It's now being reported and will be announced at a 10 AM press conference: the Browns and owner Randy Lerner officially fired Romeo Crennel, the Browns' coach since the 2005 season. Crennel's imminent departure had been clear for several weeks. Combined with Sunday evening's firing of general manager Phil Savage, Crennel's firing brings the Savage/Crennel era crashing to a close, making their failure complete. Nick Allburn reflects on The Romeo Era in his latest.

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Crennel's time in Cleveland was marked by inconsistency, and he will likely be best remembered for the incredible disappointment of the 2008 season and his mismanagement of the Anderson/Quinn quarterback situation. During his 4-year tenure on the north shore, Crennel's teams went a combined 24-40 (.375).

Crennel's first season, 2005, found him with a relatively talentless roster. Not only that, but the Browns were switching from Butch Davis' 4-3 defense to the 3-4 that Crennel preferred, and to say they lacked the ideal personnel for such a switch would be a gross understatement. Nevertheless, Crennel's '05 squad went 6-10 and probably overachieved given their circumstances. Rookie quarterback Charlie Frye replaced Trent Dilfer late in the season and showed promise. Although they

still needed a significant upgrade in personnel, the Browns' future looked favorable.

After Phil Savage made several big name free agent signings in the 2006 off-season, including Pro Bowl center LeCharles Bentley, receiver Joe Jurevicius, linebacker Willie McGinest, and tackle Kevin Shaffer, the Browns had high expectations for the '06 campaign. Unfortunately, things went awry from the very beginning.

LeCharles Bentley tore the petellar tendon in his left knee on the first play of training camp and suffered a staph infection during a surgery to repair the tendon. The infection forced him to have several subsequent surgeries, further gutting his knee. LeChuck never played a down for the Browns and would be released two years later. In a bizarre turn of events, Bentley's backup, Bob Hallen, went AWOL soon after being named the starter. Hallen later notified the Browns of his retirement, citing back problems, but there's long been speculation of something Spears-esque going on there. Many think Hallen simply couldn't handle the pressure of starting, causing him to bolt. (No word on whether or not he shaved his head thereafter.) The instability at center haunted the Browns all year long, as Charlie Frye was battered behind a lousy offensive line and missed several starts down the stretch. The Browns finished a disappointing 4-12.

The banner year of Crennel's stint in Cleveland was 2007, when the Browns surprised everybody to go 10-6 and come within a tiebreaker of a wild card bid. After Phil Savage made a draft day splash reminiscent of Porter's cannonball in *The Sandlot* by landing Brady Quinn and Joe Thomas, fans were expecting big things. Even so, nobody expected such a strong showing in '07, especially after the Browns were sliced and diced by the Steelers 34-7 in the opener. But Derek Anderson came out of nowhere to throw 29 TDs, Braylon Edwards and Kellen Winslow both had 1,000 yard seasons, and a resurgent Jamal Lewis carried the Browns down the stretch. Coming out of nowhere, the Browns became one of the league's most fun teams to watch. A Derek Anderson meltdown in week 15 at Cincinnati ultimately cost the Browns a playoff spot, but the season was viewed as a stepping stone to bigger and better things. That pleasant future never came to fruition.

After beefing up the defensive line with Shaun Rogers and Corey Williams, and improving their already stellar passing attack by signing Donte Stallworth, the

Browns appeared poised to challenge the Steelers for the AFC North title. Instead, the linebackers were exposed, Derek Anderson played himself out of the starting job, and the team limped out of the gate to an 0-3 record. The Browns were out of the playoff hunt before the leaves started changing colors.

The Browns' highlight of the season was spanking the Giants 35-14 on Monday night; a win nobody predicted. But highlights were few and far between, as the 2008 Browns started four different quarterbacks and didn't score an offensive touchdown in the last 6 games, setting an embarassing NFL record in the process. Crennel's club finished 4-12, losing 6 straight games as the season came to a close, including 8 of the last 9. The Browns' final loss, a 31-0 trouncing in Pittsburgh, put an exclamation point on one of the most disappointing seasons in the history of the once proud franchise.

Romeo Crennel was initially considered a good hire, as he was an accomplished defensive coordinator with over 27 years of NFL coaching experience. But Crennel was in over his head, personified by ridiculous coaching gaffes like chronic clock mismanagement. Frequently described as a player's coach, Crennel was considered by many too lax in what he demanded from the players in training camp, on the field, and in terms of locker room discipline. Loyal to a fault, there was a minor fan uprising until Mo Carthon, a Crennel hire, was removed from his offensive coordinator position midway through the 2006 season.

Although Crennel was a poor head coach, he was a man of great character, and he was always the consummate professional. When Phil Savage's job was in jeopardy due to a power struggle with then-President John Collins after the '05 season, it was Crennel's threat of resignation that may have saved Savage's job. Crennel frequently took bullets in the media for Savage, even after Savage had publicly thrown Crennel under the bus on more than one occasion. If there was one word to define Romeo Crennel, it was "class," and although we frequently blasted him for his coaching decisions, we always respected him as a man. (We also enjoyed making fat jokes.)

Speculation over Crennel's successor began in earnest well over a month ago, and it will now reach a fever pitch. But for at least a moment, it's worthwhile to reflect on the solid leadership qualities that Crennel brought to the table: honesty, integrity, and candor. Those were qualities which the organization sorely lacked after Butch Davis seemed on a crusade to rub as many people the wrong way as possible. Hopefully Crennel's replacement will be a better head coach, but

hopefully he will possess Crennel's first-rate character traits as well.