

## Wellness Check

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Tuesday, January 31 2012 4:36 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, January 31 2012 4:54 PM

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As the offseason begins one of the first things people usually analyze is the roster as they give their opinions on and evaluations on players and their performance. I am going to start from the top and talk about how the organization performed from the owner down to the GM.

### Owner

The Browns have an owner who doesn't claim to be a "football man" and one who takes the approach that he will hire the proper people and let them do their job. Owner Randy Lerner actually lives in Cleveland now and seems to be more engaged than he has ever been with the Cleveland Browns.

He doesn't speak much and tends to stay out of the limelight during the season so it is hard to actually have an opinion on the job he did, other than simply judging the overall performance of the franchise.

I will say two things about him that I feel strongly about. The first is I have a strong appreciation for his stance on his money. Unlike some owners, Lerner never really seems to make decisions based specifically around saving money. If he feels a coach or GM needs to go he will pay them their contract and move on. As a fan you have to appreciate that. Many owners would not re-sign a regime and oust them the very next year because of the money involved. Good or bad, he won't let money be the determining factor in who stays or goes.

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The second thing that I feel strongly about has come to over the last year or so and that is a feeling that I actually like the guy. The last few times I have actually heard him talk I really came away impressed. He seems genuine and he doesn't seem like he is trying hard to say the right things, but he does.

He seems to understand the mindset of the fans and he gives the impression he not only understands but cares. I have really grown to like him and more and more I am convinced he won't give up until he gets it right for the Browns and the fans.

## President

My thoughts regarding Mike Holmgren started to turn negative in 2011. When you talk about the job he has done I think you're looking at a mixed bag. He hired Tom Heckert, which up to this point has proven to be a great hire, but hiring people was not supposed to be his only job. He was also supposed to be the face and voice of the organization and he's failed in that department.

If you actually listened to his press conferences this year it seemed like he took on an edge that most Brown's fans, including me, didn't appreciate. He seemed to have an extra arrogance that doesn't taste good at all. The press conference after the horrible handling of the Colt McCoy concussion was a prime example of the attitude Holmgren has started speaking with.

I think everyone respected what he had done in his NFL career as a head coach but we all were a bit hesitant to give him the football czar title after he was fired as GM in Seattle. Most of the hesitation that was attached to personnel decisions has abated after seeing GM Tom Heckert perform fairly well while making those decisions but I really think Holmgren's status took a dip this year.

Holmgren was brought in to build trust with the fans and to get the Cleveland Browns back on the path to winning. In 2011 Mike Holmgren's 'shut up, just watch and wait' approach was a mistake that didn't work for him.

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Holmgren may have gotten the GM right but the jury is still out on his handpicked coach Pat Shurmur. Shurmur had a miserable season on just about all fronts and I wouldn't be so smug if I was Holmgren. Holmgren went so far in that press conference as to say don't come asking for tickets when the Browns start winning. That was brutally arrogant. If Tom Heckert has another good draft and the talent level increases in Cleveland, Holmgren won't have too much flack to deal with, but I for one won't forget how he handled himself and will probably never look at him the same after 2011.

## GM

In my opinion GM Tom Heckert is the star of the front office. I have been impressed with the way he has drafted during his tenure, and for a regime who has taken the mindset of blowing everything up and rebuilding through the draft, you can't afford to make bad picks at the top of the draft and thus far Heckert hasn't

To me, his 2011 draft was flawless from an execution standpoint. Trading down for the extra picks not only got the Browns more quality players last season but the extra picks this year will allow the GM to be aggressive during the 2012 draft if aggression is called for.

He didn't hit on every pick and the FB Owen Marecic pick has been a sore point with me since it was announced, but you don't need a GM to be perfect....you need him to get the first 3 rounds right on a regular basis in order to keep a competitive roster. As far as the general roster composition of the 2011 team I do feel there were some mistakes made. The most glaring was not upgrading the talent level and experience of the WR core. The Browns offense really struggled and in my opinion the WRs were a big reason why. Some positions need some veterans and that is one of them, and from an overall talent standpoint the group lacked speed and big play ability.

It was also a mistake to count on RT Tony Pashos to not only make it through a season, but to play at a high level. The defensive line could also have used some veteran influence on the edges. A pass rush specialist to bring the heat on 3rd downs could have turned a good defense into a great one. I also think there was a

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bit of a mis-read on what kind of player Usama Young was. Not that he is a bad player but it turns out he has the same strengths as T.J. Ward does. He seemed to struggle playing a centerfield role but once Ward was hurt and he became a SS he proved to be a much better player. He did well up around the line of scrimmage but he didn't look so good in space because he lacks the natural instincts and ball skills to be a good free safety.

Tom Heckert successfully upgraded the roster with good young talent in 2011 and if he can manage the same in 2012 the Browns will be on their way to being a competitive team once again. If the GM finds a true franchise QB, Cleveland will be on its way to being more than just competitive. Tom Heckert has had a clear plan up until this point and I expect more of the same this year, including a true free agent period in which the Browns should have plenty of money to spend on some of the good, young players available.

I am not going to give a actually grade but I will give an endorsement to the organization for the direction it is heading. We have never really seen a regime here in Cleveland truly try and build a team from the ground up so it is nice to at least see something different. If the Browns and Tom Heckert continue to pick studs in the draft Cleveland could turn into team that competes for a playoff spot year in and year out and that is the ultimate goal. We all know that anything can happen if you get into the tournament, but nothing will happen if you don't.