Browns' Shurmur gets defensive on punt

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By TOM WITHERS The Associated Press

BEREA — Browns rookie linebacker Craig Robertson walked into the locker room Monday wearing a black T-shirt with "Fourth & Inches" written across the front.

Apparently someone forgot to tell him "4th-and-1" was in fashion.

Cleveland coach Pat Shurmur defended his decision to punt on 4th-and-1 in the fourth quarter of Sunday's 17-13 loss to Indianapolis, a choice that didn't sit well with new owner Jimmy Haslam, who folded his legs in his suite and frowned as the Browns lined up to kick the ball back to the Colts with 6:38 left.

Shurmur, who fell to 5-18 in his second season, reasoned there was still enough time left for the Browns (1-6) to give the ball back to quarterback Andrew Luck. With two timeouts, Shurmur hoped to pin the Colts deep in their own end of the field, force them to punt and get the ball back with a chance to win.

That's what happened, except for the win part, as the Browns failed to convert on a 4th-and-6 with less than two minutes left and dropped their 11th straight road game. Still, Shurmur felt he handled the situation properly. Given another chance, he wouldn't change a thing.

"I would do that again," he said.

Haslam's dissatisfied reaction to the punt came moments after the truck-stop magnate, whose \$1 billion purchase of the Browns was approved last week, had angrily swiped his hand at the air when rookie Josh Gordon dropped a certain touchdown pass at the goal line. Gordon failed to handle rookie quarterback Brandon Weeden's perfect throw under pressure, a miscue that cost the Browns a possible win.

The error was emblematic of Cleveland's so-far lost season — a string of near misses. "When you're fighting for inches, fighting for victories, it's important you make every play," Shurmur said. "There was a lot that went on in the game and, of course, we're all focusing on really a handful of things. And if one or two of those handful of things go the way that we all would like them to, then the outcomes are different.

"But that's the same in every game. Every game you watch played yesterday involved a handful of things that could've determined the outcome for either team. That's real."

And for Shurmur, the new reality is that Haslam is watching his every move, analyzing his every decision. Shurmur said he was unaware of Haslam's emotional response, which was caught by television cameras. The two men have exchanged text messages, but Shurmur said they had not discussed his conclusion to punt.

"No, I haven't talked to him about that, and I haven't watched the TV copy, so at this point it wouldn't be right for me to comment on it," Shurmur said. "Games are emotional and we all have attachment to a team and a game. I try to keep my emotions in check."

Another issue hanging over from Sunday was the condition of Browns running back Trent Richardson, who played with a rib injury and was benched after gaining just 8 yards on 8 carries. Richardson wore a flak jacket to protect the rib cartilage injury, but it was obvious that he wasn't himself and Shurmur decided to sit him.

Shurmur indicated there was a chance Richardson could miss some time. The Browns will host San Diego this week and Baltimore on Nov. 4 before their bye. Shurmur said Richardson will be

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evaluated on a weekly basis.

"If he's ready to play, he'll play," he said. "If we see this is bothering him to the point where he can't perform, then we'll make those decisions as we go."

Following the game, Richardson acknowledged he wasn't running as hard as usual. He said Shurmur made a "smart" decision in resting him, but the first-round pick also indicated his injury is perhaps more severe than he or the Browns are letting on.

Shurmur said Richardson prodded him to stay on the field.

"Trent wanted to play that whole game," Shurmur said. "He was constantly trying to convince me to keep him in there, and I've got to evaluate it the way I see it, and there were some things happening out there where we weren't having efficiency running the football that were no fault of Trent's.

"But I'm watching the player and we try to make decisions based on what's best. He's a warrior and he's going to be a great player around here for a long time, and he wanted to be in the game and that's important for everybody to know. But when I look at it, I want to make sure that we consider him, his health and everything as we move forward."

The Browns only gained 55 rushing yards against a Colts defense that allowed 252 on the ground the previous week against the New York Jets. Without Richardson at 100 percent, Cleveland's offense was missing a vital component, but Shurmur wouldn't use that as an excuse.

"We need to be better," he said. "Rushing yards as a team is a team thing, just like stopping the run is a team thing, just like stopping sacks is a team thing, just like getting a bunch of completions is a team thing. A combination of things has to get better there.

"We need to do a better job doing it — call better plays, block better, run better. That's it. I wish I could give you some theorem that makes it happen that way, but we just need to do it."

NOTES: Shurmur said DT Phil Taylor will begin practicing this week. He's been out all season since undergoing surgery to repair a chest muscle he tore lifting weights. ... Shurmur said the team would not be trying out new punters. Reggie Hodges averaged 41.4 yards on five kicks, but only got off a 21-yarder in the fourth when the Browns were trying to pin the Colts deep. "We're going to work with the guys we have," Shurmur said.

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