It was one preaseason game, on the road, in one of the NFL's most intimidating environments for visitors, against a Packers team that is less than two years removed from the doorstep of the Super Bowl. But it meant so much more for Browns fans hanging over their television sets like starving dogs, ready to lap up any morsel of anything that could be construed as progress. What we got was a 17-0 beatdown that looks a lot like what we were sick of seeing. Fans are already giving up hope on the '09 season. Should they be? Erik Cassano gives us his thoughts.

The Browns' home preseason game on Saturday against Detroit won't be blacked out locally. On Tuesday, the team brokered a deal with the TV carrier of its preseason games, WKYC Channel 3, to split the cost of the remaining unsold tickets.

In Cleveland, this might actually be bad news for a fan base that was expecting so much more than what Eric Mangini's squad delivered in Green Bay last Saturday.

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What we got was a 17-0 beatdown that wasn't even that close. Outside of Brady Quinn and a small handful of others, no one else had anything close to a decent performance. The defense was embarrassingly slow, exhibiting no pass rush, little ability to stop the run, lousy tackling, and safety Abram Elam was beaten deep on a first-quarter touchdown pass to boot.

The offense was inconsistent. Quinn moved the ball on a couple of drives and should have had a touchdown pass, but Braylon Edwards did what Braylon Edwards does and dropped the ball in the end zone. Beyond that, Jamal Lewis looked to be 29 going on 50, Derek Anderson's mental static was alive and well on an air-mailed interception and Mike Furrey might have been the best receiver of the night.

One more thing -- penalties. Still a problem.

The anger of the fan base was palpable after Mangini's Browns coaching debut. Exactly what has Mangini been teaching these guys? Isn't he supposed to be a "real" coach, not the couch potato poking holes in the air until he could draw a pension, like Crennel supposedly was? Isn't Mangini supposed to be a fully-indoctrinated Bill Belichick disciple, thoroughly grounded in the Ph.D.-level strategy and discipline of The Gray Hoodie?

So what gives? Why did our first glimpse of the Mangini Browns look so terrifyingly like the junk heap that Crennel and Savage left on our doorstep as they scurried out of town with their severance packages last January?

Maybe Mangini is an ineffectual, incompetent goof. Or, more likely, the players play the game, and that junk heap from last January was still on the field last Saturday, just with a new coach.

Zebras will continue to have stripes. Leopards will continue to have spots. And a lousy football team with a gaping hole where the impact talent is supposed to be will continue to lose games.

The Browns looked bad because they are bad. This is a franchise that has been cracking under the weight of botched draft picks and inert free agent signings for a decade now. Mangini might be able to coach some of the penalties away. He might be able to instill better discipline, better prepare his team for game day and make better in-game adjustments. But the only antivenin that is going to cure this

snake-bitten team is better performances during the free agent signing period and, more pointedly, during the draft.

Unfortunately, that's a process that is going to take years before we know if Mangini and GM George Kokinis possess the ability to drag this moribund franchise back to daylight, or whether they're just the latest in a long line of failed management teams.

That's the reality. The expectation, however, is still that Mangini is going to be able to spin moldy barn straw into 24-karat gold, or at the very least, something brighter and shinier than we've seen recently. It's an expectation Mangini undoubtedly carries for himself.

Allegedly, one of the selling points that got Mangini the Browns job was his belief, professed to Randy Lerner, that he could win with much of the current roster intact. If true, you'd have to believe that it's exactly what a desperate Lerner wanted to hear. After three regime changes in 10 years, who wants to have to go through another full-scale rebuild again?

The idea that the Browns don't have to undergo a complete rebuild is half-right. They don't need another five-year plan or a three-year plan or even a one-year plan. As fans, we don't need more promises of better days ahead. Those promises never get delivered.

What the Browns need, and what Mangini needs to provide, is steady, incremental improvement. Better drafting, better development, better game management. We don't need more grand schemes fashioned in the mold of the Patriots, Steelers or Ravens. What we need is a coach and a front office that is going to define and cast a new Browns mold.

The job Mangini has in front of him is a lot less glamorous than trying to follow in Belichick's footsteps. It's to re-define and re-assert what it means to be the Cleveland Browns. Somewhere along the line, that meaning was lost. And it was probably lost even before Art Modell plucked the original franchise from Cleveland.

It's going to become reality through acquiring good players and providing them with good coaching. No more, no less. And there are no quick fixes. That was the shooting star that Savage chased, and he got burned.

Until Mangini can build a Browns Way that is not merely a watered-down derivative of the Patriots Way or the Steelers Way, you will continue to see variations on what you saw last Saturday. Because the Browns just aren't very good.

Now is not the time to pass judgment on Mangini. He's slogging through the swamp just like the rest of us. Only time will tell if Mangini has what it takes to recreate the Cleveland Browns.

And time, regrettably, is one of the few things that isn't in short supply around here.