*From the Associated Press:*

CLEVELAND – In a completely rational move that surprised none of the team's fans, the Cleveland Browns today announced they would cease and desist all operations in lieu of the team's loss to the Cincinnati Bengals on Sunday.

"We felt it was the right thing to do," Browns President Mike Holmgren said at a press conference on Tuesday morning. "Our fans, never known for hyperbole or emotional overreaction, made it clear that this was our only choice."

Team owner Randy Lerner, unable to attend the press conference due to a previous engagement at an Aston Villa Football Club soccer practice in Birmingham, England, released a written statement that concurred with the decision.

“Though the Browns have a rich history stretching over seven decades and deep generational roots in the community, we did not feel we would be able to continue in light of recent developments,” the statement read. “I understand the season started recently and we played a game that we almost won but didn’t against another team that lives nearby. In the competitive world of Major League Football, this is simply not permissible.”

A season of already subdued expectations went awry on Sunday when the Browns looked undisciplined and unprepared for their game against the Bengals, who entered the contest as heavy underdogs.

Pat Shurmur, in his first game as an NFL head coach, saw his team rally from a 13-point deficit to take a 17-13 advantage into the fourth quarter, only to see it vanish when the Bengals scored the winning touchdown on a play in which the Browns’ defense failed to break the huddle in time.

On advice of their fans, Shurmur was fired as the clock hit zero – once everyone was sure the Browns weren’t going to rally for a thrilling victory.

“I completely understand,” Shurmur told reporters as he cleaned out what few items he’d managed to bring into his office after being hired eight months ago. “I mean, coming off of a

four-month lockout, for a young team that still doesn't have much talent and a brand-new coaching staff to make a mistake like that…wow. What's the point in living?"

But even with the Shurmur era finally over after three frustrating hours, Holmgren & Co. weren't satisfied.

"Then we started thinking," Holmgren said, "what's the point? I mean, the fans are right. They cunningly encouraged one another to sell all their tickets for all future Browns games and to stop supporting this garbage.

"I have no idea what I'm doing and shouldn't be directing an NFL franchise. It doesn't matter who the coach is or who's running the front office, this team is always going to lose. So we decided this was a perfect opportunity to rationalize the entire operation and pull out rather than putting our level-headed fans through another Sunday afternoon like this."

Fans, who already lost the Browns once when they moved to Baltimore in 1995, expressed relief that the team finally decided to listen to them.

“I’ve been saying they should have shut down ever since the night they came back in 1999 and got clobbered by the Steelers,” said Bill Herman of Elyria. “I said it again after every loss since. Don’t know why it took them so long. Now we’ve got to get the Indians to do the same thing. Friggin’ Shapiro…”

“I started out by swearing at the TV when the Browns gave up that long touchdown pass when they weren’t paying attention,” Walter “Bud” Kinnison stated. “Then I tweeted that (defensive coordinator) Dick Jauron should be killed on the spot and the entire defense should be released. Then, as the heat of the moment faded, I calmly realized that the only thing the team could do was pull the plug.”

Some fans expressed concern that perhaps the decision to shut down the long-beloved franchise was a bit hasty. They were quickly shouted down and thrown into Lake Erie, accused of being on the team’s payroll.

But what if the Browns had managed to pull out a win on Sunday, Holmgren was asked. Wouldn’t that have changed everything? And aren’t there 15 more games to play this season?

“We’d have bought ourselves another week, I guess,” he said with a shrug. “But these fans are too smart. We couldn’t fool them forever. And to say there’s 15 more games would be hiding

behind excuses. This city doesn't tolerate excuses. It wants results now."

And Holmgren admitted the results have been mixed since he assumed control of the team two years ago.

"We haven't drafted well the last couple years," he said. "We weren't active enough in free agency. I only took this job to make sure my friends and family get plush paychecks and don't do anything. On Sunday, the fans finally figured it all out."

Consequently, the NFL will eliminate the Browns from its master schedule and $300-million Cleveland Browns Stadium will be turned into the largest dog park on the planet.

All jerseys, t-shirts, hats, and other Browns paraphernalia can be deposited at the team headquarters in Berea. Fans are asked to do so before noon on Thursday, at which time the facility will be imploded.

“We’d like to thank Cleveland fans for all the support they’ve given us over the years,” Holmgren said, “particularly those that only voiced their support after victories and rightfully requested anyone associated with the team be set on fire after a defeat.” Then with a smile he added, “It’s been a helluva ride.”

Holmgren has been extradited to the Dominican Republic, where he is currently awaiting trial.

Shurmur will try to land somewhere as an NFL assistant, which he did successfully for 12 years, but admits it will be difficult to find work. “We couldn’t punch it in from the three-yard line on that drive in the third quarter,” he said quietly. “How can a guy expect to support his family after something like that?”

All copies of the Madden 12 video game with Browns’ running back Peyton Hillis on the cover currently on the shelves of retail stores across America will be pulled until a new cover can be designed and the Browns team eliminated from the game’s coding.

Browns players were asked to turn in their equipment and receive their final paychecks on Wednesday. Considering what little talent there is among them, according to the fans, it is unlikely any of them will be signed by other teams.

“I mean, it sucks that I’ll have to go work at Abercrombie & Fitch now, but I get it,” said Browns’ quarterback Colt McCoy. “We lost one game. You can’t do that in this town.”

Follow @jknightwriter