

Where Romeo Went Wrong

Written by {ga=mrburns}

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Nick Allburn doesn't have the same rosy disposition towards Browns coach Romeo Crennel that Phil Savage does, and lays out his reasons why in his latest piece for us. Nick says Romeo bungled the quarterback competition, from the notorious "coin flip" to the teams release of Brady Quinn friend and mentor Ken Dorsey. And thinks Romeo is a dead man walking as the leader of our beloved Browns ...



The Cleveland Browns' 2007 draft was one of the franchise's high water marks since its 1999 return. The argument can be made that in the history of the Cleveland Browns, this year's draft was an even more significant event than the club's playoff appearance following the 2002 season.

Following April's draft, the fan base had its first legitimate reasons for optimism in years. So much for that.

Romeo Crennel acted quickly to temper the enthusiasm of the success-starved fans. During his mismanagement of the quarterback derby, Crennel has displayed an ineptitude that rivals that of the Bush White House.

Our story begins prior to minicamp, when Crennel declared the starting quarterback position an "open competition," for which Frye and Anderson would duel. Generally, "open" competitions aren't limited to two candidates, particularly when there are other qualified applicants. For the Browns, Ken Dorsey was the third wheel that never even garnered consideration.

Dorsey would have been, at best, a dark horse candidate to win the starting job. However, there was no reason for the Browns to exclude him altogether. What

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did they have to lose?

The Browns knew that each of the quarterbacks had significant shortcomings when they evaluated the position after last season. Charlie Frye, while being fairly accurate on short routes, has difficulty reading a defense and struggles with deep passes due to a lack of arm strength. On the other hand, Derek Anderson has a much stronger arm than Frye and is a little better at reading defenses, but lacks touch on short routes. Both quarterbacks are guilty of forcing passes and taking foolish chances, often resulting in turnovers.

Dorsey gained significant starting experience with San Francisco in 2004 and 2005, although his career quarterback rating is a lackluster 63.5. Even though Dorsey has poor arm strength, he is relatively intelligent, capable of reading defenses, and accurate on short routes.

Draft day made it clear that the Browns were not comfortable with the quarterback position, as they paid a heavy price to trade back into the first round to select Brady Quinn, who plummeted all the way to number 22. If anyone not named Brady Quinn won the quarterback job coming out of training camp, that player had the full knowledge that he was just keeping the seat warm until Quinn was ready to assume the starting mantle.

Would it have been at all detrimental to include Dorsey in the race, even if he was eliminated early on? Probably not.

Fast forward to training camp. Joe Thomas and Eric Wright are signed on the eve of camp, while Brady Quinn's well-documented holdout begins. Many Browns fans become angry with Quinn, and the fact that he went to Notre Dame and is perceived by many as a "pretty boy" does not help Quinn's cause.

And that brings us back to Crennel. Remember when Crennel, mimicking Bill Parcells' treatment of rookies, refused to use Brady Quinn's name during Quinn's lengthy holdout? Crennel simply referred to Quinn as "the quarterback." How passive-aggressive is that? Moreover, how childish is that? Grow up Romeo. Players and coaches constantly overuse the cliché "He's a professional," or some variant. Crennel should have treated Quinn more like a professional.

After an 11-day holdout, Quinn finally inked a five year deal just a few days prior

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to the first preseason game against Kansas City. Crennel announced that Quinn probably wouldn't play in that first game, and sure enough, Quinn held a clipboard all game long. That seemed fairly reasonable; while he may have known the playbook, he certainly had no timing down, and it was a fair way to admonish him for missing a large portion of training camp.

But Crennel hardly handled the quarterback derby competently leading up to the Kansas City game. Prior to the game, Crennel declared that the starter would be determined via coin flip.

Wait. Crennel had seen each of these quarterbacks play through mini camp and several weeks of training camp, and was still unable to determine who was more qualified to be the starter? Even if Crennel was so incapable of evaluating talent at the position, why would he admit it, exposing himself to public ridicule? Are you sure this man is qualified to coach a professional football team? Why do so many Steelers fans have mullets? All pertinent questions.

The game itself did little to vindicate Romeo. Crennel elected to *alternate* series between Frye and Anderson, giving each quarterback a chance to play with the first team. That might sound good on paper, but it's extremely difficult for the team, let alone the quarterbacks themselves, to establish any kind of rhythm when the signal caller is different every series.

One week removed from being visibly incompetent prior to and during the first game, Crennel finally felt comfortable naming Derek Anderson the starter for the second game against Detroit. In addition, Crennel decided that the quarterbacks should play more than one series consecutively, although I'm told that he considered alternating snaps at center between Hank Fraley and backup Lennie Friedman.

Once again, Frye outplayed Anderson, although given Anderson's performance (one interception, one fumble), Frye had to do little more than show up with a pulse. Lost in all the smoke and mirrors, Ken Dorsey led an efficient drive early in the fourth quarter, capped by Jerome Harrison's touchdown run.

Of course, the big story was Brady Quinn, who saw his first NFL action. Taking the field to chants of "BRA-DY! BRA-DY!", Quinn led two impressive touchdown drives, albeit in the fourth quarter against guys who would soon be staffing 7-Elevens throughout Greater Detroit. Nevertheless, Quinn showed a

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poise and command of the huddle that Browns fans hadn't seen of late, at least not in a Cleveland huddle. Quinn finished 13 of 20 for 155 yards and two touchdowns; Quinn was actually 13 of 16 if you subtract four spiked balls, as he had no timeouts to work with.

How the organization reacted after the events of the Detroit game was perhaps the most crucial point of the quarterback race. But alas, I fear that the Browns didn't select the best course of action, and may pay for it down the road.

The following Monday, Frye should have been named the starter for Opening Day against Pittsburgh. From that point on, Anderson could have done nothing to catch Frye in the competition, and starting Quinn, still wet behind the ears, against a very complex and very good Steelers defense is a recipe for disaster.

During the week, the Browns should have burned up the phones in an attempt to trade Derek Anderson and if they were unable to find a suitor, they should have released him. At best, Anderson would yield a draft choice late on day two, and his continued presence on the roster would simply take repetitions away from Frye and Quinn, both in practice and preseason games. Finally, late in the week, it should have been announced that Quinn would see significant time with the first team in the upcoming game against the Broncos.

But, true to precedent, Crennel and company were a model of inaction, and elected to do nothing except what they had little alternative to do; name Frye the starter against Denver.

Frye played his best game of the preseason, leading a drive that culminated in a Jamal Lewis touchdown run. Anderson looked very mediocre, and at that point, did anyone really expect anything more?

Again, the story was Brady Quinn. For the second straight game, Quinn looked like the best quarterback on the team, going 7 of 11 for 81 yards and a touchdown. Quinn also threw what appeared to be an impressive 39-yard touchdown pass to Joe Jurevicius which was ruled an incompleteness. Replays showed what appeared to be a catch, but Romeo Crennel did not request a coach's challenge.

That Crennel did not challenge is disturbing on several levels. On the surface, it suggests that he does not have anyone in the booth watching replays for him, and

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informing him as to whether or not he should challenge a particular play. Deeper, one could infer that Crennel knew the play was a touchdown, but did not choose to challenge because he did not want Quinn's stats to look impressive enough that he would be forced to seriously consider starting the rookie. And given the way Crennel has handled Quinn thus far, it may not be mere conjecture to think that Crennel does not want Quinn to succeed, unless it's on Crennel's terms. Conspiracy theories aside, the refusal to challenge, manifestly, represents a poor coaching decision that personifies Crennel's tenure in Cleveland thus far.

Between the Denver game and the final preseason battle against the Bears, it should come as little surprise that more mistakes were made.

During the week, first round picks Quinn and Joe Thomas were forcibly restrained by some members of the Browns' defensive line and had their heads shaved. As playful and harmless as this may seem, it certainly represents a lack of discipline in the locker room. This is the NFL, not high school cross country. If Quinn and Thomas don't want to sport crew cuts, they shouldn't have to, not to mention the inherent danger of players grappling in the locker room.

Someone easily could have been hurt. These are the Browns we're talking about. The same Browns with whom franchise linemen suffer career-threatening injuries on the first non-contact play of the season. This incident would have been a lot less funny if Quinn had fallen and hurt his throwing arm, or Thomas had twisted an ankle trying to escape his captors.

Plus, this event again makes Crennel look weak. His team didn't have the discipline to refrain from horseplay and tomfoolery. Furthermore, Crennel didn't come out and publicly denounce what occurred or punish those who were culpable. This failure to reprimand the guilty parties is as good as complicity in my book.

This lack of professionalism by Browns players is becoming commonplace during the Crennel regime. Recall his difficulty controlling the flamboyant personalities of Braylon Edwards and Kellen Winslow last season. Apparently, little has changed in that department.

The final preseason game was a golden opportunity to both start Quinn and give him valuable experience playing against an opponent's number ones. Such risk-free experience now will not present itself again until preseason '08. Had

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Crennel started Quinn in Chicago, Charlie Frye would go into week one confidently, having played his best game of the preseason in Denver, and Quinn could have played the majority of the Chicago game.

Instead, Crennel chose to grant Frye and Anderson significant playing time. While both Frye and Anderson failed to impress, Quinn looked like the best of the bunch for the third game in a row. He led the Browns' only touchdown drive in the second quarter, and finished 9 of 14 for 64 yards with an interception (on a tipped ball).

Perhaps in a foreshadowing of the final cuts, Dorsey only played one snap, and was sacked.

Things looked pretty clear as the preseason faded into the rear view mirror; Quinn was the future at quarterback, but probably shouldn't play until the bye week at the earliest. Frye was the starter, and Dorsey would make the team as he and Quinn had developed a bond. Dorsey would mentor Quinn, helping him learn the subtleties and nuances of Rob Chudzinski's offense, which Dorsey understands better than the other quarterbacks due to playing for Chudzinski at the University of Miami.

Not so fast! Dorsey was cut and Anderson retained, in what was the biggest surprise of the week.

This seems to be a critical error. While Ken Dorsey was not going to see the field, and lacked the physical tools to be a quality NFL quarterback, he would be invaluable in speeding Quinn's development.

As the number three quarterback, Anderson has very little value to the Browns. There has been speculation by some that Phil Savage kept Anderson in an attempt to trade him to a team in need of a capable backup, such as Atlanta, and thus receiving at least some value for the time the Browns invested in Anderson. Once Anderson had been jettisoned, the team would re-sign Dorsey, as it is highly unlikely that another team will move quickly to sign him. If this is the case, it's a shrewd move by Savage that could pay off. Regardless of whether or not the Browns can find a trade partner for Anderson, Ken Dorsey needs to be on the team to help prepare Quinn for the NFL.

After all the hoopla, Frye is the starter and Quinn will probably take over for him

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midseason. That's what most predicted when training camp began, so what's the big deal?

With these latest apparent errors, a trend that dates back to the 2005 season continues to build. Romeo Crennel is stubborn. Romeo Crennel does not like to play rookies, even if a rookie is the best player at his respective position. Romeo Crennel holds grudges. Romeo Crennel cannot make the tough decisions. And Romeo Crennel might not be the head coach of the Cleveland Browns in 2008.