It turns out that the biggest obstacle Cleveland Browns head coach Eric Mangini had to overcome was himself. In a revealing portrait by Greg Bishop in Sunday's New York Times, Mangini basically admitted that most of his trouble is self-inflicted.

If that's the case and if the latest accounts about a changed Mangini are correct, then perhaps Mangini really is coming into his own as a NFL coach with a real future. Sunday's career-defining win by the Browns against the New England Patriots is a significant step in that direction.

The assent of Mangini 2.0 came as such assents often do, through a humbling. Mangini had a right to be heady when he became the league's youngest head coach at 35 years of age. The descent, as such descents often do, was precipitated when that headiness turned to cockiness.

According to the story, Mangini literally had no idea how to actually be a NFL head coach. He had never drawn up a practice schedule. He had limited experience before the media. As much as he wanted the job, it probably came much sooner than he expected.

So Mangini went about emulating the only real teacher he had, Bill Belichick. He did so when it came to preparing his team and he did so when it came to interacting with his team. He was a pain in the ass to the players and worse to the media. Just like Bill.

In the process, though, Mangini says he completely lost his sense of who he was. In the story, Mangini allows that he brought much too much of this on himself mostly by not sticking to his core principles. He didn't favor the signing of Brett Favre for example while he was in New York and yet didn't speak up. As suspected, he left New York thinking that he was the fall guy for the

Favre signing instead of seeing a far bigger picture developing in front of him.

The story doesn't touch too much on last season in Cleveland, but if last season had not played out exactly as it did, it's pretty clear Mangini would be unemployed to this day. He came on like gangbusters last season, from his first interaction with Shaun Rogers to the seeming pettiness of his rules even before the first practice was held. He then bought too much into his own genius by first bringing in and then firing his close friend George Kokinis, taking over the job duties in the interim. He remained ever the reluctant communicator.

With the season spinning out of control, owner Randy Lerner stepped in and did the only sensible thing he could have done short of firing Mangini. He determined that his franchise lacked credibility, internally or externally, and sought out a voice that would change all that.

Lerner found it of course in Mike Holmgren. If the public criticism Mangini was receiving last year was tough for him to take, imagine how difficult it had to be for him to hear from Lerner that the Browns were bringing in Holmgren to essentially repudiate damn near everything Mangini was trying to build, at least in the front office. Mangini certainly acted last year like he was that credible voice and then comes Lerner, seeing the franchise about to burn again, deciding that whatever virtues Mangini had personally, he wasn't resonating as the voice of the Browns.

That decision by Lerner to bring in Holmgren may have been borne out of frustration but it provided a whole new lease on life to Mangini. Unburdened by all of the responsibilities he took on himself and for which he was ill suited, at least at the time, Mangini suddenly found himself as the head coach and only the head coach of a NFL franchise.

That could have gone either way for Mangini. The fact that it seems to have worked out as well as it did for him is a tribute to the fact that Mangini didn't become a diva. Instead he engaged in the kind of self-examination that kind of public rebuke tends to force and came out on the other side realizing that he indeed was his own worst enemy.

It was easy to feel a bit sorry for Mangini when reading the Times story. Mangini talked about how difficult last season really was on him, the toll it took on him physically and emotionally. He couldn't sleep, he was overeating and he was chewing too much tobacco. The self-doubt and self-examination, fueled by an incredibly stressful two years, had literally turned Mangini into a

bloated mess.

According to the assistants and colleagues interviewed, Mangini is slowly, surely altering course demonstrating that he is a personality and not just Belichick-not so light.

The first thing Mangini has done is to alter his eating habits and with it his physical appearance. It's been a success. Mangini is a shadow of his former self. That's a good sign. I've never understood, actually, how coaches can allow themselves to balloon up while presiding over athletes for whom the most common message they send to them is one of discipline. He also allows himself to crack the occasional joke. The players certainly have noticed.

It was evident from preseason that Mangini was more relaxed. But the best evidence of that came after Sunday's game. Walking to the locker room, Mangini allowed for himself a huge smile, knowing that he had given himself, his team and this city a transformative victory. The old Mangini might have mumbled almost imperceptibly about it being just another game. The new Mangini, the one better in touch with himself, allowed the smile he actually was feeling.

It turns out that Lerner saved Mangini's job not by simply recommitting to him but by getting Mangini the help that even Mangini might not have realized he needed. Sometimes it's tough for any of us to admit when we need help because we feel so sane. Even tougher yet is to embrace that help and maybe that will serve as Mangini's best accomplishment to date.

The Browns are only 3-5 halfway through the season but it is the most optimistic 3-5 record in the league. It is a team clearly on the upswing. More than that, though, it is the kind of team that fits perfectly into the psyche of the average Cleveland fan.

It's neither a team of superstars nor misfits but of a bunch of guys that seem committed to working hard and getting the best out of themselves for the pure satisfaction of what it feels like to overachieve. If it feels like the team Mangini always envisioned then it's probably because that's exactly what it is.

It's just that it was a vision Mangini wasn't ever going to see clearly until he exorcised some of

his own demons that were standing in his path. It's a work in progress, just like the team he coaches but the signs for once are mostly good. If yesterday really was the culmination of a necessary reinvention, then the Browns really are on the right path because the much wished for stability may finally be at hand.