

Doomed To Fail

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Monday, November 09 2009 7:00 PM -

Browns head coach Eric Mangini, in the midst of the biggest crisis of his professional life, used his bye week judiciously and proved it on Monday by declining to name a starting quarterback for next Monday's game against Baltimore. And a whole fan base and the entire NFL just shook its heads and said "sheesh.". Now ... with Randy Lerner seeking a Mike Holmgren-type to run the franchise, will Mangini act like he's learned something through this mess and embrace his new boss? Don't count on it says Gary Benz.



To say that Cleveland Browns head coach Eric Mangini looks foolish again is to state the obvious. To say that this is the time he needs to look the opposite is to state the impossible.

Mangini, in the midst of the biggest crisis of his professional life and apparently hanging on to his current job by the strength of his lower bicuspid, used his bye week judiciously and proved it on Monday by declining to name a starting quarterback for next Monday's game against Baltimore. And a whole fan base and the entire NFL just shook its heads and said "sheesh".

What's the rush, really? Mangini claims he'll address this in a few days because, among other things, he hasn't talked with his quarterbacks yet.

Apparently George Kokinis took the team's phone book with him when he was escorted out a week ago.

Brady, Derek, if you're reading, coach needs your cell phone number, fast.

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Naming a quarterback for this team at this point is like the governor picking out a turkey to pardon at Thanksgiving, except that the lucky turkey in this case is the one who gets to sit back and wear a ball cap during the game without worrying that Mangini will ruin his career further. But if past is prologue, and it is in this case, Mangini will end up sparing neither and sacrificing both.

He is just that random, or foolish, take your pick.

With the second half beckoning, this can't be at all what Mangini envisioned when it all began during the halcyon days of mid July. Then Mangini was a known commodity begging for both patience and the latitude not to be judged by his past mistakes in New York.

Four months later, patience has been pushed to their breaking point but at least he's not being judged by his past mistakes from his New York days. He's committed so many new ones in his short time here to put his job in jeopardy that it's hard to remember why he was canned in New York.

Oh yea, it was for treating the players like pawns, for being sneaky and subversive and, generally, for losing the respect of everyone in the building.

Ok, some things are hard to escape.

It could be, though, that the reason that Mangini can't decide whether the lowest rated quarterback in the league, two seasons running, deserves still another chance is because he's been preoccupied with reports about owner Randy Lerner's sudden fascination with credibility. The news that Lerner may be targeting former Seattle Seahawks head coach Mike Holmgren to run the football operations in Cleveland can't be seen as good news to or for Mangini.

Holmgren would indeed bring instant credibility to the Cleveland organization and would send the rest of the NFL, busy doubled over laughing at the Browns at the moment, a message that Lerner really is serious this time about improving his

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franchise's prospects.

In some ways, the story of Holmgren is the story that Mangini is trying to carve out for himself. Like Mangini, Holmgren never played at the professional football, though he was drafted. Instead, Holmgren's entrée into the NFL was through a series of coaching jobs starting with high school.

He moved on to be the quarterbacks coach of Brigham Young before being hired as quarterbacks coach of the San Francisco 49ers.

From there he went on to be head coach of Green Bay before taking the combined job of head coach and general manager of the Seattle Seahawks.

Ultimately, the combined job proved to be too much for Holmgren, just as it was with Butch Davis. Holmgren resigned his general manager's job in 2002. That move proved to be beneficial to both Holmgren and the Seahawks.

From 2002 until the 2008 season, the Seahawks didn't have a losing record and went to the playoffs each season.

In 2005 the Seahawks lost to the Pittsburgh Steelers in the Super Bowl.

The overriding question for those still invested in Mangini is whether a similar future awaits, particularly when you consider the parallels. From where things currently stand, that's highly doubtful and for one overriding reason, Mangini himself.

This is precisely the time for Mangini to fall on whatever sword he's been carrying and act like he's learned something through this mess. Instead of seeing someone like Holmgren as an ally with whom he has much in common, Mangini more than likely will set the impending relationship ablaze.

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It's not as if Mangini doesn't have a track record of doing just that. He burned his bridges with Bill Belichick and then Mike Tannebaum, except when it comes to trades. Then

Tannebaum extracts his revenge by fleecing Mangini at every turn.

There's also the little bridge burning Mangini just completed with George Kokinis and, for good measure, his former assistant, Erin O'Brien.

These aren't isolated examples.

They're a trend.

At least his Christmas card list is manageable.

Then, of course, is the rest of the story.

Whatever Mangini's success had been pre-NFL, his actual NFL experience has been very suspect. A hard worker, certainly, he's learned a lot about Xs and Os by watching a lot of film. It's a solitary experience that sequestered him from having to establish the people skills necessary to effectively translate that knowledge to those responsible for execution.

It shows.

He knows virtually nothing about handling actual people.

As a result whatever book smarts he's acquired hasn't translated to success, particularly at the head coaching level.

More importantly, though, he's shown no capacity for change, either.

Having flamed out in New York all he's done in Cleveland is ratchet up the paranoia as if that was the problem. Mangini's biggest blind spot is that he thinks if he just keeps talking about his "process" and how long it will take enough times, everyone will magically buy in as if he's really discovered cold

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fusion.

The reason no one is buying into what Mangini is selling of course has everything to do with the lack of respect he shows for those who he courts. Frankly, Mangini thinks the players aren't real bright and can't tell a ham from a wienie.

Jamal Lewis, as established a veteran as exists in the league, candidly admitted that halfway through the season even he doesn't understand what Mangini's trying to accomplish.

Imagine, then, how any of the number of rookies on this team must feel. All they know of the NFL at the moment is that head coaches covet power, hate the media, and play games with players' psyches as if it's a blood sport.

It would be one thing if sooner or later Mangini's little mind games and overriding personality deficiencies revealed themselves to have some higher purpose.

Instead it all just comes across as a guy in way over his head, which is exactly what he is.

If Mangini really had the capacity to change, he would have understood why he failed in New York and actually applied a few lessons learned. Instead, he views his New York experience a success on which to build.

Pity.

When Mangini came in and immediately isolated Shaun Rogers, it made it seem like a matter of miscommunication. Everyone, myself included, gave Mangini the benefit of the doubt and essentially labeled Rogers immature, a narrative that fit with his experience in Detroit.

Instead and in context, the Rogers incident was heavy with foreshadowing. It

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may very well be that Mangini just didn't see the big guy when they were at the same charity function.

But given how much disdain Mangini seems to have with everyone lower than him in the food chain (and that includes pretty much everyone but the owner), it makes sense.

The point though is not to revisit the Rogers incident so much as it is to highlight exactly why Mangini won't be able to co-exist with someone who will exercise real authority.

If indeed Holmgren comes to Cleveland or even if it's any of the other names being bandied about, don't look for Mangini to survive. Lerner may be saying that in his view Mangini will be back in 2010.

But the lawyer in me sees the lawyer in him and just knows that Lerner's parsing his words knowing full well it will be someone else's decision.