

Can't Anyone Coach This Game?

Written by {ga=tommoore}

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Every week as the Cleveland Browns drudged their way through a 4-12 season, the anti-Pat Shurmur crowd was out in full force, bleating about the first-year coach's shortcomings:

"Shurmur doesn't know how much time is left on the clock."

"Shurmur doesn't know how many players should be in the huddle."

"Shurmur doesn't know which players are in the game."

"Why does Shurmur call a 5-yard pass on the third-and-7?"

And on and on – no matter what happened, it was somehow Shurmur's fault.

We certainly share the frustration of another lost season – did we mention the Browns were 4-12? – but we never totally understood the level of criticism.

We know fans are hyper-focused on the Browns, they are the local team and all, but doesn't anyone watch what's happening on the sidelines of the other teams in the NFL? If you were to hold every coach to the unrealistic expectation that some fans hold Shurmur to – no mistakes, ever – then you would quickly come to the conclusion that there isn't a person alive fit to be an NFL coach.

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Just look at Sunday's AFC and NFC Championship games.

With the game, and the season, on the line, New England's Bill Belichick left Julian Edelman alone to cover wide receiver Anquan Boldin one-on-one. Boldin came up with a big play, turning a short pass into a 29-yard gain that took the Ravens to the New England 23-yard-line on the game's final drive.

We love anyone from Kent State (except James Harrison), but Edelman was a college quarterback and he was trying to cover the other team's No. 1 receiver.

Or how about calling a deep pass to Matthew Slater – who had one reception all season – that was intercepted when the Patriots had an opportunity to ice the game after intercepting a Joe Flacco pass with 7:30 left in the fourth quarter?

Or what about Super Bowl-winning coach Tom Coughlin not realizing that maybe the Giants should cover San Francisco tight end Vernon Davis, who had touchdown catches of 73 and 28 yards? The 49ers only completed one pass to a wide receiver all day; it shouldn't have been that hard to figure out where the ball was going.

And here we thought the Browns were the only team that struggled to cover tight ends.

Some of the loudest bleating during the season was focused on the Browns special teams (as if we are going to one day tell our grandchildren about the back-to-back 5-11 teams that Blake Constanzo "starred" on).

That's why it was particularly interesting to see the 49ers have not one, but two crucial breakdowns on special teams. Especially since San Francisco's special teams coach is Brad Seely, formerly of the Browns and someone that has been elevated to the level of Paul Brown in some fan's eyes.

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Those mistakes were all just prelude to the utter failure on the Ravens' sideline, though.

Facing a 4th-and-6 at the New England 30-yard line with 2:53 remaining in the game, the Ravens called timeout, only to come out and run a hot mess of a play that resulted in a Joe Flacco incomplection. Somehow, even with time to think about it, the coaches couldn't come up with anything better than having Flacco chuck the ball at the sideline.

But the absolute biggest gaffe came at the end of the game when the Baltimore coaches didn't even know what down it was when Billy Cundiff lined up for a potential game-tying kick.

Baltimore linebacker Terrell Suggs told ESPN's *First Take* that the Ravens thought it was third down – and not fourth – which is why Cundiff had to rush on the field to attempt the kick.

“There was a lot of confusion on that last play,” [Suggs said](#) . “Those last two plays happened so fast.”

Apparently things were happening too fast for Baltimore coach John Harbaugh, who didn't realize he still had a timeout that he could have called to settle the team down.

“That never occurred to me. I didn't think that,” an apparently clueless Harbaugh said after the game.

Who knows? Maybe he thought he could pocket it for next year. Why waste it on what was only the most important play of the entire season?

And throughout the playoffs we saw plenty of 5-yard passes on the third-and-long that teams converted into first downs because the players on the receiving end were able to make a play.

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This isn't to excuse Shurmur for the season the Browns just had – after all, you are what your record says you are – but to point out that coaches make mistakes constantly during an NFL game, even in the playoffs. The difference is that playoff teams have players who can make plays and cover up for their coach's blunders.

No one knows yet if Shurmur is going to be a good NFL head coach – it's only been one year. We don't know, team president Mike Holmgren doesn't know, Shurmur himself probably doesn't even know yet.

But what we do know is, while Shurmur was part of the problem this year, there is no chance that he was 100 percent of the problem.