In the coming months, Randy Lerner will hire the fourth leadership regime to head the Browns since the NFL hastily awarded a replacement expansion franchise to Cleveland in 1998. For those of you keeping score at home, that's two years of Carmen Policy, Dwight Clark and Chris Palmer, four years of Policy and Butch Davis, and four years of Phil Savage and Romeo Crennel. Erik Cassano says this Randy Lerner's last chance to get it right.

In the coming months, Randy Lerner will hire the fourth leadership regime to head the Browns since the NFL hastily awarded a replacement expansion franchise to Cleveland in 1998.

For those of you keeping score at home, that's two years of Carmen Policy, Dwight Clark and Chris Palmer, four years of Policy and Butch Davis, and four years of Phil Savage and Romeo Crennel. Ex-president John Collins overlapped the previous two regimes for a couple of years.

It would be easy to lump the previous 10 years into one pile labeled "bad decisions." But each regime was hired under different circumstances and failed for different reasons.

Working in Lerner's favor: Savage and Crennel were the only two football operations heads hired under Lerner's direct supervision. The first two regimes were constructed primarily by Policy, who took the leadership role in the organization while Lerner's father took a far-more-comfortable background role.

By 2005, Al Lerner had died, Policy was back in northern California pursuing a second career making wine, and the buck stopped with Lerner the junior. Hindsight being 20/20, his first football hires reflected that of an executive who had a beginner's knowledge of NFL ownership, possibly put too much trust in the wrong people (such as Collins) and didn't take enough initiative when researching potential candidates.

In the end, Savage was hired because he has a reputation as a good talent evaluator. Little else factored into the decision-making process. Crennel was hired because he is a no-nonsense, candid, humble, down-to-Earth kind of guy with long-standing connections to Bill Parcells and Bill Belichick. In other words, Crennel was the anti-Butch Davis with five Super Bowl rings.

Savage and Crennel both showed their Super Bowl-winning resumes to Lerner, and to the inexperienced Lerner, that was enough to impress.

But candidates from good organizations don't always equal good hires, even if they seem like the right men for the job at the outset.

From purely a talent-accumulating standpoint, the hire of Savage was defensible at the time. The Browns were quite possibly the most talent-deprived team in the NFL after Davis exited midway through the 2004 season. The Browns needed more talent, plain and simple, and Savage could -- and did -- ramp up the talent level of the roster.

Even if Savage felt that his place was on the road, scouting the upcoming draft class, instead of at the home office carrying out administrative duties, we as fans could live with that if Savage could string together a few solid drafts and make the Browns competitive again.

We could have lived with it through 2008 and beyond if the homefront was supervised by a head coach who had built a strong team identity and a culture of accountability. Obviously, that wasn't Crennel. So the burden fell back onto Savage to step in and take control, which he never really did.

The fundamental flaw that led to the demise of the Savage-Crennel regime was failing to develop an organizational identity and direction. A GM can amass all the talent in the world, but if he and the head coach haven't worked together to develop a method for developing and utilizing that talent, discord will follow in the locker room and the front office, and the losses will continue to outpace the wins.

Savage and Crennel might have been cordial, even friendly at times, but they didn't work well together. Lerner never demanded that they work well together. Lerner never demanded that they develop a system for working well together.

Savage and Crennel both seem to prefer the background to the spotlight. They're

specialists --Crennel in his 3-4 defensive scheme and Savage in scouting -- so even with a system in place, both might still have proved themselves incapable of adapting to a larger set of responsibilities. But Lerner didn't give his first NFL hires the best chance to succeed.

Good owners don't meddle and undermine the authority of the people they hire. But good owners stay involved with their teams. Only those on the inside of the Browns organization truly know Lerner's level of involvement over the past four years, but the public perception is that he hired Savage and Crennel, told them to play nice with Collins and left a "call me if you need me" note on the lunch room bulletin board.

As we remember, it took less than a year for Collins and Savage to develop an irreconcilable rift, with Collins departing.

Lerner must handle things better on his second go-around. Even if he hires Bill Parcells, Scott Pioli or any other experienced NFL coaching/personnel guru, he must stay involved in the process of building the identity of his team. He must insist that he stay involved.

For many years, the Browns have survived on their municipal-heirloom and storied-franchise status. The only identity the Browns have had over the past 20 years has centered on Jim Brown, Lou Groza and grainy footage of the franchise's glory years. It's great to remember and honor your history, but if your franchise's relevance is based solely on building bridges to the past, something is wrong with your present.

Lerner has one more crack at getting this right before he faces massive pressure from around Northeast Ohio to sell the team. These next hires need to reflect an owner who has learned from his past mistakes, an owner who will hire the best all-around candidates, with evaluation, leadership and organizational skills, and stick with them to make sure they're developing the organization properly.

There is still hope for Randy Lerner as an NFL owner. But it's flickering hope at best, and at stake are more than just wins and losses. The true tragedy would be if Lerner leaves the Browns organization -- his father's work -- as a failure.