How quickly can an NFL game slip away from you?

How fast can you go from looking at a 10 or 14 point lead to being down 10?

19 plays. Or 4 minutes.

Really, it turned on one play. One incredibly massacred play. With a young, not-ready-to-believe team, it just takes one play to destroy their spirit and release and avalanche of suck.

The Browns started out this game by giving fans a glimpse into the potential of the Big Three Rookies - Trent Richardson, Brandon Weeden, and Josh Gordon. After Ahmad Bradshaw fumbled on the Giants' first offensive play, Richardson broke a few runs and capped it with a strong 15 yard TD up the gut. Then following a New York punt, Weeden threw what was probably the nicest pass in the New Browns era, a 62 yard TD on a rope and on the button to Gordon, who had gotten behind the Giants' secondary.

You can't expect the Cleveland D to keep the Giants' powerful offense down for long, and New York scored a TD to cut the lead to 14-7 before the teams traded FG drives.

4 minutes left in the 1st Half. 3rd and 1 at the Giant 25. Browns up 17-10, hadn't really been stopped by New York either on the ground or in the air to that point. A TD pushes the lead back

up to 14. Even a FG pushes it to 10 and probably - at the worst - only allows New York enough time to score a TD and send Cleveland into the Half with a 20-17 lead, getting the ball to start the 2nd Half.

At worst.

Instead of calling a run, which had been effective all day, Pat Shurmur opted to pass. Which is what it is, lots of teams pass on 3rd and 1 these days, even after telegraphing their intention to pass by removing their best RB. But Shurms called a pass play where **he rolled out his QB of mediocre mobility** , cutting his options in half right from the get go. The play was clearly designed to go to Jordan Norwood, who was running a pattern straight towards the sideline (away from Weeden) and surely would've been a pick 6 by the Giants' Corner - who did not bite at all - if Brandon threw it that direction.

On top of the only realistic option on this terrible, inexplicable play call being covered, NY's Chase Blackburn sliced right at Weeden since he had left the pocket. Drifting back to avoid the pressure, Weeden threw off his back foot towards Gordon, and the ball sailed on him. Interception. Ball returned 46 yards to the Cleveland 40.

That was Play 1.

It took all of 2 plays for the Giants to saunter into the end zone (Play 3). Then Josh Cribbs fumbled the following kickoff (Play 4), then D'Qwell Jackson was injured and left the game for good 2 plays later (Play 6), opening the flood gates for the 2nd Half rushing barrage.

3 plays later, the Giants punched it in again (Play 9), and the once-14 point lead had already vanished into a TD deficit.

Play 11 was a dropped pass, Plays 12 & 13 were penalties, backing the Browns way up and allowing the Giants to burn time outs and return a punt to their 42 with 17 seconds left (Play 16).

Play 18 was an inexplicable pass interference penalty on Buster Skrine, allowing Lawrence Tynes to kick a FG (Play 19) as time expired on the self-destruction that accompanied the end of the Half. The at least 20 point swing from double digits up to double digits down broke the Browns, who, at 11 losses in a row and counting, have almost no confidence or toughness when things go awry.

Cleveland made some feeble attempts to climb back into it in the 2nd Half, but the Defense couldn't stop anything and the Offense made just enough mistakes to keep the score from ever getting within shouting distance.

As a Browns fan, I know that they probably would've lost that game even without that 19 play black hole. I expected a melt down. Until they don't melt down, I will continue to wait for it to inevitably happen.

I just didn't expect it to happen so incredibly quickly.

_____

Stats

Time of Possession: NYG - 35:24, CLE - 24:36

Total Yards: NYG - 502, CLE - 375

Net Yards Passing: CLE - 291, NYG - 259

Net Yards Rushing: NYG - 243, CLE - 84

First Downs: NYG - 30, CLE - 15

Turnovers Forced: NYG – 3, CLE - 2

Sacks: CLE - 0, NYG - 0

Final Score: New York 41, Cleveland 27

A lot of this statistical onslaught came in the 2nd Half when the Giants ran the ball at will (racking up 1st downs and time of possession along the way), but it's still disheartening to see. The Defense is just awful right now, and realistically will require at least an offseason - a really really good offseason - to fix.

In previous weeks, at least they got consistent pressure on the opposing QB. Not so much this week. They were rightfully worried about Eli Manning and therefore didn't blitz, but the DL didn't get any kind of penetration on their own so the scheme ended up giving up big plays anyway.

If there's a Julius Peppers in this draft, make sure you get him. This team could turn around in a hurry with a new coach and a dynamic pass rusher.

Game Balls

Trent Richardson – Imagine how good he'd look on a team that doesn't throw all the time and isn't always playing from behind.

Joe Thomas – Finally had a Thomas-like game, thoroughly shutting down Jason Pierre-Paul and also throwing in some quality run blocking.

_____

Honorable Mention

Josh Gordon – Showed his potential on the 2 TD catches, especially the bomb. Still needs to improve a lot to get to that #1 WR zone.

Jordan Norwood – Much better hands in Active Week #2.

Offensive Line – Gave up no sacks and kept Weeden clean for the most part. More than that, looked a lot more athletic blocking downfield than I've noticed in a long time.

_____

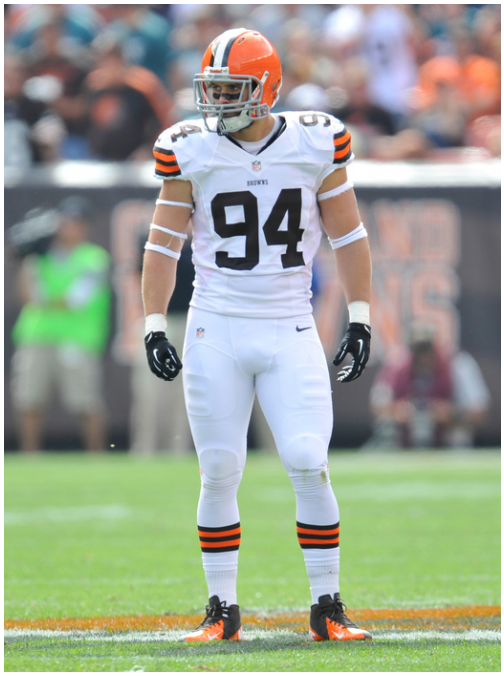
Hall of Shame

Brandon Weeden – It only takes one mistake to turn a Game Ball into a Hall of Shame, especially when the mistake is as back-breaking as that INT at the 4 minute mark. Yes, we already discussed how much worse the play call was than the pass itself - no way did that play call do anything but put Weeds in a bad position - but you still can't make that throw.

The Entire Defense – Not one person played well. The Defensive Line got no penetration and got pushed around in the Run game. After DQ went out, the Linebackers were invisible. And the only reason the DB's were visible is they were the guys running well behind wide open Receivers on TD passes.

CBS – Cut to a commercial just as the Ref was about to announce if a stopped play on 3rd down was a penalty or time out.

Trevin Wade, Dimitri Patterson, Sheldon Brown – These guys are just lost out there.



Tank Carder – Jumping offsides on a punt and gifting the Giants a 1st down.

Greg Little – 0 catches for 0 yards. On one of his few targets, let the ball fly right through his mitts of stone. Again.

Usama Young – Got plowed by Bradshaw. You'd never see Troy Polamalu get plowed like that.

Josh Cribbs – Sure, you had a nice average on your kick returns (of which there were many). But you can't fumble that ball in that situation.

Phil Dawson – That onside kick attempt was not your defining moment.

Joe Haden – Hope your l'il party was worth it.

_____

Just Shoot Yourself

Buster Skrine – Again resembled a dirty rug - beaten on frequent basis.

Paddy O'Shurmur – Assuming he is gone directly after the final game of the season, we are 82 days, 22 hours, 17 minutes, and 34 seconds as of this writing from being Shurmy-free.

_____

Regarding The Plans

So, let's say you're Jimmy Haslam. In about a week or so, the Browns will officially be yours, at which point you can do whatever the hell your little heart desires. Nude cheerleaders, trained monkeys as ball boys, make everyone speak in iambic pentameter... whatever you want.

With the all-but-finalized move from Mike Holmgren to Joe Banner at President, Haslam's first football decision will be regarding the future of one Paddy O'Shurmur.

Should he stay or should go? There's only 3 options:

1. Fire him right away.

Pros - Well, he's gone. Never again are we subjected to his play calling or his overly pouty and defensive press conferences or his generic drab explanations or that lost look on his face during the game. Sure, there's little chance that has-beens like Dick Jauron or Brad Childress will take over and "turn things around" (and it might be fools gold if they did), but at least we'd be comforted in knowing the Shurminator definitely *won't* be back.

Cons - Under interim guys that everyone knows are temps, this young team may pack it in. Or Jauron/Childress could be just enough more competent than Shurmy that Haslam/Joe Banner make the same mistake that KC made with Romeo and keep them as HC's next year.

2. Fire him at the end of the season.

Pros - Since a miraculous playoff run is out of the question at 0-5, there's really no reason to fire Shurmur right away. Maybe he loses you a couple games that you otherwise win, thereby improving your draft position. And it's not like anyone's dying to see what Jauron or Childress can bring to the Head Coaching table. Just push through the rest of the year then clean house 10 minutes after the last game of the season ends.

Cons - The team improves enough that even Shurmy can't help but win a few games, and Haslam is so impressed by the team's " *growth*" and Paddy's ability to "*keep them together* " that he makes the mistake of giving Shurmur "
one more year to prove himself
", a la the horrific error that Holmgren made with Eric Mangini in 2010.

3. Give him another year to grow along with the team.

Pros - I can't really think of one now. I guess we wouldn't have to debate over which coaching candidates we love/hate, and I'll get more use out of my Shurmur doormat.

Cons - Another year of Shurmur, aka Another Lost Year. Oh, and also you lose faith in your new Owner right away, which means there is NO hope.

If it were me, I'd opt for Door #2. There's no real reason to fire him right away, no message to send and no pound of flesh to be extracted. We'll be about halfway through the season anyhoo, might as well let the runaway train crash and aim on repairing it in the offseason.

And I'm fairly certain that's exactly the course of action Haslam will take.

This decision is an easy one. The decision after that, the one to replace Paddy? THAT one will be big.

_____

Regarding Whatever

***I know many of you are desperately down on this team, and you have every right to be. You'd think I'd feel the same - I think I'd feel the same - but I don't. I see talent on this team, especially on the offensive side of the ball. I like what I see from Richardson & Weeden & Gordon (in spurts) and am interested to see where they'll be with some experience, some consistency, and some decent coaching/playcalling.

Add lots of cap space and a really high pick in the draft... whomever the new coach is next year will probably look like a genius.

***With Haden back next week and Phil Taylor back in about a month, not to mention with the rookies getting more experience and (hopefully) starting to limit their mistakes, this team will need to get really creative figuring out ways to keep blowing games.

***Last year, the Offense was so abysmally bad that I often switched to another game while they were on the field and returned only when the Browns D was back on the field.

This year, it's completely the opposite.

***Mr. Weeden - you have a free play (offsides) on 3rd and 18 in the 4th Q, and you dump it off?

Do you know how those free play thingies work?

***A lot of people have started revving up the wah-mbulance lately over the fact that the Browns are destined to have a pick right at the top of the 2nd round which they must surrender due to the Josh Gordon pick.

There is a long way to go before we know if that pick was solid or not. But just imagine this WR corps right now WITHOUT Gordon on it. It's more appealing to just crap in your hand.

***Why IS Hardesty still on this team?

***I'm not ready to crown their asses yet, but Saturday night was the first time I felt like the Buckeyes were more than just a run-of-the-mill team. That Defense still has too many problems for them to play with the Big Boys, but they won't get a chance to do that this year anyway.

Jim Tressel won a Championship in Year 2... can Urban do the same?

***The best 4 teams in the NFL right now are the Houston Texans, the Baltimore Ravens, the Atlanta Falcons, and the San Francisco 49ers. And not an "elite" QB amongst them. Maybe the trend towards over-emphasizing QB play is on its way back down to earth.

***Just finished up *Dexter, Season 6*, and it's such an innocuous season that I've already

forgotten it. And one of the few things that *was* memorable was memorable because it's just... weird.

But the end... oh, Nelly, it can only get really interesting from there.

Next Up

Cincinnati Bengals (3-2).

It's hard to pick the Browns against any team they play, but this is probably the week where they get off the schneid. Cincy is 3-2, but their 3 wins came against 3 teams that are a combined 3-12 (CLE, WAS, JAX). They lost at home last week to a very meh Dolphins team. They should be able to score plenty against Cleveland, but the Browns will be able to score on them too. It will come down to a play here or a play there, and I think Joe Haden makes that play in his return from drug suspension.

Yes, yes, call Ripley's... I'm taking...

Browns 31, Bengals 27.