

Still No Czar

Written by {ga=davekolonich}
Wednesday, December 16 2009 7:00 PM -

As of this late morning, the Browns are still officially "czar-less". After an overnight affair in which our continental owner wined and dined his latest offseason love affair, Mike Holmgren, the former Seahawk boss left Berea with little more than fanciful visions of an alleged eight million dollar a year contract and perhaps some good intentions. Not to mention some serious leverage heading into the coming days and weeks of NFL front office free agency. In Dave's latest, he talks Holmgren, and also hits on some news surrounding a couple of former Browns.

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As reported in various media outlets, the dinner portion of the evening took place in a very public setting, which could suggest some sinister motives on both Lerner and Holmgren's part.

For Holmgren - accompanied by his agent - the public talks could signal to the rest of the league - particularly Seattle - that he is ready to once again cash some serious NFL checks. And as for Lerner - well, I can only say that our easily smitten owner has perhaps already made a decision regarding his inherited franchise's future - one that occurred probably shortly after Holmgren shook his hand.

As it stands now, Holmgren has to be weighing his other options, which may only be limited to Seattle. Perhaps Holmgren's rationale in declaring a holiday deadline to make a decision was more an attempt to see what other interest there is for him around the league.

Or, in other words - Lerner has just done a masterful job of marketing Holmgren.

However, the next week or so should give us all a better idea of the actual market for Holmgren...and the direction that our beloved franchise may be taking.

As for how all this relates to our current Boss of Berea, Eric Mangini either knows something the rest of us don't, or is simply playing along for the moment.

[Cleveland Browns Leaving Eric Mangini to Talk About Mike Holmgren](#)

"I think it was one of those meetings where everybody gets to know each other and whatever decision's made is made," Mangini said.

Part of Holmgren's visit included a private meeting with Mangini. Mangini would not be specific about what they talked about.

"We talked about a lot of things, the team, different aspects of the season, things like that. I'm not going to go into the play by play of it," Mangini said Mangini insisted the visit was not unsettling to him.

"No, not at all," Mangini said. "I think what I focus on and what I ask the players to focus on is the task at hand, the opponent at hand. And I'm really happy with the progress and the way the guys have worked..."

...Mangini said, "I'm all for anyone that can come in and help this organization be more successful. The more smart, talented people you can put in the building -- that has the same approach in terms of being focused on winning -- that's the best thing that can happen. You can't ask for a better situation than a group of people all focused on the same task."

Regardless of Mangini's belief that the team has made progress - which is mostly valid, at least based on the past month of the season - I think the question that has to be asked regarding a Holmgren/Mangini pairing involves philosophy, rather than recent production.

While Mangini has made some on-field progress, and has certainly improved the overall locker room culture of the team, the bigger issue comes down to the overall team identity.

Or, does a Holmgren regime naturally change the one currently beginning to emerge under Mangini?

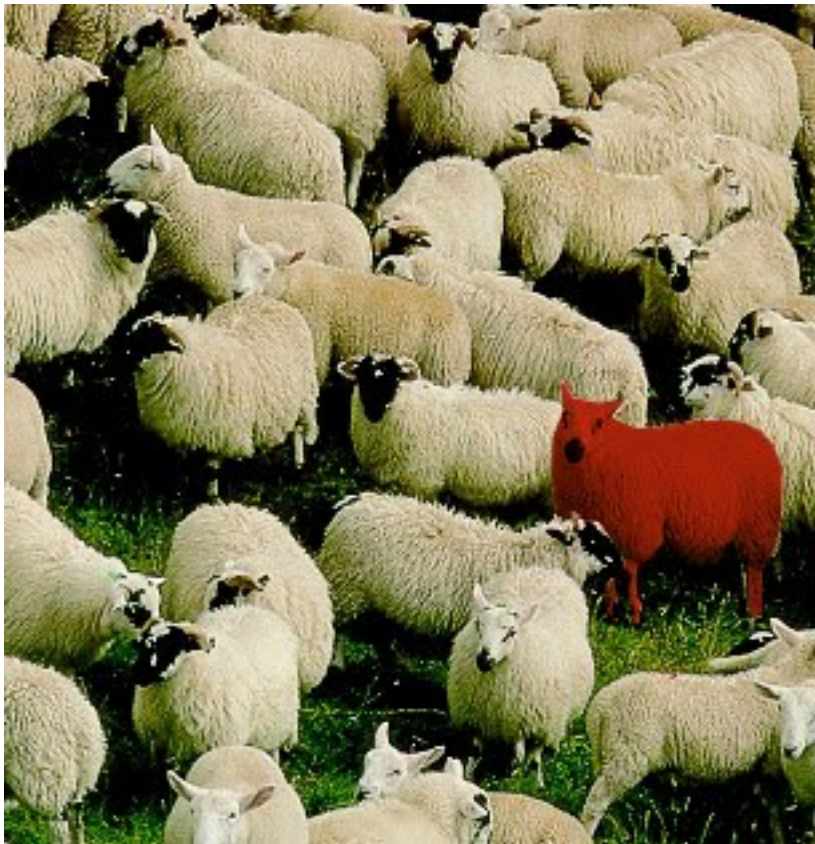
If so, the Browns could feature yet another disconnect between coaching and management. Consider that Mangini's style of football and Holmgren's roster blueprint - at least evidenced by his Seattle days - would seemingly clash. Holmgren's Seattle teams featured more speed and finesse type players, while Mangini's roster - at least ideally - favors stronger, more traditional types.

And if such a change occurs, it will be rather obvious who the victor in this battle

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will be.



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Under such an arrangement, Mangini's role will likely be limited to just game-day decisions. On the surface, this separation of powers is ideal; however, it's possible that Mangini will be saddled with a roster of players that don't fit his preferred style of play.

Unless some accord has been struck by Lerner and Holmgren regarding Mangini's future role with the team, this potential pairing seems to be an odd fit.

However, in Mangini's case, he is certainly the person in this equation who has the least amount of leverage. Although Mangini has had volumes of negative criticism thrown at him in recent years - much of which has been unfair and beyond excessive - it would prove incredibly difficult for him to land another NFL head coaching job.

Certainly, Mangini knows this. As does Holmgren.

Which makes the entire situation that much more confusing. Even our heartstruck owner has to realize that a football "czar" will want to shape the Browns in his own vision. Total franchise control in the NFL is the wettest of dreams for a power hungry executive, which only serves to make Mangini a mere accessory in the process.

And while I've grown to support Mangini's attempt to turn around our franchise, I have to wonder if it's worth it for Lerner to keep him around in this potential new arrangement.

Basically, any decision made to keep Mangini would have to be considered a concession, or even almost a favor to Lerner - who has finally realized that stability is key to developing a consistent and successful franchise.

Of course, Lerner is still trying to figure out this whole "timing" concept.

And while there may be financial incentives to retain Mangini, you have to wonder if Holmgren and Lerner are evaluating Mangini compared to other potential coaches, or solely on the basis that he is the guy currently in charge.

If Mangini is compared to a wider net of potential coaches, then a decision to retain him would essentially state that he is the best candidate for the job. Otherwise, the full impact of bringing in a franchise leader may not be realized.

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And really, if Lerner is ready to commit to such a monumental move, he should at least allow his new "czar" to make the necessary changes he feels are needed for this franchise to return to relevance.

If not, bringing in Holmgren will prove to be quite pointless.



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And speaking of which, a familiar face from the past emerges - yet again.

[Bengals Bring Back Shaun Smith](#)

Of all the Browns players that sweated through the initial Camp Mangini, would you have ever expected Shaun Smith - of all people - to be the only one on a playoff roster come December?

And in the increasingly bizarre annals of the 2009 season, such a thing is likely to occur.

Now, I'm waiting for a Super Bowl that features Richard Bartel throwing a championship-winning deep slant to Paul Hubbard.

Or, how about this guy lighting up the scoreboard on Sunday?

[Frye to Start at QB for Raiders](#)

Somewhere in Alabama, Phil Savage's eyes twinkle just a little more.

First, Bruce Gradkowski plays unlike Bruce Gradkowski, and now this.

I'm beginning to worry. Maybe the Mayans were just off by a couple years. Perhaps the end is sooner than we think. First, Randy Lerner is on the doorstep of finally giving his franchise some much-needed structure, last week our Browns beat the Steelers and on Sunday, Charlie Frye starts for an NFL franchise...albeit, the Raiders.

If anyone sees Ken Dorsey complete a twenty-yard pass or William Green not get stabbed - I just want to say that it's been nice sharing the Earth with all of you.