With yet another NFL post-season sans the Browns now unfolding, Gary Benz takes the opportunity to take a look around the league at a couple stories related to former members of the team. He starts in Denver, where the Broncos defensive line of ex-Browns was their undoing. Gary goes on to poke some fun at the old Browns team, the offensively impotent Ravens. Lastly, Benz takes a look at the two ex-Browns head coaches that faced off yesterday. Future Hall of Famer Bill Belichick, and the beleaguered Marty Schottenheimer.

Maybe these various things are related. Maybe not. But as another playoff season unfolds in the NFL without the Browns, you have to find your fun somewhere.

For example, it may have been worth only a one sentence mention at the end of Tony Grossi's weekly dribbles about the Browns in this Sunday's Plain Dealer, but isn't there just a bit more of a story to be told in the Denver Bronco's firing of defensive line coach Andre Patterson earlier this week?

Remember all the kvetching Browns fans did when the Denver Broncos essentially either signed as free agents or traded for all of the Browns defensive linemen a few years back? It was done at the behest of Patterson, who had recently been fired by the Browns and hired by head coach Mike Shanahan. In short order, Denver had Courtney Brown, Gerard Warren (for a fourth round pick), Mike Myers, Ebenezer Ekuban, and Kenard Lang.

As was reported at the time and at various points thereafter, this was another Cleveland joke, another example of a Cleveland team being played for fools. The Broncos, certainly as big a white whale to the Browns as any other team, were going to put these players into their far superior system and out would pop several pro bowlers.

In fact, the Plain Dealer and others, including the Beacon Journal, helped stoke those flames. Mary Kay Cabot of the PD, for one, gushed in a January, 2006 story about the grand success Denver was enjoying with these ex-Browns during a very modest playoff run. Cabot noted that when Patterson got to Denver, he sold Shanahan on these Cleveland castoffs. This quote in particular stands out: "Patterson said folks always wanted Warren to dominate the game to justify his No. 3 overall pick. 'It wasn't enough for him to be keeping guys off everybody else," said Patterson. "But no matter how much I jumped on the table and beat my chest to tell people how good he was, nobody believed me.'"

Well, Shanahan drank the kool-aid. But oh how things change when a team doesn't make the playoffs. None of these ex-Browns lived up to Patterson's rather optimistic assessment and this was one experiment that didn't work any better in Denver than it did in Cleveland. When Patterson was told this past week to report to Shanahan's office and bring his playbook, it was the case of having to pay the price for a monumental defensive collapse.

Surely, while Browns head coach Romeo Crennel and GM Phil Savage have had little to smile about this year, this story had to at least curl up one corner of their mouths. The biggest reason the Broncos didn't make the playoffs was the woeful play of the defense. And when you look deeper you'll find that some things never change as it was the defensive line that hurt the Broncos the most. Courtney Brown couldn't stay healthy, Gerard Warren continued to underachieve and Myers and Ekuban continued to play the minor insignificant roles guys like that will always play. For Shanahan, it was a case of again being talked into something silly, only this mistake is likely to linger longer than the ill-fated decision he was talked into making when Denver drafted Maurice Clarett in the third round.

And if Denver's failures in this regard provided some warmth to Browns fans during this 20th anniversary weekend of "The Drive," watching the Baltimore Ravens lose on Saturday in the playoffs had to make them downright toasty. The flameout by the Ravens was particularly noteworthy if only because it was the result of the same problems that have plagued self-proclaimed offensive genius and megalomaniac Brian Billick for years. Lack of offense.

Whereas Broncos fans were probably a bit skeptical when all the ex-Browns were signed, no such caution was exercised in Baltimore when Ozzie Newsome rescued deposed Tennessee Titans quarterback Steve McNair from the scrap heap. McNair was the missing piece, the experienced quarterback, the winner who could put this team over the top, or so Ravens fans were told.

But the truth is the Ravens offense was mostly mediocre all year. They were 17th overall (8th in the AFC) in total offense, averaging 317 yards per game, only marginally better than 2005. Steve McNair had virtually an identical quarterback rating with the Titans last year as he had with the Ravens this year, a very pedestrian 82.5, although this was much better than Kyle Bollar's 71.8 in 2005. In context, this was improvement for the Ravens, just not enough to make them a true contender. In fact, despite Billick's credentials, the Ravens have struggled offensively since he arrived, despite the one Super Bowl victory.

This brings us, finally, to the odd site of New England vs. San Diego in a battle of ex-Browns head coaches. Of all the cruel things to happen to Browns fans, the emergence of Belichick as one of the best head coaches ever in the NFL has to rank at or near the top of the list. When Belichick cut quarterback Bernie Kosar without a viable alternative, it was the last indignity in an already shaky marriage. Of course, public enemy number 1, Art Modell, fired Belichick rather than carry him to Baltimore, giving Cleveland fans at least some reason to smirk. Billick may have one a Super Bowl, but Belichick has become an icon. If he had kept Belichick, perhaps Modell may have been able to hold onto his franchise.

As for Marty Schottenheimer, his successes or failures will never generate much emotion in Cleveland. No one who knows him was surprised that Schottenheimer took a highly-rated, rested team into the playoffs, only to lose, again. But at this point, most Browns fans look at Schottenheimer rather fondly for what he did accomplish, even if he could never quite get his team over the hump, either here or elsewhere. Still, given the way Clevelanders think, even had the Chargers won, Clevelanders still would have shrugged and said “that figures.”