We unveil a new feature here at TCF this afternoon called "Heroes & Zeroes", crafted by Nick Allburn. Each week he's going to assign dog bones and demerits to five players on the Browns who excelled and five who stunk up the joint. There were no shortage of candidates for the Zeroes this week, headlined by our seriously overmatched head coach ... but who did Nick identify as his Heroes for this week?

Something had been missing on Sundays. Like Charles Nagy pitching on a full week's rest, I felt a little *too* good.

But come 1:15 this past Sunday, right on schedule, the old feeling reemerged. That''s right folks, the Browns are back, and returning with them is the three-hour emotional torture chamber inherent to Sunday afternoons in autumn.

Each week, this column will recap the exploits of our beloved Browns, highlighting key performances both positive and negative, by doling out Dog Bones (for outstanding play) and Demerits (for deplorable play). I will keep track of the leaders of each respective category all season long, and after week 17, the winners will receive...absolutely nothing. Let's get to it.

The Zeroes

Five Demerits: Romeo Crennel

"Attitude reflects leadership, captain." -Julius Campbell, *Re member the Titans*

There were scads of candidates, but if you are looking the one man most liable for Sunday"s shellacking, few would debate that the mantle of responsibility falls most squarely on coach Crennel's broad shoulders.

The Browns suffered some bad breaks early, most notably the punting fiasco following the first series, but the coach has to take the bulk of the blame for the team's inability to recover mentally. This is old hat; the Browns have caved in the face of adversity over and over again during Crennel‘s tenure.

Whether it was blowing his coach's challenges early, or basically admitting that he anointed the wrong quarterback the starter, Crennel's performance against the Steelers only perpetuated the sentiments of many that he is, like Alicia Silverstone, clueless. If things do not change quickly, Romeo Crennel will become the textbook lame duck coach. (See Wikipedia: Carr, Lloyd.)

Four Demerits: Darlie Franderson

This week, Charlie Frye's play drummed up memories of Doug Pederson and Spergon Wynn back in the 2000 season. Anytime a quarterback is compared to Pederson or Wynn, you can be sure that the comparison is unfavorable. I wake up in a cold sweat several times each year, still suffering from nightmares of feebly thrown Pederson interceptions...

Charlie Frye threw an interception, held the ball too long, and as usual, failed to throw the ball downfield effectively. It should not be surprising that the Charlie Frye era officially came to a close on Tuesday, when he was traded to the Seattle Seahawks.

The other half of the quarterback tandem, Derek Anderson, was not much more impressive. Anderson led the Browns' lone scoring drive, but was able to do so primarily because the Steelers were playing a softer, prevent-style defense. Anderson came as advertised; he still has that cannon of an arm, he still struggles on short patterns, and he still dangerously forces the football into coverage. Anderson, like his counterpart, was unable to limit his turnovers, fumbling once and throwing an interception. Frankly, Anderson was lucky that he had only the one interception, as many of his passes were within reach of Pittsburgh defenders.

Because of the Frye trade, it's Anderson's show, for now. Brady Quinn is waiting in the wings, and will almost certainly play at some point this season. At this point, it's not a matter of if Quinn will play, but merely a matter of when.

Three Demerits: Paul Ernster

The Browns were dealt more of the extraordinary bad luck that has come to pass for business as usual in Berea, as punter Dave Zastudil injured his back early last week and was unable to punt Sunday. Unfortunately for the Browns, Zastudil did not concede that the injury would prevent him from playing until Saturday.

Enter Zastudil's replacement, Paul Ernster, hauled from the free agent scrap heap. Doing his best Derrick Frost impression, Ernster botched a perfect snap on the Browns' first possession of the game. This error forced Cleveland's blockers to grab a hold of Steelers' defenders like horny prom dates, and resulted in the only play I have ever seen during which one team committed four penalties.

Ernster at least managed to get the punt away, even if the ensuing penalties meant that the Steelers took over at the Browns' 22-yard line. And, to his credit, Ernster managed to handle the rest of the punts competently, but the damage had already been done. That play was a sucker punch from which the Browns never recovered, and they spent the rest of the game wheezing for air.

Two Demerits: Rich Gannon

As has been the precedent in recent seasons, the Browns were stuck with one of the worst broadcast teams that CBS has to offer; Kevin Harlan and Rich Gannon. Harlan proved to be tolerable, but Gannon

was nothing short of cringe-worthy.

Mixed metaphors, clichés, and bad analogies were served early and often by Gannon, who seemed ready to clear space for Ben Roethlisberger in Canton.

I can deal with the dregs of the broadcasting world if the Browns are winning; at least their comic value is somewhat redeeming. However, when the Browns are losing, the Rich Gannons of the world do little to assuage my grief.

That might be the best incentive to start winning; so we can kiss Ian Eagle and Solomon Wilcotts goodbye.

One Demerit: Braylon Edwards

"The more things change, the more they stay the same." - Jean-Baptiste Alphonse Karr

New offensive coordinator, different linemen, different quarterbacks, different running back, same Braylon Edwards. While Edwards spent the summer trying to renovate his image as the team's resident crybaby, perhaps he should have been concentrating on football.

The Braylon Edwards dropsies returned, along with a fumble, and the unnecessary leaps, et cetera. But in addition, Edwards has once again failed to step up and show that he is an elite, number one receiver in the NFL. There is still plenty of football to be played, but Edwards' performance against the Steelers was very disappointing.

Of course, some of Edwards' problems can be attributed to the God-awful play the Browns received from the quarterback position, where a change seems imminent. If Edwards fails to produce with a different quarterback, it will be one less excuse in his repertoire, and it will be one more reason to believe that he, and he alone, is the reason for his struggles.

The Heroes

Five Dog Bones: Kellen Winslow

There is not a single Browns player who has taken more heat from fans and media alike, sometimes deservedly, than Kellen Winslow. But I give Winslow a great deal of credit. He managed to play every game last season in spite of his borderline-bionic knee, and he never quits playing hard.

Winslow was one of the few Browns who came to play on Sunday, notching four catches for 83 yards. Winslow had what might have been the play of the game in the second half, when

he absolutely leveled a Steelers defender with a bone-crushing block in the middle of the field.

But Winslow was most impressive immediately following the Browns' lone touchdown, a short play action pass from Derek Anderson to fullback Lawrence Vickers. The second-year player from Colorado caught Anderson's pass in the end zone, then initiated a spontaneous dance party, apparently ecstatic about the fact that the Browns now only trailed by 17. Winslow hurried over and instructed Vickers to stop this foolishness, showing some class and wherewithal that many did not believe he possessed.

Four Dog Bones: The Remaining Fans

This almost goes without saying, but the fans that were able to stick it out at the stadium for four quarters deserve a great deal of credit.

Watching the game on television, it became clear that late in the game, fans were fighting not only the Browns' awful play on the field, but equally awful weather, not to mention an increasing ratio of Steelers fans to Browns fans. It shows some real fortitude not to head for the exits in such a hopeless

situation, and I applaud those of you that soldiered on through the last few ugly minutes.

Three Dog Bones: Antwan Peek

It looks like the Browns have netted that rare free agent who actually performs *above* expectations.

Peek does not appear to be a mere preseason aberration (i.e. James Harrison, 2006), and the Browns appear to have found a quality pass rusher to compliment Kamerion Wimbley. 'Twan was one of the few Browns who was able to get into the backfield with any consistency, and teamed with Chaun "Sean" Thompson for the team's lone sack.

It's only one game, and the fact that the Browns fell 34-7 should temper much of the Antwan Peek fever, but I like what I see so far.

Two Dog Bones: The Defense

Yes, the Browns allowed 34 points. But let's be honest, it very well could have been 54.

As has been the case in recent seasons, the offense put the defense behind the eight ball. It started early, as "punts" and turnovers gave the Steelers laughably good field position. The defense held their own in the first half in spite of some difficult circumstances, limiting the Steelers to 17 points; not an insurmountable lead. But as has become the norm, the defense never had any time to catch its collective breath as the Browns failed to move the football with any consistency, and eventually, the defense tired and broke down.

There were some problems; Eric Wright looked very much like a rookie and the safeties had some coverage mix-ups, particularly on that Santonio Holmes touchdown reception. But in the first half, before the majority of Cleveland defenders required oxygen masks, the run defense was better than most expected.

The secondary is very young, but very talented, and barring serious injury, that group should improve all season long. If the Browns can somehow acquire some defensive linemen who are not yet reaping the benefits of AARP membership, the defense could become quite staunch in the next season or two.

One Dog Bone: The Offensive Line

Like the defense, the play of the offensive line looks far worse in the box score than it was in reality.

Given the circumstances (i.e. starting right tackle suspended, Joe Thomas' first professional game, Eric Steinbach playing hardly playing in the preseason), the line played about as well as can be expected.

Although the Steelers managed to collect six sacks, let's be fair, they were not all due to poor blocking. Charlie Frye absorbed five of the six sacks, and at least three of them can simply be attributed to Frye's inability to rid himself of the football. When Frye was relieved by Anderson, who actually believes in throwing the ball during passing plays, the pass blocking looked tolerable.

The line deserves a mulligan on their run blocking, as the circumstances of the game did not allow the Browns to commit to run-oriented attack. For the first time in a long time, the Browns have a viable number one running back in Jamal Lewis, and they need to get the ball in his hands 20-plus times every game. Hopefully, the Browns do not find themselves in many

more situations where the running game is negated by an early deficit.

Up Next: Cincinnati Bengals, Cleveland Browns Stadium, 1:00