

Making His Case

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Monday, December 22 2008 7:00 PM -

In yesterday's press conference, Romeo Crennel said that he hopes to be able "make his case" to owner Randy Lerner about why he feels he should stay on as head coach of the Cleveland Browns. In Gary's latest, he says Romeo is in for the fight of his life in making his case. And to do it, Crennel will have to do something he's been reluctant to do so far, at least publicly. He's going to have to throw someone else under the bus.



The "news" that Cleveland Browns head coach Romeo Crennel plans to make his case for staying on to owner Randy Lerner shortly after the season ends reminds me of the old adage that a person who represents himself has a fool for a client. But it's not as if Crennel hasn't done some foolish things in his tenure in Cleveland so there's no reason for him to not have at it.

The biggest problem Crennel is going to have in defending his tenure is that Sunday's loss stands as the latest Exhibit A for all the reasons Crennel won't be around to see the next year here in Cleveland. In most ways that are important to evaluating a head coach, Sunday's loss to the Bengals encapsulated all that's been wrong under Crennel. A

A team composed of guys who constantly profess their public love and respect for Crennel matched words into inaction by putting on one of the most pathetic performances in Cleveland Browns history.

It wasn't just that the Browns lost to a team allegedly more woeful than them, the Cincinnati Bengals. It's more how they lost. Playing out the string just to get through a meaningless game is one thing.

But doing so with such little pride and professionalism is ultimately the reason

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coaches get fired in the first place.

Outside of Josh Cribbs, who even played hard?

The team was ill prepared and even less focused, which has been a near constant for the last four years. As they've done far too often under Crennel, the team was committing one ridiculous penalty after another.

False starts.

Delays of game.

Offensive pass interference.

Beyond that, the Bengals are one of the worst rushing teams in the league, even behind the Browns. But they torched a ragged defense anchored by a supposedly Pro Bowl defensive tackle for 191 yards, led by Cedric Benson who had 171 all by himself. It's not that the defense missed tackles. It's more like they only tackled when absolutely convenient.

They weren't just avoiding injuries; they were avoiding contact of any nature as if they had a photo shoot later.

If Crennel's strong suit is defense, why couldn't he figure out how to get his team in a position to stop a team that had no intention on throwing in the first place?

None of this was related to injuries, either. Indeed, the defense was mostly in tact.

And let's not forget that none of this even gets to the discussion about the offense that has to be at least as uncomfortable for Crennel. Injuries go only so far in

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explaining how a team hasn't scored an offensive touchdown in 21 quarters.

Dorsey may have no business putting on a NFL uniform, but at some point, even if by accident, a team has to score a touchdown with him in a game.

The last Browns' touchdown was Jerome Harrison's 72-yard run on the first play of the fourth quarter of the Buffalo game. Wouldn't you think it's possible that at some point in the half dozen or so times Dorsey has had his team inside the opposing team's 50-yard line since then that someone might have broken off another decent run or Dorsey could have found an open receiver?

In other words, just on its merits alone, Crennel is in the fight of his life in making his case. But like anyone else in our society he deserves his day in court. And if Crennel's going to take advantage of it, he can't play defense, which is obvious on so many levels.

He's going to have to go on offense.

To do that, Crennel will have to do something he's been reluctant to do so far, at least publicly. He's going to have to throw someone else under the bus. If he's going to save his job, an all but impossible task, he's going to have to go on the attack.

Since that's not been Crennel's style, here's a little advice, not that he asked. First, start with a little humility by acknowledging your own shortcomings.

You're simply going to have to accept the blame for the ill conceived training camps, the poor in-season practices, the failed game plans and the strange in game decisions.

But tell Lerner that's not the end of the story.

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Pick yourself up off the ground and point out in the next breath that you don't have to take the fall for everything.

You had copious amounts of help from the chief architect of this mess, general manager Phil Savage.

To do this, you need to set up the argument. Lerner has shown that his football knowledge and acumen runs the gamut from A to B so be patient.

Explain to him that more often than not the results on Sunday are a reflection of all that goes on during the week and that you're not just talking about practice.

Even Lerner, who seems to have avoided any real work in his life, has to see the outcomes are a reflection of the inputs.

After setting the table, tell Lerner how much more helpful it would have been for you to get the results that everyone wants if you didn't have a general manager constantly working at cross purposes with you. Tell him that while you were trying to maintain order, like Kevin Bacon at the end of "Animal House," it was Savage's decision to constantly disrupt the homecoming parade by throwing marbles in the street and crashing floats into buildings. Start by telling him how poorly Savage handled the unceremonious dumping of local favorite LeCharles Bentley, even if it was the right decision, and go from there.

Tell him how it was all Savage's idea to start a whisper campaign about Kellen Winslow's "real" injury and then act callously while Winslow complained about still another staph infection that found its way in to Berea. Let Lerner know how classless it was for Savage to make you apologize for Savage's misconduct, including the vulgar email to the fan, while Savage stayed in the background acting as if these weren't distractions.

Tell him how all this brought chaos and discredit to a once proud franchise and forced the players to answer questions about the general manager when they would have been far better off studying their playbooks.

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Let Lerner know, too, that it was Savage, not you, that repeatedly couldn't control a public relations department that reported to him. Tell him how this only added to the growing list of "other duties as assigned" that Savage kept dumping on you. If he doesn't

know then let Lerner also know how Savage conveniently absents himself from Berea during the week where he's needed most to instead go scout meaningless games like the Louisville-Rutgers game a few weeks ago.

Now that your blood is really flowing, hit Lerner hard with your final argument. Let Lerner know, if he doesn't already, that Savage is the man behind the curtain pulling the strings.

It was Savage, not you, that fought for and demanded the right to choose the final roster.

Tell Lerner exactly how Savage went about exercising that authority with some truly awful decisions, particularly on defense, that cost this team dearly. Tell him it was Savage's decision not to find linebackers that could actually play in the defensive philosophy espoused by his hand-picked head coach.

Emphasize that it was Savage's decision not to get some veteran help in the secondary when Daven Holley went down and Savage traded Leigh Bodden. Let him know, too, that it was Savage's decision not to turn Derek Anderson's career year into needed draft picks lost when he was busy acquiring, for example, Brady Quinn.

Let him know that it wasn't your idea to shower an overrated receiver like Donte Stallworth with riches that he didn't deserve in the first place. Finally, let Lerner know that injuries did cost this team a handful of starters, but as importantly the depth Savage has failed to build over the years made this a bigger problem than it had to be.

And if you want to get in one final lick, tell Lerner that that it was Savage, not you, that picked this coaching staff.

Sure, it was you that stood behind Maurice Carthon way too long and forced this

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issue, but tell Lerner that in the end having no real authority over the coaching staff makes it awfully hard to rein them in.

None of this, of course, is probably going to be successful in saving your job and hopefully you understand that. But since you're on your way out the door anyway why not take your shot? Besides, it has the very real chance of actually making the case why Savage needs to join you, which was really the point all along.