Well, the George Kokinis Era was officially launched today at a press conference in Berea ... and the introduction of the new GM wasn't even done by owner Randy Lerner. In Gary's latest, he says that Lerner has been reluctant, to be charitable, to explain a process for finding a new coach and a general manager that alternated between deliberate and haphazard. Gary also breaks down some of the comments from Kokinis, and gives us his thoughts on the Browns new head man.

If there was anyone other than George Kokinis that was as relieved in his finally being named general manager of the Cleveland Browns, it would have to be owner Randy Lerner, but not for the reasons you might think.

Sure, having bodies to fill slots on the org chart are important, but beyond all that is the simple fact that Lerner can avoid any more questions about why he won't put himself in front of the camera to explain this organization, at least for another three or so years anyway.

It wasn't a surprise to anyone that Lerner had club president Mike Keenan introduce Kokinis while Lerner remained safely ensconced *behind* the cameras. Lerner has been reluctant, to be charitable, to explain a process for finding a new coach and a general manager that alternated between deliberate and haphazard.

Now Lerner can safely retreat back behind the scenes while the new kids in the hall go about establishing whether or not they were worthy of the faith, not to mention the millions, Lerner's placed in them in the first place.

What we know about Kokinis is what we've known for several weeks now. He got his start in Cleveland and cut his teeth in Baltimore. In his press conference today Kokinis said that he brings the same overall approach to the college draft that is utilized in Baltimore and was utilized in Cleveland under former general manager Phil Savage. Let's just hope that Kokinis leans more toward the Baltimore experience than the chaos Savage created.

Fans who want to find flaws in the Kokinis hiring are as well served as those who want to find merit. There is more than a little danger, for example, in having the head coach essentially hand pick his own boss. There's also the not so little matter that Kokinis brings precious little experience when it comes to the college draft. As the Baltimore Ravens' director of pro personnel, his job was to focus on players already in the league, not the hundreds of wannabes that teams must evaluate each season.

But Kokinis does come recommended. Ernie Accorsi, the former Browns and New York Giants general manager, apparently served as an informal consultant to Lerner during the general manager search and strongly supported this move. Accorsi is exactly the kind of person Lerner should have been consulting. His recommendation carries enough weight to buy Kokinis an extended honeymoon should, or more likely, when things get rough early on.

It's also at least as much of an advantage as a disadvantage that Kokinis was a director or pro personnel for a team in the Browns' division. If there is one thing that was very clear under the prior regime, they proved particularly inept at fielding a team that could be competitive within its own division. The more help the Browns can get in that regard, the better.

Fans who were looking for instant gratification from the hiring of Kokinis and even Mangini can't say they weren't warned. Though on a far less dramatic and consequential scale, Kokinis basically gave his Browns' version of President Obama's warning on the lack of quick fixes for the problems of the day. Kokinis, perhaps deliberately, perhaps not, essentially lowered fans' expectations for a quick turnaround by not coming out, guns blazing, and telling the fans that come next season he and the franchise will make its fans proud.

What he did say, instead, was that both he and the new coaching staff have much work to do in first evaluating the team, player by player, before drawing any conclusions, offering only that there were some talented and capable players on the roster. They know the kinds of players they like-"smart, tough, disciplined, selfless, passionate"-and want to build from there. Kokinis called them the core beliefs he and Mangini share.

That's as good a start as any. And as much as anything it's the most encouraging thing to come out of Berea in a long while-the heads of the organization talking about core beliefs. It's the most obvious element that's been missing from this team for years. Because the Browns have basically stood for nothing they've fallen for everything. The record more than bears that out.

The devil, as they say, is in the details. It's one thing to lay a foundation and erect five pillars upon which the rest of the organization will sit. It's another to bring it to fruition. It would be fascinating, actually, to sit in on some of those first meetings, some of which might already have occurred, where Mangini and Kokinis really get to survey the wreckage of the last regime. While they may find a few more capable players than Savage did when he came aboard, it won't be significantly more. But to their point how many, really, meet three of those five criteria, let alone all five?

Instead, they will find fairly substantial holes in fairly substantial places, like linebacker, the secondary, receiver and running back. They will find an offensive line that is also depleted and too dependent on the return of Ryan Tucker. They'll

find one quarterback who can throw but can't pass and another quarterback whose development was babied while younger quarterbacks with similar skills thrived elsewhere, including with Kokinis' former team.

They'll find that some of the more passionate players on this team are also some of the most selfish. They'll find that some of the more talented are also some of the least focused and disciplined. In other words, while this team may not be the island of misfit toys, it's a far cry from the Baltimore Ravens and the Pittsburgh Steelers, the two teams that have to be first in their sights.

When Mangini and Kokinis go about trying to figure out how to credibly fill all those holes, they'll also be faced with the grim reality of having only four draft picks in 2009 to do it. The Browns are well under a salary cap that may be in existence for only one more season anyway, but they'll also know that teams that devote too much cap space trying to fill fundamental holes with pricey free agents get caught in a vicious circle from which the only escape is a radical roster purge.

What has made all the top teams in the league successful is a similar formula: develop your own players, through the draft and undrafted free agents, and fill in the few remaining spots that can push you to the next level with established talent. Outside of the New York Yankees and the Boston Red Sox, it's basically the formula for major league baseball as well. Teams in either league that try instead to fill too many holes via free agency find themselves almost unable to develop their own talent. There are only so many spots on a roster.

Assuming that Kokinis and Mangini understand this point, and all indications are that they do, then they truly are in it for the long haul and are going to have to continue to find a way to manage the expectations of the fans who have been doing nothing but waiting for a generation. That won't be an insubstantial task.

But on first impressions, Kokinis didn't necessarily excite. That wasn't the point

anyway. Far more important was the simple fact that he at least didn't disappoint. By all accounts eyes are wide open. If so, then he'll quickly realize that, yes, the light at the end of the tunnel he's looking down really is an on-coming train.