

The Browns 1-5 start and the "resignation" of Mo Carthon has many fans pondering whether or not Romeo Crennel will make it through the season. And also wondering what the fate of Phil Savage and Randy Lerner will be with this franchise. In his latest, Erik Cassano looks at the good and the bad with all three men, and assesses their chances of still being with the franchise next year.



Visit the Papa Cass weblog at <http://papacass.blogspot.com/>

The Browns' dismissal of offensive coordinator Maurice Carthon late Monday is a significant event, and not just in terms of who is running the offense from here on out.

It also marks the first time that Romeo Crennel had his hand forced by those above him into making a decision he didn't want to make.

All businesses will have disagreements among the leaders, but this could be a sign of Browns leadership fragmenting. We can only hope not, because the last thing this team needs is another reset. But, more and more, it appears that in Randy Lerner, Phil Savage and Crennel, you have three different leaders with three different ideas of what needs to be done to pull this team out of the gutter.

It's a long way from the idealized hope that existed in January 2005, when Crennel and Savage were both hired.

Perhaps the John Collins fiasco of nearly a year ago was a harbinger of things to come, a red flag of the discord that exists within the Browns front office.

Any friction is magnified when a team isn't doing well, but it's a chicken-or-egg question: Are the differences among Browns leaders the cause, or the effect?

Below, I size up the Browns' Big Three, what they are doing, what they aren't doing, and their chances of even being around here in a couple of years.

Romeo Crennel

The good

It's getting to the point where being realistic and straightforward should be a requirement, not a plus. But Crennel still plays the "I'm just a guy trying to do his job" role to perfection.

You want to root for the guy because, lost somewhere in the crossfire, is a guy who basically has his head screwed on straight and knows what he's doing. Players respect Crennel to the end. The only real questions of his leadership involve offensive playcalling.

Since Crennel took over, the police-blotter Browns of Butch Davis have mostly gone away, Reuben Droughns notwithstanding. There is no doubt he is a strong leader of players.

The bad

When you take over your first team after 30-plus years in football, there is a chance you are going to be kind of hard-bitten and jaded. The fear of failure and eagerness to prove yourself can be easily overtaken with a sense that you have been there, done that, and know what to expect.

I suspect Crennel's age-toughened hide has blinded him, at least to an extent, to the magnitude of the task at hand. Turning around a bottom-of-the-barrel organization like the Browns takes tons of energy, a defined vision, and a willingness to adapt and recover from mistakes.

Crennel is on the downhill side of his career and has been around football long enough that it has, in a way, institutionalized him. In other words, he knows what he knows and that's that.

Now pushing 60, I don't know if he has the energy or vision to stick with this team through all of the "two-steps-forward, one-step-back" compulsories that accompany a massive rebuilding project, particularly in the paramilitary world of football.

Will he stay?

Crennel is performing the very valuable task of laying the groundwork of a solid foundation rooted in hard work and no shortcuts. But he's not going to be the guy to lead this team to a Super Bowl.

If Crennel and Savage are smart, they'll start grooming a hand-picked, younger replacement who will be in a position to take this team to contention once Crennel has done all he can do.

In a very real way, Crennel is the Browns' version of Paul Silas: A disciplinarian who can start the walk, but he won't finish it.

Phil Savage

The good

Savage was brought in to upgrade the talent on this roster, and he is doing just that. The Browns, talentwise, are not as bad as their 1-5 record would indicate.

The decision to sink or swim with Charlie Frye seems perplexing on the surface, but it's really rooted in logic: Give Frye a season to prove himself. Don't bring in a veteran backup and put the temptation in place to pull Frye if he struggles.

Unfortunately, Savage, like so many Browns personnel gurus before him, thought the offensive line could be repaired in a spackle-and-paste method instead of spending draft picks. That was a major whiff, on par with Mark Shapiro's trade of Brandon Phillips.

Roster holes aside, Savage is a tireless scout who realizes a talent jumpstart is the only way to enable a rebuilding process. He's not shortcutting his way to familiar ground, as Davis and Dwight Clark did before him. He's logging the miles to find the guys who will, in theory at least, make this team better.

The bad

Unfortunately, by doing that, he's really placed himself in more of a lead scout's role than a GM's role. When a franchise is in tumult, as the Browns have so often been, there is a need for a strong, benevolent front office presence. Too often, Savage is out of town scouting, and leaving the ship in the hands of Crennel.

When a team is winning, there is nothing wrong with that practice. When a team is a tempest, the GM needs to do more than scout. He needs to reign in and calm down, effect change and be the arbiter of disputes.

As Crennel did with the Giants and Patriots, Savage learned the ways of a winning organization with the Ravens. Unfortunately, In Cleveland he stepped into a losing organization that doesn't run smoothly when the boss is away like New England and Baltimore can.

Savage is finding out: It's remarkable what you can't take for granted when your team is bad.

Will he stay?

Of all the Browns' leaders, Savage's presence is the most important, for the simple reason that he is amassing players as he sees fit. A new coach can win with the same players as the old coach, a new owner can still sign the paychecks, but a new GM almost always means a complete roster turnover.

Crennel can be fired at season's end, Randy Lerner can sell the team, but Savage must stay put, or this team is going to be set back another 5-to-10 years.

Randy Lerner

The good

Lerner has done far more than I ever expected him to do when he took the reigns of the Browns after his father died. I expected him to view the team as an unwanted heirloom and

quickly sell it.

Instead, he has embraced the role. If he hasn't effectively spurred change on the field, he's done so off the field. He has gone out of his way to embrace the Browns' alumni. Jim Brown is involved in the team and Bernie Kosar was calling preseason games, which would have been unheard of when Carmen Policy was running the show.

I expected him to not care, but he has. That might seem like a hollow quality when the team is 1-5, but if you don't care, you can't do anything else.

The bad

For a few years, the Browns, however homely, was Randy's best girl. But then another girl entered the picture. She has a sexy name and a fondness for short shorts, and -- oh yeah, she's British, too.

Now, Aston Villa of the English Premiership is vying for Lerner's attention after he purchased controlling interest in the club this summer. In addition to jetting to Ohio and back, Lerner, a Long Island resident, now also jets across the Atlantic to watch his new team have a go on the pitch.

Like any love-triangle relationship, we can already see this isn't going to work. One is going to become Lerner's favorite, and the other is going to take a backseat. The one that falls in back will suffer from neglect.

Will it be the team Lerner sought out and bought, or the team he inherited? It's something to keep an eye on.

Will he stay?

It depends on how infatuated Lerner becomes with Aston Villa. It's wise to remember that Lerner, who lived in the U.K. for a few years, is a genuine soccer fan. He doesn't view the team merely as an asset, like Malcolm Glazer did when he bought Manchester United. British soccer fans feel like Lerner is one Yank who actually understands them, and that might help lure Lerner overseas more often.

If the Browns' situation continues to stay one step above total hopelessness, one has to wonder how much longer Lerner will put up with them when he has another team to oversee, in a sport he appears to like more than helmet-and-pads football.