The current debate surrounding cornerback Eric Wrights' play last Sunday against the Baltimore Ravens serves as a microcosm of the debate around head coach Eric Mangini's future.

The nub of the issue centers around Mangini's decision to leave Wright in to fend for himself against Ravens' receiver Anquan Boldin after it was more than proven that Boldin vs. Wright was the biggest mismatch since Bunny vs. Fudd.

Mangini dismissed any notion of adjusting the defense in response to Wright's deficiencies, holding on to the notion that rotating the players and perhaps putting a bigger body on Wright would have otherwise disrupted the integrity of the underlying game plan.

To some that underscores exactly why Mangini should be replaced. He just can't adjust to what a game dictates. To others Mangini should be credited for sticking to his knitting as part of this team's overall improvement process. Both sides have a point.

One of Mangini's greatest weaknesses as a head coach, at least to this point, is his inflexibility and Sunday demonstrated it in spades. Wright was both off his game and overmatched and as the minutes wore on it wasn't going to get any better. Players have bad games and it isn't a sign of weakness but of strength to acknowledge what every one else can see and then do something about it.

Some have phrased it (e.g. Terry Pluto) in the context that doing something different couldn't have been any worse. But that obscures the debate. Whatever adjustment Mangini might have made could have been worse for the team only if you think it matters whether the Browns lose by 7 or 27. Professional sports is a bottom line business and while some losses don't sting as much as others, they all do count the same.

The better question, in a pure business context, would have been to weigh the downside against the possible upside and determine whether whatever risk that downside held was worth the chance to realize the potential upside.

If Mangini had made the adjustment before Boldin's third touchdown, then perhaps the Browns go on to win the game. That's the best case scenario. A more likely scenario is that making the adjustment teaches Mangini something about the other players on the roster. Maybe Mangini unearths a latent talent in someone like Mike Adams that he didn't know was there. Maybe Joe Haden proves he's ready more quickly than anyone thought. Maybe he comes to realize that no one in his secondary can actually play up to NFL standards.

The point isn't so much to second guess but to illustrate that making a change didn't carry any inherently greater risk to the team than staying with the status quo. The additional downside of replacing Wright was minimal while the potential upside was larger. In business, most people would take that risk every time.

Folks willing to go down that road, not coincidentally, fall into the same category as those who think Mangini should be fired and yesterday is not too soon. Their passion is understandable.

But it's not as if Mangini's point isn't well taken, either. Not coincidentally, those who think his point is well taken are willing to give Mangini more time to let his vaunted process take hold since this Browns' train isn't going anywhere anytime soon anyway.

To consider Mangini's side of things, I'm sure he doesn't think that he's inflexible. It's actually much simpler than that. Given what he knew was the outcome anyway, a strong argument could be made that having Wright take his lumps and learn from his mistakes will make a decent player better in the long run. If this year's results are being judged against the amorphous concept of progress rather than a more concrete barometer, such as success, then taking one's lumps is part of that process.

There's only so much one can learn in the classroom. The real lessons are usually learned through trial and error. Making a mess and then being forced to clean it is often the best way to

learn how not to make the mess in the first place. That applies as much to someone like Wright as it does to the second year analyst in the cubicle down the hall.

Besides, all of these players need to learn to play within the system they've been given. You can argue all you want about whether the system makes any sense, but success isn't likely to be achieved when the fundamental blueprint is easily abandoned.

If you look at the actual success that either the Ravens or the Pittsburgh Steelers have had on defense, it comes from the players understanding their roles in the overall scheme. Coaching players toward learning and executing those roles has proven to be a decent recipe for those teams and there's no reason to think it couldn't eventually be successful for Cleveland.

So when Mangini says he didn't want to mess with the integrity of the defense by shifting Wright around, it isn't necessarily fodder for those who want to chop his head off and move on to the next pretender in line to be the coach of this team.

When the day comes for the people who get paid to judge Mangini's overall performance, club president Mike Holmgren and general manager Tom Heckert, Mangini's actual boss, they will have plenty to consider and it goes well beyond just a little inflexibility in one instance. It has more to do with a track record.

Asked Wednesday what he thought Peyton Hillis' big day last Sunday might mean for his future role with the club, Jerome Harrison gave one of the most candid answers imaginable. He said he had no idea because he has no idea what his role really is on the team and never really has.

If that's true, that's at least as big of indictment on Mangini for those ready to prosecute him anyway as is his inflexibility on mid-game defensive adjustments that include personnel changes.

Consider for example how that kind of statement really undercuts Mangini's argument against removing Wright during the Ravens game. At its core Mangini was basically saying that Wright and his colleagues on defense have very defined roles and, absent injury, it's best not to upset

that apple cart.

Yet on offense you have a key player, a running back, telling the media that he doesn't even understand what his role is on the team. Mind you Harrison wasn't really complaining, just explaining. He doesn't know if he's supposed to be a feature back, a change of pace back or a former back, meaning he's never really sure how to prepare.

At the very least this dichotomy speaks to an inconsistency of approach that is ultimately damaging to the team and its morale.

When Mangini was pushing the "Mangini Process™" last season and saw some veterans, like Jamal Lewis, bristle, it was over this very issue. And yet here it is a year later and that doesn't seem to have changed all that much.

The much bigger picture to all this is that even with all its other problems, such as a disturbing lack of NFL-caliber talent, at the center of the Browns' current woes is still a coach arguably with an identity and, perhaps more damning, a credibility problem. If that is really the case, it won't matter how much fans scream for his ouster. His ticket to elsewhere is probably already punched and his departure is just a question of finding the right timing.