

The Morning After: Browns/Chiefs Edition

Written by {ga=davekolonich}
Sunday, December 20 2009 7:00 PM -

And so it goes being a Browns fan. As Jerome Harrison and Josh Cribbs set records yesterday and the Browns won their second straight game - in a most entertaining fashion against an inferior opponent - the joy that Dave Kolonich should have experienced was replaced by a dark image of the future - one that is predicated on the past: Mike Holmgren just may become the team's President, GM and Head Coach. Dave talks about the exciting win in KC yesterday, and also looks ahead to a Holmgren future here in Cleveland in his latest column for us. And so it goes being a Browns fan. As Jerome Harrison and Josh Cribbs set records yesterday and the Browns won their second straight game - in a most entertaining fashion against an inferior opponent - the joy that I should have experienced was replaced by a dark image of the future - one that is predicated on the past:

Mike Holmgren just may become the team's President, GM and Head Coach.

And in the most respectful manner possible - considering I usually don't show such sentiments to our wayward owner - Mr. Lerner, this wasn't part of the deal.

Once again, any measure of progress is going to be derailed by Lerner's fanciful football ownership whims, and in a few short years the Browns as a franchise are going to find themselves in the exact situation that they are in right now.

Meaning - are we simply going to swap Mangini for Holmgren and call it a day?

Really? Is that what this whole soap opera has been about? And in the history of the NFL, has any one person successfully filled all prominent franchise roles at once? Maybe Butch Davis? Mangini? How about Holmgren?

Anyway - more on that depressing thought later. As for now, let's just enjoy yesterday's game for what it was - which was a highly entertaining and somewhat historic win.

Having said that, let's go to the scorecard.

1. Can Brady Quinn do anything more than simply not turn the ball over? While Quinn's "game management" - which of course is a euphemism for "not terribly screwing things up" - has improved as of late, his playmaking abilities remain more of a prospect at this point in his career. Or, in other words - can he make some downfield plays this afternoon?

Want to know how I know you're below average? Because your name is Brady Quinn.

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While I've grown to appreciate Quinn for his - well, rushing skills - I have not fallen for any illusion that states that our third-year starter is improving. Why? Because he is not.

Once again, there is nothing that Quinn does well, beyond handing off the football. He is perhaps the least accurate passer in the league and it is beyond obvious that the Browns coaching staff has been handcuffed all season because of Quinn's presence in the lineup.



2. Will we continue to see a progression of a suddenly sound running game? The trio of Jerome Harrison, Chris Jennings and Josh Cribbs offered the Browns their most dynamic attack of the season last week against the Steelers. Facing a somewhat weak KC defense, will we see a continuation of this?

And on a more positive note - did anyone see that coming?

Talk about dramatic - Harrison nearly outrushes himself, or at least his totals from the past two seasons - in just one afternoon. And really - did you expect anything else out of the greatest tease in Browns running back history?

But seriously, Harrison blended some great cutback running, power and breakaway speed to completely dominate the Chiefs' defense. And perhaps in the most hopeful vision of the Browns future, Harrison took advantage of both some excellent interior blocking and some terrific outside pushes to gain some key first downs, as well as break off some huge plays.

3. Can Joe Thomas neutralize the Chiefs' only pass rushing threat in Tamba Hali?

And speaking of the Browns O-line, yesterday had to mark the unit's high point. Thomas and Eric Steinbach were dominant in the run game, and finally we're seeing the value of Alex Mack - especially in terms of second-level, downfield run blocking. Also, credit has to be given to Floyd Womack, who replaced the very replaceable John St. Clair.

Finally, how about Lawrence Vickers? In a mostly forgettable offense, the fullback position goes more unnoticed than usual. And after a couple years of being utterly replaceable in Rob Chudzinski's tight end heavy scheme, Vickers is finally being allowed to do what he does best this year - which is play like a traditional, run-blocking fullback.

But of course, our next "coach" will likely utilize Vickers as nothing more than a pass catcher.

Again - Mr. Lerner, this wasn't part of the deal.

4. Will the maturation of the Browns' rookie receivers continue against the Chiefs' brittle and raw secondary? Or, will these matchups serve as a validation of Mangini's drafting prowess, at least compared to the skill of Pioli's?

Again, how about Jerome Harrison?

Although, it was worth considering that the Browns may be a step ahead of the Chiefs at this point in each team's rebuilding efforts. The Chiefs' D-line, featuring two first round draft picks, was mostly unremarkable - while Alex Mack was dominant at times. But, as for the receivers - Chanci Stuckey continues to progress.

And again, how about Jerome Harrison? Who saw that coming?

5. In the most intriguing and entertaining sense possible, will we see more of a two-lineman and "stand-up" pass rusher approach this afternoon? Or, did Rob Ryan's defense "peak" last week against the Steelers?

In many ways, yesterday's game resembled the Lions loss from a few weeks ago. For most of the afternoon, the Browns secondary lost the battle against - well, Chris Chambers. Chambers' combination of size and speed proved to be a bit too much for Eric Wright to handle. However, the Browns defense took advantage of their offense holding the ball for some 35 minutes, and most importantly, they didn't have to win the game on their own.

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6. Will the Browns' glacier-like athleticism at linebacker hurt the team against KC's wide receiver-screen happy passing attack? Or, can anyone chase down Jamal Charles in the open field?

I can't imagine anyone was surprised when Jamal Charles took off for a huge touchdown run. After clearing the Browns line and dodging a flailing Abe Elam, there was no one in the stadium - let alone on the Browns roster - who could have caught Charles.

7. Was last week's solid man coverage a one-game blip, or will the likes of Eric Wright, Brandon McDonald and Hank Poteat again enable Ryan to confidently dial up some much-needed blitzes?

Compared to last week, the Browns did not achieve similar pass rushing results. However, you may have to credit the Chiefs' quick passing offense for this. Often, Matt Cassell had already unloaded the ball before the Browns pass rushers could reach him. Luckily for us, most of Cassell's throws were sprayed all over the stadium.

8. Will the return of Dwayne Bowe revitalize the Chiefs' inconsistent passing game? Or, how many times will he plant Brandon McDonald in the turf this afternoon?

I guess this question didn't have much relevance yesterday. Bowe wasn't much of a factor - as Chambers and Charles served as KC's only true threats. As for McDonald, let's just say that covering a broken Hines Ward may be the best assignment he drew all season.

9. Much like in the Browns two victories this season, will special teams play again decide the game's outcome?

I'll say it again - if Mangini wants the support of Browns Nation, he needs to pay Josh Cribbs some Devin Hester money - and before Holmgren arrives in town.

And here's the funny thing about what Cribbs did yesterday. Because his returns have become so routine, it's like many of us are not even surprised anymore. Granted, I'm thrilled by Cribbs' play and I completely appreciate his efforts, but it almost seems like his setting an NFL record is almost pedestrian.

Because he's Josh Cribbs. Of course, he just set an NFL record.

10. Is this the game where Todd Haley goes all Todd Haley and murders a player?

I know most of Browns Nation is greatly concerned regarding our next head coach, but I also sincerely hope that Haley sticks around KC for the next few years. Solely for the fact that one day - he will literally kill somebody.

11. How does Mangini's team respond, both after a huge victory and considering the front-office intrigue that is currently unfolding?

Beyond the overall win and incredible individual efforts that we saw yesterday, I think Mangini's worth as a coach was found in the early part of the third quarter. Coming out of halftime, the Browns stopped the Chiefs on their first possession, then went down and got a score themselves. In most respects, this set the tone for the rest of the game.

And once again, it is worth noting that Mangini has his team playing some quality December football. Again, this is no small feat in Cleveland.

12. If the "over" on combined references to Holmgren's arrival and Mangini "forcing" his team to practice in pads for over three hours is 48 1/2, do I bet the house?

Or, here's the question - were the Browns the more physical team yesterday? Did they have a better gameplan? Is Holmgren really going to coach next year, in addition to becoming team president and GM? Really?

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The Pick - Part Three

So, here's the part where I realize that I may be getting what I have wished for all season long.

Despite such an entertaining and important win yesterday, my thoughts have been consumed with the idea that Holmgren is going to assume all prominent roles in the organization. And before even suggesting that Mangini has proven his worth as a coach over the past string of games, I have to again state that Randy Lerner does not have a clue.

For weeks now, all we've heard coming out of Berea - and from Lerner's own mouth - is that the Browns need a "czar" to run the franchise. And for years, I have completely agreed with this. This franchise desperately has needed some functional sense of direction and organization within the front office. Or, in other words, the Browns need to be run like a successful franchise.

And during the early parts of Holmgren's courting, it appeared that the franchise was on the verge of accomplishing such a feat. However, yesterday's reports are nothing but terrifying.

From what I understand, Holmgren was sold on the Browns because Lerner offered the ex-Seahawk boss the opportunity to wear all the hats of the franchise. And knowing power-hungry NFL bosses like we all do, Holmgren will no doubt jump on the opportunity. So, what we will be left with is a 2010 team that becomes the sole on and off field property of Holmgren.

And now the question is this: do you really feel comforted by the idea of a 61-year old serving as the team president, GM and head coach? Wasn't the whole idea of bringing in a czar to avoid such a scenario? And isn't this the situation we're currently in with Mangini?

Ever feel like you've been duped?

Ever feel like the Browns will never win under Randy Lerner?