15 point defecit? Pfft. Yet again, the Browns came back from a big hole behind Derek Anderson and their prolific offense, knocking off the NFC West leading Seattle Seahawks by a 33-30 margin in overtime. Erik Cassano says that this win was about a team that needed to prove they belonged in the NFL playoff race, and then they went out, faced a playoff-caliber team, cleared a bunch of hurdles, and proved it. It's all good in CTown baby ...

In the closing minutes of Sunday's game, Fox's broadcast team relayed what Romeo Crennel told his players during the week:

"The most important game in the NFL this week will take place here on Sunday."

You're not going to get anyone in New England or central Indiana to agree, but as far as the Browns are concerned, Crennel was right.

Sunday's 33-30 overtime win against the Seahawks was the most important game the Browns had played under Romeo Crennel. That they were able to win shows just how far the team has come in a short period of time.

They won despite trailing by 15 in the second quarter, despite the fact that the defense once again looked like wet tissue paper, despite the fact that they were facing a Super Bowl-tested Seahawks offense with both Matt Hasselbeck and

Shaun Alexander in the lineup to start.

They won despite a missed extra point by Phil Dawson, despite the fact that they couldn't turn a first-and-goal into a touchdown late in the second half and despite the fact that the Cleveland Penalty Machine never takes a week off (This week: 6 penalties, 49 yards).

The skeptic's view of the Browns heading into Sunday's game was that they had an overinflated win total thanks to beating up on the hapless Dolphins and Rams. Sunday's game against a team one season removed from a NFC title was supposed to bring the Browns back down to Earth. And in the early going, it looked like that would be the case.

Hasselbeck marched the Seahawks down the field for a touchdown on their second drive of the game. The Browns managed to answer early in the second quarter, but Dawson's botched extra point kept the Browns behind. That seemed to send the Browns into a mental tailspin as the ensuing Seattle drive resulted in a touchdown to put the Seahawks up 14-6.

Then the special teams completely broke down when Nate Burleson found a seam off a Dave Zastudil punt and returned it 94 yards for a touchdown and a commanding 21-6 Seattle lead.

At that point, the Browns looked unready for prime time on all fronts. Derek Anderson and the offense, the Browns' go-to unit since the season's second week, was stymied, and Cleveland looked like a rebuilding team that wasn't up to facing their playoff-caliber competition.

But something amazing happened sometime between that put return and the team's emergence from the tunnel to start the second half: Somewhere, somehow, the Browns grew a collective backbone. A year ago, or even earlier this

season, a 21-6 deficit would have shattered this team and a contending club like the Seahawks would have cruised to a laugher of a win.

But these aren't the cheap-lawn-chair Browns of yesteryear. These Browns have a reservoir of intestinal fortitude not seen on a gridiron in these parts in quite some time. When Jamal Lewis capped off the opening drive of the second half with a one-yard touchdown run and pulled the Browns to within 21-16, it was a faith-restoring moment, both for the fans and the team.

From that point on, the Browns never seemed to get discouraged, and the fans fed off of the newfound toughness of the hometown team.

The defense, for all of its warts, kept Seattle out of the end zone in the second half while Anderson and Co. passed the Browns back into the game.

Seattle had the upper hand as the hour grew late. In the waning moments of the fourth quarter, when kicker Josh Brown sent the game into overtime with a barely-good hook shot of a 22-yard field goal, and in overtime, where they had possession first, the Seahawks had experience to fall back on. No one would have been surprised if Hasselbeck would have made all the right moves, pushed all the right buttons, and managed to get out a Cleveland with a squeaker of a win.

Heck, if this had been a previous edition of the Browns, we might have darn well expected it.

But that newly-discovered internal toughness seems to have a long shelf life. The Browns defense, so porous all year, came up with a clutch stop for the second straight week when Seattle's Maurice Morris attempted to lunge forward on 4th-and-1 and secure a first down that might have all but ensured a Josh Brown game-winning field goal attempt.

But Sean Jones and Andra Davis were there to stop Morris, preventing him from covering what might have been the few inches that ultimately separated 5-3 playoff contention from 4-4 mediocrity for the Browns.

When the Browns took the ball on downs and immediately drove down into the Seattle red zone, setting up Dawson's 25-yard game winner, winning was less about that particular drive and more about everything that had come before it.

This was about a team growing up and growing together right before our eyes, This was about a team that needed to prove they belonged in the NFL playoff race, and then they went out, faced a playoff-caliber team, cleared a bunch of hurdles, and proved it.

It seems so simple to say, but if you've been following the misfortunes of the Cleveland Browns since 1999, you know exactly what an amazing statement that is.