



### **How You Like Them Now?**

I got a lot of cat-calls and derisive emails two weeks ago when I lauded the job Eric Mangini has done with this Browns team.

Yes, I read the words 'shill', 'organizational patsy' (which speaks highly of the educational level of my readers) and 'douche-bag' (which also speaks to the educational level of my readers, just not as highly). I get 'douche--bag' all the time people. I'm immune to your derisive terms. Hell, I coined half of them.

But tell me: are y'all still doubting the kid writing this column?

Let me just say that if you can't see what's going on with this Browns team you might need to turn in your fan cards and start following something less complicated like the NBA. You know: where you only have to pay attention to the three or four teams capable of winning a title.

Here's the bottom line with where your Cleveland Browns currently stand in the NFL (and this is very important because it hasn't been the case for 6 years): the Cleveland Browns are relevant again. And not only are they relevant, but they are for real.

You could potentially write off a close game on the road against the Steelers as a case of the Steelers looking past the Browns and welcoming back their own quasi-criminal QB Ben Roethlisberger ('Throwing Picks & Banging Chicks' might be the greatest t-shirt slogan ever)

while the Browns started a raw rookie in Heinz Field.

But Colt McCoy acquitted himself pretty well that day.

You could maybe write off an easy win against the Saints in their 80,000 seat hurricane shelter/mass urinal as an anomaly. The Browns used some tricks and some exotic defensive looks to kick the Saints' asses but some might have looked at that game as an aberration. Okay. You're entitled to your opinion despite the fact that writing that game off to luck would be ignorance personified because the Browns physically dominated the Saints two Sundays ago.

But let's get past that given I'm so willing to excuse the ignorance of the doubters.

Let's get to the fact that Sunday the Browns came out and simply handed this year's best team in the NFL their collective asses. Nowhere near the trickieration, nowhere near the gimmickery of a couple weeks ago was necessary. Peyton Hillis simply ran the football up the rectum of Bill Belichick and his defense and Colt McCoy made every big throw or play when he had to to lead the Browns to a 34-14 win over the previously 6-1 New England Patriots.

Write off the Steelers game if you must. Write off the Saints game if you want to. But to write off the New England game is pure stupidity.

Eric Mangini has this team primed and ready to play every damn week.

Recognize.

That's not to say Colt McCoy is the second coming of Drew Brees or that the Browns have not once again set us up for the big fall next Sunday against the Jets. But damn if this team doesn't make you proud to support it.

They have nowhere near the talent that the teams they face put on the field. But show me a game where they've been out-prepared or out-hustled.

Look, you don't have to jump on the bandwagon. But I agree with what Rich Swerbinsky, the proprietor of The Cleveland Fan, said in a message board thread after the game:

***McCoy just looks so damn comfortable out there. Confident. Unlike DA and almost every other QB we've had here on the north coast these last 12 years, when he is under duress, he stays cool and makes good decisions.***

***I'm trying not to get too excited. But this isn't DA in '07 lighting up three of the worst defenses in football in his 3rd year in the league. This is a damn rookie, thrust into the mix before the halfway point of the season, going into Pittsburgh and New Orleans, and***

***coming back home and laying a bare-ass spanking on Bill Belichick and the 6-1 New England Patriots.***

***The kid is going to have his rough times and spots before this season is over. But he has got that "It" factor. And he makes the throws. Pinpoint accuracy. And with some zing on it. And his mom is hot.***

***I'm excited.***

Yeah. That's pretty much it exactly. AND *his mom is hot*. What more do you people want?

This team hasn't been out-hustled, out-schemed or out-coached yet this season but I'm not going to the 'If Only' package of excuses. The Browns are 3-5 and they've earned that record honestly. However, this team has earned your respect and your interest.

And next Sunday they play a meaningful football game at home. Here's hoping they've earned your support.

### **It Ain't All Bad**

Back in July (already some four months ago) when [The Whore of Akron](#) left for sandier pastures in Miami, it was generally viewed as a death blow to the Cleveland Cavaliers organization. Despite the stunning (if not misplaced) ferocity of owner [Dan Gilbert's response](#)

, the Cavaliers had just lost arguably the best player on the planet and had no one acclaimed as a 'Go To Guy' in NBA circles to replace him. There was talk of the draft lottery and some whispers as to whether the franchise itself could survive 'Life after LeBron'. Clearly, newly hired head coach Byron Scott had walked into a complete and utter shit-storm after Gilbert handed him the reins.

To his credit Scott never blinked. He gave the usual platitudes to the rest of the roster and declared that there was still enough talent left in Cleveland to win basketball games. Many of us laughed and wrote that off to coaches being coaches and to Scott likely having a full understanding of who signed his paychecks.

Scott even took what could now be considered as a veiled shot at TWoA when he said time and time again that Cleveland would have a team they could be proud of and one that would espouse an all for one, one for all attitude and that would never quit on each other or the fans.

So flash forward those four months after six games of Cleveland Cavaliers basketball without TWoA on the floor in wine and gold and what do you see?

Well, you see a team that is fighting its ass off for each other, scrapping for every possession and that has won half its ball games thus far. You also see a team of guys casual fans will not recognize nor leave their houses to come watch play in arenas in Charlotte, New Orleans or Oklahoma City. In short, you see thus far exactly what Gilbert and Scott said you'd see.

The question is: Is that enough for you?

It's extremely difficult to adjust expectations from Eastern Conference Finals games and 60+ win seasons to "trying really hard". At least it is for me. If I had my choice I'd take talented a-holes like TWoA all day long. You win titles with talented basketball players whether they are loveable goofballs like Shaq or villainous pillagers like Kobe Bryant. That's simply the way of the NBA. The Detroit Pistons may have done it without a true superstar a few years back but they are clearly an exception to the rule and they certainly couldn't sustain that success year in and year out.

And while it turns my stomach, I'd have to put the Heat at the top of the list to win any of the next six NBA titles. That doesn't mean they will, but it means they have the best shot year in and year out and I'd take those odds as a fan.

Before the season started I was in favor of the Cavs giving the huge majority of minutes to guys like Christian Eyenga, Ramon Sessions and Samardo Samuels. And if the minutes for those guys came after dealing away Mo Williams, Antawn Jamison and Anderson Varejao for as many picks as you could get for them, so much the better. Jamison is (literally it appears) on his last leg as a viable NBA player while Mo has some value to a contender and Varejao might be the most valuable complementary player in the game.

I had no issue running raw kids and a combination of underdeveloped potential players like Daniel Gibson, JJ Hickson out on the floor with some underwhelming role veterans like Anthony Parker and Jamarion Moon. To me that was the perfect scenario: develop young kids and lose a lot of games while accruing even more draft picks and ping pong balls for the rebuild.

The problem is I can't root for losses on a nightly basis and this team's attitude and style of play, at least right now, appeals to my sense of pride.

Unlike TWoA, they don't quit when the crap hits the fan. They play hard and they play together. Yes, it's cliché and ultimately it's going to mean missing the playoffs or being someone's early playoff round fodder, but it's uplifting to see guys going about their business that way.

So there's that. For now.

It probably won't mean nearly as much in June.

### **Andy Marte We Hardly Knew Ye (If Only that Were True Dammit)**

Andy Marte is like a crummy pet cat: no matter how many times the Indians drop him somewhere and no matter how far they're willing to drive to leave him at some farm where he can play with other misplaced athletes he always seems to find his way back to Carnegie & Ontario.

The Tribe cast Marte aside once again last week. Once again, stunningly enough, every other organization in baseball said, "Umm... no thank you" and passed on an opportunity to grab

Marte for nothing. So there's a chance, however miniscule, that Marte could end up back in Columbus where he probably has now spent enough time to build up equity in his condo and run for mayor.

Please, please don't bring this cat back to the organization. His greatest moment was on the mound last season when he pitched an inning. And that was akin to the four year manager of the varsity basketball team getting a chance to shoot a free throw in an actual game. His best moment as an Indian was a joke where fans and teammates both punched each other in the shoulder and sympathetically said, "Hey, good for him. He's a good guy who tries hard."

No one needs to be reminded of potential lost any more with Marte. Cut him loose and throw some dirt on the stinking corpse of his Indians career.

Besides, it'll make it that much more enjoyable when he surfaces with some shitty team next summer and hits a handle-shot, bloop single to drive in a game winning run. Then we can all hear about how he never got a fair shot in Cleveland and his name can be elevated to the level that people currently speak about future Hall of Famers like Jeremy Guthrie and Franklin Gutierrez.

I don't wish Andy Marte any ill will. I hope someone else does sign him and he adds on to the money he's already stolen...errr...earned from a couple organizations. I wish him another few hundred thousand dollars so that he can go back top the Dominican Republic and open up 'Andy Marte's Shitty Tourist Trap Treasures' or something like that.

But I beg to all that is holy: don't let it be here where he 'earns' that next check.