Week one disaster aside, Gary Benz isn't ready to throw Phil Savage under the bus. As a matter of fact, Gary likes most of the things he's done with this team since he joined the team, and feels Phil has been very realistic regarding the teams strengths and shortcomings. But where Savage is completely unrealistic is in his view of head coach Romeo Crennel. In fact, it's Savage's biggest blind spot. By giving Crennel a contract extension in January, Savage just reinforced the flaw in his own thinking.

If there is one positive Cleveland Browns owner Randy Lerner can take away from his team's yearly opening loss embarrassment it's that the fans still care enough to get mad. Anger isn't the enemy, indifference is. The problem is the Browns seem hell-bent on giving their fans ever more reason to be indifferent.

General manager Phil Savage told Sports Illustrated writer Peter King that his goal for the Browns this season is to be competitive.

Consider it still a goal.

More than anything else, what was particularly clear on Sunday is that the Browns are just not there yet.

Not with those cornerbacks.

Not with those linebackers.

Not with those receivers.

Not with that head coach.

In every way a team can get outclassed, that was the Browns' fate on Sunday. In and of itself, that's not a crime or a sin.

But if those fans who attended the team's opening practice at training camp this summer and chanted "Super Bowl" were serious, then such a result was as unexpected as John McCain selecting, essentially, the mayor of Willoughby to be his running mate.

It shouldn't have been.

The most revealing and refreshing aspect of King's chronicling of the Browns for Sports Illustrated is how clearly attuned Savage is to the team's weaknesses, at least in terms of players. Savage clearly acknowledged the weaknesses in the secondary and the limited opportunities he had to fix it given the other holes that had to get fixed. In that respect, he's underscoring a truism that is important for everyone to remember: in a league with a salary cap, extreme makeovers aren't going to happen over night.

Remember, too, it was Savage that readily admitted that just a few short years ago, the team had but a handful of legitimate NFL players on the roster. Generally speaking, Savage's glasses have clear lenses.

Thus, Savage gone about rebuilding the team from the inside out. He's fixed the offensive and defensive lines.

The skill positions have received a fair amount of attention as well.

The last remaining pieces, like the leaky plumbing in a downstairs bathroom, are next.

Unfortunately, it's going to take another offseason to get to that project.

But where Savage is completely unrealistic is in his view of head coach Romeo Crennel. In fact, it's Savage's biggest blind spot. By giving Crennel a contract extension in January, Savage just reinforced the flaw in his own thinking.

Simply put, Crennel is a lousy head coach. He came to the job in the same way Bud Carson came to his job as a head coach.

He had paid his dues and it was his time.

Now it's producing similar results.

The players respect Crennel and speak highly of him.

They just don't perform particularly well for him.

It may not be entirely their fault.

Week in and week out, and the Dallas game is no exception, the Browns are not as well prepared as their opponents. Crennel has not even come close to mastering the true nature of his current job description: to put his team in a position to win each and every week. Game plans don't seem to exploit the weaknesses of the opponents or anticipate their strengths.

Mental mistakes predominate.

The call for a field goal on Sunday when all sense of logic and reason said otherwise is getting a lot of run on the fan boards and the call-in shows. One perspective to it that I hadn't initially considered was that it was evidence of Crennel throwing in the towel, conceding that his team had virtually no chance to make that first down or win the game.

I don't think Crennel's a quitter.

I think the truth of that situation is far more obvious: it was just another mental misstep.

Crennel demonstrated in that moment precisely the problem with him as a head coach. The stress, strain and responsibility of being a head coach have overwhelmed him to the point that it has robbed him of all sense of instinct and context. The big book of head coaching may have said to take the

points. The rhythm of the moment said otherwise, loudly.

As awful as Crennel has been on game day, the real problems lie in the days and weeks prior. Crennel is a system coach with the inability to adapt. He continues to shove the 3-4 defense peg into the round hole of talent deficiency.

No matter how fundamentally sound Crennel may think the 3-4 scheme is, this team does not yet have the talent to pull it off.

As important as the defensive line is to that defense, what really makes it go are the linebackers.

On this team, the linebackers are nearly as weak as the secondary.

Outside linebacker Willie McGinest was something once, he's just not that anymore and he's a starter.

Andra Davis and D'Qwell Jackson, the inside linebackers, probably wouldn't start for any other team.

Kamerion Wimbley, the other outside linebacker, has talent but lacks consistency.

Despite these shortcomings, Crennel remains steadfast. And not surprisingly, the defense continues to falter.

It's a "chicken or egg" argument to blame Savage for the defensive failures since he's in charge of talent acquisition.

While that is true, in the meantime Crennel has to have enough flexibility to adjust to the talent at hand.

He's not done it yet and offers no reason to think he ever will.

Beyond his lack of flexibility also lies a coach fundamentally inept at preparing his team for the battles at hand. Until the game is played with robots, mental

mistakes are going to happen. The problem here though is that the mistakes are constant, signifying a trend rather than an anomaly. Moreover, the game plans seem simplistic and generic.

If anyone can definitively say exactly what the Browns were trying to do offensively or defensively against Dallas, please speak up now.

Dallas is a good team, maybe even a great team.

But they aren't a perfect team.

They have flaws.

Yet from the opening gun the Browns played as if there was nothing they could do to score or to stop Dallas from scoring.

The outcome was inevitable.

Savage, for his part, gets arrogant and dismissive of anyone who suggests that Crennel isn't suited for his current role. But the more he continues to turn a blind eye to one of the key reasons this team cannot progress to the mythical next level, the fruits of his hard work will never be fully enjoyed.

Savage may think this is just typical knucklehead fans lashing out because the team performed as it did on Sunday.

But sooner or later he's going to land on the conclusion that Crennel is the problem.

Likely, though, it is going to be two or three frustrating seasons too late.