

Holmgren, Heckert Keep Calm, But Some Fans Carry On

Written by {ga=tommoore}

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Cleveland Browns team president Mike Holmgren and general manager held their [season-ending press conference on Thursday](#) and delivered a message that Browns fans should be embracing.

“We know what we have to fix. But we’re not going to blow it up and start over,” Holmgren said.

But for some fans, that’s not good enough. They want to hold the current regime responsible for more than a decade of bad decisions and bad play – for everything from Brian Robiskie and David Veikune, to Butch Davis’ panic attack, Quincy Morgan’s butterfingers, Dwayne Rudd’s helmet toss and everything in between.

Some fans just won’t be happy unless they hear Holmgren say “you’re fired” to Pat Shurmur followed by Holmgren saying “I quit.”

Luckily, while Holmgren and Heckert understand the fan’s anxiety, they realize they can’t run the football team based on the whims of public opinion.

"The Cleveland Browns fans are going to be fans of the Browns forever and ever," Holmgren said. "They can be upset, as they should be and frustrated, but just know that so are we. The difference is we’re not going to look at our record this year and in some respects in my last press conference I talked a little about it. In regards to what you thought about my decision a year ago, I made it. Now, I’ve made another decision and here we are and it’s Pat’s first year.

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"The way I'm looking at that it is we had to have a huge turnover on the roster, new coaching staff, new system, all the stuff we went into the offseason so there were some difficulties there for a new group, but this is the first year. I think it's a little unfair to this group to say it's the same. The difference is we're now not going to say, 'Geez, we're 4-12 again, the same as in 1999, let's blow everything up, go sign somebody here without a team around him perhaps that can support him. Let's try and do it that way because we've got to do something different.' The difference is we're going to stay the course, we're going to do it a certain way.

"We put pressure on ourselves to do the right things to get things turned around and going in the right direction. I want our fans to know that. I think the next couple years are very important in determining how this is going to go. Like I said, I am a little upset with our record, but I am not discouraged. There is a lot of hope and a lot of good things and you start with some of our young players, that is where you start on this football team."

Along with hope, there is a lot of work to be done, and the pair gave fans a glimpse into their philosophy on the rebuilding process.

"Our record was poor, so the natural reaction is to just go crazy and spend millions of dollars," Holmgren said. "Now, if that was the right thing to do in our opinion, to build the foundation for the long term, we will do that. But that's not our philosophy on how to build this for the long term.

"So how are you going to build the team? Sometimes it's not the most popular thing to do. But I've got a lot of faith in (Heckert). He's good at what he does. We have a good coach and a good coaching staff and good young players. We have a way we think will work. It's not necessarily the quick fix. I know that can be a frustration at times. We are not opposed to doing anything, but generally speaking we are going to stay the course."

No quick fixes? That's not going to go over well with the anti-Holmgren crowd, but it's the only way to build a team that can be competitive on an annual basis.

And having nine picks in April's draft is a good start.

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“You never say never, but we like our picks right now,” Heckert said. “We have nine right now, and hopefully we’ll get some compensatory picks. We’d like to add nine good football players.”

The team will also be active in free agency if the right deal comes along, which is a good move. Too often, teams pay players for what they did for their former team, rather than what they will do for their new team.

“We don’t want to go out and sign 10 free agents,” Heckert said. “But if there’s a guy that we like, which hopefully there is, we’ll definitely go after him. Free agency is an area where you can get one or two players at positions that can help you. If there’s guys at certain positions, we’ll definitely go after them.”

Just as small children like shiny objects, some fans want any name player who is a free agent. With the Browns needing help at wide receiver, we wouldn’t be surprised to hear the drumbeat start for someone like DeSean Jackson, if the Eagles let him go in free agency.

While Jackson sounds like a sexy signing, if you look a little deeper you find that is probably not the case. This morning on Sirius NFL Radio, Sal Paolantonio brought up some interesting stats on Jackson:

- In his last 27 games, Jackson has only four 100-yard receiving games
- In his last 22 games, Jackson has only four touchdown catches
- This season, Jackson had only three red zone catches

That’s just one example, but those stats are exactly what the front office needs to be looking at when they make their decisions. Fans may not like it, but just because you’ve heard of someone doesn’t mean they are a good fit for the Browns (Andre Rison, anyone?)

Holmgren also reiterated his support for everyone’s favorite whipping boy, coach Pat Shurmur.

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“I know this about the man who’s coaching this football team: He is good, he is smart and he will do what he has to do in a very unselfish way to get the team going in the right direction,” Holmgren said. “And if that means hiring a coordinator or giving up the play calling, whatever that means – and I’m not telling you right now how that’s all gonna come down – but I’m just saying Pat is very willing to do whatever it takes. Now that in itself is a healthy, good sign to me.

“I have the utmost confidence in Pat to get this done. No one’s on the hot seat. ... We have a good coach, and we have a good coaching staff. You don’t get to where you want to get to by blowing it up every two or three years.”

That’s not going to go over well with the anti-Shurmur crowd, especially if, in the next few days, Jeff Fisher decides to take over as coach in St. Louis in Miami. Just like free agents, fans get excited about “name” coaches, but Fisher only had six winning seasons out of 17 while coaching the Oilers/Titans. Not to bag on him, as that is more winning than the Browns have done over the same time period, but is that really the definition of success we’re looking for here?

It took 12 years for the Browns to get themselves into the mess they currently find themselves in. It’s unrealistic to think the team undo all the mistakes in just two years.

While we weren’t thrilled with the results on the field this year, we are optimistic that the team has a clear plan and is committed to seeing it through.

Although it would be nice if the Browns started rewarding our faith sooner rather than later.

(Photo by The Plain Dealer)