Romeo Crennel won't talk about it, but a win this week could put the Browns in the playoffs, before they even play their final two games. And it is looking like a very strong possibility that their first round playoff game will be a trip over to Appalachia to take on the Sucklers. The two teams met in the playoffs in 1994 and 2002, and Mansfield says they are on a collision course to do so again here this season.

Despite Coach Romeo being in as much denial about the Browns being in a playoff race as the dude who'll be shopping in the Vine Street Discount Drug Mart at 5am on the 25th is about Christmas coming, the Browns are a win or two away from clinching a wildcard playoff spot with the right help. And as things come into focus, don't look now, but it's the 1994 and 2002 seasons all over again.

Despite Appalachian being in sniveling denial after the completely humiliating butt-kicking they took last Sunday , it is obvious that this year's AFC is pretty much the NFC of the early 1990's.
Back then, Carmen Policy's 49ers and Jimmuh's (and Butch's) Crackwagon teams were much like the Clash was to music in the early 1980's. As the Clash was known as
The Only Band that Mattered
TM

,

so too, were those two teams competing to determine the championship while er'ry one else watched. The Sucklers have been exposed as also-rans despite a more gaudy record than most. They are in the same category as Jacksonville, San Diego, Cleveland and a handful of other good teams with fatal flaws that keep them from competing with the Patriots and Colts. That said, due to the Browns penchant for not staying focused on the road against poor teams, the break-but-don't-bend-defense, and the repeated appearances of "bad" Derek Anderson at inopportune times, it appears that barring a meltdown of Cleveland proportion that
the Inbred
are on their way to claiming a division title. This would deny them the first round bye week and pit them against the wild card team with the second best record, which lo and behold is starting to look like it will be.....
Yeah, you know who it is. It's us snitches.

Can you handle it?

In 1994, it looked like Bill Belichick finally had righted the ship with an odd collaboration of veterans, a few draft picks he'd selected that filled in holes, and some holdovers that had underachieved previously who suddenly found themselves. The offensive line was a strong run blocking unit and underrated
by Browns fans who have recently been wondering if the 2007 version is as good as any we've had
. The enigmatic twins
, Vinnie Testaverde

and Leroy
"Isn't I 480 a NASCAR track"
Hoard, powered a pretty fair offense. The defensive line was strong and active, the linebackers savvy, and the secondary led by Eric Turner. The team won 11 games, upset the Cowboys late, and was the last Browns team to win a playoff game, which they did so convincingly against a good Bill Parcells' Patriots team.

For some reason, this bunch set the tone for what we've seen happen to the current Browns teams when they play the Appalachians.
They developed a mental block the size of Mount Rushmore, and you could see it happening. It started slowly, blowing the game-winning late touchdown reception due to a holding call in game one. They lost a close one. Later that season, they somehow made it past all the unattended road kill and unsalted paths they call roads
to the Confluence
and allowed themselves to get positively drilled. Fumbles, interceptions and the D line being intimidated to the point where Barry Foster looked like Jim Brown himself contributed to a thorough pimp slapping,
the kind of loss we've become all too familiar with as Browns' fans
. The worst was yet to come.

In the playoff game, the Browns completely forgot to show up. Who can forget Derrick Alexander's consecutive drops to start the game when he was wide-ass open twenty yards downfield? Who can forget how they discombobulated the mercurial Testaverde into a mistake ridden game? Who can forget the Browns' defense looking completely intimidated to the point of embarrassing themselves? To this day, this is the only playoff game I ever turned off. Not the 86 Jets game. Not being down 21 - 3 at half against the Broncos. This one was brutal.

A year later The Creature moved my damn team.

It took a while and it's along story, but by 2002 Carmen Policy and Butch Davis actually had the Browns on the brink of being pretty damn good. Now I know that it has become vogue to rip the previous regime to manage expectations and buy time for Phil Savage, but the 2002 edition was a bona fide decent team. A great team? Far from it. But it was a competitive group that gave us a chance to win er'ry week. Like the 94 group, it was led by an odd collection of free agent vets and draft choices that had underachieved up until that season. It featured a strong running game on the shoulders of a back that was a one-year-wonder. William Green was Terry Jacks to Leroy Hoard's Bo Donaldson. The defense had vet players at linebacker and was built around a 4 - 3 line.

This edition caught the Hilljacks at a relative low. Instead of Ben Toothlesburger and some talent, they had pretty marginal players, but managed to win a weak division.
Yeah, you remember it well.
Kelly Hokum was the toast of the town. Some called him Johnny Unitas, others' Brian Sipe. He managed to come out of nowhere and despite inconsistent play and a penchant for interceptions; he had enough hot streaks to put up some big numbers. The enamored coaching staff kept the intended franchise quarterback on the bench. Wow, things have really changed here. The Browns still managed to choke and lose a game they had won five or six times. While Dennis Dropcutt will always be remembered as the goat for dropping what should have been an easy first down conversion that may have run out the clock, it should also be remembered that the defense melted down, oh, like what you saw at Ketchup Field a few weeks ago. "Bad" Holcomb showed up for a brief second in what was a game for the ages that would have made Clint Longley
weep, and he threw a huge pick on what looked to be the drive that would have made it nearly mathematically impossible to lose and turned momentum against us late. The more things change....

So here we are now in 2007. The question you have to ask yourself is do you believe in karma, or do you believe in Jobu, the bane and cause of all that is snake bitten with Cleveland sports? If you know The Cleveland Experience ™ in sports and have spent anytime of the forums, you know Jobu well. How

you answer this question is going to determine if we want to see another 3 game season against the dark side. But whether you want to see it or not, get your butt ready for it.

These teams are on a collision course.