Gary Benz's Sunday night Browns commentary column has quickly become one of the most popular columns we run all week. So much so, that we urged Gary to follow the piece up mid-week after he's had more time to digest the contents of prior weeks game. So Gary checks back in today with his lingering items from the Texans game. Among them? Romeo Crennel's contract, Braylon whipping a ball into the Dawg Pound last week, the Browns throwback unis, and the play of Brandon McDonald.

There is any number of ways to measure the progress of a team like the Cleveland Browns, and not every one them is statistically based.

For example, this past Sunday's victory, which pushed their record to 7-4, showed evidence that the team is no longer in awe of its own success and is now capable of closing out a game it should win, something they couldn't do just two weeks prior against Pittsburgh. Another is the way in which the defense is starting to get pressure on opposing quarterbacks, demonstrating how much good, in the form of sacks and turnovers, can come from this.

But in my mind, the fact that head coach Romeo Crennel went virtually unnoticed during last Sunday's game is as much a sign of progress as anything else. There were no overt examples of sideline confusion that dot most Browns games in one form or another. The Browns didn't foolishly burn an extra time out or two trying to figure out whether to challenge an official's call. For the most part the players seemed to be in most of the right places at most of the right times. In fact, it's hard to think of any outward example of an impact, positive or negative, which Crennel had on Sunday's game. That's not a criticism.

This of course doesn't qualify Crennel for any special awards, unless of course you're Patrick McManamon from the Akron Beacon Journal and your threshold is so low that a winning record after 11 games, after two years of sheer torture, is worthy of a ticker tape parade. In Tuesday's Beacon Journal (see column here), McManamon argues that the Browns progress to date is a veritable mandate that general manager Phil Savage come out now and publicly declare that Crennel will serve out the final two years of his contract.

Let's see if I have this right. Savage already announced at the season's outset that Crennel isn't nor has he been on the hot seat. Now, because the Browns are showing measurable progress in a season that is only 75% complete, suddenly Savage needs to further back his coach? Wouldn't that sort of imply that despite what Savage said earlier, he really did have doubts about Crennel? In other words, wouldn't such a public proclamation actually raise more questions than it answers?

Beyond these rather obvious questions is the rather obvious fact that the season isn't quite finished. What if the Browns tank the rest of the games and finish 7-9? Sure, that's progress over last season's debacle, but so what? In a season where so much seems possible, wouldn't falling flat with the season on the line take the shine off that record? And by the way, if the Browns do fall flat, does that mean we should patiently sit by while it takes two more years to get to 9-7?

As McManamon admits, Crennel is far from perfect. Indeed, McManamon cites to some of the more obvious examples: the Maurice Carthon debacle, the Charlie Frye debacle, the time out debacle, etc. ad nauseum. McManamon, however, does gloss over some of the other shortcomings of this team, which ultimately are a reflection on the head coach, like its lack of discipline as exhibited by the inordinate number of mental errors that plague the team on a regular basis, such as false starts and personal fouls, the lack of attention to detail in any number of areas, like who exactly has authority to call a timeout in the first place, or the fact that this defensive specialist has one of the worst defenses in the league.

Sure any of these shortcomings can be rationalized away by placing the blame elsewhere, such as on Savage for not acquiring better players on the defensive side of the ball. And maybe that's true to some extent or even to a great extent. But even Crennel readily admits that the buck stops with him and it does.

This isn't to necessarily bash Crennel so much as it's intended to recalibrate McManamon's perspective scale a bit. It's also intended to say that nothing good comes out of making any promises that ultimately Savage may not be able to keep. As a work in progress, the Browns are necessarily still in a state of flux. Crennel has already earned the right to come back next year, like it or not. But the rest of this season and particularly next year when the Browns will be facing difficult decisions about their quarterback while no longer being able to sneak up on opponents will be the real measure of whether or not Crennel really has matured into a head coach and whether or not he really can deliver the Browns to the next level as an elite team. If that occurs, Savage won't need to make any public proclamation about his final year or the next several thereafter. Crennel's future will be secured by fiat.

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Not to go all Mary Kay Cabot on anyone, but I have the same question she had on Monday: What exactly was Braylon Edwards thinking when he drilled a ball into the Dawg Pound on Sunday? Apparently very little.

For anyone that didn't see the play, early in the second quarter quarterback Derek Anderson hit Edwards with a 19-yard touchdown pass that ultimately tied the game at 7-7. Immediately following the catch, Edwards wound up and threw the ball as hard as he could on a direct line into the Dawg Pound.

According to Edwards, he was just showing some pent up aggression, claiming he was just excited and needed an outlet since he doesn't dance. Maybe he should learn. Lucky for him the fans in that section were paying attention or someone

would have surely been hurt, which very well could have spelled trouble for both Edwards and the Browns.

Fans at sporting events are warned, on their tickets and through announcements, that they need to be alert for balls, bats, gloves, whatever, that may inadvertently leave the field of play. And while there have been any numbers of lawsuits filed by injured spectators over flying balls and bats, most of them have been losers for the fans who filed them because of this warning and the nature of the games. However, this body of law is premised on the unintended nature of the injury. It's different when it's the result of intentional or reckless conduct, just ask Albert Belle who was forced to settle a lawsuit filed by Associated Press photographer Tony Tomsic as a result of a ball Belle allegedly deliberately threw at him. Belle also had a run-in with a fan a few years earlier who had called him Joey. Belle drilled the fan in the chest with a ball. It's unclear whether it resulted in a lawsuit. More likely a private settlement resulted either before the legal process went too far or just after it was initiated. It's unlikely the incident was merely forgotten.

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Now we know the answer to the question of how we can tell if the Browns are wearing throwback uniforms. There will be numbers on the helmets, that's how.

What is actually somewhat amazing is how little the Browns uniforms really have changed over the years. Not only have the colors remained the same, but so too has the design of the uniforms. Other than an insignificant stripe or two on the helmet or the socks, the uniforms you see today are virtually the same as they've ever been.

The reason this is amazing, actually, is that owner Randy Lerner and even former owner Art Modell for that matter, saw no reason to try and tap into additional revenue that tends to follow when teams change colors and fans by new jerseys and such. Look at the NBA in general and the Cavs in particular. Teams

somewhat routinely change colors and radically alter uniform design, just as the Cavs did. The teams will argue of course it's to freshen the look. The truth is that it's done to re-open a revenue stream. It's kind of like when you buy a DVD of your favorite movie and the next year it's reissued with special packaging. It's only purpose is to separate your money from your wallet.

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Here's a question to ponder: If Brandon McDonald, in his first extended play of the season, has enough ability to shut down a Pro Bowl receiver, what took the Browns so long to get him out there?