

Romeo Must Go

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Sunday, November 26 2006 7:00 PM -

It is with GREAT pleasure that I introduce the newest member of our team here at The Blurbs, Mr. Gary Benz. Gary will be opining on the Browns and the Indians, and is a helluva writer. And how about this for a debut piece, calling for the head of one of our cities professional football coach? That WAS football yesterday, right? BARTENDER!!!



If there is one thing we can tell by now, it's when a coach is on the verge of getting canned. The results are clear on the field and in the locker room. Players fighting, airing grievances in public, playing without passion or inspiration. Those are the telltale signs of a coach who's lost control. The signs were there long before the University of Miami finally pulled the plug on head coach Larry Coker just as they were there long before Ohio State pulled the plug on John Cooper. And only a fool would try to deny the signs on this Cleveland Browns team.

It's hard to tell exactly when head coach Romeo Crennel lost the team. The smart money says it began with his steadfast support of deposed offensive coordinator Maurice Carthon, despite the putrid state of the offense. Others, we suspect, will argue that he never really had the team in the first place. To our eye, we tend to share that view.

As we've previously noted, Crennel's hiring went against the grain of what most teams look for these days. He's been a long-time assistant who had been interviewed and passed over many times before the Browns finally took a chance. Don't think the players didn't notice. And when Crennel got his chance, he acted less like a head coach and more like a coordinator when he turned his offense over to an untested and ultimately overmatched Carthon. In doing so, Crennel admittedly abdicated any role in the offense and instead paid more attention to the defense. It showed and the players noticed.

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But what shows the most is the utter lack of leadership by Crennel. He didn't say much publicly when Kellen Winslow, Jr. put his Evel Knievel dreams ahead of the team and, in the process, blew out his knee in a motorcycle accident. He said little publicly when Trent Dilfer went toe-to-toe with Carthon, except to wave goodbye to a servicable starter/backup. And when it came to finally dumping Carthon, Crennel was worried more about protecting Carthon's thin skin than acting like a leader by proclaiming publicly that Carthon resigned when everyone knew the truth. Don't think the players didn't notice.

But the signs these days are coming ever more frequently and the poster child is the increasingly childlike Braylon Edwards. We previously noted how Edwards wanted to attend the Ohio State/Michigan game and suggested loudly how grateful he would be if Crennel afforded him that privilege on the day before the Pittsburgh game. Crennel suggested, publicly, that Edwards wouldn't be going but, lo and behold, Edwards was there, defying both his coach and the other players who privately told Edwards that his first loyalty was now with the folks signing his paychecks.

In the run-up to this week's match-up with Cincinnati, there was Edwards again throwing safety Brian Russell under the bus for a clean but physical hit on Chad Johnson in the last Cincinnati game. To add even more fuel to a fire already at full blaze, Edwards blasted new play caller Jeff Davidson for being too conservative in the red zone. Crennel, for all his leadership skills, was dismissive to these outbursts except to say that Edwards wouldn't be fined.

It will be interesting, then, to see how Crennel will respond to Edwards after today's debacle against Cincinnati, that is, if Crennel still has a job. On display for anyone to see was Edwards publicly embarrassing his beleaguered quarterback, Charlie Frye. Edwards clearly went after Frye on the sidelines following another interception. Apparently Edwards was incensed that Frye was too busy running for his life to see Edwards running open. In his only effective play of the game, running back Rueben Droughns stepped into to stop Edwards visible abuse of Frye.

It's not a surprise, of course, that Crennel ignored the mini-drama unfolding on the sidelines. We've come to expect that from Crennel. But more telling, really, is the fact that Edwards feels so emboldened to act as he does in the first place. This is exactly what it looks like when the coach is no longer in control and the players feel free to challenge authority and service their own needs rather than to place any emphasis on the team or the game itself. It's what

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happened to Coker at Miami and Cooper at OSU. And it's what's unfolding in Cleveland right now.

If Crennel survives this season or even this week, we'll be amazed and disappointed. The Browns under his leadership, have clearly regressed. The last time we witnessed such an uninspired beat down like today's game against the mediocre Bengals was last year against Pittsburgh. But here the Browns sit, nearly a year later, still getting the stuffing beat out of them by a divisional rival.

When a coach gets fired, there will always be some players who will blame themselves. After all, the conventional wisdom goes, they are the ones not making the tackles or catching or throwing the balls. That's true at a basic level but at an even more basic level it's also true that these Browns don't respond to Crennel. We'd like stability and continuity just as much as anyone but another year of Crennel will just set this franchise back further.

If the Browns want to do something bold, now, they should fire Crennel and replace him with defensive coordinator Todd Grantham. Grantham is the exact kind of young coach that teams are hiring these days. He's been the one coaching bright spot on an otherwise dismal staff assembled by Crennel. Though the defense has let the team down the last two weeks, the truth is that it still plays with emotion, which we attribute directly to Grantham.

But given how the Browns operate, they'll stand pat, valuing stability over results. In the process, we'll lose Grantham to another suitor just like they lost Bill Cowher to Pittsburgh. And when Grantham finally does make it back to the NFL as a head coach, which he will, as fans we can sit back, again and say "I remember when he used to coach here" as we put the finishing touch on still another losing season.