It was a game that the Browns had to win, and they responded by delivering one of their most complete performances of the year. Although they only out-gained the Bills 304 to 232, the Browns essentially dominated the game, over one-fourth of Buffalo"s yardage came on their final futile drive. Nick Allburn takes a look back at the performance, and annoints his heroes & zeroes from last Sunday's win.

It was a game that the Browns had to win, and they responded by delivering one of their most complete performances of the year. Although they only out-gained the Bills 304 to 232, the Browns essentially dominated the game, over one-fourth of Buffalo"s yardage came on their final futile drive. The Bills entered Cleveland territory only three times all game, and just once in the second half.

Jamal Lewis was the headliner, bulldozing his way to 163 yards and becoming the second Cleveland running back to break the 1,000 yard barrier in three years (Reuben Droughns is the other). As ground-heavy as this game was, it was also a waiting game; waiting for the other team to make a costly error. Perhaps the most shocking statistic of the game was the fact that there were zero turnovers. In fact, the ball didn't even hit the ground once as the result of a fumble.

Buffalo"s botched punt, which led to a Cleveland safety, would prove to be the only real mistake of the game, but it only cost the Bills two points. The Bills started rookies at both quarterback and running back, and while both quarterback

Trent Edwards and running back Marshawn Lynch are vastly superior to your typical rookie, the fact that both played their college ball in California showed. Edwards wore gloves on both hands, electing to play with a gloved throwing hand, and neither Edwards nor Lynch seemed too thrilled with the snowy conditions.

On the other hand, Derek Anderson, Jamal Lewis, and the Cleveland offensive line chose not to wear gloves or sleeves. How many times have you seen running backs and receivers wear gloves and sleeves and lose their grip on the football? The Browns' hardnosed mentality paid dividends, and the Cleveland offensive line provided yet another dominating performance, keeping Derek Anderson's jersey clean while also plowing open running lanes for Jamal Lewis. This was a signature victory for the Browns, who retained control of their own destiny in the playoff race. The win also set up a showdown this upcoming Sunday in Cincinnati, during which the Browns can clinch their first playoff appearance since 2002. Game on.

This Week's Heroes

Five Dog Bones: Phil Dawson

Phil Dawson came up huge against the Bills on Sunday, hitting two field goals, the first of which ended up being the difference in the game. Dawson's first field goal was amazing, as he compensated for a stiff wind by aiming his kick yards to the right of the upright.

But Dawson's second field goal, which measured 49 yards, defied explanation. I was shocked to see Crennel allow Dawson to even attempt such a ridiculous feat in such inclement weather, but it paid off. The kick appeared to be hooked way left, but Dawson shocked the world yet again as the wind straightened the ball out, it bounced off of the Dawson Bar, and went in to extend the Cleveland lead to 8-0. While not the longest, it was the greatest kick I have ever seen.

Dawson has taken some heat from fans this season for missing kicks in preseason and for hit weak leg on kickoffs. I remember hearing Dawson's critics and preseason and thinking to myself, "If Phil Dawson is the Browns' biggest problem, we're looking at a damn good football team."

As for the kickoffs, I've also been a critic of Dawson's weak leg. Why the Browns don't sign a kicker with a huge foot to handle kickoff duties completely escapes me. Can you imagine what an advantage it would be to consistently get touchbacks on kickoffs? That field position really adds up over the course of a game.

In spite of his flaws, Phil Dawson is one my favorite Browns. He's the only player remaining from the 1999 expansion team, he's endured the pain and anguish of six losing seasons (out of eight total). Nobody's deserves to enjoy a Cinderella season more than Dawson, and I couldn't be happier for him.

Four Dog Bones: Jamal Lewis

Initially, I was pretty skeptical of the Jamal Lewis signing, but apparently there's a reason that the Browns hired Phil Savage, not me, as the general manager. I thought Jamal Lewis was washed up, but I'm thrilled that I was wrong.

Since the second Baltimore game, Lewis has been running like a man possessed, averaging 113.8 yards per game over the last five contests. For all intents and purposes, Lewis carried the Browns to a victory over the Bills with 163 yards on 33 carries (2nd highest career total). Lewis' short, choppy steps and bruising north-and-south running style is perfect for snowy conditions, making Lewis a great fit for the Browns in the winter months.

Lewis accumulated 80 yards in the first half, during which the Browns

stayed fairly balanced between running and passing. But everybody in the stadium knew that Lewis was getting the rock in the second half. That said, the two teams lined up, the Browns" stellar offensive line beat up the Bills at the point of attack, and Lewis bludgeoned the Bills for another 83 yards. The Browns weren't going to be stopped, Lewis wasn't going to be stopped, and there was nothing the Bills could do about it.

Three Dog Bones: Andra Davis

I've been one of Davis' harshest critics this season, but he played a great game against the Bills, essentially setting up camp in the Buffalo backfield from the opening gun. Davis had six solo tackles, four for losses, and was making his presence felt all over the field.

The big knock on Davis this season has been his speed, or lack thereof. Just as the snow was a blessing for Jamal Lewis, it was a blessing for Andra Davis, as Davis was no longer the slow guy, EVERYBODY was the slow guy. The poor conditions allowed Davis to give us a little taste of yesteryear, when he was arguably the best defender on the team.

Davis is in the second year of a five year contract extension that was signed in 2005 and took effect in 2006. The Browns definitely won't cut Davis this off-season, but next season will be a big year for Dr. Dra. If Davis can fully recover the ankle problems that have dogged him this season and give the Browns solid play in the middle, he has a good chance to finish out his five year deal and possibly retire as a Cleveland Brown. But if he doesn't perform next season, Davis will likely be

dumped on the free agent scrap heap of has-been linebackers.

As much as his play has frustrated me this season, I'm rooting for Davis, who seems to be a pretty likeable fellow. Like Dawson, Davis has played his entire career in Cleveland, and he's one of the guys who has been through some of the Browns' toughest seasons. Like Dawson, nobody deserves to be a part of the Browns' current success more than Davis.

Two Dog Bones: Braylon Edwards

Braylon Edwards' ability to haul in the impossible catch, coupled with his inability to corral the easy catch, is becoming the stuff of legend. Edwards had two catches of the impossible variety on the Browns' last drive of the first half that netted them their second field goal.

Although Edwards finished with a very pedestrian four catches for 64 yards, this wasn"t a game in which stats meant very much, and Edwards' two catches on the aforementioned drive were crucial to the Browns increasing their lead from 5-0 to 8-0 before halftime. Like many of the Browns, Edwards appeared unaffected by the snow and blustering wind, one of the advantages of drafting a player who played college ball above the Mason-Dixon line.

Lone Bone: Derek Anderson

To criticize Derek Anderson on a local sports talk show exposes one to a serious verbal lashing. Like it or not, Derek Anderson has become something of a sacred cow. Personally I think it's ridiculous, but I suppose it's the nature of the beast; the quarterback often receives too much credit when a team is winning and vice-versa.

And although I'm in the camp that believes Anderson's success is due more to a great offensive line and great receivers than anything else, Anderson deserves tons of credit for playing a turnover-free game in ugly, ugly weather. Making a statement along with the majority of the Cleveland offense, Anderson took the field without sleeves. Perhaps more significant, he elected to leave his quarterback gloves on the sidelines (unlike his counterpart, Trent Edwards) in order to maintain a better grip on the football.

Although it wasn't always pretty, and there were plenty of passes that were candidates for interception largely due to Anderson's total lack of touch on short passes, Anderson completed what was only his fourth interception-free game of the season. Of equal importance was the fact that Anderson, who had a "butterfingers" reputation earlier in his career, did not fumble any snaps throughout the course of the game.

While Anderson was unable to lead the Browns to any touchdowns, the mere fact that he threatened the Bills with a vertical passing game was significant. The Bills were forced to respect Cleveland's ability to throw deep, which made the going that much easier for Jamal Lewis because Buffalo was unable to consistently stack eight and nine defenders in the box.

Anderson was largely ineffective in the second half, but the Browns were able to ride the churning legs of Jamal Lewis to victory. Sometimes a quarterback's job is to be the game-manager and simply not give the game away, and DA played that role well against the Bills.

This Week's Zeroes

Five Demerits: Romeo Crennel

I had no problem with any of Crennel's coaching moves or his game plan until late in the fourth quarter. The Browns had the football with exactly 2:00 remaining at the Buffalo 48-yard line, and it was fourth-and-one. It was decision time.

Crennel, playing conservative, and totally gutless, ordered the Browns to punt the football after Derek Anderson led a poorly orchestrated attempt to get the Bills to jump offsides. Crennel's decision came as little surprise, he's rarely shown any guts, guile, or desire to go for an opponent's throat while leading the Browns.

It's that kind of decision that separates the good teams from the bad teams, the winners from the losers. Losers will punt, cross their fingers, and hope for the best. Winners look the opponent straight in the eye, ram the football down their throat for one lousy yard, and win the damn football game.

The Browns had their best unit on the field, with a running back who the

Bills had been unable to stop all game. Lewis had just gashed the Bills with two consecutive runs of six yards after Jason Wrights three-yard loss set the Browns up for second-and-thirteen. It would have been a great way to end a game that the Browns had essentially dominated from start to finish. It would have said, "Here we come, and you're not stopping us."

Instead, Zastudil's punt netted the Browns only 20 yards of field position, and to me, the risk-reward of 20 yards of field position versus ending the football game is worth the risk of that fourth down attempt. Sooner or later, one of Crennel's blunders is going to cost the Browns a football game, if it hasn''t already . Sooner or later, Romeo Crennel is going to have to show that he has the stones to step on the opposition's throat when they're down and finish them off. I won't hold my breath.

Four Demerits: Brian Billick

Is ripping Brian Billick getting stale? Nope.

Brian Billick's 2007 Baltimore Ravens are the gift that keeps on giving, and they''ve proven themselves particularly adept at finding new ways to sink to new lows each and every week. How could you top being blown out by 24 points at home in prime time, to the former Baltimore Colts, no less? Simple: lose to the winless Dolphins.

As much as I wanted to see the rudderless Dolphins stay perfect and keep their dream of a winless season alive, the Baltimore Ravens have

a dream of their own: to cement their position as the biggest disappointment of the ‘07 NFL season. It was just another day at the office for Billick's bozos, who have now lost eight straight.

Brian Billick is among the world's greatest jerk/dork combinations, and nobody deserves this season-from-Hell more than he. A special thanks must be directed towards the ‘07 Baltimore Ravens. Without you guys, this miracle season would not have been possible.

Three Demerits: Ryan Neill

Technically there weren't any turnovers in this football game, but botched snaps on punts don't register as turnovers in the box score. A botched snap by Buffalo long snapper Ryan Neill led to a pair of charity points for the Browns by way of a safety.

As much as he's mocked, Browns fans were grateful to have a quality long snapper like Ryan Pontbriand during a snowy game in which long snaps were extremely difficult to execute properly. Credit Buffalo punter Brian Moorman for wisely kicking the ball out of the end zone instead of trying to run the football, which might have led to a very short field for the Browns.

Two Demerits: Todd Grantham

I'll admit that criticizing a defensive coordinator when the defense pitches a shutout might be pushing it, but the Browns played a fairly mistake-free game, and aren't many players or coaches deserving of criticism.

After Romeo Crennel decided to punt with 2:00 left in the fourth quarter, which might have been the worst decision since Sony Pictures decided to make sequel to *Daddy Day Care*, did anyone honestly think that the Bills were going to go quietly? The snow made pressuring the quarterback difficult for both teams, reflected in the complete absence of sacks, and that final drive was no different. The Browns tried to put the heat on Trent Edwards, but nothing was working.

Pressure hadn't gotten to Edwards all day, and for once, the answer might have been to dial down the pressure and drop more defenders into coverage. Unfortunately, the Browns' largely ineffective blitz packages left Bills receivers open for several big plays.

Edwards shredded the Browns defense with three big pass plays, including a 20-yard fourth down pass to Lee Evans to keep the drive alive. Question: Why is Lee Evans, clearly the Bills' best receiver, in single coverage (rookie Brandon McDonald) on fourth down? Evans should have had at least two defenders hounding him as he's Buffalo's only legitimate deep threat.

Although it was partly due to poor play calling on Buffalo's behalf (swing pass to Fred Jackson), the Browns defense finally stood up at their own 10 yard line, although they gave several Browns fans a mild heart

attack on the way.

One Demerit: Kellen Winslow

Like I said five paragraphs earlier, I'm reaching for players and coaches to decry at this point.

Winslow had a couple of questionable dropped passes, which were magnified by the fact that Derek Anderson didn't throw many passes that were even remotely catchable. Kellen Jr. clearly wasn't too thrilled about playing in the middle of a blizzard. Considering that Winslow grew up in San Diego and went to school in Miami, he probably didn't have much experience with that white, powdery substance, or sub-freezing temperatures.

Winslow would finish with only two catches for 28 yards, tying his lowest reception output of the season and marking his second-lowest yardage total. Hopefully the Bills game served as a learning experience for Winslow and he will be better acclimated to cold weather in the future.

Standings

Total Dog Bones

Offensive Line---27
Braylon Edwards---22
Jamal Lewis---19
Derek Anderson---17(t)
Joshua Cribbs---17(t)K
Kellen Winslow---17(t)

Net Dog Bones

Offensive Line---25
Braylon Edwards---18
Kellen Winslow---17
Joshua Cribbs---15
Jamal Lewis---13

Total Demerits

Romeo Crennel---30
Derek Anderson---16(t)
Brian Billick---16(t)
Defensive Line---16(t)
Todd Grantham---14

Net Demerits

Romeo Crennel---22
Brian Billick---16
Todd Grantham---13

Defensive Line---12
Rich Gannon---7(t)
Willie McGinest---7(t)
NFL Rules Committee---7(t)

Pro Bowling

Congratulations to Joshua Cribbs and Braylon Edwards, who were both chosen to represent the Browns in the 2008 NFL Pro Bowl!

The selection of Cribbs and Edwards breaks the Browns' well-publicized Pro Bowl drought since returning to the league in 1999. Before this season, only one Browns player (Jamir Miller, 2001) had made the trip to Hawaii since the Browns were reactivated.

Derek Anderson, Eric Steinbach, Joe Thomas, and Kellen Winslow were named first alternates for February's game, while Lawrence Vickers was named second alternate and Phil Dawson was designated alternate.

Much has been made of several Browns players being snubbed in the Pro Bowl selection process. While Joe Thomas and possibly Kellen Winslow were deserving of making the team, I urge fans to remember that the Pro Bowl means absolutely nothing.

I'm not one to get overly concerned about individual awards. Awards are nice, but in a team sport, they don't amount to much more than a

gold star on a chart. When fans get worked up about awards, it usually means that the team isn't winning, and this Browns team is certainly winning. Don't sweat the Pro Bowl, if the Ravens have losing seasons, but Jonathan Ogden beats out Joe Thomas for the Pro Bowl during the remainder of the decade, I can live with that.

Up Next: 12/23, At Cincinnati, Paul Brown Stadium, 1:00

This is it. Win and you're in. The Browns and Jaguars can sew up playoff births with victories this Sunday. For a fantastic breakdown of playoff scenarios, be sure to read Hiko's " The Browns Outsider & quot;" column this week.

Cincinnati has officially fallen from grace this season, but they're still a dangerous team, evidenced in the fact that they've split their last six games. The Bengals can still move the ball, especially through the air. Receivers Chad Johnson and TJ Houshmandzadeh have each recorded consecutive 1,000 yard seasons. Houshmandzadeh is the red zone threat with 11 touchdowns.

Also watch out for number three receiver Chris Henry, who recently returned from his eight-game suspension. At 6-foot-4 and 200 pounds, Henry is one of the most dangerous slot receivers in the league. Defenses often key on Johnson and Houshmandzadeh, which is when Henry is most dangerous.

The Browns are a little banged up, as Antwan Peek, Orpheus Roye, Robaire Smith, and Shaun Smith were all limited in practice this week.

Leigh Bodden did not practice this week due to a back problem.

The Browns should look to limit the Bengals' possessions by pounding Jamal Lewis early and often against a run defense that allows almost 120 yards per game on the ground. The Bengals have looked like a team just waiting to implode in recent weeks, so it's important for the Browns to build an early lead. If the Browns get ahead early, the Bengals will quit. But if the Browns let the Bengals hang around, they'll become more dangerous as the game progresses.

If you were looking for an early Chirstmas present, or perhaps more appropriately, a stocking stuffer, Steelers running back Willie Parker broke a bone in his lower right leg during Pittsburgh's victory over St. Louis on Thursday night. Parker''s season-ending injury comes just in time for the playoffs. Happy Festivus, Pittsburgh!

My Call: Browns 31, Bengals 24