

Coming Full Circle

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

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This is exactly what it looks like when the worst thing that can happen to you is that you get what you want. Brady Quinn always dreamed of playing quarterback for the Cleveland Browns. He got his wish and now there is a death watch lingering over a tenure that appears doomed before it ever really got started. It has to be excruciating to both Quinn and his family. And Gary Benz talks about it in his latest column for us.



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Brady Quinn always dreamed of playing quarterback for the Cleveland Browns. He got his wish and now there is a death watch lingering over a tenure that appears doomed before it ever really got started. It has to be excruciating to both Quinn and his family.

But this is how the demonization works. First you appear as fortunate circumstance. Then you become the best alternative. Finally you become the person from whom the team has to move on from. For Quinn, a handful of professional games under his belt, he's gone full circle in Cleveland without ever having had a legitimate chance. Now he hangs on to the team's roster by a thread.

The Plain Dealer posited the question formally on Tuesday, ESPN chimed in with the by-now cliché that the house is up for sale later in the day and now it's a question that's been on most everyone's mind since last Tuesday when the Browns traded serial malcontent Braylon Edwards: is Quinn next? Probably. It's just a matter of when.

That isn't equivocation for equivocation's sake, either. Head coach Eric Mangini is still a pretty unknown commodity in these parts and while his thought processes aren't necessarily random they are nevertheless hard to predict. I suspect he likes it that way. Mangini will pull this trigger when he feels the timing is right. If only Quinn would punch one of Shaq's buddies outside a Cleveland nightclub, that would make it easier to pull the trigger now.

The case for and against Quinn is difficult to make for much the same reason. As a NFL quarterback, Quinn still is mostly unknown.

Before his injury last season, he looked pretty comfortable in charge after taking over for Derek Anderson, who was so awful so often that he made it difficult to remember his 2007 Pro Bowl season. During former head coach Romeo Crennel's waning days he named Quinn the starter for this season. In that context, Quinn had every reason to feel like it was his team to run even knowing that a new head coach was on the way.

But then he got thrust into another quarterback competition that was billed as fair but only if you're judging by standards usually applied to carnival games. It was a test he again passed only to find out that he really failed. Given 10 quarters to prove himself against what's turning out to be two of the best defenses in the league, Quinn suddenly got passive. He wasn't exactly awful in those 10 quarters, but he was overly mechanical. Like Terrelle Pryor at Ohio State right now, Quinn looked like a player trying to hit every box on a mental checklist each time he dropped back to pass.

Making matters more difficult for Quinn was the fact that the offensive coordinator, Brian Daboll, was brand new and very inexperienced, all three running backs were banged up and the teams Quinn had to face are among the best in the league at the moment.

But on the bench Quinn nonetheless now finds himself again, mainly because

Mangini seems oddly infatuated with Anderson's big arm, just as Bill Belichick was in a different era with Vinnie Testaverde. For all the indirect nitpicking that Mangini did about Quinn he's been incredibly steadfast in his support for Anderson despite the fact that Anderson has been statistically worse than Quinn thus far.

Consider also that since Anderson has been in, he's had two running backs healthy, both of whom have gone over 100 yards in the games he's started and he's been playing against defenses that aren't among the league's tops. Still, he's struggled and for all the reasons he struggled last season. He has no short-range touch. He also uses a quick release and a lack of scrambling skills as an excuse to hurry a play when sometimes prudence cautions that he let it develop a little bit.

Anderson isn't an awful quarterback and there actually may be a big upside to his further development. Surely no team would throw in the towel on him at this stage, but that still doesn't explain what can only be termed a mystifying reluctance to do the same with Quinn. He must be missing some sort of quality that Mangini believes is key to a quarterback's success but to this point Mangini hasn't stated what that might be, at least publicly.

And this is where the cycle becomes complete. Quinn's freefall in the draft is well known. But as the whisper campaign about him takes on new life, that freefall itself is becoming fodder, as in "maybe all those teams really did know something."

Maybe they did, but sometimes the obvious gets overlooked in order to arrive at an answer to the narrative someone's trying to create in the first place. The story at that time, I think, is still the right story. Outside of Oakland and Miami, quarterback didn't seem to be the most pressing need of any other team at that time. Oakland picked JaMarcus Russell first and don't you think they'd like to have that one back? Miami is the team that really threw the curve ball by drafting Ted Ginn, Jr. instead of, say, Quinn. Once Miami took a pass, Quinn was bound

to fall further. Former general manager Phil Savage saw that as an opportunity to grab Quinn late in the first round and, to my recollection, everyone thought it was a stroke of semi-genius.

Quinn falling into Cleveland's arms seemed like harmonic convergence, the kind of things that happen to teams from other cities. What was far more unanticipated was the startling way that Savage would implode as a general manager. It's made all his decisions suspect even though not every one was a clunker. The drafting of Quinn is now being viewed, at least by Mangini, through those Savage-colored glasses.

And that's where Quinn finds himself at the moment, somebody else's guy. Mangini feels no loyalty to him. Why should he? Mangini's marching orders are to rebuild this franchise and with a team this bad no position should be safe. Teams are always desperate for quarterbacks and when you see that St. Louis, for example, was starting Kyle Boller, you just know that Quinn will be a significant upgrade to some. The question is how desperate are those teams to part with a decent array of draft picks, particularly on a player whose current team seems to be purposely devaluing him. That's a problem that Mangini and his assistant boss, general manager George Kokinis will have to solve. The key issue is timing.

But whatever happens with Quinn or even Anderson, the Browns' season isn't going to suddenly turn around. This isn't a team in transition. It's a team attempting to reinvent itself.

When Mangini outlined his offensive priorities before the season, he said he wanted his team to be able to run the ball. Well, every coach says pretty much the same thing. For all the changes over the years in the game there are still some universal truths and one of them is that teams need to be able to run to be successful in the long term. The Browns are deeply entrenched in this philosophy at the moment, which is actually a refreshing change.

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That's what makes all this talk about trading Quinn even more puzzling. At best all Mangini and Daboll want is for the quarterback to manage the game. That would seem to play into Quinn's strengths more than Anderson's but it ultimately doesn't matter. Mangini seems to have his mind made up and that's to build a team with Anderson at quarterback.

It won't be the most popular decision Mangini's ever made but then again on the list of complaints people have about him at the moment, this falls somewhere in the middle.

So whatever demonization that is now taking place regarding Quinn, it will never approach the far more deserved buildup that Edwards got. Unlike Edwards, all Quinn did was try his best. Apparently it just wasn't good enough.