With the season finale against Pittsburgh just days away, the Browns are moving closer to one of the most important decisions the franchise has faced since coming back in 1999:

What to do about the quarterback position?

While it would have been nice if Colt McCoy could have made it through the season in one piece, even if he doesn't play Sunday against Pittsburgh (which he really shouldn't) the Browns have enough data on him to help make a decision on what his role will be with the team next year.

Even though he struggled at times this year, the Browns did the right thing by keeping McCoy as the starter. They needed to see as much of McCoy as possible this year, and pulling him in and out of the lineup like previous coaching regimes did with their quarterbacks was not the way to do that.

If watching Seneca Wallace as the starter the past two weeks taught us anything, it was this:

While McCoy is certainly *part of the problem* on offense, there is a *zero percent chance that he is 100 percent of the problem*

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That fact is what makes things a bit trickier for the power trio of team president Mike Holmgren, general manager Tom Heckert and coach Pat Shurmur. Is simply replacing the quarterback enough to elevate the offense to a level where it can compete in the AFC North? Which, by the way, is the only division this year that will have three teams finish with winning records.

A new quarterback isn't going to make Peyton Hillis and Montario Hardesty less injury prone; or help Josh Cribbs, who will be 29 next year, get any younger; or turn Mohamed Massaquoi or Evan Moore into reliable receivers; or help Greg Little hold onto passes that hit him directly in the hands.

Rich Gannon, a former MVP who knows more about what it takes to play quarterback in the NFL than anyone sitting on their couch or in the stands at Cleveland Browns Stadium, pointed out that talent gap when talking to *The Plain Dealer* prior to last weekend's game against Baltimore.

"Is (Cincinnati's) Andy Dalton still Andy Dalton without A.J. Green this season?" Gannon, who was working the game for CBS, told the paper . "A.J. Green already has 1,000 yards receiving and seven touchdowns, and the guy goes up and makes all of these plays when he's covered. Who's that guy for the Browns? They don't have that guy yet. Then he's got Ced Benson and a good veteran group up front and (tight end Jermaine Gresham). They also have a (top-six) defense. They're much more talented across the board."

Another example is Detroit, where Matthew Stafford has finally played like a No. 1 quarterback, throwing for 4,518 yards and 36 touchdowns through 15 games this season. But it took Stafford three years to get this level and he had the luxury of joining a team with Calvin Johnson at wide receiver.

Who is Calvin Johnson for the Browns in this scenario?

The second question the Browns face is, if they decide that quarterback is the problem, who do they draft with their first pick?

Everyone assumes Stanford's Andrew Luck will be the top pick, and it looks likely that Baylor's Robert Griffin III would be the next quarterback off the board, but that assumes they will both enter the draft rather than return for their senior seasons. And while that seems like a safe bet, everyone thought USC's Matt Barkley was going to enter the draft but he decided to stay in school.

With the way things often turn out for the Browns, would it really surprise anyone if, in a year where the team will hold a top four draft pick and may be looking for a quarterback, that there will not be a quarterback worth drafting?

Compounding the issue is it's not as simple as just selecting a quarterback – the Browns have to select a quarterback that fits into the West Coast offense because, like it or not, that is the offense the Browns are going to run.

One of the biggest mistakes the Browns have made over the years is constantly changing systems on offense and defense. They've spent too many years trying to pound round pegs into square holes and the on-field results have been more than obvious.

A big reason why the Steelers are competitive every year is that they are committed to a system – especially on defense – and they draft players to fit that system, no exceptions. They don't draft players hoping they can transition to a new position and, more importantly, they don't waiver from their philosophy, even if they have an off year.

Now that the Browns have a clearly defined philosophy on both offense and defense, they need to stick with it and draft players that fit that philosophy above all else.

So while it is fun to imagine Griffin making plays for the Browns over the next 10-12 years, if his skill set doesn't fit what the Browns want, they may be better off looking at someone else, even if a certain segment of the fan base doesn't understand the reasons why.

This isn't an endorsement of McCoy; we've seen enough of him this year to have questions about him having long-term success in the NFL. He's done his share to help the Browns build

their current 4-11 record.

But our fear is that, without better talent across the entire offense, replacing the quarterback isn't going to be enough. Better play at quarterback would add a couple of extra wins, but being 8-8 isn't what the Browns are looking for, especially if it means they can't draft high enough to continue to add elite players to the team.

One thing we are certain of, however, is that general manager Tom Heckert has to get this next draft right. With two first-round picks and another pick high in the second round, the Browns have the opportunity to add three of the top 40 players in this draft, and Heckert can't afford to repeat the mistakes of 2009, when the Browns had four picks in the first two rounds and walked out with only Alex Mack to show for it.

We'll leave you with one more thing to think about.

While the AFC North has the reputation of being a black-and-blue, smash-mouth division, the reality is it is now a passing division. With Ben Roethlisberger, Mike Wallace and Antonio Brown in Pittsburgh; Dalton, Green and Gresham in Cincinnati; and Joe Flacco, Anquan Boldin and Torrey Smith in Baltimore; you need a defense that can shut them down if you want to have a chance in the division.

We know Heckert likes drafting defense, and he looks like a man with a sweet tooth.

So it wouldn't surprise us if he found a certain Honey Badger to sweet to pass up on draft day.