

More and more information continues to emerge on the nature of the relationship between Eric Mangini and George Kokinis. The latest? An account from a pretty prominent NFL agent that painted Kokinis as completely powerless in his role as Browns "General Manager". In Dave's latest, he talks about these latest reports, expresses his disgust at the lack of organizational structure, and ponders what moves could be coming next as Randy Lerner looks to rebuild the front office of this embattled franchise. A few readers tipped me off to this gem of an article, written by National Football Post's Jack Bechta. Bechta's work usually focuses on the financial aspects of the league, but considering he serves several current players as an active agent, he highlights the kind of backstage drama that occurs among several franchises.

And based on the events of recent days unfolding in Berea, guess where Bechta turned for his latest take?

Naturally.

If you haven't already, take a minute and read this one.

[A Lesson Learned in Cleveland](#)

The next day, I spoke to George at about 10 a.m. that morning to see if they were ready to move. He said he needed a little bit more time. Keep in mind that this player was probably the first high-value free agent the new GM, head coach and current salary cap manager had brought in. So it was their first opportunity to work together.

At 1:30, I called the Browns but couldn't get hold of anyone. This is very unusual during free agency. I finally reached the cap manager and salary negotiator, Trip MacCracken, but he had no direction yet from Kokinis or coach Eric Mangini. Two years earlier, I had worked fast and fluently with Trip on bringing top free-agent guard Eric Steinbach to the Browns, so he and I had a strong history of working together.

A few more hours passed, but there was still no decision from the Browns' brass. Finally, at about 4:30, they sent the player to the airport with no contract. At that point, I was very pissed because we had just burned a whole day of free agency. I called George and gave him an earful. He was apologetic, but he couldn't give me a good reason why they didn't sign the player. I could sense he was very frustrated.

The Browns were obviously never on the same page with this particular free agent and had yet to formulate a way to work together and make decisions. Another agent I spoke to had a similar experience. The signs were there from the beginning that Kokinis had little power and that the team was somewhat rudderless.

First things first, most people assume the player in question is Jabari Greer...which is kind of irrelevant considering the deeper theme represented here.

There are so many layers to be uncovered here, but first let me somewhat sell out a bit here and state the following:

If all of the above is true - and there's no reason to suggest otherwise - George Kokinis was both grossly incompetent and stuck in the nether regions - despite his actual position of power - of an organization that has exhibits a total lack of communication and direction.

This is pretty damning evidence on many different fronts.

Consider the following:

1. It is beyond obvious that either Kokinis was never truly granted "total control over the 53 man roster" or wasn't strong enough to assert such power. Contractually, we were all led to believe that Kokinis had the final say over the Browns roster moves. If such were the case, then he could have made this deal...assuming of course that the required staff were in town to check this free agent out.

2. What looks more possible is that Mangini was not on board with bringing this player in, for whatever reason - be it based on the player's skill, attitude, history, etc. The likely scenario that unfolded here was that Kokinis arranged the visit, established a basic set of contract numbers and then was completely ignored by Mangini.

3. As for why Kokinis couldn't get a hold of the Browns coach - I would have to speculate that Mangini wasn't sold on this player coming to Cleveland. Which is fine - again, it's obvious that even if the organization was slightly functional, the coach and GM are not always going to agree on personnel issues.

Murder & Intrigue: Mangini & Kokinis Edition

Written by {ga=davekolonich}

Saturday, November 07 2009 7:00 PM -

4. However, if this was the case - did Mangini intentionally ignore Kokinis, perhaps to send a message that this indeed was his team - and not the GM's?

5. And if you believe that this scenario is true, it highlights all of the reasons why Kokinis was recently let go by the Browns...



Basically, the reason why he didn't do his job was because he was not allowed to.

Think of it this way. As most Cleveland media have correctly acknowledged in the past days, the last time Kokinis was heard from was shortly after Draft Day. If this incident occurred some weeks prior, one could logically conclude that Kokinis had already figured out how limited his role was going to be in Cleveland.

Basically, if the GM was rendered obsolete in his contractually specific powers, what exactly could he approach the media to talk about?

Another aspect of this story that is intriguing would regard the other free agent moves the Browns made in the offseason. With the exception of the signings of Robert Royal, Floyd Womack, John St. Clair and Mike Furrey, the rest of the Browns offseason moves all included former Jet players.

Now, the question is this - what role did Kokinis play in the signings of these mostly ex-Mangini guys? Who initiated the contract talks, physical visits and anything else related to free agency? Was Kokinis simply given a list of players to approach, or did he actively seek these players out, based on the needs of the team's coach?

Also, even more intriguing is this - if Kokinis tried to bring other players into Cleveland - ones who did not have prior Mangini connections - was he essentially shot down like in the case that Bechta lays out? If so - and in the manner highlighted above - the credibility of the Browns organization had to take a serious hit this past offseason.

Consider that the lack of communication between all parties would have to give the organization a serious black eye, at least in terms of basic business management. The actions committed by the organization - no matter who is to blame - has to leave a sour impression in the minds of player agents everywhere.

And now for some sensationalism - remember, it is early November in Northeast Ohio...

I have mostly defended Mangini throughout the season, as I understand that our beloved franchise has been deeply flawed for over a decade now. And although [painful as it may be](#), a complete cleansing and rebuilding of this franchise is required to make the

Browns a viable team once again.

So having said that, I appreciate the overall plan, effort and sheer audacity of Mangini as he attempts to build something stable here in Cleveland.

However, if Bechta's story is legitimate - which it appears to be - and if Mangini simply ignored his GM because he was not on the same page regarding personnel issues, then it appears we have some serious issues going on in Berea.

And although I may sound a bit skewed in saying so - I cannot think that Mangini is purely to blame for this dysfunction.

Again, just like it's been in the past and unfortunately, looks to remain so in the future - it appears that the Browns yet again are suffering from a total lack of the kind of organization, structure and basic business etiquette that has plagued this franchise for some ten years and counting.

And whose fault is this?



As I've stated a thousand times in the past, it begins and ends with the team's ownership.

After nearly a decade of leadership, if Randy Lerner can still not figure out how to structure his organization's front office - meaning if he cannot set some basic parameters regarding what his specific personnel are supposed to do, then the Browns will continue to flounder under his watch.

Speaking of which, the whole idea of establishing some kind of checks and balances system, or the mere notion of Lerner actually staying in town long enough to keep an eye on what's going on is long overdue. Lerner's history as an active Browns owner has been sketchy, at best.

Consider that Lerner's main role in the organization in past years has been to lie in the background, while various front office types jockey for power in what has become an almost lawless environment. As the situation regresses, Lerner usually chooses one flawed side to support - call it the Lerner Approach to Counter-Insurgency - but once these power players eventually destroy each other and the team in the process, Lerner reemerges to hire a new set of franchise leaders, only to quietly slip away again once power is reestablished.

Or, in other words - considering Bechta's narrative - where was Lerner when all of this offseason drama was occurring?

So, what is the solution to all of this self-defeating madness?

If you still cling to any sense of confidence in Lerner, you will no doubt be emboldened by his recent comments that the organization needs a director of football operations. However, if someone is brought in from the outside - whether it be a veteran such as Ernie Accorsi or a younger executive on the rise - the question is this:

Will the exact same scenario again unfold?

Will Lerner make an offseason splash, re-energizing the team and fanbase - then simply slip away again as the front office reconvenes its sinister power grab? Or, in other words - has Lerner finally figured out that the team's dysfunction is based on his incapability or blind refusal to define the roles of his team executives?

And if Mangini is retained as head coach, which appears to be a likely scenario, can you imagine the future madness associated the first time the team's new executive leader butts heads with the Browns' head coach? And you thought the drama involved in Berea over the past week was intriguing?

To end on a more positive note - maybe - the only action that would save the Browns franchise in the coming years comes down to one of two options:

1. Lerner brings in a legitimate football executive who can reform the front office and assign specific roles to the team's power players - which is something that Lerner has proven to be incapable of doing. For example, this person would have to assume complete control over the team's direction and either bring in a real GM or take over personnel decisions himself (assuming Lerner doesn't cave in to Mangini again and promote Dawn Aponte to the position). This person would have to basically stand up to Mangini early on in the process and affirm that the Browns coach is simply that - a coach.
2. Lerner finally realizes that he is powerless to bring a winner to Cleveland and finally decides to sell the team to a more capable owner.

For fans hoping for Option #2, good luck with that.

So, until any real changes are made within the organization, the status quo will remain. Mangini will remain the coach and defacto GM and Lerner will continue to offer meaningless, patronizing gestures, such as meeting with Dawg Pound Mike and French Fry Guy (Or are those two the same person? I can't remember.) The organization will continue to flounder and knee-jerk reactionary fans will endlessly debate meaningless topics such as DA/Quinn, Brian Daboll and walking out of a nationally televised game, only to walk in later.

And then our franchise, much like our fandom, will suffer in the process.