Back with the first installment of an excellent series that he wrote last year for us, NicK Allburn checks in with his Heroes and Zeroes from the Browns week one loss. For those who are new to this column, we highlight five positive performances ("heroes," who are awarded gold stars), and five negative performances ("zeroes," who are awarded demerits) each week. It's kind of like those sticker charts that teachers use in kindergarten.

Most fans didn't expect the Browns to beat the Cowboys last Sunday. They didn't expect to see the Clevelanders get embarrassed, either. The final score of 28-10 isn't at all indicative of the total thrashing the Browns absorbed. Make no mistake: the Cowboys took the Brownies out behind the woodshed, and it's a beating the home club will not soon forget.

In hindsight, the exhibition season now seems like it was an excellent barometer of the team's progress. The loss served as further evidence that the linebackers and secondary are not up to snuff, that the first team offense needs more reps together in order to gel, and that the Browns aren't yet ready to break into the upper echelon of the league. If this team needed a wake up call, this was it.

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This Week's "Zeroes"

Five Demerits: Braylon Edwards

You shouldn't expect too much criticism to go Edwards' this season, but he deserves some serious heat for his performance last week. Edwards, who racked up 16 touchdowns and nearly 1,300 yards last season, was held to just 2 catches for 14 yards. That's not the way to start a bid for your second consecutive Pro Bowl appearance.

While that meager total almost made Braylon a complete non-factor, we must also consider that he was targeted nine times and had somewhere in the neighborhood of four drops. And the drops were at crucial junctures, short-circuiting some early drives that could have kept the Browns in the game. Allen Iverson was wrong - practice does matter, and Edwards hardly practiced at all in the last month or so, due to the deep cut on his foot that he suffered while running barefoot during a practice in early August.

Sure, Donte Stallworth stepped on Edwards' foot, but if Braylon wants to play the blame game he needs to look in the mirror. Running around barefoot when dozens of other guys are wearing cleats is an awful idea, especially when the bad mojo of Donte Stallworth, random injury generator, is in the house. The time that Edwards missed compromised the terrific chemistry that he had with Derek Anderson last season, and here's hoping that the pair can restore the magic before the Stillers roll into town.

Four Demerits: LeBron James

We all remember when LBJ wore his Bankees hat to The Jake during the playoffs last season. LeBron probably thought he was being cute, but all he managed to do was annoy a good number of the folks who pay to watch him play. But hey, the guy didn't grow up a Cleveland fan, and when you pull for the Bulls, Cowboys, and Yankees, you're hardly a "die hard," so most Cavs fans were willing to grant him a mulligan.

Then this happened . ARE YOU FREAKING KIDDING ME, LEBRON? Cowboys shirt? Check. Yankees hat? Check. On the Dallas sideline hugging Terrell Owens and Ms. Pacman? Check, check.

During the MLB playoffs last year, I was the first one to shrug off the Yankees cap and admit that I'd let it all go when LeBron's playing basketball again, but this was

just plain bush league. (And for the record, when the Cavs are playing again in two months I'll probably let it all go, again.)

Dude, wearing the gear is one thing, but hugging guys on the Dallas sideline? That's going too far. It's tough to read that as anything but blatant disrespect for the Browns, their fans, and the whole city, and that's not cool. LeBron, maybe you are a Cowboys fan, but wouldn't it bug you a little bit if Braylon Edwards and Joe Thomas showed up at The Q decked out in Celtics paraphernalia? It probably would. C'mon LBJ, the fans love you here, try to be a little smarter when you head out to support the local teams. You can start by, you know, actually supporting the local teams.

Three Demerits: Romeo Crennel

There isn't much to be said about Romeo that hasn't already been said, but I'll give it a shot. Why do Crennel's Browns consistently get their clocks cleaned by good teams? Browns fans are usually realistic, and we don't expect a win every Sunday. What we do expect is something that resembles preparation, and we don't expect to be totally embarrassed. This was Crennel's fourth straight kickoff Sunday at home, and his team has lost all four games, including three by double-digits. Somebody send coach Walrus the memo: whatever he's doing, it ain't workin'.

The Browns didn't look like a team that believed they could beat the Cowboys. Both Troy Aikman and Tony Grossi commented that the Browns seemed to be treating this game as a fifth exhibition game, a game that they didn't have any business winning. Not to get too deep into psycho-babble, but when you believe you're going to lose, more often than not...you lose. The coach should be held accountable for the attitude in that locker room, and he needs to get those guys thinking like winners. If the Browns go into this Sunday's clash with their rust belt rivals with the same outlook, expect a repeat performance of the Dallas game.

And about that field goal in the fourth quarter... With a little more than 10:00 left in the game and his team down 21 points, Romeo Crennel chose to kick a field goal from the Dallas 17-yard line instead of going the first down on 4th-and-3. This was tantamount to a white flag, and it prompted thousands of Browns fans to simultaneously throw their remote controls across their living rooms.

Seriously Romeo, what were you thinking? Does 28-10 really look that much

different than 28-7? Did you have money on both teams going over 35? I could understand the call if the Browns had a rookie kicker or long snapper and wanted to get those guys some work, but Pontbriand and Dawson are vets. The word on the street is that owner Randy Lerner flipped out when Romeo elected to kick, and you can't blame him. When later asked about the field goal, Crennel said he'd do it all over again. That, Browns fans, is troubling.

Two Demerits: Donte Stallworth

Stallworth was a late scratch after "tweaking" his groin in warm ups. There is a rumor circulating that Stallworth was actually hurt on Saturday, but the Browns waited a day to disclose the injury to force the Cowboys to game plan for him. Regardless, Stallworth is now on the injury report with a quadriceps problem, and he didn't practice on Wednesday. It's unclear whether or not Stallworth will make his Browns debut this week against the Steelers.

This is exactly why the Stallworth signing made me nervous, especially given the Browns' lack of quality depth at wide receiver. If there was an NFL player who's on the injury report more than Larry Hughes, this might be the guy. Stallworth has only missed 12 games in his 6 year career, but he's one of those guys that always seems to be injured, and always leaves you guessing as to whether or not he'll play. If last week is any indication, the Browns really need him on the field to direct some of the defense's attention away from Braylon Edwards.

One Demerit: Derek Anderson

This loss wasn't Derek Anderson's fault, not even close. But Anderson turned his excellent start into a very mediocre overall showing, once again struggling with the short passes that plagued him last season. DA started 7-for-9, but finished just 11-of-24 for 114 yards.

Anderson went almost 30 minutes without a completion. As I mentioned above, part of that was Braylon Edwards' is fault, but going nearly two quarters without a complete pass just isn't getting it done. DA also developed some happy feet in the second half, which is strange for a guy who isn't particularly fleet of foot. He should not make that a habit. I still think that Anderson can have a big year, and that he might be the Browns' long-term solution at quarterback, but this game was clearly not the start he envisioned for the '08 season.

This Week's "Heroes"

Five Gold Stars: Jamal Lewis

What a difference a year makes. Before last season Jamal Lewis looked like a worn out retread, and now he looks like a stud. And what a difference new clothes can make. Lewis was once one of the most hated athletes in Cleveland, and now he's a fan favorite. Jamal is an easy guy to root for; he's a hard worker, he leads by example, he plays with a ton of heart, and many in the national media are still counting him out by assuming that he's simply too old to be effective. As skeptical as I was about Lewis last summer, I'm now one of his biggest fans.

Lewis was one of the few Browns who showed up with the intention of playing football last week, and he picked up 62 yards on just 13 carries against a tough Dallas defense. That included an inspired 24-yard run on the final play of the third quarter. While most of the Browns were thinking about the showers, Lewis was concentrating on giving the Cowboys' defenders a few more bruises to wake up to on Monday morning. Jamal, you've earned my respect, and I look forward to another season of watching you bulldoze defenders.

Four Gold Stars: Shaun Rogers

Although the Browns had trouble pressuring the quarterback, it wasn't Shaun Rogers' fault. Unlike Corey Williams, Rogers looked as good as advertised, giving multiple Cowboys' linemen problems and occasionally harassing Tony Romo. If Rogers can maintain a clean bill of health, I expect him to have a big year. As bad as the defense looked, it appears that the Browns may have finally found that elusive

nose tackle who will allow them to run the 3-4 defense properly. Now, about those linebackers...

Three Gold Stars: Kellen Winslow

It's no surprise that Kellen Winslow came to play on Sunday, he always does. Before the ensuing rout, Winslow was putting together a nice game, hauling in four of his five catches during the Browns' first two drives, and he scored the Browns' lone touchdown. Winslow was targeted just six times, but given his effectiveness in the opener and the fact that Donte Stallworth may once again be on the sidelines, expect Derek Anderson to look for Winslow much more against the Steelers this week.

Two Gold Stars: Offensive Line

The banged up line performed admirably against a stiff Dallas pass rush, allowing only one sack If you only looked at the box score, you might guess that because the Browns only put up 10 points, the line struggled. That wasn't the case.

Thomas, Steinbach, and company managed to keep Derek Anderson upright for most of the game, and they were also able to open up some holes for Jamal Lewis. The ineffectiveness of Braylon Edwards, the defense, and to some degree, Derek Anderson were what lost this game, not the line's play. Hopefully Ryan Tucker and Rex Hadnot can return soon, because Seth McKinney did struggle at times. McKinney is an adequate starter, but the Browns ideally want him to be their sixth or seventh lineman.

One Gold Star: Mel Tucker

Considering how poorly the defense played, this may seem like an odd choice. However, Tucker's halftime adjustments were impressive, and Tucker's predecessor, Todd Grantham, routinely had problems making adjustments.

During the first half the Browns were crowding the line of scrimmage when they were blitzing, and the Cowboys were matching up effectively enough to nullify the pass rush even when the Browns blitzed with six or seven guys. In the second half, Tucker had the linebackers and Dbs back off the line, which served two purposes. One, the Browns didn't telegraph their blitzes as much, and two, the Cowboys were unable to successfully match up with the Browns' blitzers, leading to more pressure on Romo. The strategy appeared to be somewhat successful, at least until the Cleveland defense was completely gassed as a result of the offense's impotence. It will be interesting to see how Tucker's

schemes develop during the remainder of the season.

Up Next: Pittsburgh, 8:15, Cleveland Browns Stadium

Things aren't getting any easier, and on Sunday night we get the main event. Browns, Steelers, and close to 100,000 fans down town with a seething for all things black and gold. (Did I say gold? I meant "urine yellow.")

Both Sean Jones and Brodney Pool will be sitting this one out, which means that Mike Adams and Nick Sorenson will be starting. Yikes. But honestly, this feels like a game that the Browns will have a good chance to win. The Browns are still a much better team at home than on the road, and I look for them to be highly motivated after last week's debacle. These guys are going to be angry, they're going to want redemption, and seeing the boys from Pittsburgh on the opposite sideline will simply up the ante.

Ben Roethlisberger is expected to play even though he has a sore shoulder, but hopefully that can put the scent of blood in the water for the Browns' defense. Also, the Steelers are a very mortal 6-10 away from ketchup field during the last two seasons. So the Browns have

that going for them, which is nice.

Edwards and Winslow need to have big games for the Browns. The defense needs to step up and at least slow down the Steelers, starting with former Buckeye Santonio Holmes, who has gouged them in the past. And for the love of all things holy, don't let Roethlisberger roll out to his right! This is going to be a high scoring affair, but I'm not ready to bury the Browns just yet.

Prediction: Browns 30, Steelers 27