It's a weird dynamic with the Browns and embattled head coach Romeo Crennel right now. Romeo may not be Vince Lombardi, but he is a good guy, and it's downright painful listening to the guy talk for 15 minutes each week at his press conference about his imminent firing. In Gary's latest, he says it reminds him of what Charlie Manuel went through in 2002 with the Indians. And Gary also poses some very valid concerns about Marty Schottenheimer or Bill Cowher becoming the Browns next head coach.

Listening to Cleveland Browns head coach Romeo Crennel on Monday answer questions for what seemed like the 13th straight week about his imminent firing, I was reminded of Charlie Manuel, the former Cleveland Indians' manager who recently won a World Series with the Philadelphia Phillies.

It's not that I think that once fired Crennel, like Manuel, will go on to great head coaching success somewhere else. That's unlikely. More likely is that Crennel will either retire or fade back into a role that suits him far better-defensive coordinator.

Instead, listening to Crennel talking about getting out of bed each day and coming to work to do the best job he can made me think about how Manuel handled a similar situation and in the process probably did more to enhance his credibility than anything he could have done as Indians' manager.

The Indians 2002 season started with promise but quickly turned into a rebuilding. It was general manager Mark Shapiro's second year in that role and one of his charges was to try and maintain the perennial winner that he and John Hart had built but at a far cheaper price. The Indians got off to an 11-1 start and all seemed well enough but it was more fool's gold than anything else. By the end of the first month they were 13-11.

Things continued to plummet from there and by the All Star break, their record stood at 39-47 and they had traded their ace pitcher in exchange for a handful of prospects.

This was also Manuel's third season as the manager. Manuel, like Crennel, was a long-time veteran who had waited patiently for his chance to ascend to the top job at the top level.

A folksy type, Manuel was often underestimated by those paid to know better.

Thus, as the Indians were busy transitioning to a much younger team, the theme developed that Manuel may not be the best person to take on that kind of task.

Though highly thought of generally, it was felt within the Indians organization that a younger manager could better relate to the kind of roster Shapiro was busy compiling. Helping stoke those rumors was the fact that Manuel's contract was set to expire at the end of 2002.

Matters more or less came to a head at the All Star break that year. Th ough it didn't appear that Shapiro had any plans to fire Manuel during the season, Shapiro also didn't have any plans on committing to Manuel

beyond the season either.

In Manuel's view, he was caught in limbo, knowing that if the Indians weren't going to be bringing him back next year it wasn't all that likely that he'd resonate much with the players on the roster in the interim.

Rather than sit back and let matters unfold, like Crennel is doing now, Manuel took his concerns directly to Shapiro and asked for a commitment beyond the season. Shapiro, far more entrenched that Browns' general manager Phil Savage, was honest with Manuel, telling him that he hadn't yet decided if he wanted him back the following year.

Shapiro did promise Manuel however that if he wasn't hired as manager he'd still have a job in the organization.

That wasn't nearly good enough for Manuel. Having raised the issue in the first place, he now was forced to do something with the information.

He told Shapiro that if he wasn't going to be the manager in 2003, he had no intention of staying with the organization, so he left.

Officially, Manuel was fired, but that was done as a favor to him so that he could be paid through the end of the season.

The Browns' latest rebuilding effort (and irrespective of what Savage says that's what it will be) isn't the result of the end of one cycle and the beginning of another as it was with the Indians. But for these purposes and how it impacts on the man in charge it is the same.

Crennel knows he won't be back.

The players know he won't be back.

The only thing left is to make it official.

As Manuel was then, Crennel is now in limbo. The only person that matters less in an organization than a lame duck coach is an interim one. It does tend to beg the question, then, as to why Crennel doesn't simply force the issue now and leave with his dignity in tact.

Distancing himself from a dysfunctional organization would hardly be a black mark on his career.

The reasons Crennel has chosen this course are probably several but come down to two simple concepts. First, forcing the issue with Savage is practically useless. Savage may have already thrown Crennel under the bus in the last few weeks, but Savage's status too hangs just as much in the balance.

Savage simply is in no position to make any promises to anyone about anything that extends beyond 4:05 p.m. on the season's last day.

Second, Crennel isn't a quitter. When people talk about Crennel, they mostly note the respect he commands even if that doesn't translate to performance on the field. Coming from a military upbringing, Crennel well understands the credo of duty, honor, commitment. Crennel likely sees demanding clarity from Savage,

who can't give it, or Lerner, who can't define it, as the last dishonorable act of a quitter. Fair enough.

Meanwhile, in honoring an increasingly unnecessary commitment to the Browns, Crennel has put himself in the uncomfortable role of bearing witness to rampant speculation about his successor. If he finds it personally galling that one of the fan's favorites happens to be Marty Schottenheimer, a person who is four years older, he doesn't let on.

But if he did, Crennel might be more than justified in asking why the fascination with Schottenheimer. It's a question I keep asking as well. For those who think that Schottenheimer is the answer, maybe it's because they aren't quite sure the right question to ask.

Schottenheimer meets that mythical criterion of having extensive head coaching experience. In that, he's been successful. His teams have won 61% of their games over his 21-year career. But for a variety of reasons Schottenheimer has always been someone appreciated more in retrospect than contemporaneously.

Perhaps that's as it should be.

But if an old coach out of football for two years who was something once with this franchise is the only criterion, then let's dig up the bodies of either Paul Brown or Blanton Collier and wheel them out there each Sunday. The fact is that Crennel's failures don't emanate from the fact that he wasn't a head coach previously. His failures result from a lack of skill in weaving in and juggling all of the elements of what

makes up the head coach's job.

Meanwhile, the list of teams that have been successful with a young, first time head coach that possesses those skills is long and compelling.

This franchise needs to build for the long term, not the next few years.

If Schottenheimer is hired, where would that leave the Browns in just five years when he's 70?

The same more or less goes for Bill Cowher. He's a better prospect than Schottenheimer but what the Browns really needs is the next Bill Cowher, not Cowher himself.

They need to find the right person around whom they can build an identity for the long haul, not a person who could only help paper over a few of this franchise's many holes for a couple of years.

When Manuel forced Shapiro's hand, it really let Shapiro do what his instincts told him was the right thing to do: find a young up and comer that could grow along with the roster. Eric Wedge may not be the best manager in baseball, but he's more than proven his value.

To pull that team out of the abyss and get it back to .500 last season was a monumental accomplishment.

The Browns have far more dire needs, but the same truths preside. Pul

ling themselves out of this abyss is never a one or two year process; it's a long term, long range strategy being executed by the right person with the right vision and the time to see it through to conclusion.

That's where Crennel and Schottenheimer do have one thing in common: neither is that right person.