Never one to leave well enough alone, Browns' head coach Romeo Crennel decided to add even more controversy to a team with more than its share by giving a quick hook to a struggling Brady Quinn. In doing so, Crennel showed none of the patience he'd afforded all season to Derek Anderson, all evidence to the contrary notwithstanding. Not surprisingly, it didn't work as Cleveland lost again at home, this time to the Houston Texans, 16-6. With the few fans remaining shouting "Cowher" as in Bill Cowher, the Browns find themselves once again at a crossroads and in need of another makeover. Gary tells us about it in his latest.

Apparently a practice week full of controversy isn't enough for the Cleveland Browns. Opting to heap an additional healthy dose of it into the game himself by inserting backup quarterback Derek Anderson for a struggling Brady Quinn, head coach Romeo Crennel officially pulled the pin on a season that had long since blown up in his face anyway and the Browns lost another home game, this time to the Houston Texans, 16-6, in front of what looked to be about a 100 or so diehard fans that bothered to remain to witness another bitter end.

The win was the Texans' first win on the road this season. Despite the relatively close score, it was a game the Texans dominated from the outset even if they couldn't quite put away.

Maybe that's why they were 3-7 coming in.

After the game, Crennel said Quinn is still his starter but cited a combination of the broken right index finger on Quinn's right hand that he suffered against Buffalo on

Monday night as well as some poor decisions as the underlying reasons for making the switch. And while Quinn was struggling, having just thrown his second interception of the game, this one inside the red zone, by ditching Quinn Crennel showed none of the patience he had afforded Anderson all season despite titanic struggles that made Quinn's day look mild by comparison. Crennel's decision smacked of desperation, something the players sensed and the fans well knew by greeting Anderson's entry with a chorus of boos.

Not surprisingly, Anderson couldn't provide much of a spark, something Crennel might have realized had he been paying attention all season or even just on Sunday. Texans' defensive end Mario Williams was having his way with Browns' left tackle Joe Thomas all game and harassed Anderson as much as he had Quinn early in the game. Meanwhile, receiver Braylon Edwards was busy dropping his usual complement of passes, even when Anderson was throwing well, including a potential touchdown that could have brought the Browns to within three with almost half of the fourth quarter left to play.

It was Anderson's best drive, a term being used judiciously, and still the Browns had nothing to show for it as the usually reliable Phil Dawson proceeded to shank a 39-yard field goal, only his third miss of the season.

Thus the Browns found themselves with 7:38 remaining down by 10 and pushed ever more deeply into the funk that's enveloped them all season by a Texans team with at least as many issues. Short of an exorcism, it's not likely to end, either. Meanwhile the Texans were able to over come most of their demons Sunday while holding on to the ball for over 37 minutes and keeping the Browns out of the end zone. For the game, quarterback Sage Rosenfels was 24-32 for 275 yards and one touchdown. He also had two interceptions, neither of which much mattered.

Meanwhile, the Browns were busy playing as if they truly couldn't wait until the season ended. In addition to Quinn's two interceptions, Anderson added another and running back Jamal Lewis fumbled twice. Edwards, looking as if he would fit nicely with his Michigan Wolverines this season instead of on a legitimate NFL team, had as many drops as catches (5).

Tight end Kellen Winslow had one insignificant catch for 11 yards late in the game and the now obligatory pass interference call.

The defense, despite intercepting Rosenfels twice, was having trouble accounting for Texans' receiver Andre Johnson, who had 10 catches for 116 yards.

Rookie running back Steve Slaton had 73 yards on the ground while Ahman Green added 39 before leaving the game with a sprained knee.

If the Texans' had a killer instinct the game would have been a blowout.

But since they don't, the Browns, despite being dominated, had plenty of chances, it's just that they seemed indifferent to taking advantage of them. Statistically, the Browns aren't the worst red zone team in the league, just one of the worst and it was this season long problem, as much as anything else, that accounted for the loss. Officially, the Browns were in the red zone three times on Sunday.

They came away with six points and an interception.

A conversion on any of those three, let alone all three would easily have turned the game.

Instead, the Browns have now already lost seven games, one more than all of last season.

That this game would belong to Houston and not Cleveland seemed clear from the outset. Coming into Sunday's game, the Texans had exactly one opening drive touchdown all season. Now they have two, thanks to a 17-yard pass from Rosenfels to receiver Kevin Walter. It was the culmination of a 79-yard drive that consumed 8:11 to open the first quarter and it set the tone for the rest of the game. In the drive, Rosenfels was 6-7 for 60 yards and the Texans converted three critical third down plays, including the touchdown to Walter that came on a 3rd

and 6 from the Cleveland 17-yard line.

The Browns couldn't respond, which also was a theme that held for the rest of the day. A drive that started with some promise ended quickly when Lewis, taking a quick screen pass from Quinn, fumbled into the waiting hands of the Texans' linebacker DeMeco Ryans, giving the Texans the ball at the Browns 40-yard line. It was small consolation that it was Lewis' first fumble in over a year. Indeed the only consolation came when the Browns' defense was able to hold the Texans to a 31-yard Kris Brown field goal to give the Texans the 10-0 lead.

But since the Browns would only score six points all day, it was a lead that ultimately was insurmountable.

The Browns' offense should have been fresh for having been on the field all of four plays in the game's first 16 minutes. The self-inflicted rest did them some good, just not enough to figure out their red zone problems. After putting together a decent drive that took them down to the Texans' 18-yard line, Quinn twice couldn't connect with Winslow, although Winslow arguably was held on one of the plays, and was forced to dump it off the fullback Lawrence Vickers for a short gain on the third play. D awson then converted a 32-yard field goal attempt and the Browns closed the gap to 10-3.

The Texans looked poise to respond quickly after a 17-yard run by Slaton up the gut of the defense. But linebacker Kamerion Wimbley sacked Rosenfels for a 9-yard loss and after the Texans' couldn't

convert on third down, Shaun Rogers blocked a Kris Brown 47-yard field goal attempt that gave the Browns good field position at their own 39- yard line.

Quinn then found Edwards at the Texans 18-yard line for a 43-yard gain which put the Browns right back in the red zone but with predictable results, thanks to a dropped pass by, guess who, Edwards on third down that forced another Dawson 32-yard field goal. It brought the Browns to within four at 10-6.

They'd get no closer.

The Texans had a chance to open up an 11-point lead on the ensuing kickoff but Andre Davis' 93-yard touchdown return was nullified by a holding penalty that pushed the Texans back to their own 14-yard line with just over two minutes remaining in the half. What followed wasn't the most picturesque two-minute drive you're likely to see or the most effective, but the Texans did twice convert fourth down plays to keep it alive. When it ended, Brown had his second 31-yard field goal of the game and the Texans had a 7-point lead again, 13-6 at the half.

The Texans actually had a chance to add three more points with one second remaining in the half after recovering a muffed kickoff.

But Brown was wide right from 56 yards as time expired.

Entering into the half, the real question at the time was which team felt better about itself. The Texans owned the first half statistically but only held a 7-point lead. The Browns, despite having the

ball less than half the time of the Texans and an offense that was merely offensive, were still well within striking distance.

But the reality both teams knew is that the Browns were the team struggling and doing so in a way that suggested it would continue.

They couldn't solve Rosenfels, who already was 16-20 for 190 yards, or the Texans' rushing attack, which already had 73 yards and while within striking distance it felt like a far bigger gap.

As it turned out, the Browns never did solve Rosenfels and company but that hardly turned out to be the reason they are now 1-5 at home. Instead they were so busy self-destructing under the master guidance of a head coach with absolutely no feel for the game that it wouldn't be necessary for anyone on the team to tell anyone watching what they already knew: this team quit.

Consider, for example, how the Browns came out after the half, a quick non-descript three-and-out. It put the ball right back in the hands of the Texans where it didn't remain long thanks to an interception by Brodney Pool. That put the ball right back in the hands of the Browns at their own 45-yard line, where it didn't remain long either after Quinn threw directly into the hands of Texans' defensive end Anthony Weaver two plays later to give the Texans the ball at the Cleveland 43-yard line. It didn't officially kill of the Browns' chances, it just felt like it despite the fact the Texans could only manage a Brown 36-yard field goal to push the lead back to 10 at 16-6.

For reasons that are as fleeting as mysterious, this sloppy little exchange seemed to give the Browns new energy, it just didn't last long. Running on nearly every play, they quickly had the ball at the Texans' 12-yard line. But facing a crucial 3rd and 2, Quinn suddenly had his second career interception, this time to cornerback Fred Bennett. The red zone woes continued, but this time there wasn't even the obligatory Dawson field goal to show for it.

It was the last pass Quinn would throw in the game.

He was 8-18 for only 94 yards and two interceptions.

After the Texans were forced to punt, Crennel panicked and put in Anderson. It hardly mattered. Anderson threw poorly and the Browns were quickly punting the ball back to the Texans.

Anderson's next possession was better, slightly, but by then the rest of the team was already mentally at dinner.

A couple of false starts and several drops by, guess who, Edwards, seemed to kill another drive. Even though the Texans seemed intent of keeping the Browns' drive alive with a couple of illegal contact calls, the Browns proved impervious to charity.

Edwards, proving to be as mercurial as ever, made a good catch and an even better stretch on 4th and 10 to give the Browns a key first down at the Texans' 25-yard line.

But just as quickly Edwards dropped a pass in the end zone and the Browns were forced to settle for the 39-yard field goal attempt that Dawson missed.

As bleak as things looked at that point, one final flicker of hope remained, but it too was fleeting. Sean Jones intercepted Rosenfels at the Texans' 47 and brought it back to the 27-yard line. Winslow was then caught interfering and that pushed the ball back another 10 yards. Lewis then fumbled again and the Texans had the ball at their own 45-yard line with just over 6 minutes remaining and a chance to finish off the game. The Texans, not surprisingly, couldn't quite finish it off and were forced to punt but by then there were just three minutes remaining.

The Browns quickly complied by going three and out.

Finally, the Texans closed out the game and put to an end one of the more miserable performances in Cleveland Browns' history.

In the end, the spark Crennel practically begged for never materialized. Anderson was no better than Quinn, hitting only 5-14 for 51 yards and one interception. After the game Crennel said that Quinn remains the starter, which should be the case, but one never knows because what one does know is that no Crennel decision is final until general manager Phil Savage weighs in.

The real question facing this team now is what direction it takes. If it wasn't at a crossroads before the game, it would be foolhardy for either owner Randy Lerner or general manager Phil Savage to deny it now. If Lerner wasn't otherwise spending the weekend in England and Savage wasn't otherwise fixated on his blackberry, they had to notice that the few fans that remained at game's end were yelling, in unison, "Cowher" as in Bill Cowher, the fans' next choice to restore a sense of pride to a franchise in desperate need of some. Despite being out of the playoffs for several weeks now, a team with pride and leadership would still play hard.

It hasn't happened.

The tackling remains poor. The offensive line no longer

seems capable of blocking.
The team's number one receiver, when he isn't busy dropping passes is playing with a complete lack of effort, though the two are closely related.

Even the team's most inspirational player, Lewis, lost focus and fumbled twice. It's almost as if the team has joined the fans in waiting to see when, not if, Crennel will be fired and what that kind of future may hold for them.

Whether that happens now or at the end of the season should hardly matter. The last remaining intrigue, really, comes in the second last game of the season, when the Browns play the Cincinnati Bengals.
If the NFL still wants to punish Referee Ed Hocuhli, as they did by giving him the Houston/Cleveland game in the first place, then we'll see Hochuli again when the Bengals visit.

That game should hold all the appeal of Saturday's matchup between a winless University of Washington and a one-win Washington State, a game that, not surprisingly, went into double overtime.

For when really bad meets worse, 60 minutes hardly seems enough.