One year ago, Browns fans were wildly optimistic, thanks to a young, exciting 2007 offense that had showed the promise of once again becoming the football powerhouse of seasons long past. As the team embarked on training camp just 12 months ago, the electricity in Berea and environs was palpable. Lou Groza Boulevard was teeming with brown-and-orange-clad faithful, day after day after day. This year? Expectations are much lower. Jerry Roche talks about it.

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"With a successful offense returning, a much-improved defensive line, and the fans more excited than ever about the team, anything short of a playoff berth will be a disappointment," opined one pundit prior to training camp last year. Another writer called the Browns "a sexy pick" to win the AFC North. And league officials had awarded the team no less than six nationally televised games, including three Monday-nighters and the season-opener against Dallas. All was right in the world.

This week, after suffering through perhaps the most disappointing season in team history (4-12), we fans are no longer mesmerized. The optimism is tempered, the skepticism rampant. The electricity is limited to a crackle every now and again -- only when head coach Eric Mangini shows any indication of being the field general that Romeo Crennel, sadly, never was. We have one measly national game, and pre-season expectations are, by and large, in the toilet.

My, what a difference a year makes.

The team has turned over almost 50 percent of its personnel in six months under Mangini. Here are some of the many ways that this year's roster -- and our expectations -- have changed:

>> Quarterback. Last year, Derek Anderson was coming off a Pro Bowl season: 3,787 yards and 29 TD passes. He was unquestionably the starter, despite Brady Quinn waiting patiently in the wings. This year, those two are coming off years when their QB ratings were 66.5 and 66.6, respectively. Anderson will probably be relegated to the pines after suffering a season-ending injury following a horrible early-2008 performance. Quinn, with his command of the huddle and short passing accuracy, is more of a match for the ball-control offense that Mangini valued with the Jets.

>> Running back. Last year, Jamal Lewis was coming off a Pro Bowl, 1,304-yard season. This year, he's another year older and coming off a season in which he struggled to rush for 1,000 yards (only 3.6 yards per carry). Jerome Harrison, who averaged a whopping 7.2 yards in only 34 carries, is expected to see a lot more playing time. And fans are waiting to see if rookie James Davis is as good as his press clippings.

>> Receiver. A strength going into 2008 with Pro Bowler Braylon Edwards coming off a 16-TD season; Kellen Winslow Jr. eager to rebound from past injuries; speedy Donté Stallworth an off-season addition; and Joe Jurevicius

expected back from a staph infection by mid-season. This year -- yikes! -- a complete flip-flop. The only things Edwards ended up catching in 2008 were the dropsies and the ire of Browns fans everywhere. Stallworth has been suspended from the league. Jurevicius never returned in 2008 and is currently suing the Browns for malfeasance. And Winslow is gone, gone, gone. In their stead are Edwards (hoping for a return to 2007 form) and a conglomeration of unproven talent, including touted but unproven rookies Brian Robiskie and Mohamed Massaquoi. Not to mention Syndric Steptoe, who was the team's most "dependable" (!) receiver by the end of last year, despite playing with replacement QBs who couldn't get the ball within five yards of him. Tight ends are Steve Heiden (coming off a serious knee injury), returning but under-performing Melvin Rucker, and former Buffalo Bill Robert Royal.

>> Offensive line. Pro Bowlers Joe Thomas and Eric Steinbach anchor the left side, as they did a year ago. First-round draft choice Alex Mack is now poised to start at center, but the right side is totally up for grabs, just as last year. This year, the right side is again a conglomeration of mediocre returnees, ex-Jets, and names most of us have never heard of, except for the oft-injured Ryan Tucker.

>> Defensive line. Last year, Browns fans were salivating with the addition of nose guard Shaun Rogers (even though he'd never played the position before) and Corey Williams, who had been an absolute monster in Green Bay. Wiliams, however, was in and out of the lineup with injuries; so this year, the only bright spot is Pro Bowler Rogers. Fans remain highly skeptical about the likes of Robaire Smith, Shaun Smith, Kenyon Coleman, Ahtyba Rubin, C.J. Mosley and Melila Purcell.

>> Linebackers. Last year, it was hoped that Kamerion Wimbley would return to 2007 form (when he had 11 sacks as a rookie). Crennel was hoping to get another year out of aging Willie McGinest. Andra Davis and D'Qwell Jackson were serviceable, but not much more. This year, Browns fans wonder whether Wimbley will ever realize his potential, and McGinest and Davis are long gone. Thankfully, Jackson is coming off a surprising season in which he led the league in tackles. He is joined by ex-Jet Eric Barton, ex-Jet David Bowens -- who are both serviceable but long in the tooth -- and a bunch of unproven candidates like Phil

Savage draft choice Beau Bell and George Kokinis draft choices David Veikune and Kaluka Maiava.

>> Defensive backs. This was an admitted weakness going into 2008 with comparative youngsters Brandon McDonald, Eric Wright, Sean Jones and Brodney Pool. If nothing else, the defensive backfield has gotten older this year with the addition of ex-Jets Abram Elam and Hank Poteat (who has started just 18 games in eight years) and ex-Raven Corey Ivey. Ho-hum.

>> Coaches. Crennel was much-loved by players and fans alike going into training camp last year. Defensive coordinator Todd Grantham had been replaced by the promising Mel Tucker. Offensive coordinator Rob Chudzinski was being touted as head-coaching material, based on the Browns' overwhelming offensive performance of 2007. This year? Buh-bye, Mel. Buh-bye, Rob. Good riddance, Romeo. In their place? Mangini (who got run out of New York on a rail), Buddy Ryan's son Rob ... and somebody named Brian Daboll.

>> Front office. Phil Savage -- who was socially impaired, loved the road, and hated the office -- is gone as general manager. Kokinis was Randy Lerner's *second*
choice to replace him. And Lerner himself (heavy sigh) remains the owner. Sadly, it appears, the more things change, the more they remain the same.

Can this year's version of our beloved Browns rebound from that dismal 2008 season? Watch these pages in the coming weeks as training camp unfolds and TheClevelandFan.com's observers reveal our pre-season hopes and dreams.