Unless you've been living in isolation, you know a fracture is threatening to end the Browns season before the first flake of snow hits the ground. It's the worst kind of fracture. It can't be healed with a cast or a splint. This fracture is between Phil Savage and Kellen Winslow, and it's become a full-blown sideshow upstaging the team's preparation for Sunday's game in Jacksonville, a game the Browns desperately need to win. Erik Cassano talks about it in his latest.

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To summarize, this all started immediately after the Browns' 14-11 loss to the Redskins last Sunday. In an interview with The Plain Dealer, Winslow accused the Browns of attempting to hide his second staph infection from public view to protect the organization's reputation. He expressed dismay that Savage did not call him during his stay in the hospital the week previous, and said he felt that the Browns were treating him like a "piece of meat."

Romeo Crennel tried to talk Winslow into a retraction on the flight back to Cleveland, but Winslow maintained a hardline stance, drawing a one-game suspension from Browns management. The suspension was lifted late Saturday, but Winslow still reportedly won't play Sunday.

In one sequence of events, we sampled a buffet of embarrassment that seems to summarize the train wreck that has been the Cleveland Browns over the past four years: Winslow, a player with a long history of maturity problems (and apparent

anger issues) spouting off to the media about a problem that should have been handled internally; yet another failed attempt by Crennel to rein in one of his players; a long-simmering feud between Savage and Winslow finally boiling over in front of a national audience, all wrapped in the package of the ongoing staph infection saga.

This will all likely end with Winslow's departure from the team over the coming offseason. With Steve Heiden, Darnell Dinkins and Martin Rucker, the Browns are deep at the tight end position, so Savage probably feels like he doesn't need to put up with Winslow, whose deficiencies as a blocker and deterioriating knees will likely render him an oversized possession receiver in the next three-to-five years.

The fans and media, of course, are taking sides in this battle. But as frequently occurs in the court of public opinion, the verdicts handed out have a lot to do with the direction of the prevailing winds.

Coming off a disappointing loss in Washington that dropped the Browns to 2-4, putting a highly-anticipated season on the brink of irrelevance, fans are quick to spew their venom at Savage. It was Savage, the overrated GM, who got the Browns into this mess with his spotty drafts, blind loyalty to Crennel and curious obsession with Derek Anderson. It is Savage who can't control the Browns' staph epidemic, and now he's trying to sweep it under the rug. It's Savage who just took a machete to his nasal cartilage to spite his face, suspending arguably his best offensive player for a pivotal game, on the road, against a playoff-caliber team.

Right now, Winslow is telling it like it is, shining some much-needed light into the dark, mold-encrusted corners of the Browns organization, and taking one on the chin from the Browns' cloak-and-dagger inner sanctum for doing so.

But if the Browns win in Jacksonville, the song might change just a little bit. If Anderson, deprived of one of his crutches, is forced to spread the ball around to five or six different receivers, resulting in a balanced attack and three offensive

touchdowns in a repeat of the Giants game, the "Down With Savage!" movement might lose some steam. The new slogan for the Ravens rematch will be "Kellen Who?"

Ten different people might give you 10 different takes on the Savage-Winslow rift, but this much can be safely assumed: If the Browns were 4-2, the majority of the fan base would be telling Kellen to shut up, put the team first and get to the playoffs. Savage, the playoff team architect, would be the sympathetic figure far more than he is right now.

In the end, blame always boils down to wins and losses. Fans change. The media changes. Winslow and Savage really don't. Winslow is always going to have a large dose of hotheadedness running through his veins. It's part of what makes him such a fierce competitor at football. But it also makes him prone to spouting off when he's unhappy.

When Winslow publicly stated a desire for a new contract just before the Pro Bowl in February, he was all but laughed off by the Northeast Ohio masses. Coming off a 10-6 season, when things were finally going well for the Browns, the tight end who nearly killed himself in a motorcycle crash, the tight end who should be grateful for even having an NFL career, was putting his interests ahead of the team. It looked like an obscenely selfish act.

Now that the Browns are back to swimming among the league's bottom-feeders, Savage looks like the selfish one in light of Winslow's comments. Savage looks like the one who is trying to salvage his own reputation by allegedly telling Winslow to clam up about staph.

If Savage did relay such a message to Winslow, that does look suspicious. Winslow has a right to his opinion, even if it's not popular. If he truly believes something needs to be said about the way the Browns are handling players with staph infections, and he's willing to take the heat for speaking out against his

employer, the Bill of Rights guarantees him that freedom.

But beyond that, I find it hard to sympathize with Winslow. I find it hard to believe that Winslow was broken up that he didn't receive a call from Savage while in the hospital, especially since he received a call from his direct boss, Romeo Crennel.

I find it hard to side with a guy who accuses his superiors of treating him like a piece of meat. I was willing to go along with what Winslow had to say, but he lost me at that point. The Browns hired their offensive coordinator in part because of his long-standing relationship with Winslow. He's been at or among the leaders in tight end receptions for the past two years. All this after a broken leg and the aforementioned crotch rocket stunt crash claimed the first two years of his career.

On the "Ridiculous Comment By A Professional Athlete In Need Of Some Perspective" scale, Winslow's remark ranks right up there with Latrell Sprewell turning down the Minnesota Timberwolves' multimillion-dollar offer by saying "I have a family to feed."

I do, however, find it completely believable that Winslow's outburst has a lot to do with his perception that he's being phased out by the Browns. There has probably been some simmering animosity between Savage and Winslow dating to his motorcycle crash, but while we as fans dismissed Winslow's contract demands with little more than a wave of the arm, Savage treated it like a warning shot over the bow.

When Savage dealt an '09 draft pick to move up and select Rucker out of Missouri several months later, it was Savage's way of returning fire, of telling Winslow that the organization wouldn't grind to a halt if he decided to hold out.

Winslow didn't hold out and was one of the few positives in an otherwise dismal preseason for the Browns. But then came the stunner against the Giants earlier

this month with Winslow on the shelf. As the Browns cruised to a massive upset with Heiden and Dinkins playing significant roles, Winslow might have felt expendable for the first time in a long time.

Winslow's gamble that the Browns' offense wouldn't be effective without him blew up in his face, and he didn't like it. So when he ended up in the hospital with another staph infection, adding injury to insult, he rushed his comeback, had an ineffective game against the Redskins, then lashed out, leading to this past week's circus.

And that's where we stand. A relationship between the general manager and one of his star players that is likely damaged beyond repair. A tumultuous tenure for Winslow in Cleveland appears headed for a tumultuous end in the near future.

In the end, who takes the hero role and villain role in the history books will depend upon whether the Browns win or lose. For his sake, Savage had better hope he's doing the right thing by phasing Winslow out of the Browns' future.