If Cleveland Browns owner-in-waiting Jimmy Haslam III is spending time right now wondering whether to keep Mike Holmgren and Tom Heckert he could, probably should, take into account the performance of The Oldest Living Rookie Brandon Weeden on Sunday against the Philadelphia Eagles.

The last time Browns fans saw an opening day quarterback perform this poorly (and believe me they seen a lot if opening day quarterbacks and a lot of them perform poorly) it was 2007 and it was Charlie Frye. He was traded two days later.

You can blame Weeden or you can blame the guys who picked him. I'd go with them. Consider: In the run up to this year's draft the St. Louis Rams owned the number two pick and were looking to sell it to the highest bidder. Indianapolis wasn't letting go of the number one pick they so richly earned and after jettisoning Peyton Manning, they were committed to Andrew Luck. Robert Griffin III was next in line on everyone's draft board and no one was even close.

The Rams told interested bidders they'd have one chance to make their best pitch for that pick. The Washington Redskins took that proclamation seriously. The Browns did not. The Redskins got a stellar performance from their pick (Griffin) on Sunday. The Browns did not. As head coach Pat Shurmur said in his Monday press conference, though in a different context, "simple as that."

It would be one thing if the Browns had made their best offer and fell short. It happens. But Holmgren admitted that wasn't the case. He and Heckert ignored the bid instructions, assumed the Rams were bluffing and bet on the ability to make a stronger offer when the Rams called back. They never called back. Holmgren and Heckert stood dumb founded with egg on their face or their thumbs up their ass, you pick. Either way, it's the story of this regime and every

other one that's come before them in the Browns 2.0 era. It's been one massive miscalculation after another.

Naturally Holmgren, in that "hey I'm just being honest with you" sort of way he has when he's shading the truth, basically put the blame on the Rams for not following established (?) league protocol in making sure they got the absolute best price for their pick. I mean, who doesn't call back, amiright? Holmgren even suggested the Browns were prepared to make an even better offer than the Redskins but weren't given the chance. Maybe they were going to make a better offer, who knows? What we do know, or as our doppelganger Bill Belichick would say, is that going by only what we can see, they didn't make their best offer when told to and the chance to be bold was overtaken by the need to be cautious. That's why this franchise never really takes a step forward. Again, simple as that.

That's the thing about making one of those bold trades. The only time anyone even remembers what you gave up to make it is when the boldness fails in spectacular fashion. Big risks, big rewards and all the stuff. There probably are but a handful of people between St. Louis and Washington D.C. who can readily name exactly what it cost the Redskins to get Griffin and will remember if and only Griffin suddenly turns into Akili Smith. What Redskins fans know, though, is that they have Griffin and while one performance, either way, doesn't a career make, you'd still rather see your new quarterback play like he belongs in the NFL rather than in the SEC. Right now I'm not sure Weeden even starts for the Miami Redhawks.

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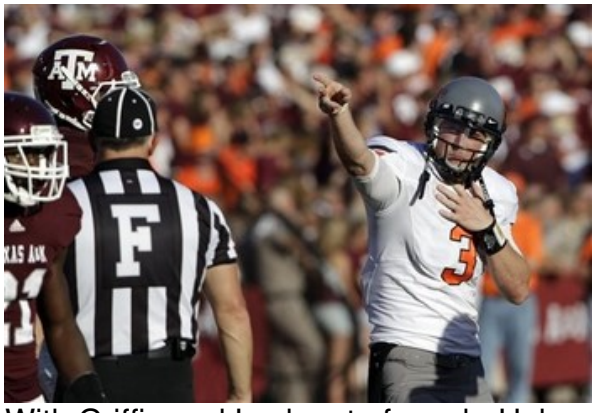

With Griffin and Luck out of reach, Holmgren and Heckert traded up to get Trent Richardson instead, figuring that in a quarterback dominated league, it's better to have a guy with lingering knee problems running the ball who can reliably be counted on to get you 2 yards per carry. Besides, Brandon Weeden would be available later in the first round. They guessed right.

One of the main issues with relying on Weeden has everything to do with his age. There's one thing to be a 25-year old rookie, but a whole other kettle of corn to be a 29-year old rookie, particularly when the alternatives were 22-year old rookies. It's simple math and makes their timid approach to getting Griffin puzzling.

Griffin is one of those 22-year olds. Even if he is the real deal (and the earliest indications are far more promising then they are for Weeden, but it's a marathon not a sprint as Holmgren reminded us last week), it's still going to take 3 or so years to consistently play at an elite level. The time period between big man on campus and starting in the NFL has certainly lessened for quarterbacks, but the learning curve once starting to gaining elite status is still relatively lengthy considering it's the hardest position to play in all of professional sports. Getting NFL good just takes time. Ask Drew Brees. Ask Aaron Rodgers. But when Griffin is ready to take that next step, he'll still be 3 or 4 years younger than Weeden is today.

Weeden is less certain as the real deal. There have been plenty of strong armed quarterbacks that couldn't make the adjustment. We had one in Cleveland and his name is Derek Anderson. But giving Weeden that same trajectory, he'll be in his early to mid 30s when he finally begins to figure it all out, if he sticks around that long. That isn't ancient, but it doesn't give a whole lot of time to forge a long career, either. For comparison sake, Peyton Manning is 36 years old.

Weeden at best is a then mid term solution. There simply isn't enough time in his career to be a long term solution. With that kind of math you can just hear Holmgren and Heckert justifying the pick down the road by saying Weeden was only a late first round pick, as if this was the NBA. With that kind of thinking though, there's probably a far safer conclusion to reach: when it comes time to pick the next Browns quarterback of the future, it won't be Holmgren and Heckert doing the picking.

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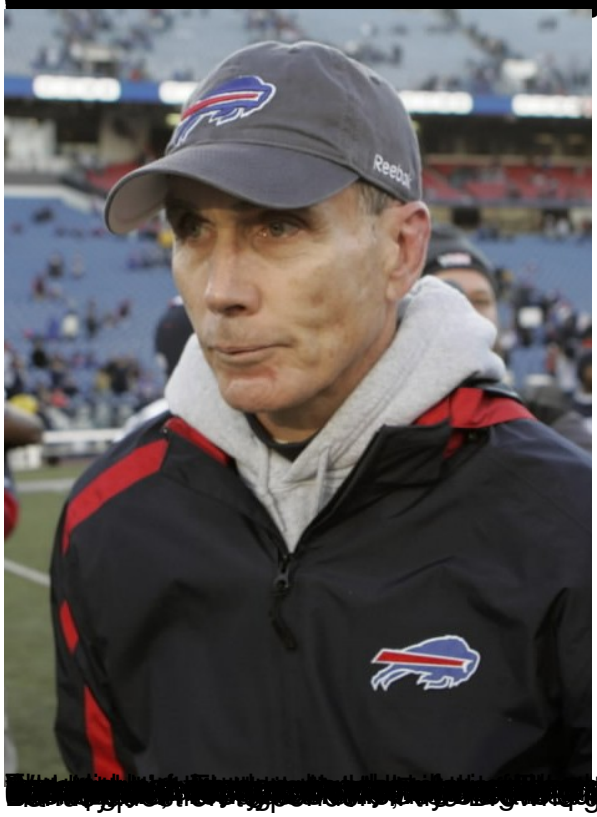

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