

Some teams use their bye week to get healthy. Some use it to make some minor adjustments to the playbook. Some use it as a time for soul-searching. The Browns, argues Erik Cassano, did none of the above. In his "Morning After" column, Papa Cass delivers a harrowing and honest state of the union of the Browns franchise, and argues that Crennel, Savage, and even Lerner could be gone by the time this team is ready to compete.



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Broncos 17, Browns 7

Record: 1-5

Some teams use their bye week to get healthy. Some use it to make some minor adjustments to the playbook. Some use it as a time for soul-searching.

The Browns, it appears, did none of the above.

More and more, this Browns season is starting to resemble a deer in headlights: frozen, stricken, incapable of altering course to avoid the impending disaster hurtling toward it.

Looking as bad as they have looked since the Week 2 loss to the Bengals, the Browns offense managed just 165 yards of total offense and ran about 30 fewer plays than the Broncos -- hardly an offensive juggernaut themselves -- ran.

The offensive line was an embarrassment yet again, allowing Charlie Frye to be sacked five times and knocked down countless others. At times, the offensive line seemed to serve merely as starting blocks for the Broncos' sprint to the passer. Many times, the Broncos got to Frye unimpeded.

This game was so bad, it could represent a turning point for Romeo Crennel's tenure in Cleveland.

Crennel had a chance to try something different. He had a chance to take the playcalling away from Maurice Carthon. He had a chance to shake up the playbook, to light a fire under the offensive line, to do something to salvage this season.

Instead, he played a fiddle while 72,000 fans burned in the stands Sunday.

Only Crennel knows if it's stubbornness, strategic paralysis or genuine cluelessness that is preventing change. What is known by the rest of us is that Crennel is starting to write his ticket out of town.

We know the fans and media aren't happy. But if reports are correct, Crennel's players are also wondering what is going on with the offense. That is the most important factor. If Crennel loses his players, he can't stay.

For a while, I've been wondering if 57 is a bit too old to be getting your first NFL head coaching job, as Crennel did. By the time you've been in football for 30-plus years, you generally know what you know and you don't want to hear about anything else.

To change the Browns, the tangled mess that they are, you need energy, adaptability and creativity. I don't know if Crennel, after 30 years of this grind, has those qualities in requisite amounts anymore.

Time may prove that time is working against Crennel, who will soon be 60. As he gets older, his desire to wade through the muck and turn this franchise around will decrease, not increase.

Ideally, if you're going to hire a first-time head coach, you'd probably want to hire a 30- or 40-something coordinator like Marvin Lewis or Lovie Smith. Of course, the Browns already tried that with Chris Palmer and it was a bust.

But that's only the tip of the iceberg. Beyond Crennel, you have a detached owner in Randy Lerner, someone who has a new pet in Aston Villa, and might be more inclined to spend the bulk of his time in England following the Queen's football. At the moment, he's not really good for being a strong organizational leader on this side of the pond.

You also have, in Phil Savage, a GM who doesn't really perform all the GM duties. Savage's concentration on upgrading the talent level of the roster is admirable, but there is much more that goes into being a GM. In addition to forming the roster, you have to be the voice of the front office and facilitate change when necessary. Of course, Savage is all but a non-sequitur in Cleveland this time of year, opting instead to traverse the land looking for kids to draft next April.

That works great if you have a head coach who has everything together and has the team winning. But Crennel doesn't, and subsequently, Savage's job duties include "organizational watchdog" in addition to "roster architect," at least for the time being. He is performing the latter, but is negligent on the former.

So, combine the three factors: an old-yet-inexperienced head coach, a detached owner and a frequently out-of-town GM, and you have to ask, who is really running this ship?

One or more of the trio of Lerner, Crennel and Savage will likely be gone by the time the Browns figure out how to field a winning team again.

Up next: New York Jets, Sunday, 4 p.m.