No vote of confidence. Rumors springing up that the Browns plan to secretly woo Jim Tressel and Bill Cowher. If you ask just about any Browns fan, it's not a matter of if Romeo Crennel gets fired. It's a matter of when. In Papa Cass's latest, he says Romeo deserves better than the lame duck status he's been dealt. And that Browns fans are unrealistic if they expect a new coach to ride in on a white horse and provide a quick fix.

Romeo Crennel seems almost fatalistic when it comes to his future job status.

"If I'm not here next year, it will be because I didn't win enough games," he said during his final weekly press conference of the season on Monday.

Sure, he says he has no real reason to believe he won't be here, but with the fan base and media slipping into daydream believer mode all around him, who can blame him for taking a "whatever happens, happens" attitude?

The names have been fluttering, fast and furious: Jim Tressel. Bill Cowher. Jeff Fisher. Even Urban Meyer from this particular corner.

Those of us with notepads, microphones and fond memories of Kosar-to-Slaughter are free to dream up whatever scenario we want. The danger is when team ownership joins the fray.

For too long, Randy Lerner and Company have been right alongside the fans in holding the belief that the Cleveland Browns job is every coach's dream. We look at our fallen football franchise with a mother's love, scolding and chastising, sure, but never for one minute thinking that there is anything bad about our sweet little Brownies.

The history. The tradition. The bitter cold Sundays on the lakefront. The mouths of Braylon Edwards and Kellen Winslow Jr. The knowledge that Jim Brown and every Browns alumnus with a cane and a damn will be looking over your shoulder like you are Norman Dale and they are the town fathers in "Hoosiers."

And the losing. Did I mention the losing? Seriously, what's not to love?

Yet, somehow, we think we can do better than Crennel, who willingly stuck his head into this hornets' nest. Somehow, we think we are owed better than Crennel.

Somehow, we think that if we maneuver this thing just right, Tressel or Cowher will leap into our arms, if not this year, then next year.

And that will change what, exactly? The coach isn't the biggest problem on this team. The several dozen draft picks this team has blown since re-entering the league is. Building the offensive line through aging free agents instead of high draft picks is. Bad luck is.

Think Tressel and Cowher and anybody else you might be dreaming about don't know that?

When it comes to football, Clevelanders tend to think that blood is thicker than water, or losing for that matter. Tressel, who spent his youth shagging kicks for Lou Groza, and Cowher, a former Brown, are blood relatives to us. In our minds, they are destined for Cleveland. Fortunately for the Browns, Tressel and Cowher probably don't share your sentiments. And hopefully neither does Lerner.

The worst thing the Browns can do is make Crennel a benchwarmer until our dream coach comes riding into town to come, see and conquer like Caesar.

You want to see a team roll over and die? Put a lame duck coach in charge of it, and watch the losses pile up. You want to create a scenario that no coach worth his weight in minerals would want any part of? Try to hand him the out-of-control day care center the Browns would almost certainly become with a lame-duck coach at the helm.

The Romeo Crennel era has certainly had its share of bumps in the road, and Crennel deserves his share of criticism, but he also deserves better than to be a lame duck.

Either commit to him now, or let him go now. But if you let him go, just don't expect his successor to have it much better than he did, at least until the team starts to string some good drafts together.

No matter how much you might want to believe in the magical stardust of eras past, no coach with a historical connection to the Browns is going to be able to ride into this town as a conquering hero until he has the tools to work with.

Crennel took over a decimated team and willingly put a bullseye on his back, knowing the rebuilding process was going to be slow and, at times, ugly. For that, maybe he deserves to be considered one of us. Like the fans, he sees potential in a team that has a face only a mother could love.