Browns fans headed into this past weekend's game with the Bengals watching with one eye open, fearing another embarassing home performance coming off the heels of the stinker versus the Steelers. Instead, they were treated to an offensive spectacle as the Browns posted 51 points and knocked off the heavily favored Bengals to go to 1-1 on the season. In this regular weekly feature here at TCF, Nick Allburn looks at the Heroes & Zeroes from Sunday's win.

Not even Miss Cleo saw this one coming.

If Browns fans had been surveyed prior to Sunday's game, 99 percent would have predicted a lopsided Browns loss. And the one percent in the minority would have been lying, hammered drunk, or both.

But if there is one role which has been played time and again to critical acclaim in Cleveland, Ohio, it is that of the underdog.

On the heels of this week's incredulous victory, let's begin with...

## *This week's Heroes*

## Five Dog Bones: The Offensive Line

Last week, this unit played better than both the box score and local talk shows would suggest. This week, they were nothing short of outstanding. All of this, mind you, is with starting right tackle Ryan Tucker still serving his four-game suspension.

There was a reason that many Browns fans were clamoring for Phil Savage to use the number three pick on Joe Thomas; for all the excessive media coverage and hype that centers on the skill positions, as the cliché goes, "it all starts up front."

Games are not won and lost solely in the trenches, mind you, but without adequate run blocking and pass protection, it is very difficult to execute an offensive scheme. Lackluster line-play has been the most common denominator of the various regimes who have tried, and failed, to return the Browns to their former glory.

It appears that the Browns finally get the picture, and although it has its flaws, this looks like the best offensive line the Browns have fielded since number 19 was under center, rocking his glorious, curly mullet.

## Four Dog Bones: The Wide Receivers

It feels somewhat unimaginative to hand out Dog Bones to, well,

basically the entire offense, but when you score 51 points, it usually means that everyone put forth a significant contribution.

The receivers turned in a very strong performance, as they torched the already suspect Cincinnati secondary until the final whistle was blown. The headliner was Braylon Edwards, who, after absorbing some criticism in this column a week ago, has treated this writer to a hefty slice of humble pie.

Edwards had what was hands down his finest game as a professional, seizing eight catches for 146 yards and two trips to the promised land. Braylon's fully-extended, 37-yard touchdown catch is one of the greatest catches you'll ever see, reminiscent of Pittsburgh's John Stallworth, who so often almost appeared to be catching the back end of the football.

After being accused by many, present company included, of being "soft," Edwards took some punishing hits on Sunday, including when he was brutally upended near the goal line in the first half. Elite receivers do not shy away from contact, and Braylon's willingness thus far to absorb jarring hits is encouraging.

Kellen Winslow turned in another quality performance with six catches for 100 yards and a touchdown. Joe Jurevicius, who was an invisible man when Charlie Frye was running the show, chipped in with a pair of touchdown catches.

Overall, a very strong showing from what is ultimately the most talented position on the team. If the receivers can develop more chemistry with Derek Anderson (or Brady Quinn, depending on how things play out), and either Tim Carter or Joshua Cribbs emerges as the slot receiver, the Browns' receiving corps could be among the finest in the NFL.

## Three Dog Bones: Jamal Lewis

Even after four preseason games and the first "game" against the Steelers, it's still tough to look at Jamal Lewis in Browns colors without doing a double-take. Although the Browns had kept Lewis under wraps in recent seasons, no one can forget that Lewis once mauled the Browns for 500+ yards in just two games.

There was a time when one of my greatest fears was seeing Jamal Lewis burst into the second level of our defense. Sunday's game placed the shoe securely on the other foot, and it felt wonderful.

Lewis' short, hard-fought carries in the first half paid dividends in the second-half, as he cracked off several long runs, highlighted by a 66-yard sprint to paydirt on which he was completely untouched. On the day, Lewis carried 27 times for 216 yards and one score.

For years, we have heard about how you need to "establish the run;" how running early and often softens the defense later on. Butch Davis was the flag bearer for this concept, although it rarely worked out as Uncle Butch envisioned (e.g. William Green's 30 yards

on 25 carries against the Steelers in the '03 playoffs). Maybe the Browns finally have the personnel in place both on the offensive line and at running back to successfully execute a run-first game plan.

## Two Dog Bones: Joshua Cribbs

Cribbs' performance was lost on some amongst all the offensive fireworks. He finished with an 85-yard kickoff return, had a 97-yard kickoff return called back due to multiple Browns infractions. Throw in an 11-yard end around and a tackle on special teams, and Cribbs had a solid game.

Cribbs makes plays when he gets the football, plain and simple. Rob Chudzynski needs to find creative ways to get Cribbs consistent touches on offense.

## One Dog Bone: Derek Anderson

Like week one, Anderson's performance was worse than the numbers indicate. Anderson missed several wide open targets, and his accuracy isn't anything to write home about. There was a point in the first quarter where Anderson's play was so poor that it looked as though Brady Quinn might be seeing action far earlier than intended.

But Anderson deserves credit, as he managed to play a pretty solid

game, even if much of his success resulted from great catches by Cleveland receivers, or breakdowns in the Cincinnati secondary. Even against the worst defense in the NFL (which, for the record, the Bengals are not), you don't throw five touchdown passes by accident.

## *This Week's Zeroes*

### Five Demerits: The Secondary

The Bengals are one of the only teams that, without fail, is capable of moving the football against the Browns at will. The Browns' secondary was just as impotent as their Cincinnati counterparts, allowing 401 passing yards.

The Browns found themselves in zone coverage far too often, and when offenses aren't dealing with a short field (near the goal line), experienced receivers will find gaps in zone coverage. The Bengals have a pair of top-notch receivers, and found more holes in the Browns secondary than in a block of Swiss cheese. For two weeks in a row, the secondary has suffered major breakdowns, and it's looking less like an aberration and more like a trend.

### Four Demerits: Chad Johnson

I'm not a Chad-lover, nor a Chad-hater; I'm Chad-neutral. If Johnson wants to have his goofy touchdown celebrations each week, and the other team is not offended, then let him have his fun.

However, jumping into the Dog Pound was blatant disrespect, and it was going too far. Jumping into the Dog Pound is the Cleveland Browns equivalent of dancing on the Dallas Cowboys' star; just don't do it.

We already knew that Chad wasn't bright enough to use the correct Spanish number (**ochenta** y cinco) on the back of his jersey, but his belief that the fans would welcome him with open arms drops his IQ score even lower, say, around...85?

Our brown and orange brethren bathed Johnson in malted hops, threw food at him, and issued countless enthusiastic gestures of "we're number one." Do you know what? It was completely justified, and it served as proof that we haven't gone soft. Dog Pounders, I salute you.

## Three Demerits: The Defensive Game Plan

Like the breakdowns in the secondary, there isn't one individual who is solely accountable for the lousy game plan.

The Bengals have a high-powered offense, but there is never an excuse for giving up 45 points. Not only was the secondary burned time and again, but the Browns failed to pressure Carson Palmer, and lost the battle at the point of attack, allowing Rudi Johnson to average over five yards per carry.

Although the Bengals are solid offensively, they have been dealing with some turmoil on the offensive line. Their former center, Rich Braham, retired following last season and current center Erie Ghiaciuc has been dealing with a sore neck, guard Eric Steinbach defected to the Browns in free agency, left tackle Levi Jones is still recovering from a knee problem and did not start, and right tackle Willie Anderson has been involved in a platoon with Scott Kooistra due to a sore right foot. Long story short: the Browns should have managed more than Robaire Smith's lone sack.

## Two Demerits: Kickoff Coverage

The struggles of the kickoff coverage team came as a surprise because the Browns are usually very solid in all phases of

special teams. The Browns yielded several lengthy returns, but in fairness, the coverage team did have to defend 10 Browns kickoffs. Maybe the injury to fan favorite and special teamer extraordinaire, Mason Unck, is finally catching up with the coverage team...

## One Demerit: Lawrence Vickers

One year removed from being made a walking punch line due to the play calling of Maurice "But I'm Friends With Romeo" Carthon (halfback option, anyone?), Lawrence Vickers has the skill set to make a positive contribution for the Browns. I'm all for getting Vickers a handful of touches every game, but let's be realistic and take baby steps with the guy.

For some reason, the powers that be (OC Rob Chudzynski) anointed Vickers the go-to-guy on Sunday, turning to him twice during crucial junctures in the game.

Late in the third quarter, the Browns turned the ball over on downs when Vickers failed to convert a fourth-and-one with a fullback trap. In the fourth quarter, Vickers was wide open following a play action fake on a third-and-short, but did his best Travis Wilson impression and dropped the pass, stalling the

drive.

While Vickers did not make the most of his opportunities, one can't help but wonder why Chud decided to call Vickers' number twice in such crucial situations. The trap play on fourth-and-one is particularly troubling, because Jamal Lewis had been running well against the Bengals' defense.

Like I said, increasing Vickers' involvement with the offense is a good idea, but in crucial situations, the ball needs to be in the hands of one of the playmakers (i.e. Jamal Lewis, Kellen Winslow, Braylon Edwards, etc.), not in the hands of a second-year fullback who is still a bit of a project. (VONK, perhaps?)

## Up Next: Oakland Raiders, McAfee Coliseum, 4:05

The Raiders are the one team that the Browns have beaten consistently in recent years. The Browns have won the last three meetings between the two clubs; 13-7 in 2003, 9-7 in 2005, and 24-21 last season.

The Raiders have looked better this season, but come on, they're still the Raiders, right?

## My Call: Browns 27, Raiders 24