The Cleveland Browns are finishing up their organized team activities, which aren't mandatory, so that they can start their mini-camp, which is mandatory. In the meantime the steadying hand of team president Mike Holmgren is ever present and what a difference it's made.

To say that head coach Eric Mangini got off to a slow start in his new job would be an understatement on the level of the Cavs are having merely an interesting off season. Mangini came in with a huge chip on his shoulder and an uber confidence that belied his modest accomplishments to that point. He couldn't have picked a worse strategic plan if he had merely thrown a dart on a board instead.

When he wasn't alienating established veterans, he was pissing off rookies and their agents by having them volunteer for a 10-hour bus ride to help out at his youth camp in Connecticut in the same way that Rich Rodriguez has his players volunteer for extra practice in the summer.

Then came perhaps the worst run training camp in the history of organized football that provided a springboard for a season that made Bill Belichick's tenure in Cleveland seem like a Tony Robbins seminar by comparison. In between there were firings, trades, a fan revolt and a near mutiny from within.

Maybe it was all just part of a vaunted process and the natural outgrowth of a change agent meeting resistance from enemies of progress, but when the dust settled owner Randy Lerner was frustrated to the point of declaring that he needed a credible person in charge of his organization, a tacit acknowledgement that neither he nor Mangini qualified for that spot.

In rode Holgrem and suddenly it's the Browns that look positively functional while the Cavs are solidly out of sorts. The Indians, hopeless.

The biggest controversy at the moment for the Browns has to do with the relatively high number of restricted free agents who won't sign the one-year contracts tendered to them. If this had been a year ago, this would have been chalked up to another misstep by Mangini, as if a team that is 4-12 can't get by without D'Qwell Jackson, Jerome Harrison, Matt Roth, Abe Elam and Lawrence Vickers.

Instead, under the new regime this is general manager Tom Heckert's problem and virtually no one is raising much of an issue over it. That's the kind of implied confidence the average fan has in both Holmgren and Heckert that it will get resolved quietly and professionally. No drama, no tears, just mature human beings confronting the daily grind of problems in their business.

Beyond this little free agent issue everything else is perfectly sanguine. That's what makes me nervous.

In the last 10 years the Browns really haven't had a season in which there wasn't any controversy. Under the ownership of first Al Lerner and now his son Randy, the Browns have been a the Old Faithfuls of dysfunction. You could set a watch by the eruptions, they were that predictable.

Even as the losses piled up like autumn leaves in the backyard, this team has never lacked for another story to tell. Whether it was Chris Palmer and his runaway train, Butch Davis and another lecture about guts or Romeo Crennel and his magic coin flip to pick a starting quarterback, the Browns have been more entertaining off the field than on.

But now the Browns are making the sound of one hand clapping. It's really the sound of a creeping stability, the sense that maybe Lerner finally got something right.

The Browns still don't have enough quality players to make a serious run at the playoffs. Right now the fans would be satisfied with a serious run at 8-8. But the barge, seemingly pointed permanently in the direction of a black hole, has actually begun the slow turn toward respectability.

It's not one thing really but a series of small things that provide the clues. There's little if any grousing by anyone inside or outside of Berea. Draft picks showed up and are working out. Even the restricted free agents are trickling in and those that aren't are fairly quiet.

This is what it really means to have a serious, credible leader in charge. It's one thing to push around a guy like Mangini, he really hasn't accomplished anything in the NFL. Holmgren's resume is far more impressive. He's either seen it or done it and that's something he has on everyone else in the organization at the moment.

It helps, too, that Holmgren speaks his mind and when he does he speaks plainly. He keeps spin to a bare minimum and the rest of the organization as begun to takes its cues from him that the quickest exit out of panic mode is to actually stop panicking.

Mangini is the biggest beneficiary. Right now no one's giving him a hard time even as his natural tendencies creep in from time to time. There was little bit of "there he goes again" when Mangini hinted a few times over the last few weeks that he sees using Seneca Wallace at quarterback along with Jake Delhomme.

Is this Mangini trying to play mind games with his quarterbacks? Probably. He operates from the management school which motivates through infliction of insecurity and some habits die hard. He's also probably trying to keep the competition guessing as to his plans, as if they're even paying attention at the moment. Other habits die hard as well.

But beyond these kinds of quirks and tics, Mangini is mostly acting far less like the paranoid control freak he came across as last year. He still doesn't answer questions directly and probably never will for fear that he may give away some sort of state secret, but he's also far more relaxed about how he goes about it.

He also seems far more welcoming to his players as if he's come to some sort of realization that being a prick isn't generally the best approach to managing the troops.

All of this means, of course, that there is likely going to be far less opportunities to kick around Mangini this season. And that's a good thing. When the team's lousy, a ready punching bag is all that can keep a fan's interest. It's kind of fun I suppose to write about things like Phil Savage telling a fan via email to essentially "step off," just as it's kind of fun to write about players getting suspended for talking to the media about staph infections. But in truth it's most fun to write about what most fans want to focus on, the games themselves.

Unfortunately, in Cleveland there's been precious little to write about when it comes to games that doesn't begin with "another day, another loss." and that isn't confined to just the Browns. But, as implausible as it seemed just a few short months ago, it looks like it will be the Browns, under Holmgren, that will be the first Cleveland team to put the focus back where it belongs. I wonder, for once, if the Cavs are paying attention.