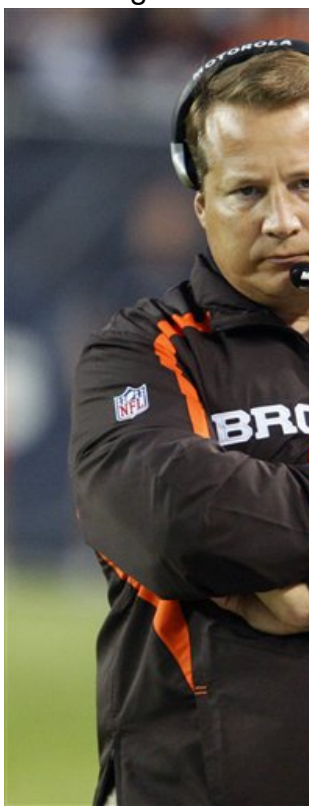
Through 12 weeks, the Browns were 1-11, the team was in disarray and it was hard to fine anyone who wasn't convinced that Mangini was the root of all that evil. But 1 month later, following a loss to the San Diego Chargers, the Browns caught fire, winning 4 straight including a victory against the Pittsburgh Steelers. They've played inspired ball and it's turned a lot of heads. With Mike Holmgren, the Browns new club president, arriving in town this week to determine Mangini's fate, it's probably time to really get to the bottom of whether or not Mangini is indeed the Root of All Evil. Enter Gary Benz for an amusing look at the topic ...



There was a show on Comedy Central called *Root of All Evil*. It was hosted by Lewis Black and the premise was to put various aspects of pop culture on trial.

Black would name a topic, such as Dick Cheney, and then have two celebrities make the argument pro and con as to whether Cheney was the root of all evil.

Black would then pronounce a verdict.

It never came up on the show, but as good a topic as any would be Eric Mangini. Through 12 weeks, the Browns were 1-11, the team was in disarray and it was hard to fine anyone who wasn't convinced that Mangini was the root of all that evil.

But 1 month later, following a loss to the San Diego Chargers, the Browns caught fire, winning 4 straight including a victory against the Pittsburgh Steelers. They've played inspired ball and it's turned a lot of heads.

With Mike Holmgren, the Browns new club president, arriving in town this week to determine Mangini's fate, it's probably time to really get to the bottom of whether or not Mangini is indeed the Root of All Evil.

I don't have ready access to any celebrities with enough knowledge on the Browns to cogently make the point/counterpoint. But picture, in this corner, Drew Carey as if he were making the argument for keeping Mangini.

In the other corner then is Martin Mull presenting the case for a one-and-done for Mangini.

Presiding, of course, is Holmgren.

"We're here today to decide, once and for all, whether Eric Mangini is the root of all evil. Mr. Carey, you have the floor."

"Thank you, Mr. President.

"Actually, this is a far easier case to make than getting through those two episodes of Gary Unmarried that Mr. Mull guest starred in last year. I'll summarize it in 3 simple words: We Beat Pittsburgh.

That's right ladies and gentlemen, when was the last time we could make that claim?

Ok, so it was only 6 years ago, but wasn't that, like 8 coaches ago or something like that?

"The Steelers were the reigning Super Bowl champs for goodness sakes. We outplayed them on national television.

Spanked them good, too.

Even if the Browns hadn't won another game all season, this one victory against Pittsburgh makes Mangini a rousing success in my book."

Mr. Mull, do you have a reply?

"Drew, I think your glasses are squeezing your brain to hard. Either that or the barber is digging a little too deep into your scalp with the clippers.

Sure the Browns beat the Steelers and sure it's been 6 long years since that occurred, but guess what?

In 2003 the Steelers didn't make the playoffs then, either.

Want to go back even further?

How about the Browns' only other victory against the Steelers since returning in 1999.

That was in 2000 and it was at Pittsburgh and you know who the coach was?

It was Chris Palmer.

And you know what else?

The Steelers didn't make the playoffs that season either.

I don't remember anyone in the town going ga-ga over that win or screaming that we had to keep Palmer.

He was fired at the end of the season.

C'mon Drew, you're going to have to make a better case than that."

"Look, Marty, I get it. You're bitter. You haven't had steady work since,

when, the Roseanne show went off the air?

When was that 1997?

But hey, I

loved you in those two episodes of Two and a Half Men.

Don't let that bitterness cloud your judgment, though.

Mangini is a fine coach.

He's just getting rolling.

"Look, if you want to discredit the Pittsburgh win, fine. But you can't ignore the 4-game winning streak at the end of the season.

It proves that the players really were buying into his system.

Sure it took awhile to get moving, but

once it did the team was a juggernaut.

With the way Jerome Harrison and Josh Cribbs have been running, there wasn't a team in the NFL that would want to play the Browns at the moment.

"Jacksonville came into Cleveland with a potential playoff spot on the line. All the Browns did was rise up and kick them in the teeth.

That showed me and everyone else that Mangini has turned a corner with these players and with this town.

He's a keeper."

"A keeper, you say? Do you really think that someone who hosts The Price

is Right for a living ought to be doling out the career advice?

When I want your advice, I'll confine it to how much a box of Betty Crocker spicy cake mix should cost.

"Here's what I do know. The players are rallying all right, but it's for themselves, not their coach. Did you hear Derek Anderson's press conference?

Did you hear what Corey Williams had to say?

Nearly identical things, that's what.

They said that they were really just playing for each other.

That the players remaining pulled together after they had reached rock bottom at 1-11.

"Here's what else I know. The Browns had 5 victories this past season and not a single one of them was against a playoff-bound team.

Maybe you were involved in putting together the final showcase when it happened and weren't paying attention, but did you see what the Browns did look like when they played against playoff-bound teams?

They weren't competitive.

Their last loss was against the San Diego Chargers and it wasn't nearly as close as the final score would indicate.

When the game was on the line, the Browns were down by three touchdowns.

Only boredom on the part of the Chargers kept it close at the end.

"In fact, when you look even closer, the Browns really didn't have the most difficult schedule in the league. They played only 5 playoff-bound teams and lost to them all. They also got their heads handed to them against Denver and Chicago.
A 4-game win streak is nice, but the truth of the matter is that this team wasn't even competitive when it mattered most.

"And the running game? Please. Wasn't it Mangini that kept pushing Jamal Lewis out there game after game when it was clear in the preseason that he had lost at least a step? And what about Harrison?

Everyone knew he was a good back going into the season, everyone that is but Mangini.

He deactivated him for two games, and that was after he ran for over 100 yards in the first Cincinnati game."

"Mr Carey, you look like you're about to jump out of your skin."

"Actually, Mr. President, I wish I had jumped out of this skin about 150 pounds ago, but that's another subject for another day. What my esteemed, aging, balding and barely employed colleague fails to appreciate is that until Mangini came along, Harrison was just a change of pace back going nowhere.

Mangini had to deactivate him for those two games to show him that no player was above the team concept, just like Brian Robiskie.

Sometimes you have to take a step backward to move two steps forward.

Let's face it, my good friend here, Mr. Mull, did Sabrina the Teenage Witch.

That's the equivalent of being deactivated in my view.

Yet he used that low point to go on to even greater glory, if you call playing Gene Parmesan in Arrested Development greater glory."

"For the record, Mr. Carey, I'm proud of my work on Sabrina the Teenage Witch, but your point is noted. I understand humility. But treating professional football players as if they are a group of juniors and seniors from Berea High School is ridiculous. If we wanted a high school coach running the Browns, there's plenty of good ones available, like Chuck Kyle over at St. Ignatius.

This is the pros."

"I hardly think Mangini qualifies as a high school coach. Would a high school coach drain the pool of bottom dwellers like Kellen Winslow, Jr. or Braylon Edwards? He's the one who cut Shaun Smith.

Romeo Crennel didn't have the guts to do any of that.

It takes a set of brass ones to take on guys who are making more money than you are.

But Mangini did it and he's not afraid to make the tough decisions, even if they make him unpopular."

"Well, who more than you would know about being unpopular? I've seen your yearbook.

Weren't you voted most likely to be given a wedgie?

Fine, you want to give Mangini credit for dumping Smith, Winslow and Edwards, great.

But who'd we get in return,
Jason Trusnik, Chansi Stuckey and a bunch of draft choices?

Nice players, I guess, but if Mangini had been more patient he could have gotten them for free when they were cut by the Jets anyway.

"Which brings me to my main point: this guy needs to be kept as far away as possible from player acquisition. He blew 3 second round picks in 2009 alone. He brought in a bunch of washed up Jets to fill out the roster, everyone of which will probably be gone next year.

In fact, the only players that made any meaningful contribution this year were acquired by Phil Savage."

"Are you saying you want to go back to Phil Savage? That's like saying it's time to bring Fernwood 2 Nite back on the air.

Alex Mack played every down this season and you could see his improvement week to week.

It's no coincidence that as the line solidified so, too, did the running game.

Mohamed Massaquoi is going to be a big time receiver.

He showed plenty this season.

And let's not forget about Matt Roth and Evan Moore, two players Mangini picked up off the scrap heat.

Besides, by the time Mangini was hired last year he hardly had enough time to prepare for the draft.

Why do you think he made all the deals he did in order to get 11 picks this year. He'll be ready, I guarantee you that.

This guy knows what he's doing."

"Let's see, he's been a head coach now for 4 consecutive years, three of which were losing seasons. That sounds more like the ratings for the Drew Carey show than it does a successful resume for a head coach."

Then Holmgren stepped to the podium.

"Ok, gents. Time's up. This is starting to get personal. You both present compelling cases.
It's true that this franchise was at one of its lowest point ever just two months ago.

But it's also true that it is riding high at the moment.

Mangini made a lot of ridiculous moves early in the season many of which he now admits were mistakes.

But on the other hand he fired one of his best friends and has a habit of alienating those close to him.

The team's improved in certain areas, like avoiding penalties, but they are still at the bottom of the league in every meaningful statistic on both offense and defense.

They've also won only 1 more game than all of last season.

It's a close call.

"Mangini, the root of all evil? I'll render my final verdict in a few days. Stay tuned."