

At 0-2 on the season with both losses coming at home, the team finds itself in a precarious position this week as they head to Baltimore to play the Ravens. Only three teams in NFL history have made the playoffs after an 0-3 start. Predictably, fan reaction to the start of the season has been angry. In his latest, Erik examines the difference between the fans' perception of the Browns right now and the reality of the situation.



It's mid-September. The Browns are 0-2. They got to 0-2 by losing to the Steelers. If they lose to the almost-as-despised Ravens this weekend, they'll be 0-3, one-third of the way to a losing season. Most 0-2 teams don't make the playoffs. The track record of 0-3 teams? You don't want to know.

The reaction has been predictable among the general population.

Are Browns fans playing the part of the stereotypical star-crossed lover and readying themselves for the deep plunge off an area bridge? Are you kidding? This is Cleveland. That's what the name on the door says, right? What kind of delicate, melodramatic divas do you take us for? No, we're reacting how you should anticipate that a football-crazy fan base watching yet another football season teeter precariously on the edge of oblivion would react: With anger.

Fans are lining up outside the Bastille, ready for the signal to storm the gates and make some heads roll. Not pointing the finger of blame so much as swinging the sword of smiting.

It's a progressive condition. Drop an opening day egg? We develop a nervous twitch. Lose a winnable game to the Steelers in Week 2? We find it hard to concentrate on menial tasks. Lose to the Ravens? Heaven help you if you wear brown and orange.

No one in the Browns organization should feel terribly comfortable right now. It's hard to imagine a season filled with so much promise getting off to much worse of a start. But as much as we the fans wail and gnash our teeth, owner Randy

Lerner isn't going to bulldoze the organization anytime soon. Nor should he.

Phil Savage, Romeo Crennel, Derek Anderson and their associates have put themselves in this position. Cutting bait on anyone after two lousy games not only scuttles the season, it lets the guys responsible off the hook.

So let them twist in the wind for right now and figure it out. They owe us at least that much.

What's the difference between the fans' perception of the Browns and the reality of the situation? Let's take a closer look...

Romeo Crennel

Perception: He's a nice guy who made it to where he is by sticking around long enough and earning the respect of the right people. He is, however, completely overmatched as an NFL head coach. He is quite possibly the worst game-day coach in the NFL.

Reality: He is a nice guy who made it to where he is by sticking around long enough and earning the respect of the right people. His resume includes five Super Bowl rings as an assistant coach and the loyalty of countless players, making him a tremendously popular locker room leader.

However, if the players like you too much, that might not be such a good thing. The Marines wouldn't get anywhere as a fighting force if their drill instructors tried to win popularity contests with recruits. In the end, a coach's job is to teach and discipline, and the Browns, as they did under Chris Palmer and Butch Davis, seem to lack basic discipline. At least William Green isn't getting into pregame fights with Joey Porter anymore.

Crennel's game-day coaching misadventures have been re-hashed ad nauseum in many forums and outlets this week, so I won't do it again. But suffice it to say, it's his weakest area. And we're not talking about strategy here (which I think Crennel actually has a decent handle on for the most part). We're talking about basic procedural things like getting the play to the quarterback in a timely manner, making the right replay challenges and knowing when to call a timeout.

Even if Crennel was coaching the Joe Montana-era 49ers, if he botches basic

football procedures the way he has in his three-plus years at the helm of the Browns, he's going to lose games.

Is it time to fire Romeo? Not yet. But if the Browns enter the bye week at 0-4, his dismissal will be on the tip of everyone's tongue.

Phil Savage

Perception: A good evaluator of talent who isn't afraid to make a bold move, unlike a certain baseball GM in this town. The man most responsible for the Browns' 10-6 season a year ago.

Reality: Savage has enjoyed the perks of success as the GM of the Browns. A lot of criticism that would otherwise be aimed at him gets deflected. But as the losses mount, that's starting to wear away.

Yes, Savage's work on the Browns roster is masterful compared to some of the hack jobs done by his predecessors. But that's mostly an indicator of how bad it was prior to his arrival.

Savage's track record has been spotty. History will likely show that the drafting of Joe Thomas and the acquisition of Shaun Rogers were among his greatest successes. But most of his moves are, at the very least, up for debate.

Outside of Thomas, Savage's draft picks haven't yielded cornerstone players. Braylon Edwards has flaws that might prove to be fatal to his ability to become an elite receiver. Kamerion Wimbley has shown virtually nothing since his rookie season. Brodney Pool already has suffered three concussions. Charlie Frye was a colossal whiff. Brady Quinn might achieve stardom ... for another team. And that's without getting into the virtually-bare cupboard that has been Savage's collection of second-day draft picks.

His trades have been better, when they have been impact trades. The Hank Fraley deal was a thing of beauty in a time of need. But most of the time, Savage tends to pay out a lot, maybe too much, in trades. He gave up a second-rounder for Corey Williams, who some Browns coaches have already reportedly labeled a bust. He gave up a first-rounder and second-rounder for Quinn, who has played in one game so far. He gave up next year's third-rounder for Martin Rucker, a tight end who has been hurt since training camp.

Free agency has been relatively kind to Savage, the LeCharles Bentley fiasco notwithstanding. Savage has nabbed Eric Steinbach, Dave Zastudil, Jamal Lewis, Donte' Stallworth and Joe Jurevicius off the open market. But outside of Steinbach and maybe Stallworth, free agency didn't give Savage long-term, every-down impact players. Jurevicius and Lewis are short-term stopgaps.

Savage has done a reasonable job in accumulating talent, but like Grady Sizemore, he could stand to hit for a higher average.

Derek Anderson

Perception: His throws have two speeds: hard and harder. He thinks "finesse" is some weird French dish made with pig's feet. He thinks "feathering it in there" has something to do with chickens. If you had to lead a drive to win a game to save your life, Anderson would be about 153rd on the list of QBs you'd want under center.

Reality: Teaching D.A. to develop a soft touch has been kind of like teaching a bazooka to feed layups into a basketball hoop. It's just not in his nature, and it doesn't play to his strengths.

If the Browns foresee a future with a conservative, dink and dunk offense, might I suggest moving to Quinn? If you're going to use Anderson's arm, use it.

At this point, I'm fairly convinced that Anderson is what he is. He knows he can muscle balls into tight coverage because of his arm strength, so he gambles. Last year, it paid off. This year, it's not paying off, and it's not all his fault. In addition to Braylon's much-publicized drops, Anderson has no safety valve without Jurevicius and no second deep threat with Stallworth injured.

If the Browns are going to stick with Anderson, they'd better be prepared to accept both sides of him. He can thread the needle at his best, but he has accuracy problems, makes bad reads and gambles too much. A better coaching staff might allow Anderson to refine his skills a bit more, but it appears that Good Derek and Bad Derek are a package deal. Take him or leave him as is.

Rob Chudzinski

Perception: Last year's offensive genius, this year's shrinking violet.

Reality: In 2007, the Browns showed up on Sundays believing that they were going to score points, believing that they had the weapons to win and knew how to use them. The brains behind the brawn belonged to Chudzinski.

This year, the Browns' bold, potent offense has been replaced by something far more conservative -- maybe even timid at times. Granted, when you are facing the defenses of the Cowboys and Steelers, you can be excused for wanting to minimize your mistakes. But Chud has allowed the offense to stray from the unpredictability that made it so dangerous a year ago. The vertical passing game has been eschewed in favor of lots of first-down runs up the gut and underneath passing.

It's not so much that it's a bad approach, it's just that Chud's offense has become far more vanilla and predictable than last year. Hopefully, facing the Ravens, and especially the Bengals, in the coming weeks will convince Chud to open up the offense a bit more. Because right now, this seems like training-wheels offense.

Braylon Edwards

Perception: A guy who talks a much better game than he plays. The poster boy for arrogant, cocky, mouthy athletes who can't back it up on the field.

Reality: Behind the bravado and histrionics is a young man who is putting a tremendous amount of pressure on himself. He knows how much he means to the team, and it's playing no small part in his early-season bout with granite hands.

Edwards has always been known as a guy who doesn't have the greatest hands. Perhaps he doesn't have the naturally soft hands of a Jerry Rice. But most dropped passes are the product of what is going on between a receiver's ears.

The pressure isn't going away, so Edwards needs to take the pressure and turn it from a negative into a positive, from a burdensome weight to a challenge to which he must rise. And the sooner he can figure out how to do that, the better. His drops are killing this team as much as Anderson's errant throws and Crennel's game mismanagement.