Anyone who thought that Cleveland Browns head coach Eric Mangini was going to break stride and make some sort of announcement on his starting quarterback after Saturday night's win against the Tennessee Titans is probably wringing his hands today in frustration. The rest of us know better. No announcement was ever coming and no announcement may ever come. If Mangini names a starting quarterback, ever, that might actually be news. Gary talks about it.

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Mangini occupies the Browns' head spot from a comfortable perch. Owner Randy Lerner, after nearly running the franchise into the ground in large measure because of his own indifference, has put his faith in a coach whose resume has the kind of upward mobility anyone would envy. Mangini, once the ball boy, is now the Prince. And like the subject of Machiavelli's political treatise, Mangini's

approach is to manipulate as necessary to protect the city-state from the invaders.

That's why Mangini isn't going to do anything on anyone's timetable but his own. If you're Lerner and your interests lie across the pond with a different form of football, you might be lulled into thinking that Mangini has already been a rousing success. From the ashes of a torched 2008 season, Mangini has been able to nonetheless stoke new flames of fan interest. At least that's how Lerner must see it.

It's partially true. From a purely public relations standpoint, Mangini turning his first season's training camp into a quarterback version of American Idol has the fans talking about the team. With Brady Quinn playing the role of Kris Allen while Derek Anderson takes on the persona of Adam Lambert, Mangini has the fans debating which of these two millionaires should lead the team on his next tour through the American Football Conference. It's caused a certain buzz.

Even if Mangini isn't a coaching genius, give him credit for understanding how the local media works. Like soldiers on a hundred mile hike, he's led them down a path where they're grateful for even a sip of water. Every nod of Mangini's head, every monotone syllable uttered is discerned for hidden meaning. "He said Quinn looked sharp while he said that Anderson only looked good. He must be leaning toward Quinn."

Treating the beat reporters like the suckers they've become, they are unwittingly playing the part the local Fox station does during American Idol by fanning fan interest through mindless reports on a competition that seems far more important than it is.

Harsh? Hardly. It's all the reporters can write about. If you looked at the local newspapers following Saturday night's game, about half think that Quinn did enough to win the prize while the other half think it's too close to call. The only

thing missing is a hundred or so web sites dedicated to the competition.

If this whole thing were being orchestrated by Mangini in just this fashion, it might be considered a stroke of genius. The problem is that while Mangini may be that calculating, it's for far different reasons. This is simply about control. He has it, you don't.

Mangini isn't going to name his starting quarterback any time soon because he doesn't have to. There's no league rule mandating that he be straight with the fans and Lerner isn't about to push that button. Mangini is far more convinced that the longer he withholds this information, the tougher it will be for opposing teams to plan for the Browns. The Prince wouldn't do otherwise.

But the quarterback position is hardly the only area where Mangini is flexing his power muscles. There are a number of players, relatively important players like Shaun Rogers and Ryan Tucker for example, that haven't been seen in several days and yet Mangini acts as if there's no story there.

Perhaps he's right. Rogers may be hurt, perhaps seriously, but it's also every bit as likely that his absence from practice and preseason games was part of some off-season pact Mangini made with Rogers to lighten his load and keep him fresh for the regular season. Whichever theory is correct or whether it's something in the middle, Mangini ought to say, which is precisely why he's not. Never show your vulnerabilities.

As for Tucker and even Brodney Pool, who knows? Both may be contemplating retirement at the moment or both may be taking a less strenuous route to preparing for the season. When/if either or both reappears, like Rogers, Mangini is certain to act as if nothing was askew in the first place.

Right now, this is causing the fans to gnash their teeth. But if the Browns find a

way to pull out a few victories, particularly early in the season, the heat will be off Mangini. Fans are very Machiavellian about their teams which is why teams tend to be run by Machiavelli wannabes. And if ever this team has been run by a Machiavelli wannabe, it's the Browns.

Like Machiavelli's Prince, Mangini is running on the notion that if you can't be both loved and feared, it's better to be feared. Through the aura of power he was granted by the far away king, Mangini now has his troops and a compliant media walking blindly lock step to his rhythm. And if Cleveland's Prince is ultimately successful, they'll continue walking in whatever direction he dictates.

So far, it's working. During that part of Saturday's game against the Titans that mattered, the Browns did find a way to win when they deserved to lose. The Titans pretty much dominated the game offensively and yet repeatedly couldn't make that final 8-foot putt. It kept an opportunistic Browns team in the game long enough to turn the tide in their favor.

Quinn certainly did nothing to hurt his status and Anderson didn't do much to hurt his, in each case whatever that means. Playing, as usual, without much of a running game, Quinn first and then Anderson, still kept the offensive moving mostly in the right direction.

As for that running game, it's easy to dismiss its failure as more the result of a good Titans' defensive line than poor execution on the Browns' part. That would be a mistake. If nothing else was clear, it's that Jamal Lewis has lost at least one step, probably more. As strong as he remains physically, he simply doesn't hit the hole quick enough to make players miss. James Davis, who may or may not be a star in the making, demonstrated at the very least what a pair of much younger legs can accomplish. Davis consistently attacks the line much more quickly. His inability to get more yardage seemed more attributable to a lack of veteran savvy than ability. Jerome Harrison should be worried.

The defense, on the other hand, can't rely on good teams consistently imploding like the Titans did on Saturday night. Those long drives eventually will turn into tired bodies, increased injuries and insurmountable opposing team leads. If Mangini really is undecided about his quarterbacks, maybe it really is because he's preoccupied with the defense at the moment. He should be.

The Browns' personal city-state is far from fortified and the Prince knows it. It thus remains vulnerable. But as Machiavelli pointed out, a Prince's ultimate goal is to gain honor by performing great feats. In Cleveland at the moment, their Prince will gain great honor if he can just put together the great feat of an 8-8 record.