There is a common thread that seems to unite all media members in their contempt for the Browns new coach Eric Mangini: his zealous protection of all information surrounding his team. Mangini offers little truthful information to those who spend time inside Berea covering the team. And the net result is that Mangini and the media are often at odds, and we as fans are left to pick through the media coverage of this team to try and discern the truth from the coverage that has been slanted by the media's overall negative opinion of Mangini.

In the court of media opinion, it seems like Eric Mangini is a man with two strikes against him before the first pitch is even thrown.

(Yeah, I'm crossing my sports metaphors. Stick with me.)

Most of Mangini's moves, or non-moves, have been met with widespread skepticism, no matter who you read or watch, local or national. All offseason, the chorus line on Mangini has been the same: he works his players too hard, his practices are too physical and he forced his draft picks -- bullied, some have said -- into taking a 10-hour bus ride to Connecticut to work at his football camp.

When he's not being a taskmaster, he's waffling, unable to decide between quarterbacks throughout the preseason, and butchering his first Browns draft by

trading down thrice in the first round -- including his decision to trade the fifth overall pick to the Jets, willingly giving USC quarterback Mark Sanchez to his former employer in the process.

Snaking through all of it is the common thread that seems to unite all media members in their contempt for the Browns new coach: his zealous protection of all information surrounding his team. In defense of the people who cover the team, M angini's CIA-level protection of team information is excessive at times. In some cases, such as naming his starting quarterback, there is solid, competitive reasoning for secrecy, as Mangini wants to keep the Vikings guessing in advance of the Sept. 13 opener. But sometimes, it seems he just stays mum for the sake of staying mum.

All preseason, we've been left to wonder exactly why Shaun Rogers failed to appear in a game. It really offers no competitive advantage for Mangini to keep quiet on why Rogers is sitting out of exhibition games, but Mangini remained tight-lipped.

When the Browns traded defensive lineman Louis Leonard to the Panthers at the start of the month, it was reportedly the Panthers front office, not the Browns, confirming that Leonard had been traded for an undisclosed draft pick.

It's not a new phenomenon. Mangini's attitude toward the media, and his tendency to not disclose even the most mundane information, was fashioned by Bill Parcells and Bill Belichick, two of the all-time greatest coaches who have treated football intelligence like war games. Mangini received his first shot as a head coach in the country's biggest media market, meaning that he quickly developed an extreme vigilance in protecting team information against the packhounds in the New York and national media.

It's an overreactive approach that probably needs some fine-tuning now that he's gone from the Walmart of big-box media markets to a

comparative mom-and-pop operation in Cleveland.
Mangini
will have to start disclosing injuries once the season starts, per the
NFL's
policy. But the damage has already been done.
Mangini
brought a stable of national media critics with him to Cleveland, a piece of fallout from his Jets days. Once he arrived in Cleveland, he was faced with a local media throng used to the laid-back
stylings
of Romeo
Crennel
, now forced to deal with a far more controlling presence in the head coach's chair.

The net result is that Mangini and the media are often at odds, and we as fans are left to pick through the media coverage of this team to try and discern the truth from the coverage that has been slanted by the media's overall negative opinion of Mangini. It can be difficult at times.

In Sports Illustrated's 2009 season preview, Peter King infamously predicts the Browns will finish an NFL-worst 2-14 despite having one of the league's easiest schedules. Keep in mind that despite an ongoing quarterback controversy and the frequent game mismanagement of
Crennel
and his staff, injuries were the main reason the Browns finished 4-12 last season. Once Ken Dorsey and Bruce
Gradkowski
had to play out the string as the starting
QBs
, an 0-6 finish was signed, sealed and delivered. Put either Derek Anderson or Brady Quinn under center for those final six games, and I firmly believe the Browns do not go 4-12.

King's prediction, which I believe is a two-numbered way of saying "I hate Eric Mangini and hope he fails miserably with the Browns" is offset by a team preview capsule
in which author Ben
Reiter

paints a picture of
Mangini
as a hard-working coach who is trying to instill discipline in his players while attempting to relate to them in a more positive fashion than he did in New York.

Plain Dealer beat reporter Tony Grossi has been arguably the pre-eminent authority on the Browns for more than 20 years. He has earned his standing as the go-to guy for print Browns coverage, but even he has let his irritation with
Mangini
seep into his writing, referring to
Mangini's
practice of not disclosing injuries as "
mind games
," and flippantly commenting that "The Browns will not confirm their final record until some time in March" in his
'09 season predictions
. (
Grossi
pegs the Browns at 6-10.)

It would have been a weak grab for a laugh if it had come from the keyboards of opinion columnists like Bill Livingston or Bud Shaw. Coming from the guy who is supposed to provide the public with an unvarnished view of Mangini and his team, it makes you wonder how much of what we read and hear is straight shooting, and how much is slanted to cast
Mangini
and his practices in an unfavorable light.

It's a shame that it has come to this. There isn't a single culprit. Mangini could back off the screws on some of his disclosure policies, throw the media a few bones and his team wouldn't be any worse for the wear. But the folks who write the stories and record the soundbites that we read, see and hear each day need to accept that they've been given a difficult assignment. No one is asking them to be happy about it, but they need to refrain from letting their personal feelings about how
Mangini
affects their jobs seep into their coverage of the team.

If something needs to be said on the matter, opinion columns -- like this one -- are

the proper forum. If your job is to report the news, then report the news, no more and no less.

The reporters who are sparring with Mangini through their medium of practice might think they're taking the Browns coach down a notch or two on the self-importance scale. But in actuality, they're just making it more difficult for the fans -- the consumers of their work -- to gain an accurate picture of their favorite team.

If the fans have to guess as to what is truth versus what is slanted by Mangini-hat e, then the disservice the media is doing to their readers and viewers is worse than any disservice
Mangini
is doing to the media. The media's job is to accurately inform.
Mangini's
job is to win.