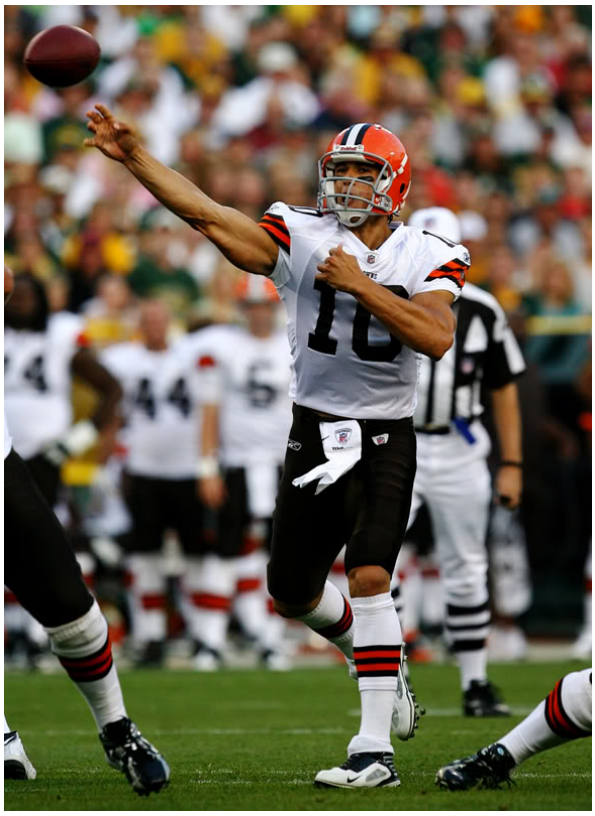
Assuming Cleveland Browns' owner Randy Lerner even has a mind's eye, this can't be what it envisioned. By changing almost everything about the Browns, from the personnel to the painting on the walls at Berea, Lerner pulled off the nearly impossible by still managing to keep things exactly the same. Gary hits on the Browns/Packers game in his latest piece.



Assuming Cleveland Browns' owner Randy Lerner even has a mind's eye, this can't be what it envisioned. By changing almost everything about the Browns, from the personnel to the painting on the walls at Berea, Lerner pulled off the nearly impossible by still managing to keep things exactly the same.

Meanwhile, new head coach Eric Mangini probably was wishing that he could have been anonymous, returning to the ranks of ball boy rather than admit to have presiding over another mess spilled about on the grass of the anything-but-frozen tundra of Lambeau Field. Losing 17-0 to the Green Bay Packers, the Browns looked every bit as tantalizing as left over lasagna. They were as lazy and lethargic as both the weather and last season's edition of a team that didn't score an offensive touchdown in its last 7 games.

The loss was harmless mostly because it was preseason. In a perverse way, though, it actually was productive. The Browns showed their fans that things can't

get any worse. Things may not be getting better, either, but at least they aren't getting worse.

Saturday night's game featured everything familiar with what alienated most fans from this team by early last December. There was quarterback Derek Anderson demonstrating again that for however strong his arm is his leadership abilities are that weak. There was Brady Quinn looking like an actual NFL starter, but as always it's hard to tell exactly what that means because it's being compared to Anderson. There was the defensive line giving up run after run after run after run and yard after yard after yard after yard. And for good measure, it once again treated another opposing quarterback, this time in the person of Aaron Rodgers, as if he was wearing a red practice jersey. And of course, of course, there was receiver Braylon Edwards dropping a critical pass. Oh yea, Josh Cribbs played well.

With all that out of the way, was there really anything to take away from Saturday's game except that this team has miles to go before it sleeps? Actually, there was. First, the Browns absolutely need to pick a quarterback and dump the other one. Quinn gets the job, essentially by default, but the job should be his. No more vacillating. No more trying to balance practice reps. It's neck and neck as to which happens first, the team scores a touchdown or Congress passes health care reform. The offense won't build any consistency by essentially ensuring that neither quarterback is fully ready for the season.

Quinn is a legitimate NFL starter. He's not Tom Brady but he's far from Ken Dorsey. Quinn has a presence and swagger that a quarterback needs and Anderson simply lacks. For however well Anderson may play in practice, he is tentative and indecisive (if you can be both) in games. It's time to put that issue to bed and move on to something more fundamental, like practicing the beejeezus out of the first team offensive unit until it proves it can put points on the board.

Second, the Browns need to settle their defensive line. Shaun Rogers may not have played Saturday night, but it's hard to see how much good he could have

done. The Packers chewed up 230 yards on the ground. That's actually why the score was a relatively close as it was. The Packers were doing their level best to shorten the game by toying with the overmatched defensive line.

This has to change, immediately. If the Browns can't stop the run, they'll never be able to rush the passer. As if this point needed to be proven yet again, the line made sure it did exactly that Saturday night, putting virtually no pressure when the starters for both teams were in the game.

And let's not forget the good folks at linebacker. Faces change but not the result. D'Qwell Jackson keeps getting singled out in practice as someone who really is taking a step forward. But like a golfer whose great on the range but not on the course, if Jackson really is going to be a force he's going to have to prove it when it counts and for these purposes, preseason counts.

The defense, like the offense, is suffering from a lack of leadership. On offense it comes down to the unsettled nature of the quarterback position. On defense, it comes down to that lack of a stud player with an ego. If you look at the Pittsburgh Steelers defense, you think about James Harrison and Troy Polamalu. The Browns are as far away as they've ever been from having that kind of talent on defense, but more to the point they are too far away from having those kinds of personalities.

Third, and more fundamentally, Mangini needs to find a way to eliminate the stench that currently has gripped every aspect of the franchise. Since running laps isn't helping much maybe an exorcism will. While Mangini is trying everything in his power to change the course of human events Saturday just proved that the toxic mold that has attached itself to this franchise isn't just on the surface. It's inside the walls and nothing short of tearing it completely down and rebuilding it is ever going to eliminate it.

In truth there really is no reason to get all animated about one preseason loss,

particularly with this team. In fact, the losses are expected. What fans want to see is progress and that's why Saturday's game was such a head-scratcher. There was nothing about any phase of the game that would suggest that any progress has been made. If the team comes out and lays still another egg this coming Saturday night, it might be years before fans will get to see a home game on local TV.

But let's focus for just a moment on the one positive, Cribbs. Showing once again why he remains the team's only consummate professional, Cribbs is making a strong pitch to become the team's number 2 receiver. That should help his contract status. Another thing that should help it is the mere fact that on this team he is far and away the most valuable player.

The only thing really hurting Cribbs' chances for a new contract anytime soon is that it is abundantly clear that the team has far more immediate concerns to address. And given how significant and several those concerns are, it looks like Mangini and the rest of the staff will be completely preoccupied for weeks to come.