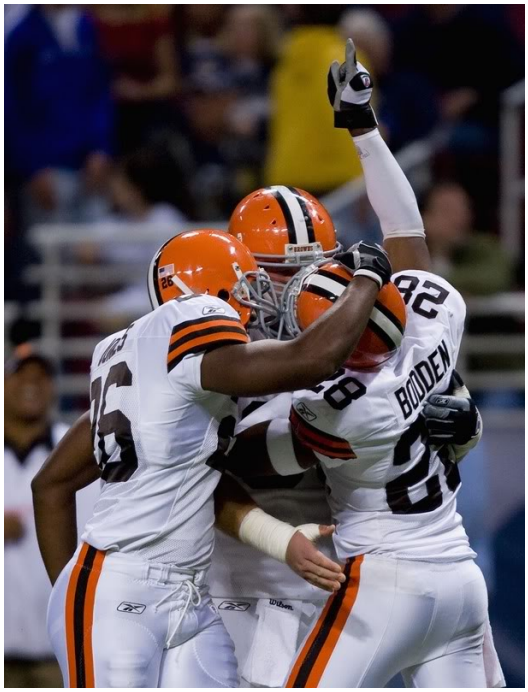
Maybe it's not quite time yet for car flipping and couch burning, but for the beleaguered fans who have followed this Cleveland Browns franchise for these last several years they finally have something tangible to celebrate other than Halloween: the Browns first two-game win streak in four years. Gary Benz checks into his usual Sunday night spot with his commentary piece on today's 27-20 win over the Rams.



Maybe it's not quite time yet for car flipping and couch burning, but for the beleaguered fans who have followed this Cleveland Browns franchise for these last several years they finally have something tangible to celebrate other than Halloween: the Browns first two-game win streak in four years.

All it took to seal the 27-20 victory against the winless Rams was a Leigh Bodden interception with 35 seconds left. Oh, if it were only that easy.

In truth, this game was as much about the Browns overcoming their numerous mistakes on both sides of the ball as anything else. On offense, particularly in the second half, the Browns seemed to be walking backward because of penalties as much as they were moving forward because of quarterback Derek Anderson. Throw in the fact that the Rams were just injured enough and just lousy enough and the Browns were able to get both their first road win, their first winning streak and their first winning record of the season, all at the same time. But again, it wasn't easy.

At the outset, the Browns look like they had decided they liked their bye week well enough to extend it a few more days, coming out flat and looking unprepared. But after the St. Louis Rams had just finished scoring their second touchdown, a 10-play 71-yard drive that looked every bit as effortless as it was, head coach Romeo Crennel did something as out of character as Britney Spears calling it an early evening. He let his struggling defense know he had a pulse.

There he was, on the sidelines, headphones off, actually reading the riot act to a defensive line that was being abused by a make-shift Rams offensive line. Maybe it was Crennel's word choice. Maybe it was the sight of seeing their laconic head coach coming unglued. Or maybe it was the fortunate timing of the Rams' Steven Jackson apparently re-injuring himself followed quickly by Rams head coach Scott Linehan making a questionable call on 4th and 1 from the Cleveland 33 with Jackson out of the game. But whatever it was, the players seemed to respond.

Suddenly, a Browns team that was down by 11 to a Rams team that had only scored nine points in their last two games combined, found new energy on both sides of the ball getting the score back to even, 17-17, as the first half ended.

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Personal Aside #1: Is it too much to ask the NFL to require CBS to broadcast every game in high definition? CBS treats HD like it is brand new technology and their cameras are on back order. Of course this wouldn't make a difference if the network had more respect for the Browns and to be fair, it's not as if the Browns prior to this season gave anyone any reason to give them respect. But actually seeing an agitated Crennel in HD while tearing into his defense would have been YouTube-worthy. Instead, the picture was every bit as muddled as one

of Crennel's press conferences.

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The emergence of the Browns offense this season has been one of the most pleasant surprises in Cleveland sports in years. Derek Anderson, after a slow start, threw a perfectly placed jump ball to receiver Braylon Edwards for the team's first touchdown and threaded the ball to tight end Kellen Winslow II for the second touchdown. For the game, he was 18-25 for 248 yards and three touchdowns. But as good as Anderson's passes were, both touchdowns were set up by the decision of offensive coordinator Rod Chudzinski not to eschew the running game despite the early deficit.

In that first drive, running back Jamal Lewis ran the ball five times for 34 yards while Jason Wright added a sixth run for eight yards. The second drive featured another six running plays, including an end around to Josh Cribbs who eluded and otherwise ran through a number of tacklers on his way to 18 yards. Overall, the Browns had 132 yards rushing. By this point, with a run firmly established, Anderson was able to take advantage of what was becoming a soft Rams secondary.

Still, as well as the Browns were playing on offense as the half ended, they were only tied with the Rams, thanks in part to the defense allowing Rams quarterback Mark Bulger to move the ball 52 yards in just over a minute to put the Rams in a position to kick the game-typing field goal.

Thus, an opening drive in the second half to re-establish the momentum was absolutely critical. It happened. But again it wasn't easy. The drive, which resulted in Anderson's third touchdown pass of the day, was as comical as it was poetic. It featured four penalties, including three false starts. In the old days, which means any day prior to the end of the Pittsburgh game the first week, any one of those penalties would have taken the air out of the offense if not the whole team. But where this team has really gotten better is in its ability to stay on track, at least offensively.

Despite the self-dug holes, Anderson was able to lead the way mostly by completing key passes to Joe Jurevicius. And when they finally stopped making penalties, the Browns were able to move rather easily through a Rams defense that was looking more and more defeated with each completed pass and third down converted. An under thrown pass by Anderson and a brilliant catch by Edwards got the ball to the Rams three-yard line and, two plays later, Anderson found Edwards in the back of the end zone for his third touchdown pass of the game, pushing the lead to 24-17.

But because this is the Browns and because they have to play defense, the game was far from over. Indeed, even as Bulger was temporarily exiting to get a damaged thumb taped, the Rams were able to move the ball well enough, aided by still another Browns penalty, to get into field goal range and get the game to well within striking distance.

And then it got real interesting. With the Browns taking the next possession and moving to finish the game, Edwards decided it was time to unleash his inner child for the first time this season by channeling the ghost of Dwayne Rudd. Following a 19-yard catch that took the Browns

to the St. Louis 26 yard-line, Edwards ran down the field, tore off his helmet and jawed at the crowd, as if he had just invented oxygen. An unsportsmanlike conduct penalty took the ball back to the Rams 45. Eventually, the drive stalled at the St. Louis 27 (a sack and a Winslow false start didn't help, either) and Phil Dawson drilled a 45-yard field goal to push the lead to seven. It could have and should have been more.

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Personal Aside #2: As immature of an act as it was to throw off the helmet, Edwards showed some uncharacteristic maturity by actually apologizing to his teammates afterward, attributing the "mistake" to thinking that the quarter had ended. That's a far cry to how dismissive he was last year about his conduct after chewing out Charlie Frye on the sidelines. Edwards seems serious about turning a corner, which is at least as good of news as Anderson's play this season.

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In fact, despite the Edwards misstep, things looked pretty good after the Browns defense put up an uncharacteristically strong stand, forcing the Rams to punt with 7:47 left in the game. But a three and out put the ball right back in the Rams hand and the Rams were much more efficient this time. Eventually, though, the Rams stalled when they again couldn't convert on 4th and 1.

With the Rams forced to use all of their timeouts on the Browns next possession, the game should have been over. Unfortunately, a dropped pass by Edwards on third down gave the Rams a final chance, which the Browns were aiding with two straight penalties, including a pass interference call against Eric Wright. But with time running out, Bulger was forced to take bigger chances and Bodden stepped in front of a pass intended for Torry Holt finally close out the game.

If it seems like it's a broken record at this point to again single out Edwards and Anderson, that's because it is. Anderson, behind a rebuilt offensive line, now has 17 touchdown passes for the year and is on pace to easily break the franchise record. Edwards is having a Pro Bowl year. He had eight more receptions, giving him 37 on the season. He had 117 yards, giving him 669 for the season. He also had two more touchdowns, giving him nine for the season. Outside of Randy Moss with New England, no receiver is having a better year.

The emergence of the Browns really mirrors a shift in the NFL. In fact, it defines it. This year more than any other year in recent memory, offense is winning games in the NFL, not defense. That's good news for teams like Cleveland, bad news for teams like Baltimore.

It's hard to believe, however, that a team with the worst defense

in the league could actually make the playoffs, but as this point anything is possible. And if the Browns can find a way to solve the enigmatic Seattle Seahawks next week, even the most cynical among us won't think the playoffs are so farfetched. But again, it won't be easy.