

Useless Excuses

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Monday, November 23 2009 7:00 PM -

According to Browns coach Eric Mangini, there was a certain, what's the word, unusualness, about the rash of injuries that former colleague Jim Schwartz's defensive players seemed to have just when the Browns' scary good offensive machine was rolling on Sunday. Mangini levied these allegations in Monday's press conference following Sunday's 38-37 loss to the Lions. Gary Benz says if Mangini throwing a colleague and friend under the bus sounds familiar ... it should. And he explains in his latest column for us.



For a man living in his own glass house, Cleveland Browns head coach Eric Mangini sure likes to throw rocks.

Engaged in so much questionable, rule-bending conduct of his own (the "voluntary" bus trip to Connecticut; the post-practice opportunity sessions; the failure to properly report injuries to the league office; pushing George Kokinis out as general manager and then trying to make it seem like it was his fault), Mangini has no trouble pointing fingers at others for perceived infractions when it suits his own purposes. This time it's Detroit Lions head coach Jim Schwartz, a former colleague of Mangini's, as if that matters.

According to Mangini there was a certain, what's the word, unusualness, about the rash of injuries that Schwartz's defensive players seemed to have just when the Browns' scary good offensive machine was rolling on Sunday.

If Mangini throwing a colleague and friend under the bus sounds familiar it should. He's done it before with Bill Belichick and Kokinis, now he's doing it with Schwartz. Apparently professional football is unlike any other business or venture in that it doesn't rely on personal relationships. And people wonder why Mangini

Useless Excuses

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Monday, November 23 2009 7:00 PM -

is so disliked within NFL circles?

It's not as if Mangini directly through Schwartz to the wolves. That would take a brass set that Mangini doesn't have. Instead he did it by implication, repeatedly calling attention to the supposedly high number of injuries Lions players seemed to be suffering at just the right time during Sunday's game and letting the listener draw the conclusion. It was Mangini's way of saying to everyone listening "you're clever. You can connect the dots." Indeed, just not in the way Mangini would like.

That's part of the trouble with Mangini. He's a professional sociopath. He has nothing but contempt for almost anyone around him, he's secretive, often paranoid, authoritarian to a fault, incapable of making lasting attachments to anyone and wholly unable to feel shame or guilt about anything he's done. In other words, he's textbook.

There's no question that Sunday's loss was difficult. The Browns for once were moving the ball effectively even though it was against a mirror-image team. They scored 37 points in one game, a figure that might be difficult to match over the season's remaining games combined. They had a penalty called against them that is rarely called even if it was the right call. And then the defense couldn't make one play when it really needed to.

Yes, it was a difficult loss and particularly difficult on Mangini who probably is hanging on by the slimmest of threads at the moment. But to essentially point a finger at Schwartz for engaging in gamesmanship is a sly but cowardly way of shifting the blame for the loss from the place from which it came in the first place, the handiwork of Mangini and his staff.

There was much talk last week about Bill Belichick's decision to go for a first down on a crucial 4th down play from his team's 28-yard line in the waning moments of a key game against Indianapolis. Lost in all the overreaction to that decision was

Useless Excuses

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Monday, November 23 2009 7:00 PM -

the simple fact that the odds favored Belichick on at least two fronts: the ability to convert and the ability to stop Indianapolis if the conversion failed. If the odds favored Belichick's defense being able to keep Peyton Manning out of the end zone from the 28 yard line when only a touchdown would do, imagine the odds favoring the Browns' ability to keep the Lions out of the end zone when they were starting from their own 12 yard line with less than two minutes and no time outs.

When you put the game in that context, you begin to understand how ridiculous it is for Mangini to even mention the Lions' suspiciously timely injuries, let alone imply that they kept his team from building momentum. The Browns and momentum don't belong in the same sentence unless that sentence also contains the words "lack of" between the two.

It's trite but true. Winners win and losers make excuses. Ah yes, the process, let's not forget the process. This is all part of it.

But beyond just the incredible defensive meltdown on that last drive was another key to the loss: two sure touchdown passes being dropped. The first was by rookie running back Chris Jennings just before the half. The second came later when Mohamed Massaquoi couldn't find the handle on a deep pass near the Lion's end zone. That lack of execution slowed down the offense far more than anything Schwartz was doing.

The other thing to keep in mind is that the so-called fake injuries are as old as the game itself. If Mangini hasn't been able to instill in his players the ability to overcome such silly moves then there are far bigger problems on the team, like a coach who highlights this fact by

Useless Excuses

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Monday, November 23 2009 7:00 PM -

making the complaint in the first place.

There are a lot of ways to look at the loss to the Lions on Sunday but it hadn't once occurred to me that undeserved was one of them. To me, it was well deserved, just another step in the wrong direction, not the giant steps that the team had been taking, but a step nonetheless.

The Browns' defense turned Lions quarterback Matt Stafford into two parts Tom Brady and one part Willis Reed. As has been its m.o. for far too many games, the defense allowed teams to turn dump off passes into long runs by being out of position and missing tackles and ultimately allowed itself to get into a position where it couldn't protect a 21-point lead against the previously worst team in the league.

But in fairness, at least the Browns proved that they can be competitive with the dregs of the league, though I don't remember reading that as one of owner Randy Lerner's main goals when he hired Mangini. Maybe we all just misunderstood the point of the season. Attitude properly readjusted, this all bodes well as there may still be a few fair fights left on the schedule in the form of games against Kansas City, Oakland and Tampa Bay.

The arc of Mangini's tenure in Cleveland has been as interesting as it has been jagged. His goals change to fit the ever changing narrative of the season, each set back and flare up spun as an orchestrated part of a mythical process.

Useless Excuses

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Monday, November 23 2009 7:00 PM -

But the goals of the fans haven't changed. They want a winning team. They don't want to hear about injuries or steps backward to move forward or processes or three quarters of the crap that Mangini shovels at them on a daily basis. In short, they don't want excuses they want results.

Maybe the fans were always unrealistic about their own team and for that they should be forgiven. They're fans, after all, not analysts. But given no visible signs of progress but plenty of signs to the contrary all a boatload of useless excuses does is widen the gulf between them and the team. And given the paucity of fans watching in Detroit these days, it's pretty chilling to see what that gulf actually looks like.