Time once again for some weekend Lingering Items from Gary Benz. This week, Gary notes some similarities he sees between new Browns head coach Eric Mangini and the insane genius that used to run the Cincinnati Bengals, one Sam Wyche. Gary also touches on the job being done with the Pittsburgh Pirates by Mark Shapiro protege Neal Huntington, and how Eric Mangini has handled the Josh Cribbs contract situation much better than fellow Belichick disciple Josh McDaniels has in Denver with Brandon Marshall.

Reading about how Cleveland Browns head coach Eric Mangini had rearranged the deck chairs inside the titantic-like Browns' facility in Berea reminded me of another coach with a Cleveland past. And this coach's name is not, surprisingly, Bill Belichick.

The kind of camaraderie that Mangini is trying to build on this, the 40th anniversary of peace, love and sewage that was Woodstock, reminds me of the insane genius that used to run the Cincinnati Bengals, one Sam Wyche.

As awful as the Bengals' franchise has been, generally, they have still been in two Super Bowls, which is two more than the much more storied Browns' franchise. In fact, but for some Joe Montana heroics,

the Bengals might actually own two Super Bowl trophies.

The Bengals' last appearance was in 1989 when they lost 20-16 to the San Francisco 49ers at Miami's Joe Robbie Stadium. The Bengals essentially haven't recovered and, with the Browns, constitute a major reason why Pittsburgh and Baltimore have had their way in the AFC North for oh so many years.

But the Bengals' 1988 season was glorious. They went 12-4, won the AFC and found their way to that Super Bowl. The point is not to praise the Bengals. In what universe would that be a good idea? Rather it's to recall the story that Wyche has told saying, essentially, that the seeds of that season were sown in training camp the previous August.

The Bengals were coming off of a 4-11 season (strike season). The NFL itself was still in a bit of a mess because of the strike in 1987 that broke the backs of the unions when the owners used replacement players. To help bring his team together, Wyche re-arranged not just the lockers; he also "forced" players to room with each other during camp. In doing so, he often had black players rooming with whites, defensive players with offensive players, and the like. He claimed and probably still does that the forced familiarity this bred led to a far closer team.

I suspect that's exactly what Mangini has in mind with his little bit of maneuvering. In addition to moving players around the locker room, mixing offensive and defensive players, veterans and rookies, he's also taken to actually quizzing the players on what they know about their

colleagues. Will this have any impact on the won/loss record? It's hard to know because there is never a straight line between these kinds of "soft touches" and productivity.

One thing we do know is that if the team doesn't improve, some will accuse Mangini of focusing on the wrong things. If you doubt that, consider how many times members of the media along with some fans complained that the Browns' players during the Carmen Policy years were too soft because their every need was attended to?

My sense is that all of this kind of thing can only be helpful. What this team has lacked for too long is a culture and a purpose. If Mangini can create an actual team out of the parts he's been left with, that in itself is an accomplishment. If nothing else, it's the first baby step on the road to recovery.

But all this touchy-feely stuff would probably have never appeared on my radar if not for receiver Braylon Edwards unintentionally lifting curtain a bit on what makes him such a lousy member of the Browns. In discussing how the team is buying into Mangini's concepts, Edwards let on that all of these adjustments, including having to move his locker, have been a bit of annoying but necessary. Now, he said, he even knows the name of his teammates.

I suppose making sure one of the most self-absorbed athletes to wear a Browns uniform become a bit more aware of his surroundings is a good thing. It's a little disturbing to think, though, that Edwards wouldn't bother to learn a teammate's name unless he had to. I suspect, though,

that the converse wasn't true. Given how many passes Edwards has dropped over the years, his past teammates were well aware of his name.

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Since I took the trouble to mention one rival city, Cincinnati, it seemed only natural to mention another, Pittsburgh.

Not the Steelers. Does anyone really need to rehash the current state of affairs whereby the Browns serve as their ceremonial punching bags twice a season? Nope, this time I'm thinking of the Pirates, baseball's equivalent to the Bengals.

The Pirates are in the midst of their 17th consecutive losing. Entering this season the Pirates had no real chance of being competitive and didn't actually pretend they did. Teams occupying that space at least pretend they are building for the future. Not the Pirates.

Instead of using this season to hopefully establish a core, they ended up trading away whatever slight talent remained and brought in another group of youngsters to chart a new course. So what, you say? Who cares about the Pirates?

Well, no one much cares about the Pirates outside of Pittsburgh but the Cleveland angle to all of this is that Neal Huntington, a Mark Shapiro protégé, is the architect of this all. What Huntington has undertaken in Pittsburgh reeks of familiarity with how Shapiro went about torching this franchise the last few years. According to an article in Thursday's USA Today, in nearly every trade Huntington has acquired multiple young players in return. He calls it his "quantity of quality" master plan.

If there was ever a doubt about whether Shapiro was actually a tree that could cast off its seed elsewhere, it's now been dispelled. Huntington even comes with his own special bag of meaningless bromides. What makes this just a tad delicious is that Pirates fans are suffering in much the same way as Indians fans and for much the same reason. Both franchises are being run by general managers more focused on turning a phrase than a win.

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Speaking of rivals, or at least rivals past, what's taking place in Denver at the moment provides an interesting contrast with the Browns' camp on at least two fronts.

When Broncos owner Pat Bowlen fired Mike Shanahan as head coach, it was as controversial as the Browns' firing of Romeo Crennel was not. New Broncos head coach Josh McDaniels was certainly a candidate here in Cleveland but as we know now, owner Randy Lerner swept in and grabbed Mangini before fully vetting other candidates.

McDaniels may prove to be the better long-term coaching prospect, but his start in Denver has been as rough as Mangini's has been easy. For reasons that still aren't abundantly clear to anyone east of the Rocky Mountains, McDaniels picked a fight with starting quarterback Jay Cutler and ended up trading him for Kyle Orton. Now that's a quarterback controversy of a different order.

But the fight McDaniels is now having with wide receiver Brandon Marshall provides a stark contrast with what's going on with the Browns, Mangini and Josh Cribbs. Marshall is as petulant of a receiver as there is in the game. He's had the nickname "Baby T.O." and not for good reasons. Marshall's been stewing for a new contract and it came to a head on Friday when he got suspended for, well, acting like a midget leaguer whose dad makes him go to practice even though he'd rather be collecting soil samples to view under his toy microscope.

That Marshall acted like a spoiled child by sucking his thumb during practice as a way of wangling a new contract says plenty about Marshall. But it also says something about McDaniels and his control of the team. Bluntly, Marshall is challenging his rookie coach because he can. McDaniels has the title but not the full respect of the team at the moment.

In Cleveland, Cribbs talks about possibly sitting out the regular season in order to get his new contract. In the meantime, all Cribbs has done in the preseason is put his head down, work hard and produce. By a large margin, he's been the most impressive player in preseason.

Cribbs didn't come in the league with the pedigree of Marshall, but he's become a very valuable player in his own right with a far more professional approach. Rather than pout and challenge his new head coach, he's gone about earnestly trying to demonstrate why he should have anew contract.

But it also says something about how Mangini has control of this team that Cribbs, or Shaun Rogers for that matter, hasn't bothered to challenge him publicly. It's a fight he'd probably lose anyway. Mangini's tolerance for difficult personalities runs the gamut from A to B.

Though it's very early in each coach's tenure, Mangini is ahead at the quarter post.

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The news that Mangini's old team, the Jets, have recently named Mark Sanchez their starting quarterback didn't make me long for an end to the Browns' so-called quarterback competition as much as the incessant pondering by a local media given virtually nothing else to talk about by Mangini. What Sanchez being named starting quarterback did make me wonder is whether it not it made Mangini chuckle or wince.

If he's chuckling, it's because he believes he knows something the Jets don't, such as that their quarterback situation heading into camp was so bad that they had no choice but to start a rookie, a rookie possibly not as good as advertised. Mangini had the opportunity to draft Sanchez and passed on it in order to bounce around the first round and gain a few more draft picks. If Mangini didn't think Sanchez had a bigger upside then either one of the quarterbacks he can't make a decision over, then the fact that he thinks he may have fleeced his old team with the trade, and the pickup of Brett Ratliff, is probably making him laugh at the moment.

But don't discount the notion that maybe he's wincing just a bit. The fact that Mangini is stuck in neutral on two quarterbacks means he still doesn't have one starter. His old team, left with only Kellen Clemens on the shelf, found Sanchez due in large part to Mangini's abject desire to emulate Bill Belichick and continue picking up draft picks. Given the quicker trajectory of rookie quarterbacks into starting roles these days, perhaps Mangini is kicking himself just a bit.

More likely, though, is that if Mangini was still in New York and had taken Sanchez in the draft, he never would have named him the starter at this point. The Browns' quarterback battle is not so much a battle as it is a training-camp long act of deception Mangini is trying to perpetrate on the rest of the league, as if they're even paying attention.

Mangini believes the mystery he's created will give him a competitive advantage. Certainly the Browns need all they can get. But before the Browns start playing these kinds of games with the rest of the league, other teams have to be paying attention. And though no team takes any other too lightly, let's just say that the Browns game isn't circled on any other team's schedule at the moment.

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With the Indians never completely out of one's mind, this week's question to ponder is: "Is Eric Wedge playing a clearly injured Grady Sizemore in a desperate attempt to save his own job?"