



Week 16 – Cleveland vs Baltimore

Ah, the dog days of the NFL season for the losing franchise. We know them well.

Draft talk starts anew. Talk of the Coach's future becomes primary. Talk of the QB's future becomes secondary. A few hearty souls take sides on these topics (like any of it will matter) and argue vociferously about the glorious destiny the team will reach if ONLY the higher-ups would listen to THEM.

It's gotten beyond old. It gets damn hard to give a damn.

Just ask the 20,000 empty seats in Cleveland Browns Stadium on Sunday. This team is methodically killing off its casual fan base.

But don't worry, Randy, the stadium will be filled up again this Sunday, and the dollars will flow.

Sure, those 20,000 seats will be filled with Steelers fans, but hey, even their crumpled moonshine-stained dollars spend, right?

I feel about Eric Mangini the way I feel about, say, Matt Roth. Decent at what he does. Is better in certain games than others, somewhat inconsistent, but effective and probably not a detriment to the team.

But not elite.

Not irreplaceable by any stretch.

Yeah, this team is improved over last season. But it's also a better team talent-wise. Joe Haden, TJ Ward, Peyton Hillis, Scott Fujita, Ben Watson - not to mention the 3 QB's, all of whom are better than either Brady Quinn or Derek Anderson... many of the Browns' most consistent performers are new.

So, if you have a better team, then maybe being "

watchable

" and "

playing teams tighter

" on the way to an identical 5-11 record isn't as impressive a feat as some make it out to be.

Right now, I trust Mike Holmgren and Tom Heckert much more than Eric Mangini. Their track record of success is off the charts better than Mangini's, and their last offseason was probably the most productive in Browns 2.0's history.

If it came down to siding with one or the other, the choice is beyond easy.

So if Heckgren feels that Mangini has to go, then Mangini has to go. Sure, I wouldn't mind seeing a 2011 Mangini-led team with a new Offensive Coordinator and some more talent, but I'm not going to throw any hissy over losing Coach Matt Roth either.

And Mangini's philosophy (especially Offensively) is so counter to Holmgren's (and probably Heckert's) that I don't see how this marriage of convenience survives. I watch the games, and I imagine Holmgren sitting up in his perch tearing out huge chunks of mustache in frustration.

I have to assume that Mangini's a DMW (Deceased Male Wandering).

Unless you're one of those "*If the Browns [insert thing you don't want], then I am no longer a Fan!*" people, you might as well accept it and move forward.

The rest of you... well, there's still a few pieces of Steelers gear down at the Giant Eagle that I haven't stepped on.

Game Recap

Does anyone really want to re-live that game? Outside of Ravens fans, that is?

Final: Ravens 20, Browns 10.

Conclusion

Time of Possession: Baltimore – 31:46, Cleveland – 28:14

Total Yards: Cleveland - 280, Baltimore – 258

First Downs: Cleveland – 17, Baltimore - 15

You could've knocked me down with a helium balloon when I saw these, mainly because it didn't feel at all this close.

The key stat not pictured: Turnovers. Ravens took 4 (3 picks and a fumble recovery off of a Mo Mass blunder), while the Browns only took 1.

That was enough for them to go into a semi-protective shell and allow the game to look statistically closer than it was.

Gameballs

Joe Haden – 5 tackles, a sack, a forced fumble, and a pick. Not a bad day. His 6 INT's now leads all Rookies and is 2nd in the entire NFL behind only Asante Samuel (7).

And this is with him not starting

Brian Robiskie - What in the name of Bejeezus is going on here? Another TD (a great catch), another big play (42 yards) wiped out by a bogus Offensive PI call, and another TD missed because Colt didn't see him until he'd already started throwing the ball away and couldn't keep it in. I'm still not foolish enough to pretend that Robo is going to mature into a consistent game-changer, but even "functional" is more than I thought I'd ever see out of this guy.

Honorable Mention

Defense & Rob Ryan – A surprisingly solid effort after getting just plowed over by the juggernaut Bengals & Bills.

Chris Gocong – More and more I notice this guy making plays.

Wall of Shame

Colt McCoy - Yep, that was a bad performance. One might call it "worrying", what with throwing high floaters up there for easy interceptions.

And some inaccuracy, some flustered-ness to boot.

But I notice Colt limping still and I add a grain of salt to this mix.

I went and re-watched the New England game on Monday, and there was a huge difference in McCoy's velocity of delivery and even spiral between his pre-injured performance and the injured performance.

Let's hope the ankle is the problem - not the wind.

Eric Mangini - OK, I get what you were trying to do - again - at the end of the Half. You wanted to run the clock down enough so that the Ravens would have very little time to do anything after you scored.

Problem is, by getting so cute with the clock, you made the cardinal mistake of leaving too little time to even attempt a TD pass on 3rd Down at the 13.

Unforgivable error for an NFL Coach to make.

John St. Clair - Looking forward to him not starting any more.

Sheldon Brown - Both those TD passes were on you, Chief.

Peyton Hillis - You lost me a Fantasy Championship, dude. So what if you carried me all season and you can't help it if you got hurt?

I'm a very shallow person, and your 5 measly points cost me a couple hundo.

I'm sure I'll love you again next week, but, for now, we're through!

This season is dead.

There was a point where it felt really, really good. The pinnacle probably came right before Chansi Stuckey fumbled against the Jets in OT.

Had they won that game, they would've been 4-5 on a 3 game win streak against 3 of the better teams in the league.

Who knows where they go from there?

Instead, they were 3-6 and subject to an emotional letdown, which was compounded by the horrific loss to Jacksonville the following week. 3-7. Season done. A performance erosion ensued. And they've

fallen to here:

10, unable to do little more than "keep it close" against even the worst teams.

5-

The season now feels like nothing more than a carbon copy of most of the last 11.

What if Chansi hadn't fumbled?

Mangini'd probably be feeling a lot more comfortable, that's for sure.

But you can't ask those question - it'll drive ya nuts. What if Northcutt didn't drop the pass? What if Rutigliano had sent Cockroft out there to kick one play earlier?

What if Byner hadn't fumbled?

Can't re-write history - we have what we have, and we have to live with it.

Unfortunately for Mangini, so will he.

Since the season is dead, might as well look ahead (again). Where do the Cleveland Browns have to improve? This here list be... here... for you to notate the schools these guys play for and watch their Bowl Games and formulate your own opinion.

1. **Wide Receiver** - AJ Green (Georgia), Julio Jones (Alabama), and Justin Blackmon (Oklahoma State) all would be welcome additions to the WR corps. Yes,

there is some unwritten rule that states that an elite WR has to be a dooshnozzle, but as long as he's a dooshnozzle that's really good (as opposed to a dooshnozzle that ain't worth the effort, like Braylon Edwards) then it's a sacrifice worth making, because this team desperately needs a big-time talent that can stretch the field.

2. Defensive End/Tackle - Robaire Smith is 152 years old, Shaun Rogers isn't long for this team, and Kenyon Coleman and Brian Schaefering aren't going to cut it.

This team desperately need a youth/talent infusion at this spot (at least one), and there are a couple guys worth looking at, including Nick Fairley (Auburn), Marcell Dareus (Alabama), Stephen Paea (Oregon State), or Cameron Jordan (Cal).

3. Pass Rusher - And that usually means an OLB in a 3-4 (assuming the Browns stay in that formation). It's always dangerous to draft these guys high because converting guys that were essentially DE's in college to LB has a big bust potential.

But that doesn't mean that there aren't guys that are worth the risk.

Take a look at Robert Quinn (North Carolina), Da'Quan Bowers (Clemson), and Ryan Kerrigan (Purdue).

4. Cornerback - I know you took Joe Haden in the 1st Round last year, but Corner is still one of the most vital positions on the team, and Sheldon Brown ain't getting younger. If a Patrick Peterson (LSU) or Prince Amukamara (Nebraska) fall to you, it might be worth it to make the investment.

Then you can keep Brown at CB (temporary starter or Nickel) or move him to Safety.

5. **Right Tackle** - Generally, these guys don't get picked high in the 1st (where the Browns will be stationed), but we need one badly and I personally wouldn't freak out because we solidified the RT position for the next 5-10 years with a "reach" (though I'd prefer a trade-down).

Some of these guys are probably better fits at LT, but they bear watching regardless - Anthony Castonzo (Boston College), Gabe Carimi (Wisconsin), Derek Sherrod (Mississippi State), Nate Solder (Colorado), and DeMarcus Love (Arkansas).

Honestly, you could name any position on the Browns' roster and it would be a potential "need", but these 5 are probably the most pressing. Some might argue Running Back, but between Peyton Hillis and what I'm going to assume is a fully recovered Montario Hardesty, I think they might be OK.

Some might say Safety, but TJ Ward, a revived Abe Elam, and potentially Sheldon Brown, this isn't as bad as other spots.

Some might even argue that QB is a weakness, but unless Andrew Luck or Cam Newton drop to the Browns (and they won't), it's not worth consideration there in the 1st Round.

So, fork yourself up a mound of pork and sauerkraut, maybe some cheesy potatoes, a Christmas Ale or two, perhaps toss in some prescription painkillers or anti-depressants (if that's your thing), and sit your ass down on the couch and enjoy watching these guys while collecting fodder for the endless draft discussions to follow.

Another important aspect of building a team is not losing important pieces along the way. The Browns haven't lost many of these over the recent history, likely because they've had so few to lose.

Here are the important 2011 Free Agents that the Browns will need to make decisions on. Much goes into these decisions, and they will be considerably clouded by the uncertain status of the CBA.

Will there be a salary cap?

What will it be?

Will these players be Restricted or Unrestricted under the new terms?

Regardless, here's the list:

Seneca Wallace (QB) - If Mangini stays, I can't imagine Wallace doing the same. But if Mangini gets the boot, Holmgren might be able to convince Seneca to re-up.

As much as people like to complain about Wallace, I think he's a very solid back-up QB.

And the fact that he's about the same size as and plays a very similar game to Colt McCoy means that the Browns wouldn't have to drastically alter their game plan if Colt went down.

Conclusion:

Not a must, but would be nice.

Mike Bell (RB) - A dime-a-dozen RB that's gotten very little chance to show what he can do. With Hardesty coming back and probably a later-round jitterbug-back in the draft, I'd be very surprised if the Browns don't let him just drift away.

Conclusion:

Not important.

Lawrence Vickers (FB) - One of the better blocking backs in the league, I'd hate to see the Browns lose this guy. *Conclusion:* As close to a must re-sign as they have.

Chansi Stuckey (WR) - Ya know, Chansi's made some plays for the Browns this year. It's not like he's completely useless.

But he's also not a vital cog, and easily replaceable.

Conclusion:

Stay, go, I'd be fine either way.

Floyd Womack (G) - The OL is thin these days, and Womack is - at the very least - a solid backup at Guard and Right Tackle. around.

helps retain him.

efinitely would be a good re-sign.

The Browns need to keep guys like this

Hopefully his past with Holmgren

Conclusion: D

Phil Dawson (K) - Phil seems to feel that Sunday is his [last game with the Browns](#) , but I've heard that song and dance too many times to get all weepy.

If the Browns want him back, he'll be back.

Seeing as he is a very solid kicker who knows how to perform in the elements, I hope they retain him.

But if they feel they can upgrade to someone with a bigger leg (Kickoff-wise), then I guess we'll see.

Conclusion:

Another good re-sign.

Matt Roth (LB) - Looked like a damn steal at the end of 2009, but has been somewhat of a

disappointment to me (and humanity) this year. He's one of those players that you like to have, but whose presence doesn't make or break a team.

Conclusion:

Keep, but only at the right price.

Chris Gocong (LB) - Gocong's been coming on as of late, but to me, he's a lot like Roth - you want him to stay, but you don't NEED him. Still, out of the 2 of them, you really should keep at least 1, and I guess this is the one I'd rather keep.

Conclusion:

Worth making a fair offer to.

D'Qwell Jackson (LB) - DQ has lost most of the last 2 seasons to various boob-muscle injuries.

There was a time when he looked like an up-and-coming star, but I think that trolley has passed.

I don't see him staying, and I now think of him like Sean Jones - a player that looked good at first, sort of flamed out at the end of his tenure here, then went elsewhere where he continued his career in non-descript fashion.

Conclusion:

Re-up only if he wants it and is willing to take a lower-end contract.

Abe Elam (S) - For his first season and a half here, I would've said you could find any schmoe on the street corner that could do his job just as good as him. But he's somehow

elevated his game here at the end of 2010, be it scheme or understanding of said scheme or what. He looks now like a useful player - maybe not a top end starter, but someone who makes your roster better.

Conclusion:

Don't break the bank, but keep if you can.

Eric Wright (CB) - His confidence got shot, but there was a time when EZ-E was a high quality CB in this league. There's no reason he can't be again. I'd love for the Browns to be the team to give him that shot, but with Wright likely looking for a fresh start and a starting job (and neither being available to him here), he's likely to walk.

Conclusion:

Keep if you can, but good luck with that.

Robaire Smith (DL) - Robaire is old now, and his body is just wearing down. He still has some value, and if he'll take the minimum, then he's worth one last 2 year contract, but otherwise... time to move on.

Conclusion:

What I just said.

Joe Thomas was voted to the Pro Bowl this week, officially making that "honor" a big crock-o-shit.

Don't get me wrong - I love Thomas. But this was by far his worst year, struggling with pass protection against several teams, almost wholly responsible for the rash of high ankle sprains at the QB position as they were tackled from their blindside.

wouldn't trade the guy for anything (I believe this season is an anomaly), but he didn't play at Pro Bowl level this year.

He just didn't.

Peyton Hillis, Eric Steinbach, and Alex Mack were named 2nd Alternates (thought Hillis deserved to be higher, but there are a lot of good RB's in the AFC). Ray Ventrone, Lawrence Vickers, and Josh Cribbs were 3rd Alternates (another crock - Cribbs was hurt and ineffective all season).
Joe Haden was a 4th Alternate (seems like he should be higher, but let's remember he didn't start until Eric Wright got hurt).

Somehow, John St. Clair was left off the list. The Senate has assembled a task force to make inquiries.

It's Steelers week. The anticipation and the hype is so poignant that we can barely comprehend it. Northeast Ohio hasn't been this excited since the WNBA Finals.

Never have I seen this game approached by the general public - both Brown fan and Steeler fan - with less interest.

Makes me sporkin' sick.

Happy New Year, Ladies and Gentlemen. No matter your 2010 fortunes, may 2011 be better.

Next Up

Pittsburgh Steelers (11-4).

You wouldn't think so, but this is a huge game. The Steelers have to win this one.

If they win, it'll be the AFC North crown, the number 2 seed, and a 1st Round bye.

Lose it, and they will likely be the #6 seed and have to go on the road to Kansas City or Indy next weekend. That's a big damn difference.

Now, as you probably know, the Browns have trouble beating the Steelers. Moon landings seem to happen with greater frequency than victories over the Unwashed, especially at home, which is what Cleveland Brown Stadium will be to the Pittsburgh players and fans on Sunday.

Eric Mangini, if you are indeed going out, go out with a Blaze of Glory that makes kamikaze pilots drool with jealousy. This might very well be the last NFL game that you are Head Coach of. Use this opportunity to take out all your anger, all your frustration, all your stress. Unleash Hell on the Inbred.

This is your Super Bowl. This is everything to you. If you want us - the general public, the front office, the media - to believe in you, then you make the players understand and carry the fight to the field.

All you have to do is win this one game - against all odds - and you can ride off into legend, no matter what your fate may be the day after that.

Great Disney movie... but this is real life, and real life don't work that way.

Steelers 23, Browns 20.

Thing I Like Aaron Goldhammer More Than

Braun's "Wear Your Face" Commercials

We have evolved as a society where there are as many male bimbos as women.

Oh, did I use the word "evolved"? My bad. I'm pretty sure that process peaked and is now on the downslide.

You've seen this commercial (unless you are part of the lucky few): A vacant-looking male model runs at the screen, with a voice over stating:

"
Fashion doesn't define who I am
."

And then... BAM! Dude's mug is right in the screen, staring at you without a trace of human intelligence/awareness/thought and up comes the Braun's message: *Wear Your Face.*

Uh... what?

Unless I'm Hannibal Lecter, the only face I ever wear is mine.

Let's look a little deeper (because "deep" is definitely what this commercial is): *Fashion doesn't define me - my face does.*

What I wear isn't as important as how I look.

That's comparing two things that are exactly the same, and both things are freakin' stupid.

My left nut doesn't define me - my right nut does.

Wear Your Nuts.

Besides, Braun, every man knows that it's the length of our johnsons that defines us. Duh.

