As the early season losses pile up for the Cleveland Indians, Gary says manager Eric Wedge is sounding more and more like former Cleveland Browns' head coach Romeo Crennel. As he watches one leak after another spring in the good ship Tribe, Wedge is starting to take on the demeanor of someone who knows not every leak can be patched but he's bailng as fast as he can anyway. In his latest Lingering Items, Gary hits on Wedge, the Browns 2009 schedule, athletes in trouble with the law, and Braylon Edwwards.

As the early season losses pile up for the Cleveland Indians like iTunes charges on your credit card, manager Eric Wedge is sounding more and more like former Cleveland Browns' head coach Romeo Crennel. As he watches one leak after another spring in the good ship Tribe, Wedge is starting to take on the demeanor of someone who knows not every leak can be patched but he's bailng as fast as he can anyway. Kind of like Crennel.

Wedge doesn't skirt the fact that his team is losing and finding new ways to do it each game. But the silver linings he sees are the same Crennel saw even as Crennel was losing his grip on the only head coaching job he ever had, kind of like Wedge.

"Our effort is good, our attitude is good, our energy level is good, but we just have to start performing," Wedge told the media after Monday night's loss.

It sounded like a Crennel press conference on Monday morning after a Pittsburgh beatdown. And just like a Crennel quote, it would be easy to break down Wedge's assessment and say, somewhat snidely but nevertheless truthfully, "well, they did just come out of spring training, didn't they? If the attitude and effort aren't there now, when would they be?"

Maybe this is just what happens when a team with lofty expectations can't live up to them. You look for the little bit of sunlight in the storm clouds. But despite how much Wedge is sounding and acting like Crennel, there are major differences.

Wedge is the kind of coach the Browns should have looked for instead of hiring Crennel. Wedge was a young up and comer, clearly in tune with the changing nature of the game and was brought in specifically to grow with the team. That he did. Crennel was the lifetime assistant whom no other team but the Browns ever envisioned as a head coach. They were right.

Where Crennel never seemed to have a firm handle on any aspect of his job, Wedge is supremely confident and clearly in charge. The kinds of players he has to coach have far less character issues than what former general manager Phil Savage gave Crennel, but Wedge has nonetheless kept the lid on any insurrections. Discipline, except at the plate of course, doesn't seem to be an issue with the Tribe.

While both men clearly command the respect of the players, Crennel's team could never quite translate that respect into performance. With Wedge, the jury is still out. There have been times when Wedge seems to have wrung every last bit of potential out of some of his players. At other times, the converse seems to be the case. That may be due to the subtle nature of the game and the very thin line between success and failure, but there also is a sense that at times the players simply tune Wedge out, content to follow their own path.

Some have suggested that last season was Wedge's real test as a manager. He

managed to make a little chicken salad out of the chicken droppings he had to work with. There is some truth in that and that will buy him plenty of goodwill with the front office for now. But if the early season is any indication then this season is really shaping up as a true test. The team isn't wracked with injuries, just top to bottom ineffectiveness. The season isn't close to getting away from them yet, but any time would be a good time for this team to start finding its groove. On a team with no real leaders, it's going to be up to Wedge to be the big toe. His ability to avoid stubbing it is going to be directly related to his ability to keep his job.

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Here's how I know there is too much sports programming on television. On Tuesday night ESPN devoted two full hours to revealing the 2009-2010 NFL schedules. Outside of someone who is bedridden in front of a television that only gets one channel, there should be no one alive who claims he watched that entire broadcast.

To a certain extent, and then just barely, I can understand making the NFL draft a broadcast event. But the NFL has been taking its so-called branding to an extreme under the misguided assumption that the fans' appetites for anything NFL is insatiable. It's the reason, for example, the NFL continues to cling to the theory that some day enough fans will storm the offices of Time Warner or Comcast demanding that the NFL Network be on basic cable. It hasn't happened yet and it isn't going to happen ever. Until the NFL gets a bit more realistic on the relative lack of value of its in-house network and/or provides more than late season meaningless games as its showcase programming, most fans will continue to live rich and full lives not having to contemplate that there actually is a channel out there in the ether broadcasting another NFL roundtable on a Thursday night where the relative merits of the three-point stance are debated for two hours.

The Browns got their final verdict on their schedule Wednesday and the one thing that stands out most is that the league seems intent on embarrassing the Browns for its misplaced faith in them last season. By granting the team two prime time

appearances, one each against the Ravens and the Steelers, the NFL picked the two teams on the Browns' schedule most likely to publicly take them to the woodshed. For good measure, the NFL made sure they were late season games, knowing that by then the Browns will have their usual 20 or so players on injured reserve while both the Ravens and Steelers buckle down for the final push toward their battle for the AFC North title.

If you see a scheduling perk in the fact that the Browns finish the season with two home games, good for you. I hope you're enjoying that perk at a half-filled stadium freezing under a blanket while a steady 20 MPH wind, gusting to 45 MPH, whips across your cheeks like a worn razor blade.

There are some other interesting side notes to the schedule. Three times during the season the Browns have consecutive away games and each time the second of those two games is against a divisional rival. The bye week comes exactly in the middle of the schedule. There is a two-week stretch where the Browns play the Lions and the Bengals, although both on the road. That's a real chance to build a modest win streak as it follows the Monday night home game against the Ravens. Finally, there was a time when playing in January meant your team was heading to the playoffs. Now it just means that the regular season is too long as the Browns will again play in January irrespective of their actual record. The regular season doesn't end until January 3rd.

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There are a number of cautionary tales in the world of sports. The death of Anaheim Angels pitcher Nick Adenhart was senseless and sad. The legal problems facing Donte Stallworth are crushing and tragic. But for a truly pathetic story, consider Travis Henry.

Earlier this week Henry signed a plea agreement admitting to one count of conspiracy to distribute cocaine in exchange for other charges being dropped. It's a plea agreement that should put Henry, the former running back for the Denver Broncos, behind bars for a minimum of 10 years.

But in some ways, prison, no matter how harsh the terms, may be a vacation of sorts from Henry's main problems. According to a story that appeared last month in the New York Times, Henry is financially destitute, crushed by the weight of having to support 9 children by 9 different mothers. Henry makes Shawn Kemp look positively responsible by comparison.

Henry's seed-spreading ways began in high school when he fathered his first child. He impregnated two more women while at the University of Tennessee and another six while a professional, one apparently for each full season he spent in the league. Not surprisingly, Henry played the victim card with respect to at least four of the pregnancies, saying, in essence that he was duped by evil women.

All told, Henry is responsible for around $170,000 a year in child support payments. In context, that doesn't strike me as all that much, especially considering the millions he received and apparently completely squandered. In 2007 he signed a $25 million, 5-year contract. It wasn't all guaranteed, certainly, but the multi-million dollar signing bonus he did get is long gone. Henry says he's now broke.

Adding to the financial straits, of course, is the recent plea deal which

will indebt him to the federal government for another $4 million. The chance that anyone Henry owes will see another dime is nil.

The innocent victims in all this are the 9 children, of course. In living large and acting small, Henry perpetuated enough stereotypes to keep sociologists up to their ears in spiral notebooks for many years to come. But what this mostly reveals is why having players with character and integrity is so critical to one's team.

Henry had more talent than most. He ran for 1,200 yards in three separate seasons. But he's broke, out of the league and on his way to prison because there is no content to his character. In turn, the Broncos and the teammates that relied on him, not to mention the fans that buy the season tickets, end up having to deal with a problem they didn't create. Poor Mike Shanahan. No wonder he lost his job.

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I come back to these character issues from time to time because it reminds me that the challenge for teams like the Browns is that the need to win can seem so overwhelming at times that taking short cuts to accomplish the goal seem necessary.

When talking about character, receiver Braylon Edwards naturally gets implicated. He's certainly not a criminal like Henry. Far from it, in fact. His legal troubles have been minimal. On the other hand, he's been active in the community and has donated large sums of money to those

in need, both here and in Michigan. On that level, the league needs more people like Edwards, not less.

But where Edwards lacks character is in his approach to football. He displays all the drive and initiative that deadbeat kid you went to high school with who still hangs out at the CVS. The difference, though, is that Edward's lackadaisical approach is the polar end opposite of his expectations. By virtue of his God-given speed and occasional flash of brilliance, Edwards possesses an outsized entitlement attitude that doesn't come close to matching what he's either accomplished or deserves. On that level, if the Browns were to part with Edwards it would be the ultimate "great trade, who'd we get?" transaction.

If the Browns do trade Edwards, and rumors have him heading to the New York Giants for former University of Akron star Domenick Hixon and some draft choices, undoubtedly the Giants will sell it to their fans with the disclaimer that all Edwards needs is a change of scenery. Hardly. All he needs is a healthy dose of professionalism, something a trade isn't going to create. They'd have a far easier time selling their fans on Anquan Boldin.

That's the real challenge head coach Eric Mangini has when it comes to Edwards. Can he and his coaching staff (by the way, Mangini has yet to hire a wide receivers coach, so there is that) find a way to reach Edwards when those before him have not? Crennel certainly failed but so too did a boat load of veterans who reached out to Edwards and tried to school him to no avail. Maybe Mangini and company can, but with all the other problems on their plate is this one they want to take on, especially since Edwards is in the last season of his contract

anyway and probably wouldn't resign under any circumstances? The question basically answers itself. Look for the trade to happen sooner rather than later. Who'd we get? Does it matter?

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With the Indians stumbling their way through such heavyweights as Texas, Toronto and Kansas City, this week's question to ponder: How much would you have wagered that the Indians would have had a worse record after 8 games than the 2008 Browns?