



Same Old Same Old

My 10-year old daughter and I were watching the second half of the Green Bay-NY Giant game Sunday after I dejectedly returned home from the Browns game. Early in the fourth quarter Greg Jennings caught a 20-yard in from Aaron Rodgers, feinted toward the sideline and then took off up the left hash mark for another 20 yards on top of the throw. My 10-year old tuned to me and, my hand to God, said, "How come we don't have any guys that can do that dad?"

Naturally, I slapped her mouth, screamed at her and sent her to her room for being insolent.

Actually I looked at her and said honestly, "I really don't know Kacie."

And I really don't know why we don't have guys that make those plays or whether it's the game plan that doesn't call those plays or allow the talent that is on the roster to run them.

I don't know anymore whether I'm watching a team play really hard for their coach or if I'm watching a few talented guys lead some other dedicated guys through 60 minutes of play **despite** their coaches.

I don't know.

What I do know is that Sunday marked the unofficial end for Eric Mangini in Browns gear. He's not going to survive this three game (and counting) fade. Much like last season's 4-game streak to end the year bought Mangini his 2010 season you can bet your house that this four game (I'm assuming a season-ending Pittsburgh beat down) will cost him any chance of returning in 2011.

Maybe it's for the best.

I'm not sure that Mangini and Brian Daboll are the best thing for a young, precocious quarterback like Colt McCoy. McCoy had a nightmare day Sunday throwing three interceptions but he's going to need the deft touches of an innovative offensive mind to realize his full potential. That's not Brian Daboll.

And while I still see talent as being the biggest difference between Eric Mangini and his coaching counterparts who are experiencing success this season, I guess anyone you bring in is going to be better off with the talent you'll be acquiring in April and in free agency. I personally believe Eric Mangini is a really solid football coach.

Unfortunately for the Mangini family I think he'll need to prove that in his next head coaching gig which will come after he re-establishes his candidacy by working as a coordinator somewhere.

So, for seemingly the 38th time in the last 11 years, let's look forward to our almost annual Super Bowl of Coaching Speculation season that we seem to enjoy so damn much around these parts. While other teams are busy preparing for playoff games and lamenting the playoff game that got away we can once again discuss who was spotted eating with Mike Holmgren at Morton's and who Randy Lerner was wrapping his ascot around at John Q's.

It's what we know. It's what we do. It's who we are.

No One Worth Rooting For

When it comes to the recent Ohio State/NCAA scandal surrounding the selling of personal awards and trinkets that will cost five Buckeyes five game suspensions to begin the 2011 season (at the very least given a few of those guys are likely to leave school rather than serve their time) all you can do is shake your head.

You shake your head at the players because, despite what Jim Tressel and Athletic Director Gene Smith say, these guys are well versed in what they can and cannot do in terms of playing by NCAA rules. They understand without a shadow of a doubt that they can't profit from their standing as a football player or athlete while they are participating in NCAA athletics.

They can play dumb and their administrators can rightfully protect them by falling on their own swords. But these kids know (and knew) that their actions were improper while they were taking those actions and they knew if they were caught there would be issues.

And spare us the, 'Taking care of my family' bullshit. No one begrudges a kid doing what he has to do to support his mom. But if Terrelle Pryor is supporting his mom by loading up his arms with tattoos then I'd like to understand more about how that works. Unless he's charging billboard rates to put your logo on his shoulder I'm calling horseshit on his excuses.

But for the love of \$cam Newton, the NCAA should be ashamed of itself.

What a two-faced, corrupt and vile organization we're talking about here. This is an organization that unevenly polices and punishes for an ever-changing litany of offenses designed not to keep amateur athletics pure as the driven snow but to keep up the charade that these are actually amateur athletic events at all.

There's a kid getting ready to play for the national championship at Auburn in a couple weeks whose old man took huge amounts of cash to pimp his kid to one school over the other. Our

own Dan Wismar detailed the entire, disgusting Bobby Lowder saga on these pages a few weeks back that basically show one man lording over the Auburn athletic program by buying players and coaches with shady bank and casino money and building a base of power that Tammany Hall and Boss Tweed would have envied.

The NCAA is a joke. They protect this 'amateur' status because it's the only thing separating them from formally being the USFL or the NBADL.

The players were wrong. That much is indisputable. And the overwhelming conclusion is that they knew they were wrong. But the NCAA is as much to blame as the players for the ever-changing policies and uneven approach to lording over the game.

I can't help but wonder, as you look at the swag that these bowl games are handing out to players from bowl teams, whether or not the NCAA is diligently following the ownership histories of all these X-Box 360's that are being handed out. Most of the players already own or have access to gaming systems, if not three or four of them, in their apartments. Are you telling me it's not common practice to sell the one you picked up at a bowl game for \$200 worth of cash for spring break beer money? Does the NCAA have someone on this?

Can a player take his \$1,000 worth of books (paid for by that scholarship) and cash them in at the end of the semester for the standard 12% of what he paid and take his lady to Chili's with that \$120??

Who's tracking this shit? It seems like you could really bend some programs and some kids over a barrel if you just open the doors to your ivory tower and take a look around. Granted, it would be a bit more difficult to track and monitor than someone's old man shaking down universities across the south for \$200k, but still, you could do some damage to some reputations should you care to take the time.

Pryor and his trinket-selling buddies are at the very bottom rung of this criminal operation. If you want to really find some criminals who should be wearing masks and dodging the law look no further than the NCAA offices in Indianapolis.

Better Than We Hoped

The biggest fear I had for the Cavaliers to start the 2010-2011 season was that a roster with professionals like Antawn Jamison, Andy Varejao, Boobie Gibson, Mo Williams, JJ Hickson and Anthony Parker might just mediocre their way to 35 or 40 wins and foul up my entire hope for lottery selections.

I'm happy to say things are not that bleak.

The very roster I feared would be mediocre is actually awful and there is still time to pare some of those guys off the roster as the trade deadline approaches.

As it stands now I'm sitting here with an evil grin and rubbing my hands together like I'm an NCAA compliance officer who just saw a non-SEC division 1 player accept a free drink at a local bar.

Sure, I understand completely that the NBA draft lottery is as rigged as an Auburn depth chart, but it's still the very best chance the Cavs have to again become relevant. There are no stars who will come here of their own accord. Not for January and February living in Cleveland during the NBA season. There wasn't a star-in-his-prime that came here when the Cavs had the most talented player in the game, so you can pretty much rest assured they're not coming here to play with Jamario Moon and Ryan Hollins.

The only way back is with an infusion of talent that the lottery brings you. And even that's a temporary fix given players can leave after a few years should they so choose. But there's a gleam men. And there's a gleam because I overestimated just what a collection of pieces and parts the Cavs were aside from LeBron James.

Well, the first 30 games of the first season without him corrected that oversight. Now let's get cracking on selling off these over-hyped complimentary players to teams who are willing to

overpay for their services.

Now I get It

For a couple months I've been somewhat critical that the Indians chose to sign bit players like Jack Hannahan and Adam Everett as well as bringing back Austin Kearns for another season.

But I understand it now: this roster doesn't need any major talent infusion or overhauls. All that's required is a couple minor parts and some tinkering.

Looks like we're in for a hell of a ride this summer.