....and it doesn't appear that he will be finished anytime soon.

And what happens if a Browns player gains or retains some level of proficiency or, dare I say it, stardom? Multiple former players have commented that Mangini is not fond of players whose talent levels tend to dwarf those of their teammates. In what is being called the new era of Socialism across many different venues, how does Mangini keep a sense of competitiveness both amongst his roster, as well as on game days?

Before you burn your throwback jerseys, let's take a step back...from the ledge.

Obviously, Mangini is the most competent and talented coach the Browns have had since their 1999 return, at least in terms of instilling fundamentals. Certainly, if Mangini had the Browns current roster under his watch for several seasons, the results could be dramatically different. In most respects, Mangini is a good football coach. The past and current Jet teams are an example of his coaching prowess. Although it's not the most popular opinion in Cleveland, the team could have done a lot worse in hiring or retaining a head coach...or a lot better, depending on your perspective.

And if you grant that Mangini is a skilled teacher of fundamentals, which is incredibly important at any level of football, you still have to consider the time it

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would take for this process to yield positive results. For example, while the play of Kamerion Wimbley has improved in 2009, the results of Mangini's work will not be revealed anytime soon.

So, in most respects, the entire process comes down to one of Mangini's favorite words - "trust." Or, in other words, do you want to hand over your kids to a tough babysitter or send them to military school?

Tough love is one thing - egomania is quite another.

## EGO

Which brings me to my final point... Who does Eric Mangini think he is?

Does Mangini truly think that he is capable of completely building an NFL team from virtual nothingness into a legitimate contender? Obviously, he has a plan, he has the willingness and he has inherited a situation where a deadbeat owner will allow Mangini to do whatever he wants - but still, is there anyone who is truly up for this kind of challenge?

What is it about NFL coaches that make them think they can go all Bill Parcells and wreak havoc on a near billion dollar franchise? Can someone just go ahead and buy the likes of Mangini and other pseudo-nation builders a copy of Madden 2010? I hear the franchise mode is pretty deep. Plus, you can restart a franchise as many times as you want...without having to worry about the casualties involved in such a process.

Unfortunately, in real life, things are not so simple. Based on the perfect storm of ineptness that is Randy Lerner, Eric Mangini now has the opportunity to try to do what is pretty much impossible...completely tear down and rebuild an NFL franchise. Regardless of Mangini's ability to do so, Browns fans are hopelessly stuck and must endure this process, for better or worse.

And while the current reality is utterly depressing, keep in mind that Mangini has not yet reached the breaking point with the 2009 roster...which unfortunately means that the rebuilding phase of the process has not yet begun and that as Browns fans, we cannot realistically expect our team to be competitive for a long, long time.

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But, since I am a lifelong Browns fan, the only thing I have to rely on is blind optimism. So, despite all evidence to the contrary, I will remain optimistic regarding Mangini, simply because there is no other option on the table for the next 2-3 years in Berea. While it is perfectly natural to resist or even to revolt against the current leadership of the Browns, you have to resign yourself to the fact that we have only just begun the process.