

Round Up the Usual Suspects

Written by {ga=mattvan1}

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Our beloved Browns have a new head coach. Pat Shurmur is the sixth man to wander the sidelines at CBS since Drew Carey told a Sunday night ESPN audience “You can stop making fun of Cleveland” in the fall of 1999. Unfortunately, Mr. Carey was a tad premature in his admonishment.

Much has changed since Dwight Clark proclaimed Chris Palmer was “the guy we wanted all along.” The Browns finally have, at least on paper, a solid organizational structure, with a clearly in charge Mike Holmgren, and an apparently more than capable GM in Tom Heckert. All that’s missing are the victories. Maybe that will change. Then again, hope is not a plan.

It’s difficult to throw stones at Mike Holmgren. The Walrus is one of only 5 coaches in NFL history to take two different teams to the Super Bowl. Shula, Parcells, Vermeil, and Reeves are pretty impressive company. Besides Holmgren only Parcells continued his career as a front office executive. The Walrus swims in relatively uncharted waters – trying to make the all the right moves to bring a championship to the shores of Lake Erie while struggling to shake his obvious desire to continue coaching.

The path taken to reach a decision on the new head coach appears, on the surface, to be straightforward. According to Holmgren’s press conference, the team compiled a “finalist group of 10, like you would. Then we took those 10 and did a little more digging and came to, what I thought, were the three.” Ah yes, the 3 - perhaps the Father, Son and Holy Ghost? Or maybe Some Random Guy, The Rooney Rule Guy, and The Guy I Wanted All Along?

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Should other capable, credible, leaders of men poised to pull the Browns from the abyss of perpetual suckitude have been included? Maybe they were. I want to believe. I really do.

My question is not about the final 3, or the eventual winner (if one may consider taking over a team with an aggregate winning percentage of .333% over the past 12 years “the winner”) but rather the criteria for the winnowing of the mystery 10 to the final 3. What characteristics were sought? In order to de-mystify “the process” (there’s that word again) I asked my team of lab rats to construct a “Holmgren Press Conference Tower of Babel Translation Program”. Finally there is a semi-reliable method to decipher “coach-speak” into words that we mere mortals can actually understand. I ran the transcript of the two most recent pressers into the app, and, in a scientific breakthrough rivaled only by the invention of The Whizzanator, we have the following:

On if he is limiting the search to coaches with NFL experience

Holmgren’s answer - “No Tom (Withers), we’ve compiled lists, columns if you will, of coaches that fit into certain categories and college coaches are certainly one of the categories.”

Translation – There is really only one category and that is an offensive minded coach who runs the WCO. We did consider college coaches, but the names of all the college coaches we considered are in the column “will not hire”.

On if he is going to branch out from the Holmgren Tree and look at candidates that don’t have the same philosophy

Holmgren’s answer - “Yes, we’re opening it up. It’s a pretty wide search in my opinion; we’re not limiting ourselves in any way.”

Translation – No, not really.

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On if the next coach will have to run more of a West Coast style system

Holmgren's answer - "No, I don't think I can do that. In what I tried to do with Eric (Mangini) this year and we talked about it this morning.

I said, 'I wish I could have helped you out more,' and we had one of those things where we were kind of talking to each other that way. If I hire a coach, I'm hiring a coach.

He's going to run what he runs, what he's comfortable with, what he knows.

Translation – You're kidding, right? I won't make him run it because I am only going to hire someone who runs it already.

I wish Mike Holmgren would have truly broadened his search as he originally indicated. As a personal preference, I would much rather have the best guy for the job based on his experience, leadership, vision, organizational skills and ability to communicate with his staff and players as opposed to someone who might be the right guy but runs a certain system. The caveat, of course, is that above description of "the right guy" sounds a bit like the vast majority of NFL head coaches who get fired every January. So Holmgren must believe either:

- a) The lineage and knowledge of the system is more important than the individual

- b) Pat Shurmur has all of the skills needed to be successful head coach in the NFL, and as an added bonus he coached under Andy Reid and believes in the WCO. In other words, football nirvana.

I can only bring myself to believe in "b". The thought of "a" is so demoralizing that dark thoughts start creeping into my consciousness. Years of cynicism will eat away at your brain and induce "front office paranoia" which leads to the certain knowledge that everything the suits do is

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wrong. Incompetence and ego cloud judgment which leads to stupefying decisions. Randy Lerner as owner tends to act as a catalyst for this affliction. Bone numbing pessimism is the result.

But just because Mike Holmgren's list of possible head coaches was written on the back of a postage stamp doesn't mean he didn't get the right guy. Holmgren made a relatively quick decision, which gives me a bit of confidence that Shurmur came across well in his one on one meeting. Is he our Neo? Too early to tell, obviously, but just because Mike decided to round up the usual suspects doesn't mean it won't work out. Right? I mean it has to, right? Because I could use a bit of football nirvana right about now. I want to believe. I really do.