You know how the old saying goes. Coaches who listen to the fans are destined to end up in the stands with them. Yet it appears public opinion is, in fact, influencing the method to Phil Savage's and Romeo Crennel's madness. And this is the topic of Erik Cassano's latest piece. Erik says Phil Savage and Romeo Crennel are the masters of the mixed message. And the whole team is suffering because of it.

Politicians never listen to their own advice. Neither, apparently, do the handlers of the Cleveland Browns.

You're not supposed to govern by opinion polls because public opinion is extremely fickle. Yet how often do the local representatives kiss posterior to get votes the next time their name appears on a ballot?

Coaches and general managers of sports teams aren't supposed to cave to public demand, either. The old saying is that coaches who listen to the fans are destined to end up sitting with them in the stands.

Yet it appears public opinion is, in fact, influencing the method to Phil Savage's and Romeo Crennel's madness. Where fan and media pressure isn't influencing, a general lack of interest in making the tough calls seems to be picking up the slack.

This much we know: The Browns' leadership tandem (trio, if you want to throw Randy Lerner in there), has been treading on eggshells pretty much since the NFL draft. The number of noncommittal non-decisions Savage and Crennel have made
since the spring is enough to choke ... well, an entire season.

They could have, and should have, named a starting quarterback at the outset of training camp. It should have been Charlie Frye, not because he was necessarily the best choice to win, but because on a team

where continuity has been about as hard to access as Macchu Picchu
, your best bet is to lay the groundwork for the most seamless torch-pass to Brady Quinn you can muster.

But in rode Derek Anderson on a white horse, lifting the Browns to an overtime win over the hapless Kansas City Chiefs late last year. In a city so desperate for football success in any form, this apparently qualified him to receive a legitimate look as a starter. The Anderson bandwagon picked up a head of steam in a hurry, and the Browns were happy to oblige.

So Savage rubber-stamped an open quarterback competition this year. The trouble is, straw in any form can't be spun into gold. Neither quarterback seized the job, despite the best efforts of Crennel and offensive coordinator Rob
Chudzinski
to cross their fingers and hope really, really hard that the more physically-gifted Anderson would suddenly emerge as a modern-era Vinny
Testaverde
.

The QB cloud hung over the Browns for more than a month, through an 11-day Quinn holdout, through at least one coin flip to decide who would start a preseason game and through a large graveyard of offensive drives that died before their time. Finally, Crennel emerged and announced that the Browns were headed right back to where they were a year ago. Frye was starting.

As far as anticlimactic events go, that was the equivalent of any Super Bowl that featured the Dallas Cowboys and Buffalo Bills. And all it cost the Browns was a training camp's worth of building offensive continuity.

Then after finally, finally making up their minds, putting their foot down, making a move that showed some semblance of conviction, Crennel chose Frye to start against the
Steelers
, pulled him after one and a half offensive quarters and two days later, Savage traded him. In doing so, he might have revealed the real reason the Browns can't seem to achieve success.

Savage and Crennel can't blame the roster misadventures of Butch Davis anymore. Not with a couple of solid drafts and free agent classes now on the team. They can't blame hasty hiring of assistant coaches, not with the hand-picked tandem of Chudzinski
and Todd
Gratham
playcalling
. They can't blame a team president or a meddlesome owner. John Collins is long-gone and Lerner has an ongoing affair with his English mistress, Aston Villa.

The only guys left are the men in the mirror. Savage understands the talent-amassing part of the job. But that's only half the battle. You must manage that talent properly once you get it. That's something neither he nor Crennel seem to understand in full. Playing yo-yo with your quarterback situation until the tail-end of August, then pulling the plug on the guy you selected after one quarter of the first game of the season isn't managing your roster the right way. It sure as heck doesn't send a good message to the rest of the team.

It was probably a mistake to draft Frye and try to turn him into the future of the franchise. Savage was a rookie GM when he drafted Frye in 2005. Frye was coming off a great performance in the Senior Bowl, he was a local boy from a local school, and Savage was probably trying to play to the fans a little bit. But in the end, it was a "draft-and-hope" situation. Savage was hoping that Frye

would be worth the third-round pick and would turn into a hometown boy made good. He didn't.

But instead of coming up with a definite plan on how to handle the Frye situation, Savage and Crennel swayed to extremes, burying him behind Trent Dilfer one year, then handing the starting job to him with no veteran mentor the next. This year, they split the difference by forcing him to compete for the starting job with Anderson, his competitive peer. All the while, Crennel and his ever-changing legion of offensive assistants were trying to de-program Frye's legs (his only true asset as a QB) and turn him into a pocket passer.

Here's a bet that once Mike Holmgren clears out all of the mental static Frye's head has accumulated over the past two years, he might actually become a productive player for the Seahawks.

Apparently, that's too much to ask of Browns management at this point. Whether it's caving to fan opinion, media criticism or their own indecision, Phil Savage and Romeo Crennel seem to be the masters of the mixed message. And the whole team is suffering because of it.