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Wherefore art those Browns, Romeo? On the cusp of the playoffs



Dec. 11, 2007
By Lesley Visser
CBS Sports

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Tony Romo isn't the only Romeo in the league. Romeo Crennel, coach of the Cleveland Browns, is named after his father's favorite Shakespeare play, and it's this Romeo who has much of Northeast Ohio falling in love.

Crennel has his 8-5 team on track to secure the last wild-card spot in the AFC, which would vault Cleveland into the playoffs for only the second time in 12 years.



"If the season ended today, we'd be in," said Crennel, who often calls his players "the kids." "But we still have three games to go, and this game against Buffalo (7-6) is crucial."

The man who has been in the NFL almost three decades, who helped earn five Super Bowls rings under Bill Parcells and Bill Belichick, knows that anything can happen.

"Hey, I'd never seen three inside kicks in a row," said Crennel of Sunday's victory over the Jets. "I was just glad we were on the receiving end."

His wide receiver, Joe Jurevicius, who played on two Super Bowl teams himself, came up with two of the onside kicks.

"We have a lot of young players, but Joe is a tough, experienced veteran," said Crennel of the wide receiver who was born in Cleveland. "No one likes being on the bottom of an NFL pile, but he has good hands and can concentrate."

Romeo Crennel cut his coaching teeth working under some of the game's biggest names. (AP)

Derek Anderson, the pride of Scappose High School (20 miles outside of Portland, Ore.) was traded from the Ravens, where quarterback gurus Brian Billick and Jim Fassel didn't think he'd make it. Anderson has passed for 3,247 yards with 26 touchdowns and 14 interceptions.

"I knew Derek could play when I saw him last year against Kansas City," said Crennel, who traded the team's only experienced quarterback, Charlie Frye, to start Anderson. "Charlie got hurt and Derek led us to the win in overtime."

With Anderson, a rejuvenated Jamal Lewis (who picked up his 33rd 100-yard rushing game against New York), and the experience of both Jurevicius and Willie McGinest, Crennel has a core he can trust.

"I've been around a long time and lived in many different places," said Crennel. "I learned motivation from Bill Parcells and preparation from Bill Belichick. My style is low key, but I think the players know that I know what I'm talking about."

Crennel was born in the foothills of the Blue Ridge Mountains in Lynchburg, Va., and was both an offensive and defensive lineman at Western Kentucky. His college coaching experience took him to Mississippi and Texas and Georgia and, as an NFL assistant, he worked under Ray Perkins, Parcells, Ray Handley, Chris Palmer and Belichick.

Crennel faced the sting of racism along the way. While recruiting at a high school in Mississippi, he once had to check into a hotel as "Romano Crennelli," and before the 2003 playoffs, he interviewed for five NFL head coaching jobs in 36 hours without receiving one offer.

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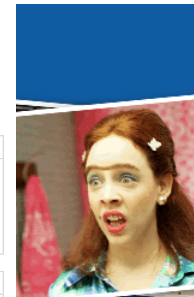
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