The ghost of the Butch Davis regime continues to mock us from beyond the grave. We could have had LaDainian Tomlinson in the 2001 draft. He was there for the taking at the third pick. But Davis, in a preview of the personnel management disasters that were to come, balked and took Gerard "the nicest guy ever arrested" Warren. Warren is now living life to the fullest in Denver. Tomlinson is on the fast track to the hall of fame in San Diego. The Browns ... well, look at the record.

Chargers 32, Browns 25
Record: 2-6

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Yesterday's game was painful because the Browns were trying and were still made to look foolishly bad in the end.

They hit the Chargers hard. They took the ball away. They held the lead in the second half. But in the end, it was one Charlie Frye fumble and a lot of LaDainian that took the game away from Cleveland.

Frye's fumble was recovered in the end zone for a touchdown. After that, it was a steady diet of Tomlinson eroding the Browns' resolve.

LaDainian's nickname should be "Love," because, like the Beatles song, he's all the Chargers need.

Three touchdowns in the final 17 minutes simply crushed the Browns, including a 41-yard romp.

While Tomlinson dragged the weary, battered Browns defense around like an ankle weight, the offense does what the offense usually does.

The playcalling of Jeff Davidson means the Browns now attempt field goals when field goals should logically be called for, but it's still painful to watch six potential touchdown drives stall before the goal line, forcing the Browns to call on Phil Dawson.

If Dawson is on your fantasy team and you didn't win this week, the rest of your team must really suck. He banged home six field goals, cashing check after check on stalled drives.

The Browns didn't reach the end zone until the game was out of reach late in the fourth quarter. That was despite a career day by Kellen Winslow and dominance in the kick return game.

Reuben Droughns, a breathtaking stallion a week ago against the Jets, was a smelly old pack mule against the Chargers, struggling to reach 36 rushing yards. Frye didn't look much better, and, as much as I like Frye, I am starting to wonder what this Browns offense would look like if Phil Savage had managed to land a Steve McNair in the offseason like the Ravens did.

Outgoing Plain Dealer columnist Roger Brown has a flood of antagonists in the Cleveland area, and his abrasive writing style is meant to gather that response. But he brings up a good point every now and again, and last month he did.

If Frye were from Willard, Texas instead of Willard, Ohio - fans would be calling up radio shows screaming for a replacement, branding Savage and Romeo Crennel as dopes for handing the starting quarterback job to this neophyte from a midmajor school.

But Frye is a hometown boy (home region, anyway). He grew up worshipping at the altar of Bernie Kosar, and he gets the mother of all mulligans when he struggles.

The simple fact is that, while you have to admire Frye's toughness, humility and hustle, it appears the NFL game is just moving too fast for him. He gets flustered and makes bad decisions. He turns the ball over way too much. Some of that might be due to his inexperience. Some of might be due to the fact that he went to Akron for a reason, as opposed to a Big Ten school.

Pulling the " MAC Attack" cards of Chad Pennington, Byron Leftwich or Ben Roethlisberger when making a case for Frye is just a bad argument. Pennington and Leftwich went to Marshall, which was a MAC school in name only. Their talent level was far superior to their midmajor opponents.

Roethlisberger was stuck behind the coach's son until he was a senior in high school, otherwise he probably would have gone to a big college instead of Miami, Ohio.

Not to lay this all at the feet of Frye, but the Browns could have negated Tomlinson if they were better in the red zone. Someone has to be the glue that holds this offense together, and I just question if Frye can do that.

In the meantime, the story will continue to be Tomlinson, the guy the Browns could have had if not for that pesky Butch Davis Florida connection.

Tomlinson might get himself a ring in the near future. Warren might get himself a ring in the near future. The Browns, meanwhile, will be left holding more baggage than a hotel bellhop.

Up next: at Atlanta, Sunday, 1 p.m.