



Sunday's loss in Cincinnati makes it two straight weeks of suck-fest football from the Cleveland Browns. I know we like to speak of the big picture and how hard this team plays with less talent than many middle school teams but there's no way you can look at the last two football games and not see regression on the part of the Browns.

The biggest culprit Sunday was the fact the Browns couldn't stop the Bengals from running the football straight down their throats. And when you can't stop the run you lose the time of possession battle, the field position battle and ultimately you find yourself giving up a huge pass play because you bring up a few more defensive backs to try and stop the run. All of that happened Sunday afternoon.

That's regression given the Browns have been relatively stout against the run for most of the season. And you know who's not in position to endure a great deal of regression given his boss was not the guy who actually hired him? Eric Mangini.

That might be the most annoying part of sitting through the second consecutive crappy football game Cleveland has played: you know you're going to endure another week's worth of 'Will He or Won't He Be Back' from all corners of the media.

Oddly and surprisingly enough, I think CBS analyst Steve Beuerlein actually hit the nail on the head when speaking about the likelihood that Mangini returns. To paraphrase Beuerlein he stated that the Browns are clearly a better team now than they were last season and at the start of this season but that it might not matter if, at the end of the day, Mangini is simply not a Mike Holmgren guy.

I'm a believer that Eric Mangini is a good football coach and I'm a believer that he has this team on the right path. I also think changing coaches once again is going to cost this team a year in the development cycle yet because you don't often see a guy come in and alter the philosophy, style and personality of a football team and take them to the playoffs at the same time.

But there are legitimate detractors out there who point to his handling of the quarterback position in each of the last two years and who are convinced that the defensive successes of the team are more the result of Rob Ryan's involvement than Mangini's work. They point to the fact that Holmgren and Mangini have vastly different philosophies offensively and that, at the very least, Mangini will have to cut ties with offensive coordinator Brian Daboll to have any hope of hanging onto his job. Again, I disagree only because of that middle school talent that they are working with.

I'd like to see another productive draft and another productive free agency signing period with the staff that's been assembled here and then make the determination whether you can win with these coaches. But with each bad loss the likelihood of that happening lessens. The hue and cry to run Mangini out of town will continue to pick up support and Holmgren will be able to point to a putrid finish and the NFL being a bottom line business when he makes a change.

I hate the prospects of running a guy out on a rail when his team plays hard and when his quarterback choices (none of whom he was behind acquiring) are either doe-eyed rookies, 8 year career back-ups or the corpse of Jake Delhomme. And you can see that this staff has developed Colt McCoy. He looked like anything but a rookie again Sunday when he threw for nearly 250 yards, two touchdowns and once again didn't turn the football over.

I've said all season that next season should be the year when it becomes a bottom line business for this team and only then should it be all about wins and losses. But I have a feeling that these last two games, both of them difficult games at home, matter a lot more now than they did a couple weeks back.

### **Don't Go There**

There's been a lot of talk recently about whether or not Colt McCoy has done enough to eliminate the Browns need to draft a quarterback with their first pick in the NFL draft.

Let's put that to bed now: Colt McCoy is the Browns quarterback of the present and the future. Unless you should somehow fall into a situation where Andrew Luck is sitting there for you there's not a quarterback in the draft who doesn't have question marks attached to his potential selection. And with gaping holes existing all over the field you don't use that golden first round selection on a questionable commodity.

The Browns have the opportunity to upgrade anything from wide receiver to defensive line to the defensive backfield with a very good player who will step in and make this team better immediately.

Personally my choice if you're drafting anywhere from 10<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> is a wide receiver. Specifically I'd prefer Julio Jones from Alabama. Jones is 6'4" tall and weighs 225lbs and would immediately upgrade your receiving corps as well as your passing and running game. He is a strong blocker, has good hands and speed and he'll likely be available when the Browns pick.

If Eric Mangini survives or if the next Browns coach prefers to run a physical, ground-oriented offense I believe Jones will have the front office salivating over his physical approach to the wide receiver position.

And if the Browns go another route and upgrade the d-line or the right side of the o-line you won't me complain a lick. I still think a strong draft and a productive free agency signing period puts this football team in position to make the playoffs in 2011.

But please, no quarterback if Luck, as expected, is gone.

**'Tis the Offseason**

YES!!!!

Jack Hannahan and Adam Everett acquired in the same offseason? How about that for the Tribe playing Santa to all of us on the north coast?

You know, this time of year is notable not only for the holidays but also for a general rise in suicide rates as people seem to battle a lot of stress and depression during these months. I wonder if the rates are higher in Cleveland than in other cities.

What makes it worse is that we can expect this to continue until there is a fundamental change in how baseball handles its finances. The issue is that teams like the Indians and owners like the Dolans are still making money hand over fist regardless of what you're told. These guys are businessmen regardless of whether they own teams in Cleveland, New York, Boston or anywhere else. Do you truly believe that men who have amassed vast fortunes with their business acumen are losing money every year and sticking around to lose more?

That's not happening.

And baseball is a business to these men. If they can turn a profit, regardless of whether it results from handouts and television or if it comes from putting a winning team on the field, they're going to stay in the game.

And while they make money we can continue to be underwhelmed by the 'talent' they put on the field. They have no incentive to spend more if it's just going to cut into their take.

## Hallelujah

It's really difficult to find anything good to say about the Cleveland Cavaliers, even the day after they broke a ten game losing streak and beat the Knicks in overtime.

So I'm not even going to bother.

What I will say is Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to all of you who read each week. Have a safe and happy couple of weeks.

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