Cleveland Browns receiver Donte Stallworth has been given his notice by Commissioner Roger Goddell that he'll remain under suspension for the 2009 NFL season. After that, he's free to re-apply for re-admission to the fraternity. In Gary's latest, he says Stallworth has a long way to go before the stain of his offenses fade away. And tries to put Stallworth's crime in some contemporary context.

Being the worst free agent signing in the history of a franchise doesn't automatically make one a bad person. Killing a man while you're under the influence of alcohol pretty gets one a lot closer.

Cleveland Browns receiver Donte Stallworth has been given his notice by Commissioner Roger Goddell that he'll remain under suspension for the 2009 NFL season. After that, he's free to re-apply for re-admission to the fraternity. While appearing quite contrite and saying all the right things, at least through his lawyer, Stallworth still has miles to go before the stain of his offenses start to fade. To some, they probably hope that never happens.

Considering the gravity of Stallworth's criminal behavior, the truth is that the only reason Stallworth isn't still in jail is the result of the convergence of a moneyed ballplayer, a lenient prosecutor and an overburden edjustice system in Miami's Dade County. Those presented the exact right recipe to allow Stallworth to escape the harsher punishment he otherwise deserved by throwing around enough millions to escape the kind of justice that has ensnared many others.

Sure, he's forever barred from driving a motor vehicle (the over and under on how long it will take him to break that restriction once he thinks no one is looking currently stands at 23 days according to Las Vegas oddsmakers). He has a healthy amount of community service to perform, although until I see a picture of him wearing a yellow vest and picking up garbage on the side of I-75 in the middle of the August heat for 8 hours a day that punishment is mostly irrelevant. And he probably surrendered a healthy amount of the millions Randy Lerner was foolishly talked into paying him by deposed general manager Phil Savage. All that did was buy off a desperate family from pushing the case further. It couldn't and didn't bring back a life.

But the notion that none of this makes Stallworth a bad guy, as he said recently, is laughable. If anything, it's the exact definition of what a bad guy is, that is if you think a bad guy is someone who abuses the privileges he's been given and it ends up in tragedy for someone else.

Let's put Stallworth in some contemporary context. Is Stallworth's actions worse than, say, Michael Vick's? Depends on who you ask, I suppose, but from a pure law and order standpoint Vick spent much more time in jail and much more time in Goodell's dog house, so to speak. Maybe that says something about how fondly this society thinks of its animals vs. its citizens, but doesn't it also say something about how this society values the actions of a drunk driver?

Where are the protests? Where is MADD threatening to show up at every Browns game as long as Stallworth is a member of the team? This isn't about trying to place dots on a sliding scale in order to put a value on the seriousness of one's offenses, but ask yourself, is Vick really worse than Stallworth?

Terry Pluto, writing in the Plain Dealer, thinks Goodell got it right by suspending Stallworth for a year. Maybe he did, but frankly, if Goodell threw him out of the league permanently I'd be fine with that as well.

I'm less concerned, though, with Goodell at the moment and more concerned with the lack of response from the Browns. Out of the parochial concerns of a salary cap hit that will have absolutely no actual impact on them this season, Stallworth technically remains an employee of the club; albeit an employee in unpaid status.

Allowing Stallworth to maintain any sort of status with this storied franchise is the kind of thing that Savage would have done. He always favored optionality over common senses. But from everything we've been led to believe about new head coach Eric Mangini, he's tolerant like Vladmir Putin is tolerant. Some messages are worth sending to your constituents, in this case the fans and this is one of those times.

Consider for a moment how many deserved public relations hits Lerner has taken in the last year. Unquestionably, he's the least liked of the owners of the town's three major professional teams. While standing up publicly for ethics and morals by cutting Stallworth isn't going to repair Lerner's image immediately, it would certainly be a good start.

It makes me think of the verse in the Bruce Springsteen song "Long Walk Home." The song's voice, remembering a walk through town with his dad, says:

*My father said "Son, we're lucky in this town*
*It's a beautiful place to be born*
*It just wraps its arms around you*
*Nobody crowds you, nobody goes it alone.*
*That flag flying over the courthouse*
*Means certain things are set in stone*
*Who we are, what we'll do and what we won't."*

Well, that Cleveland Browns flag is flying over the Stadium at the moment, but for

each day the Browns continue to hold on to Stallworth over such trivial concerns as this year's salary cap tells everyone that with this team, nothing is set in stone. They don't know who they are, have no clue what to do and have no limit to what they won't do, including keeping a person on the roster who killed an innocent man who, himself, was just taking his own long walk home.

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Although Mangini has been tongue-tied in how to address the Stallworth situation, other than the ubiquitous "it's something we continue to evaluate" or some similar nonsense, he was far more verbose, in deed if not word, in dumping serial loudmouth Shaun Smith last week.

This wasn't about creating a roster spot to sign another lineman to replace Rex Hadnot. It was about much more. On just the surface, Mangini wanted to make Smith an example in order to establish his own sea legs with the team. It's one thing to talk tough, it's another thing to be tough. If it's true that Smith's Romeo Crennel-like approach to training camp had worn thin after just a few sessions, then cutting him now before Smith can further pollute the atmosphere makes sense.

But you also can't discount the Brady Quinn factor and in that sense, cutting Smith may be a bit of a signal on where Mangini is on that issue. Smith isn't just a loudmouth of the first order, he's a pain in the ass player whose contributions will always be measured against the distractions he brings. If he was on a short leash, it's only because he deserved to be.

When Smith punched Quinn in the face last season, it undoubtedly had a subtle but definite impact on the rest of the locker room. While I'm sure it's happened somewhere else, I can't remember a time where a player on any team physically assaulted one of the team's marquee players and was around long enough to brag about it. The only thing that probably saved Smith last year was Crennel's

grandfatherly approach to discipline, which is to say that at most Smith got a stern lecture followed by a big bear hug.

With Mangini, it was always going to be a different story. Mangini might claim that the players come with a clean slate, but that's more public relations hooey than reality. Smith has a history. But more to the point, Smith has a history with Quinn. If Quinn is going to be this team's starting quarterback, it doesn't help to have someone like Smith around the rest of the team given both her verbosity and his obvious dislike for Quinn.

Mangini hasn't done much to tip his hand about which quarterback he prefers, which is why you have to read the tea leaves. This is one tea leaf that I think is worth reading. Mangini may not be locked in on Quinn yet but let's just say he probably thinks the kid has a bright future.

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Someone explain to me again why a rules official put Tiger Woods and Padraig Harrington on the clock with three holes to play in last week's Bridgestone-WGC event at Firestone Country Club. Maybe they were lingering a bit too long, but it's not like this was a hack foursome backing up the course at Manakiki on a Saturday morning.

For too long, golf has looked for a worthy adversary for Woods and may have one in Harrington. They were engaging in what looked to be an epic battle. And just when the match is reaching its emotional apex, along comes a rules official and tells them to hurry up because, gosh, you don't want the event to bleed into the Sunday 6 o'clock news where some dimwitted new reader is waiting to breathlessly tell us about either a fire on the east side or a Walk-A-Thon of some sort.

The argument for putting them on the clock is that they should have to live within the same time constraints as every other golfer. On the surface, that makes sense. The reality is that on the Sunday of a PGA tournament, there is no such thing as a time constraints. Three-quarters of the remaining field know they have no chance of winning and play as quickly as they can so they can get the heck out of there and on to the next event. In other words, they'll play fast, very fast. That leaves essentially a wide open course for the other quarter of the field that has a reasonable shot at a high finish. If in the end that results in an extra 10 minutes, how is that a big deal? Golf was never meant to be a timed event. Besides, just move up the tee times if you're worried about the finish.

The other argument is that this goofy rule was voted in by the players and so every player should live with it. Again, on the surface that makes sense. But the rule wasn't so much voted on as dictated. It's sold to the players as necessary in order to meet the demands of the networks that pay millions to broadcast the events. Yet those same constraints don't apply to, say, football or baseball where the broadcast fee rights are even higher. Football often does go into overtime and baseball, as George Carlin would say, might go on and on and we don't know when it will even end. The next time Fox moves a playoff game that's running long to FX because it's time for local news will be the first.

Sure, Harrington cracked under that extra pressure and all Woods did was hit an 8-iron 178 yards to within a foot. That means Woods probably wins anyway. But without the pressure to rush his next shot, who's to say that Harrington doesn't sink that chip? Harrington is a pretty fair golf in his own right, so he had more of a chance than, say, you or me.

So much of golf's history revolves around great matches. Woods made history with another victory in Akron but a more lasting impression of that day was lost because of an anal-retentive rules official with a stop watch.

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The Indians are in Minnesota this weekend, or maybe it's Kansas City, hard to remember. What isn't is this week's question to ponder: Does the summer move slower or faster when the Indians are out of it by June?