The Browns injury report is a pretty crowded place right now. Defensive starters Shaun Rogers, Brodney Pool, Eric Wright, Kenyon Coleman, and Kamerion Wimbley could all miss Sunday's game against the Chargers. Also, Jamal Lewis has played his last football game in the NFL and all Gary can think about at the moment is his comments from a few weeks ago about how his head coach, Eric Mangini, conducts practice sessions. In this week's Lingering Items, Gary talks about a potential correlation, and also hits on the NFL's concussion policy, and whether or not Mangini and Ron Ryan will return to the team next season.

Cleveland Browns running back Jamal Lewis has played his last football game in the NFL and all I can think about at the moment is his comments from a few weeks ago about how his head coach, Eric Mangini, conducts practice sessions. According to Lewis, Mangini works his players too hard during the week, leading to a team that's dead tired by the time it takes the field on Sundays. The natural consequence of course is that tired players become injured players.

Mangini defended his practice by suggesting, through creative calculation, that after you discount the ½ hour walk-through at the beginning of practice and ignore the post-practice opportunity sessions, practice is only 2 ½ hours long, the same as every other team. It reminds me of Barney on The Simpsons panicking at the weekly card game because after this case of beer, that case of beer and that other case of beer, there's only one case of beer left.

It's hard to know, really, if the Browns' spate of injuries is the result of a tough preseason training camp and a tough in-season practice session. It is instructive that the injuries are now stacking up like planes over LaGuardia and it's near the end of the season, but there may be another explanation all together.

The only players that don't get injured during a typical NFL season are those that spend the season in street clothes. Brian Robiskie and David Veikune, you're probably safe, although I'd have said the same thing about James Davis and he resides on the injured reserve list at the moment. But players on teams that are fighting for playoff teams tend to find ways to get themselves back on the field. Players on teams fighting for the number one pick in the draft tend to call it a season as early as possible.

Don't misinterpret. There is no question in my mind that the injuries suffered by every Browns player are legitimate. Football played at any level but particularly at the pro level is incredibly violent. The fastest and strongest crashing into each other 90 some times a game can't be good for anyone's body. There will be blood. It's just that when there is nothing left to fight for, it is far better to take your time with an injury get completely healthy and don't risk losing another season in what is typically a very short career. That's not criticism, that's just reality.

The Browns of last season had a similar rash of late season injuries and it's pretty clear those couldn't have been the result of practices being either too long or too difficult under Camp Country Club being led by Chief Counselor Crennel. Every one of those injuries was likewise legitimate, yet there they were several.

Maybe it's all just bad luck or the curse of the franchise that calls itself the Browns. More likely, though, it's just a function of a team going nowhere under a coach the players can't stand.

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It's good to see the NFL finally taking concussions more seriously. This week it announced new guidelines for when a player can return in a game after suffering from a concussion or concussion-like symptoms. In the past a team was prevented from putting a player back in only if he lost consciousness during that game.

The timing of these new guidelines reminded me why Hines Ward of the Pittsburgh Steelers may be my least favorite player of all time. Perennially called out by his fellow players as the league's dirtiest player, Ward is a cheap shot artist whose blindside chop blocks on unsuspecting defensive backs are a weekly occurrence. Browns' quarterback Brady Quinn was called on the carpet by Ray Lewis for a dirty hit on Ravens linebacker Terrell Suggs, but Hines has made a career of doing the same thing.

But perhaps Ward's most detestable act to date was calling out his very own quarterback, Ben Roethlisberger, for not playing against the Baltimore Ravens last week because he was still suffering from the effects of his latest concussion.

Ward essentially questioned both Roethlisberger's manhood and loyalty by telling Bob Costas that Roethlisberger could have gotten around the doctor's orders if he really wanted to by essentially lying about his condition. Future, what future? There was a game to be won right now, dammit, and you don't get that back.

Ward has since backed off his comments, but as is typical with a guy like Ward he did so not because he didn't believe them but because he verbalized them publicly. The truth is that Ward doesn't care any more about Roethlisberger's long-term health than he does about the economy in Detroit. Ward is first and foremost concerned about Ward and what the plans he has for the playoff money he'll earn if he can just get Roethlisberger's butt back on the field.

This is exactly why the NFL needs stronger rules regarding concussions. Teams are for more interested in short-term goals than the long-term concerns of the

players that help them reach those short-term goals.

The Browns put two players on the injured reserve list this week with concussions, Lewis and defensive back Brodney Pool. In Pool's case this was either his fourth or fifth concussion. In actuality he's probably suffered far more than that. Mangini did the right thing by immediately relegating both to injured reserve, but neither probably would have been healthy enough to play anyway. Pool, like Lewis, may be done as a professional anyway. The chances of suffering the next concussion are exponentially higher for each one you've previously suffered. Pool has a real chance of doing permanent damage that he'll never overcome if he gets back on that field again.

I don't wish ill of any player. But maybe just once Ward needs to walk in the shoes of players like Roethlisberger, Lewis or Pool to understand that often times there's something far more important at stake than another game against the Ravens.

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With all the Browns injuries, the chances are increasing that they'll be used as a reason by owner Randy Lerner to give Mangini another year he hardly deserves. After all, it's hardly Mangini's fault that the team wasn't competitive, look at all the injuries, of so the theory goes.

As theories, it's as faulty as "the process." The Browns already were the worst team in the league before the injuries really started to strike and it's not as if the loss of more players will make this team any worse. It's not as if the Browns will now be 33rd in the league.

If Lerner goes down that road, a road he didn't go down with Crennel at

the end of last season, it would just be another grave mistake on an ever expanding list. This team hasn't been competitive all season. It won one game against a bad Buffalo team because of a crucial special teams mistake at the end of the game that allowed them to kick a winning field goal. It played one other team well, the Cincinnati Bengals, in an overtime loss. But every other game, from week one to last week's rematch against the Bengals, has been an exercise in futility.

The Browns under Mangini have basically not stood a legitimate chance all season. That's his legacy and that's where the judgment comes. But given Lerner's penchant for trying to find the easy and convenient way out of making the hard decision, the injury plague in Cleveland stands as ready-made.

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Whether Browns' defensive coordinator Rob Ryan is head coach material or not isn't exactly clear, but the same can't be said for his candor. Ryan in front of a microphone is everything that Mangini is not. He's passionate, honest and outspoken. Frankly, he reflects far better on the psyche of the typical Browns fan than a guy like Mangini ever could. He's a guy that Browns fans can and will rally around given the right circumstances.

In Friday's press conference Ryan stood up for Mangini in a very direct fashion, which was admirable, but what was even more refreshing was the unabashed way he stood up for himself. He told the media that a

better defensive coordinator did not exist, allowing for perhaps only his father, Buddy Ryan. Even then, the younger Ryan said that was just a "maybe."

Ryan can be brutally honest while being brutally humorous, as in his statement about getting reinforcements for his injured troops from one of the high schools in the state championships or in how he described his defense as a "house of cards."

Ryan has clearly been dealt only half a hand this year by the leader he praised. But rather than offer excuses, he just keeps plugging away, pumping up his dispirited troops as best he can. Given the lack of talent on this team, there was never much chance of it being anything but the worst defense in the league. Neither Ryan nor Jesus could raise it from the dead. But Ryan is a bright spot nonetheless and if he at all has the qualities for being a head coach, letting him get away even if Mangini is purged would be a mistake, kind of like Art Modell letting Bill Cowher get to Pittsburgh because he thought Cowher was too young to be a head coach.

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The blackout's been lifted and it leads to this week's question to ponder: How many disenfranchised Browns fans do you think will actually change their plans this Sunday now that the game is being televised locally?