

## Romeo's Waking Nightmare

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The Romeo Crennel Summer of Love and No Contact Tour is winding down. In fact, at about 7 PM tomorrow night in Detroit, Romeo might actually be taking the first solid hit of the preseason when he's smacked upside the head by the reality that he has a full-blown quarterback controversy yet again. It's Romeo's worst nightmare. And Pecker talks about it in his latest column for us.



*For Never was a story of more woe / Than of the quarterback situation for old Romeo.*

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Plenty of people get smacked around (and worse) in Detroit. At least Romeo will be able to leave with his life.

But when Crennel does escape Detroit he'll be doing it with the media hounds hot on his tail. Because no matter how much he'd like to forget about it and no matter how much he'd prefer to push it under the rug, the question of what he's going to

do with Derek Anderson and Brady Quinn is going to haunt him like Ted Washington haunted a buffet table.

When the Browns signed Anderson to a 3-year deal following his Pro Bowl appearance last season it seemed clear that DA would again be the man under center while Quinn completed another year in his apprenticeship. DA threw 29 TD passes and was at the controls of an offense that simply exploded onto the scene last season. Quinn said all the right things as the backup and did all the right things on the practice field to make the most out of his rookie year.

But when you're talking about DA and his hold on this quarterback job, you really need to look below the surface of those 29 TD passes. And more specifically you need to look at how Anderson "handles" pressure situations.

**Training Camp '07-** With an open quarterback battle in camp and the job clearly up for grabs, Anderson responds to the pressure by having a worse camp than incumbent starter Charlie Frye. Anderson gave us all some hints in camp of what was to come. Poor touch, some poor decision-making and some poor clock management mixed in with flashes of brilliance weren't enough to wrestle away the starting job from Frye. DA was beaten out by a guy who would last less than a half at the position and then be traded away to Seattle before week 2.

Anderson assumed control in week 2 against Cincinnati with nothing expected of him and with fans and the organization in complete 'Hope & Prayer' mode. With expectations reduced he came out and threw for 328 yards and 5 TDs.

**Week 3 Oakland-** With the shock from week 2 wearing off and fans and coaches alike wondering whether they had stumbled upon a diamond in the rough, Anderson faces down increased pressure by throwing two interceptions and fumbling once against the Raiders. This was a bad performance in what would become a huge loss in the Browns season. But the sentiment that Anderson was the guy to lead the team was reduced and with it so was the pressure to perform.

Anderson promptly dials his nerves down and leads the Browns to a blowout win over the Ravens in week 4.

**Week 5 New England-** Anderson takes a 2-2 Browns team into New England for a huge test against the unbeatable Patriots in a hostile Gillette Stadium. He responds by throwing 3 interceptions in a 34-17 loss, all in the first half, to put the Browns in a hole they could never escape. The first two interceptions came on the Browns first two possessions of the game including one on the New England goal line. With the Browns down 20-0 at the half and the game basically over (i.e., pressure off), Anderson has a solid second half and puts up 17 points.

Anderson then puts 3 solid games together (though he did sputter in St. Louis) and the Browns go into Pittsburgh at 5-3 against their dreaded rival.

**Week 10 Pittsburgh-** DA leads the Browns to 3 1<sup>st</sup> half TD drives and a 21-9 halftime lead but can get next to nothing done in the 2<sup>nd</sup>

half as the Steelers rally to win 31-28. Anderson throws for just 123 yards in the game, doesn't turn the ball over, but can't make any adjustments or enough short, accurate throws in the 2<sup>nd</sup>

half to extend possessions and keep the ball away from Pittsburgh. Another road loss and the playoff drive is stalled again.

Two Browns wins follow the Pittsburgh loss and the club sits at 7-4 and is on the precipice of a playoff spot as they travel to Phoenix to face a mediocre Cardinals club.

**Week 13 Phoenix-** DA goes into Phoenix and throws for 304 yards and 3 TDs. Unfortunately, one of those 3 TDs went to Roderick Hood. And

Hood plays for the Cardinals. Hood returned a horrible DA pass 71 yards the other way and the Browns lost a closely contested game to the Cardinals, who were playing without their two best receivers in Larry Fitzgerald and Anquan Boldin, 27-21. This was a huge swing game and everyone connected with the Browns knew it. Including DA. Anderson mixed in another turnover on a fumble on his own side of the field that was turned into an Arizona TD.

Plainly and simply, DA wet the bed in this ballgame and it cost the Browns a huge win and a chance to go to 8-4 on the season.

The Browns rebound to nip the Jets and the Bills (in a game no QB should ever be judged upon) and head into Cincinnati with a 9-5 record. A win against the lowly Bengals and a win the next week against the even more squalid 49ers and the Browns are in the playoffs.

**Week 16 Cincinnati-** Abomination doesn't quite do this effort justice. Playing against a poor defense that he had put up 5 TDs and 50+ points against in week 2, DA goes out in a pressurized road game and lays another egg. He mixes in 2 TD throws with 4 interceptions and the Browns watch the Bengals capitalize to the tune of a 19-0 halftime in what ended up as a 19-14 loss that crippled the club's playoff hopes and forced them to rely on help to get in. They didn't get that help.

Two of Anderson's interceptions came on consecutive possessions late in the first half. Both were egregious, the second more so. The Bengals accepted the gifts and scored 2 TDs in a 39 second span to give them a lead they never relinquished.

**Week 17 San Francisco**- The Browns beat the 49ers in what ended up being a meaningless game when Indianapolis surrendered to Tennessee hours later. DA threw his token interception as well as TD pass but what was interesting about this game was DA's reaction to Brady Quinn's 2007 debut.

DA left this ballgame late in the first half with an injured finger and Quinn entered to a hero's welcome. Quinn was serviceable and made some good reads and good throws while knocking a season's worth of rust off. Meanwhile, DA had come back out of the locker room and looked nothing less than frantic on the sideline. He hurriedly picked up a ball and started throwing while nervously glancing at the field. He made sure his coaches knew he was ready to re-enter the action and he never relaxed on the sideline.

It was a desperation moment from the starting QB that couldn't help but be noticed by people closely watching the action. He looked like a selfish, petulant child who was forced to watch another kid play with his toy and who desperately wanted it back.

This isn't to completely knock Derek Anderson. He handled his first season as a starting QB the best he could. He showed flashes of brilliance but also the proclivity to make the huge mistakes. His performance in road games and under pressure came up short.

This is more about the fact that Brady Quinn has thus far done everything the right way. This is a kid who eats up and handles the pressure he's faced with. And he's been faced with a ton of pressure

since the time he was 14 years old and college scouts started showing up at his junior high games to take measure of his skills and ability. He handled that pressure and then went straight into the crucible that is quarterbacking the Notre Dame Fighting Irish. He ate up that heat beginning halfway through his freshman year and led the Irish into a big BCS bowl game against Ohio State in his senior season. Looking back at Quinn's college years through the benefit of elapsed time, he was leading an under-talented team against some of college football's best clubs and doing it admirably. Admirably is also how he handled his falling in the 2007 draft as well as his rookie year with the Browns.

On the field he's smart, poised and willing to take what the defense gives him. He's throwing a better ball today than he was this time last year and he's also elusive in the pocket and comfortable throwing on the run.

And now, due to DA's concussion suffered in a horrific performance against the Giants (under pressure yet again, given the Browns becoming a media darling and a primetime staple this season) Quinn finds himself with a golden opportunity to make Romeo Crennel's life a living hell by again serving notice that he's ready to play now.

This isn't about Derek Anderson and his weaknesses so much as it's about the potential strengths of Quinn. Given the chance Quinn will make enough throws to get by. He's not Ken Dorsey-like in terms of arm strength. And time and time again he's shown nothing if not the ability to win games and lead an offense. The criticism that he dinks and dunks down the field is unwarranted. He's taking what people are giving him and when teams start loading up underneath Quinn will have and take opportunities down the field.

This team has some strength and firepower on the offensive side of the football. Brady Quinn has a chance to show he's the best steward for that squad. My bet is he does just that starting Saturday afternoon in Detroit.

Whether Romeo has the stones to make a move with his QBs is another story altogether. But make no mistake: regardless of whether Romeo wants to admit it or not, the Great QB Debate of '08 is alive and well and will dominate his days and nights.