



*Give me a ticket for next year,*

*And a towel to dry my tears,*

*Losing days are done,*

*Time to go back home,*

*The Owner, he wrote me a letter.*

*I don't care how much money he makes me spend,*

*Glad to do it, just say when*

*Losing days are done*

*Time to go back home,*

*The Owner, he wrote me a letter.*

*Well he wrote me a letter,*

*said it's time to be patient again*

*Listen mister can't you see*

*I've got to get back to my team once again,*

*Give me a ticket for next year,*

*And a towel to dry my tears*

*Losing days are done*

*Time to go back home,*

*The Owner, he wrote me a letter*

Clearly Jimmy Haslam is distracted.

The owner of the Cleveland Browns is throat deep into two significant messes and it's causing him to act desperate. Maybe he is desperate.

In a tone deaf letter to season ticket holders, Haslam counseled patience to Browns fans as he and The Stooges go about their supposedly methodical approach to finding a new coach. The implication is that fans shouldn't grow nervous as every other team with an opening goes about getting it filled. These are the Browns, dammit, and they do things on their own schedule and in their own way. Remember when they hired Rob Chudzinski?

It's pretty clear that Haslam is feeling the heat from a dwindling season ticket base and felt the need to drop them a Kevin Baconish "remain calm, all is well" missive. I doubt it accomplished much other than to highlight the pyramid of institutional incompetence on which he sits atop.

It's certainly plausible that the Browns targeted Denver offensive coordinator Adam Gase at the beginning of their search and are just waiting until the playoffs end before they can sit down with him. But unless they have assurances from Gase's camp that he actually does want to sit down with them after Denver's season ends and that his interest is serious and substantial, then the Browns will undoubtedly be left holding the bag. It doesn't seem to make them nervous, either, that when Gase had the opportunity to sit down with them during the Denver bye week he declined. It should.

And what does it say about a methodical, patient search if the Browns targeted Gase from the outset and have simply been shuffling their collective feet since? It says that that there was a predetermined outcome and the search was in fact a hoax, a diversion to unsuspecting customers. Gee, where have I heard allegations like that before? Let me think. Let me think.

Haslam emphasized in his letter that the Browns remain an attractive option, a statement now dripping with irony given how there are no other openings at the moment.

This is where the distractions from the federal investigation into his Pilot Flying J apparently have clouded his judgment. If you're a head coach wannabe, like Gase, the Browns are only an attractive option if you're too impatient to see which better run franchises will have openings next year.

Haslam is simply in denial if he doesn't grasp how damaging it was to the prospects of attracting top talent when he signed off on Chudzinski's firing. He may bristle at the suggestion but in truth it looks like the team is indeed run by a bunch of stooges, with the inability to fill the head coaching slot the latest evidence.

Haslam notes the team's five Pro Bowlers (one of whom, he doesn't note, is a free agent), its plethora of draft picks and the generous cap space that awaits a new coach. It's like he's selling the fans real estate and highlighting the pool out back without mentioning the cracks in the foundation. I can only imagine the sales pitch that Gase will get.

The surprise that awaits the next head coach is that he'll be subject to the same petty whims and bizarre personnel decisions of folks like Joe Banner and Mike Lombardi. This contingent sold Chudzinski on a transition year in 2013 that would lead to a bonanza in 2014 and then sent him packing before he got used to the idea that he was ever really a part of their plans.

If Gase is indeed the target, the choice he faces is simple. With no other NFL head coaching jobs open at the moment he either jumps in with the Browns or wait another year when there will be several openings only because there always are several openings every year, including, probably, one in Cleveland.

There's no reason Gase needs to be desperate. In fact, the Browns' mismanagement of their search has shifted all the leverage to Gase and if he isn't smart enough to exercise it appropriately then he isn't smart enough to be a head coach in the first place.

To choose the Browns' job, Gase will have to be convinced that the Chudzinski situation was an anomaly. The more money Haslam throws at Gase, the easier it will be to convince him, mainly because it softens the landing when it inevitably turns out not to be true.

Depending on the outcome of Sunday's game between Denver and New England, fans will know whether Gase is on board either next week or in early February. If it's not Gase though then the Browns have an even bigger problem of their own making. By not actually being methodical, let alone expansive, the Browns have ended up putting themselves in the position of looking foolish once again. I'd say even more foolish but, frankly, that's impossible.

If Gase turns the Browns down then it will be time for Plan X or Z or whatever they want to call the scramble that will come next. Then Haslam and Banner will try to convince the media and the fans again that they guy who they took is the guy they wanted all along.

Haslam's letter to the season ticket holders carries with it an implied request to be trusted. It's a ballsy request given his record. It's also a request that he knows he didn't need to make. The fans, unlike Gase, don't really have an effective choice. In one form or another they are stuck with the Browns, even if they'll never trust them again.