Twitter Thread by Nate Atkins



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I'm starting to think Marvin Lewis is one of the more underappreciated NFL coaches of the past couple decades. Staying 16 years in one place is TOUGH, and I feel like people have forgotten a lot of context along the way.

In the 12 years before Marvin Lewis arrived, the Bengals were 55-137. In the two years since he left, they are 6-25-1. That's 14 years and 0 playoff appearances.

Lewis was 131-122-3 with 7 playoff appearances.

Lewis took over a 2-14 team in 2003. His first three years, he went 8-8, 8-8 and 11-5.

He got his QB in Year 2 in Carson Palmer and reached the playoffs in Year 3. But on his very first throw, Palmer tore his knee.

So, we begin the narrative that Lewis was 0-7 in playoff games. Fair criticism to a point. But here were his seven QBs for those playoff games:

Jon Kitna after 1 throw
Carson Palmer
Andy Dalton
Andy Dalton
Andy Dalton
Andy Dalton
AJ McCarron

The Bengals, who have a cheap owner as GM, not only struggled to find Marvin Lewis a QB but also struggled to get him much of anything. They consistently let good players walk, from Carson Palmer to Marvin Jones to Kevin Zeitler to Eric Steinbach to Leon Hall to Reggie Nelson.

Go ahead and find me the best free-agent acquisition the Bengals made in Marvin Lewis' 16 years there. Cedric Benson? Tory James? Bobbie Williams? Dhani Jones?

Do any of those scream, "Time to go win us a playoff game"?

But it's not just about excuses for Marvin Lewis' tenure. He won four division titles in an AFC North with the Ravens and Steelers, who combined for 8 AFC Championship Game appearances and three Super Bowl victories in those 16 years.

People will bring up the lack of discipline. It's a fair criticism. But you also take character risks as an organization when you refuse to pay top dollar.

To win consistently despite shenanigans, you need the respect of your players, and everyone will tell you Lewis had it.

Because Mike Brown refuses to hire a GM or scouting department, Bengals coaches have to do everything. They churn and burn the roster since they can't keep free agents.

Marvin Lewis hired Jay Gruden and Mike Zimmer as his coordinators and created a beautifully streamlined system

Marvin Lewis is 62 and is defensive-oriented. He hasn't won a playoff game and won't win the press conference. But those are some of the motivations that lead to awful hires.

I imagine what Lewis could do as a coach with a real GM and scouting department. I hope he gets a shot.

Casual NFL fans only tend to see the Bengals when they make the playoffs, when their lack of poise or a QB shine through. It took a LOT to get there.

Unless you're an organization saying, "We're tired of losing in the playoffs every year," you probably shouldn't thumb your nose.

This goes back to the fact that we react to the guy wearing the headset and standing at the podium and not the one who finds the players. All about visibility.

Again and again, coaches get fired while awful GMs keep plugging away.

It also shows how we judge the end of a tenure more than the full thing. Some guys are great with their second team — Andy Reid, Tony Dungy, Jon Gruden, Bill Belichick, Marty Schottenheimer.

A fresh start can be good, especially for a guy who worked for Mike Brown for 16 years.

Atlanta and Detroit feel like good matches for Marvin Lewis. Both have established passing attacks.

Lewis has the experience Dan Quinn lacked.

And the areas where Matt Patricia struggled — organization, relatability, staffing — are Lewis’ biggest strengths.