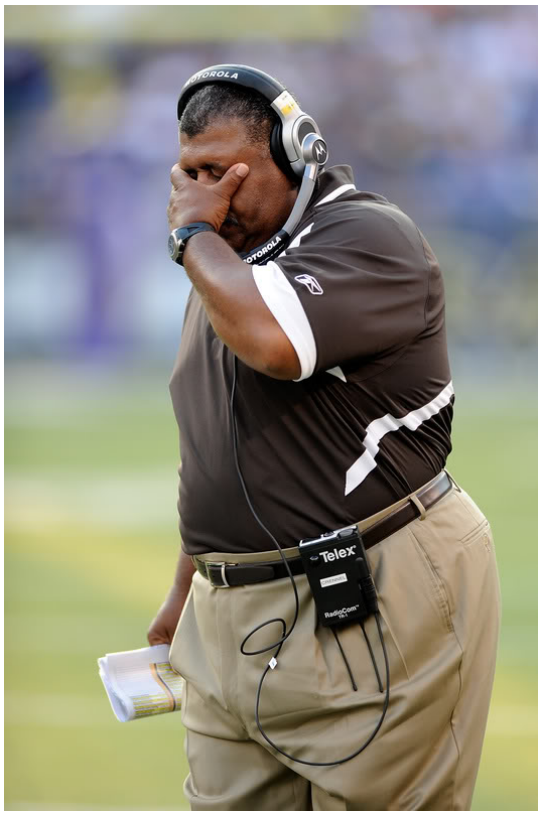
Last weekend's loss to the Ravens was a vintage "when it rains, it pours" scenario. Reeling after a deflating loss to the rival Steelers, the Browns handed a win to another divisional foe and essentially ended their bleak playoff aspirations. As he does after every game for us, Nick Allburn gives us his heroes and zeroes from last week's contest.



Last weekend's loss to the Ravens was a vintage "when it rains, it pours" scenario. Reeling after a deflating loss to the rival Steelers, the Browns handed a win to another divisional foe and essentially ended their bleak playoff aspirations. With 13 games to play and a schedule that doesn't offer any breaks, the Browns' playoff drought will now extend to six seasons, and I'll die a little more inside.

This Week's Zeroes

Five Demerits: Derek Anderson

This is exactly what Browns fans were afraid of; that Derek Anderson was a mirage, and that when faced with any kind of pressure, he would implode. It's why many - myself included - advocated trading Anderson over the winter while his stock was high. Unless something drastically changes, if the Browns look to move Anderson this off-season they will receive next to nothing. Heck, Anderson's size 15 shoes have higher trade value than Anderson himself at this

point.

Dating back to last season, Anderson has thrown just nine touchdowns against 13 interceptions in his last 8 games. DA looks gun-shy, and if he's afraid to take shots down the field, then he's negating his greatest strength. Anderson isn't going through reads and he's locking onto one receiver early, making it easy for the defense to figure out where he's going with the ball, and it's why these routes keep getting jumped.

After that last interception DA simply sulked alone on the sideline like the dorky kid with braces at a middle school dance who's afraid to talk to the girls (*cough*, not speaking from personal experience or anything). That kind of attitude isn't what you need from a team captain. Leadership isn't exactly DA's strong suit.

Anderson has a chance to save face and keep his job (Crennel announced he would start) against a lousy Cincinnati defense this week, but I think it's time for us to get a look at Brady Quinn. Anderson has been given more than a fair look, and with the playoffs out of the picture the Browns need to start evaluating their quarterback position for 2009.

Four Demerits: Braylon Edwards

Edwards just hasn't looked the same since he injured his foot. Part of his struggles can be linked to Anderson's, but Edwards clearly hasn't found his rhythm yet. As long as Donté Stallworth is sidelined, things aren't going to get any easier for Braylon, as he'll continue to be the focal point of opposing teams' secondaries.

Unfortunately, Stallworth's injury means that the Browns need a competent Edwards more than ever. Without Edwards wreaking havoc in the secondary, the only receiver that opponents really have to account for is Kellen Winslow. Part of me wonders if Edwards' performance would be enhanced if the Browns made the switch to Brady Quinn, but given Romeo Crennel's tendency to ride sinking ships in the past (read: Carthon, Maurice), it seems unlikely that we'll see the Mighty Quinn any time soon.

Edwards has also been called for a slew of stupid penalties in the first three games. No receiver should ever be called for a penalty like a false start or a block in the back, but Edwards' boneheaded errors keep short-circuiting Cleveland

drives. Supposedly Edwards could be benched this week, which will probably just mean he won't be in the starting lineup. Regardless, Romeo Crennel either has to find a way to get Edwards to focus, or Edwards needs to see less of the field, because there are other receivers on the team who can put up insignificant numbers but can do so penalty-free.

Three Demerits: Romeo Crennel

I feel like this column is starting to beat a dead horse; bashing Anderson, Crennel, and Edwards week in and week out. If that's the case, then I apologize, but they are the most culpable for the team's early struggles.

Ah, Romeo, what are we going to do with you? (Well, Phil's going to fire you at the end of the season, for one.) The lack of passion, lack of preparation, and absence of a noticeable game plan have become overlying themes of Crennel's tenure, and this latest disappointment only reinforced those maxims.

Crennel announced midweek that Derek Anderson will remain the starter, and one can't help but wonder what DA will have to do to get benched. Some form of manslaughter, perhaps? Crennel is bypassing a major opportunity to give the fan base some hope - and maybe give himself some breathing room - by leaving Brady Quinn on the bench.

Two Demerits: Steve Beuerlein

Beuerlein must have some sort of running bet with Rich Gannon on who can use the most clichés during a broadcast. So far, I'd imagine the competition's pretty close. Nobody expects the color commentator for a lousy game to be Howard Cosell, but c'mon Steve, how about a little effort?

Every other sentence out of Beuerlein's mouth began with "in the NFL," and his analysis wouldn't have cut the mustard on a closed circuit high school broadcast, let alone at the professional level. I know CBS and FOX like to put former players in the booth to add some on-field perspective, but here's a newsflash: just because a guy was a quarterback doesn''t mean he's all that bright. Hell, did you ever listen to the nonsense that Sean Salisbury used to spew? Watching an ugly loss is bad enough, but listening to Beuerlein's mindless drivel for three hours is enough to make me want to jump out of a plane sans parachute.

One Demerit: Mel Tucker

For the second consecutive week the defense played alright, but we should have seen a much more complex and confusing scheme from Mel Tucker considering that the Ravens were starting rookie Joe Flacco. Tons of movement and lots of blitzes from unexpected places; that's what I thought we'd see. But even though the Browns intercepted two Flacco passes in the first half, they showed him a pretty basic package. We haven't seen enough of Tucker to pass judgment on him, and maybe we never will. After all, he may prove to be as much of a lame duck as Crennel.

This Week's Heroes

Five Gold Stars: Jamal Lewis

Lewis criticized the coaching staff for not committing to the running game, and rightfully so. In spite of some quality running by Lewis against Dallas and Baltimore, the Browns only got him 13 carries and 12 carries, respectively.

Against both Baltimore and Dallas, Lewis averaged nearly five yards per carry, and with Derek Anderson struggling to get anything going, the Browns need to ride Lewis now more than ever. The Bengals have been gouged by the running game this year, allowing 229 yards against the Ravens and 177 yards against the Titans. If the Browns are smart, they'd look to pound Lewis and Jerome Harrison early and often against their interstate rival.

Four Gold Stars: Ed Hochuli

Referee Ed Hochuli didn't do anything extraordinary last Sunday, and by all accounts he called a good game. What impressed me about Hochuli was the way he reacted to his huge blown call in the Denver/San Diego game two weeks ago.

It's awfully tough for someone in a position of authority to admit a mistake, just ask any MLB umpire. But Hochuli essentially admitted he screwed up after they reviewed the call. Furthermore, Hochuli received scads of angry email from Chargers fans who felt he'd stolen the game from them. Instead of responding angrily (the wrong move) or simply

ignoring the emails (what you'd expect), Hochuli chose to respond and basically issue the fans a *mea culpa*.

Hochuli sent the following response to several emailers, "Affecting the outcome of a game is a devastating feeling. Officials strive for perfection - I failed miserably." That's a stand up guy, and he's got my respect.

Although it was a bad call, it wasn't really Hochuli's fault. Replay is in place to overturn bad calls like this, but because Hochuli had blown the whistle to indicate a dead ball, the play could not be reviewed. In this case Hochuli didn't let the NFL down, the NFL let him down.

Three Gold Stars: Jerome Harrison

Harrison got just one touch on Sunday, but he made the most of it, scoring the Browns' lone touchdown on a 19-yard screen pass. I said it last week, and I'll say it again: it's totally inexcusable that the Browns aren't at least getting Harrison a half dozen touches or so each week.

Harrison has made a pretty strong case for more playing time. After delivering yet another solid preseason, Harrison may have the team's two most exciting plays of the year under his belt. Even more impressive is the fact that he's made those two plays on just three total touches. I don't care if he can block worth a lick or not (and with how little he plays, does anyone really know?), the Browns have to find a way to get Jerome Harrison on the field.

Two Gold Stars: Lawrence Vickers

Lawrence Vickers remains one of the Browns' unsung heroes, and one of the Phil Savage's biggest day two draft successes. A sixth round choice in 2006, Vickers is one of the better fullbacks in the league; a solid blocker who can hold his own either running the ball or catching a

pass out of the backfield.

Vickers had a notable 16-yard reception to move the chains against Baltimore, and he moves very well for a 250-pound back whose primary responsibility is blocking. Especially after watching Terrelle Smith try to catch the ball for a few years, I wouldn't mind seeing Vickers snag a handful of receptions every game.

One Gold Star: Joshua Cribbs

Speaking of people who need to see the ball more, weren't we promised five or six trick plays for Josh Cribbs every game, a la Antwaan Randle El? Maybe Rob Chudzinski is being cautious with Cribbs, who's still recovering from that high ankle sprain, but considering how stagnant the offense has looked, a few trick plays would be a welcome respite from the Derek Anderson laser beam incompletion.

Cribbs still appears to be less than 100 percent on kickoff returns, but he looked more like a receiver on Sunday than he ever has before. One long second half incompletion stands out, as Cribbs had torched his defender but Derek Anderson overthrew him. Some have been critical of Cribbs' route-running, but it's easy to forget that this guy was playing quarterback at Kent State not too long ago. Maybe the light is starting to come on for JC. With Donté Stallworth out until God knows when and Braylon Edwards doing some soul searching, any contribution from Cribbs would be a big plus for the offense.

Up Next: At Cincinnati, Paul Browns Stadium, 1:00

Welcome to the battle for the 2008 AFC North cellar. As bad as the Browns have looked, the Bengals have given them a run for their money. The Bengals have had trouble protecting Carson Palmer, Chad

Johnson has averaged less than 30 yards per game, and Chris Perry remains their starting running back. Yeah, it's bad.

With Houshmanzadeh and Johnson out there the Bengals will have some passing success against the Browns; they always do. The question is whether or not Derek Anderson can get his head screwed on straight.

Cinannati is bad enough defensively that I"m banking on Derek Anderson playing just well enough that Romeo Crennel won"t have to take his job away, further pissing off and alienating the fan base. Look for the Browns to run the football early and often to take pressure off of Anderson. Thirty-plus carries for the Browns would not be at all surprising. I can't believe I'm doing this, but I'm picking the Browns to win again. We have to be better than the Bengals, right?

The Browns will limp into the bye week at 1-3.

Prediction: Browns 23, Bengals 20