Man, talk about a radical change in modus operandi. Just a week after saying there's no reason the team could not compete and win lots of games this season, Phil Savage essentially pulled the plug on the 2007 Browns season in the presser announcing the trade of Charlie Frye on Tuesday. In Gary's latest, he breaks down the Savage press conference and talks about the ramifications of tossing in the towel on a season just nine days after it started.

With all that seems to be going on in Berea with the Browns these days, it would hardly shock if their mission statement was cribbed from the Japanese proverb that says “Vision without action is a daydream. Action without vision is a nightmare.”

Demonstrating a propensity to effectively alternate between daydreams and nightmares while keeping reality at arms length, the Browns have no idea where they’re going ... so to them any road will do. And because the sun has set and it’s another new day, there’s another new road for the Browns.

In what surely will go down as one of the more memorable press briefings by the Browns in recent memory, GM Phil Savage, in the course of but minutes, left fans on Tuesday wondering exactly what he and his wreck of a franchise are trying to accomplish this season.

Initially, Savage laid out the case that the objective is to win, saying “Some people think we're doing some kind of experiment, but we’re not. We are trying to win. Unfortunately, things got derailed Sunday before we even got started. Obviously, we have to play better. I think our team knows we’re very serious about winning, and I think they'll have confidence in whoever we put out there.”

But if that really is the case, which is unlikely, surely it was completely undermined a few minutes later when Savage essentially relegated winning to an afterthought when he said: “The important thing in the big picture is that we develop Brady Quinn in the right way. That is the most important thing that we have to do this year. That's what we’re trying to do. . . . And win.”

Seeing the quote really doesn’t do justice to how that message was delivered. The “and win” wasn’t said for emphasis. Far from it. It was a tagged on afterthought when Savage suddenly realized that he had just told season ticket holders and everyone else who owner Randy Lerner is counting on to financially and emotionally support this franchise that nothing, not winning, not preparation or professional effort, not even credibility, is more important than developing Brady Quinn. (You can hear the press conference by going to the Browns official website , clicking on the multimedia tab and searching for Savage’s September 11 press conference.)

As unprecedented as the trade of Charlie Frye may have been, it pales in comparison to the unprecedented sight of a general manager throwing the towel in on the season after just one game. The Browns aren’t talented enough to make the playoffs anyway so maybe he was just stating the obvious—that henceforth the Browns are in an extended pre-season mode. But there still is

something dispiriting about the one person charged with making all personnel decisions telling the fans just nine days into the season that hey, winning would be nice, but we've got more important work to do.

Maybe in some perverse sort of way Savage should be credited for his candor. But it's also fair to suggest that if Savage believes that anything in professional sports trumps winning, then he's really in the wrong job. In fact he's in the wrong profession.

You can't create a winning culture without winning and so long as Savage believes that the development of the 22nd pick in the draft, a pick that fell to him by happenstance and luck, prevails over building that winning culture, the long nightmare that has been the Browns return will continue uninterrupted.

This is not to be naïve about Savage's comments. It's clear he's taking a long view of the situation and essentially saying that getting Quinn to realize his potential will eventually yield wins. And, in his view, if sacrificing a season for the long-term is what it takes Savage seems comfortable with it. But are the fans? Are the players? Not likely.

Professional athletes are an interesting breed. The public often focuses too much on the business side of their lives, bemoaning the contract negotiations, the holdouts and the outsized salaries. But at their core, what makes athletes who they are is a competitive nature that doesn't countenance losing. Collecting a good salary is a nice perk, but what keeps them coming back every day and makes them take such risks with their bodies is the chance to win, to establish superiority over others. It's their most basic instinct.

The same is true with the fans. The reason there is a separate section in every newspaper in the country dedicated to sports, the reason forums like this exist, the reason that every town with a radio tower offers an outlet for every Rick from Brunswick to talk sports, is because fans are passionate about their teams and demand the opportunity to revel in their wins and complain about the losses. Fans want to win every game and get very emotional when that need isn't met. What they don't want to hear are excuses or long-term views or sacrificing the here and now for some elusive promise seasons away.

That's why Savage's comments are likely to be going over inside and outside Berea about as well as a Romeo Crennel halftime pep talk. He has pulled the plug on a season almost as soon as it got started. In the process, he has asked his players, including the free agents he brought in here to win now, to sacrifice their current health in order to help achieve a goal that they might not be around to witness, let alone enjoy. He also has asked the fans to subjugate their need to win now for a greater payoff somewhere down the yellow brick road. And in doing so, he's also asked both groups to take a tremendous leap of faith that nothing else will go wrong in the interim.

It's hard to imagine any scenario where that would be an acceptable request, particularly given the Browns unwillingness to participate in that request by, say, cutting ticket prices in the meantime. But given the credibility gap that is by now at least a mile wide and a thousand miles deep between the Browns and the fans, Savage truly is asking the impossible.

But then again, Savage wasn't really asking anyway, was he? Given a

long leash inside a franchise with no actual organization to it, Savage spoke like a man who has absolutely no concern for the consequences.

What Savage may not realize yet, but someday may, is that those consequences are nonetheless quite tangible. They involve such petty matters as the alienation of an entire generation of Browns fans who now have gone 13 years, almost a generation itself, without anything substantial to hold their interest.

Oh well, there's always the hope that Savage will be right about Quinn. After all, he was right about Chris Redman, Kyle Boller and Charlie Frye.