

Patriots' Crennel accepts Browns' coaching job

CLEVELAND (AP) — From dynasty to disaster. Romeo Crennel is going from one NFL extreme to the other. Shortly after helping New England win its third NFL title in four years, the Patriots' defensive coordinator accepted an offer to coach the Cleveland Browns, a chance to advance that he once worried would never come.

"I've been in this business for a little while," Crennel said after the Patriots beat Philadelphia 24-21 to seal their place among the league's best teams ever. "I've always been told if you work hard and you're good at what you do, you'll get an opportunity to move up."

Crennel's agent, Joe Linta, said Browns president John Collins called him "about two minutes" after the Patriots'

win to offer the 57-year-old Crennel, a five-time Super Bowl winner, his first head coaching job.

"He has accepted, pending us working out a contract," Linta said from Jacksonville, Fla. "Hopefully, we can get it done quickly and he can begin putting together a staff."

The Browns will introduce Crennel as their 11th full-time coach — and first Black coach — in team history.

Linta said he will seek a five- or six-year deal.

"He's not like most first-time coaches," Linta said. "He's a guy with more credentials. Although he hasn't been a head coach, he has five Super Bowl rings. They're buying into a program. They are getting 25 years of experience and knowledge."

The Browns are hoping Crennel can bring them back to glory, but there's much work to be done.

Crennel, who began his pro coaching career on Ray Perkins' staff with the New York Giants in 1981, will be Cleveland's third coach since 1999, when the Browns returned to the league as an expansion team.

Since then, the club has gone just 30-67 and lost their only playoff game in 2002. Last year, Cleveland went 4-12.

The lone bit of decent news to come out of that woeful season: The Browns will have the third pick in April's draft.

This will be Crennel's second stint with the Browns. He served as the club's defensive coordinator in 2000 under Chris Palmer, who was

fired after going just 5-27 in two years. In Crennel's one season in charge of Cleveland's defense, the Browns recorded 42 sacks — a 17-sack improvement over the previous year.

Before hiring Butch Davis in 2001, the Browns interviewed Crennel, who was a candidate for other openings the past few years but was passed over despite his success and a handful of Super Bowl rings.

But he emerged as the Browns' No. 1 choice during a Jan. 7 interview in Boston with Browns owner Randy Lerner, Collins and general manager Phil Savage, who had been hired that day.

"I put my best foot forward," Crennel said last week. "If their impression was that I floored them, then that's great."

Fittingly, New England's win over Philadelphia was sealed with a defensive stop as safety Rodney Harrison intercepted Donovan McNabb in the closing seconds. As clock wound down, Crennel embraced New England coach Bill Belichick and offensive coordinator Charlie Weis, who is leaving

for Notre Dame.

"Bill, Charlie and I got together right as the game was ending and that kind of let you know that it was over, that it potentially was the last time we'll coach together," Crennel said. "But if you have to go out, to go out a winner of the Super Bowl, that's really a special feeling."

Five coaches leave Florida A&M staff

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Five Florida A&M assistant coaches, including the younger brother of head coach Billy Joe, resigned Friday in another troubling sign for the embattled Division I-AA program.

Offensive coordinator and receivers coach James Joe, interim defensive coordinator and secondary coach Derek Hill, running backs coach Allen Bogan, defensive line coach Herbert Moore and linebackers and special teams coach Terry Jones all left — leaving just two assistants on the staff.

No reason for the departures was announced. School officials didn't return a call seeking comment.

"I want to thank them for their years of service to the university and me, and I wish them well in all future endeavors," Billy Joe said in statement.

In December, the school declined to offer a contract extension to Billy Joe, who is 86-46 in 11 seasons. School officials have told Joe his contract could be terminated after the 2005 season.

Florida A&M's athletic budget was cut by 20 percent last year, and more cuts may come. Joe, who makes \$135,000 annually, said last year he'd be willing to accept a buyout — but he was told no money was available.

University President Fred Gainous was fired Sept. 28, eight months after pulling the plug on an effort to move football to the Division I-A ranks. Also, the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference stripped the university last year of 11 conference titles, including two in football, as punishment for 196 NCAA rule violations.

Are we missing something here?

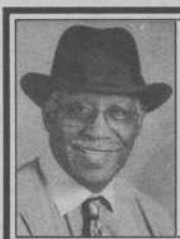
Each year, the day before the greatest show in the sports world, the Super Bowl, 39 members of the media get together and decide just who has done enough to be considered for inclusion to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. The selectors come mainly from the 32 venues that have National Football League teams, plus seven at-large members.

The only African-American on the committee is Jarrett Bell, a native of Detroit, who attended Michigan State University and is considered one of best football reporters in the nation.

Outnumbered by such an overwhelming majority, Bell can hardly expect to influence the other voters when a candidate has been overlooked, although he has been diligent in his efforts.

And many times, when he gets to the Super Bowl city, the primary candidates have already been chosen. Now that's just what happened when the committee met in Jacksonville, Florida, last weekend, the day before Super Bowl XXXIX.

For some reason, after the committee just missed last year selecting as a seniors candidate the late Bob Hayes, a phenomenal record-setting Dallas Cowboys wide receiver who played the Super Bowl VI championship, they didn't even put Hayes name up for selection this year. A mysterious turn of events.



SPORTS PACE

By Huel Washington

Hayes was the man who, in the NFL, revolutionized the art of going deep for a pass. Instead of completing the selection of Hayes — the only football player who, among his fantastic accomplishments, won gold medals and set records in the Olympics (100 meters winner and 400 meters anchor) — they didn't even have him on the ballot.

Hayes, a native of Jacksonville, Florida, has been idolized so much in his hometown that they have erected a statue in his honor in A. Phillip Randolph Park near the high school where Hayes got his start as a sprinter star. Also, inside the Ritz Theater, which houses the LaVilla Museum, an entire section has been dedicated to him.

To add to the committee's mystifying selection process, this year they chose for induction Fritz Pollard, the first African-American to play professional football in the United States and Bennie Freidman, a quarterback from the University of Michigan, who both played more than 50 years ago.

Pollard not only played, he was the first African-American to coach a football

team in the American Football Association which later became the National Football League.

Pollard, who was considered by some to be the fastest football player in his era, and Freidman, who was the one of the greatest passers from the time of when passing was second to running, should have been in the Charter Hall Class.

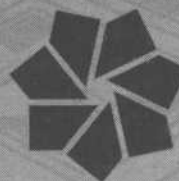
The assumption that Hayes didn't make the Hall because of some difficulties he encountered with the law should have been ironed out by the committee last year. Since he came so close to induction then, it was assumed that the matter had been taken into consideration before he was placed on the ballot.

Can all the other people be wrong? Can those who erected a statue in Hayes honor, along with those who hold him in such reverence for his contributions in the world of sports, plus those at Florida A&M University and all who know his part in placing Jacksonville, Florida, on the map and who honor his records in the USA Olympic team and with the Dallas Cowboys all be wrong?

A bust in the Pro Football Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio, should have already been among the other so-called stars of the NFL.

This year's selections also included Steve Young of the San Francisco 49ers and Dan Marino of the Miami Dolphins. The chosen men deserve it.

But in the Hall before "Bullet" Bob Hayes? No, Sir. Somebody on the selection committee missed the boat in Jacksonville.



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