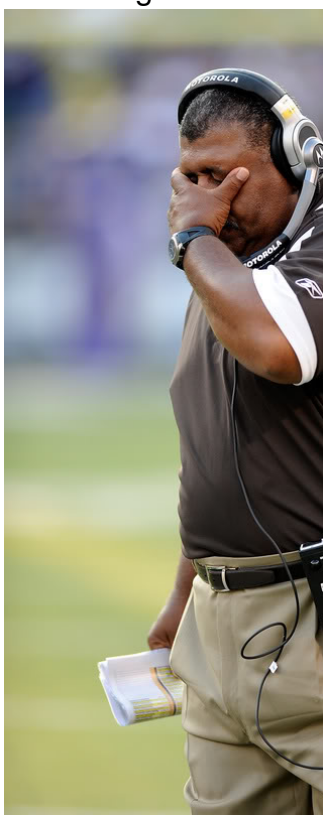
The Browns won their first game, but it didn't feel that way. In fact, it was as anticlimactic and unsatisfying a win as I can remember. Perhaps it was because it came against the hapless Bengals, but it's more likely due to the fact that resident anchors Derek Anderson and Romeo Crennel did just enough to save their jobs, merely delaying the inevitable. Nick checks in again this week to give us his Heroes & Zeroes from the Browns win over the Bungles.



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In a way, winning this year may be bad for the Browns in the long run - if it means more of the DA and Romeo show, that is. It's always nice to win, even during a season that was essentially over after just three weeks. But unless Crennel miraculously develops a trait that resembles competency or we get a look at Brady Quinn, it's going to be tough to mask that sinking feeling; the realization that this is basically a lost year.

This Week's Heroes

Five Gold Stars: Jamal Lewis

A week after publicly criticizing the team's play calling, Lewis got just what he wanted: more carries. Lewis piled up 79 yards on 25 carries and found the end zone once. Those aren't staggering numbers, but in a game with less than 500 yards of total offense, they got the job done.

Lewis came out of the gate with a flourish, but the Bengals were able to slow him down once they figured out that Rob Chudzinski was calling plays with Derek Anderson's delicate psyche in mind. We'll get to that later. When Cincinnati discovered that the Browns were trying to throw as little as possible, they plugged up the middle to stop Lewis. They never truly stopped Eight Ball Jamal, but they slowed him down just enough to keep the game close the entire time.

I'll admit that I was worried we'd see a decrease in effort from Lewis this season on account of that new contract he signed over the winter. It's just human nature; you tend to work harder when your livelihood is on the line. But to his credit, J-Lew has been one of the few Browns who has given consistent effort and delivered consistent performance all year long.

Four Gold Stars: Mike Adams

It was a huge blow when Sean Jones was sidelined, and although Mike Adams doesn't have Jones' talent, he's held his own as a starter. Adams had a key interception in the second quarter which stalled a Cincinnati drive in Browns' territory.

When Adams made the team last year, most, myself included, responded with a mere shoulder shrug. "Great, a scrub safety who couldn't hang on with the 'Niners." But Adams has been a big contributor, becoming one of the Browns' best special teams players and now a solid reserve who can play corner or safety. He's never going to be a star in the league, or even a consistent starter, but Adams

is an example of the type of key depth player that the Browns can never seem to find. Laugh if you want, but the Browns could use plenty more Mike Adamses.

Three Gold Stars: Eric Wright

EZ-E was burned in the exhibition season, and burned often. There was just as much reason to worry about Wright as there was to worry about the secondary's depth in general. But to his credit, Wright really seems to be coming on, not unlike his performance towards the end of last season.

He may not be what he once was, but Chad Johnson is still a tough cover. By and large, Wright kept Johnson under wraps, holding him to three catches for 28 yards and a touchdown. It's also worth noting that the touchdown was the result of a perfectly thrown ball and was no fault of Wright's.

Wright accounted for one of the three Cleveland interceptions, even if he did fumble the ball back to the Bengals while running it back. In spite of the fumble, Wright deserves credit for being patient and waiting for blockers during the return, something defensive backs frequently forget to do. And although he did fumble, I'll give him credit for trying to make a play, God knows the offense wasn't helping him out in that department.

Two Gold Stars: Alex Hall

Alex Hall started opposite Kamerion Wimbley this week, and it's about time. I don't know about you, but I was getting tired of timing Willie McGinest's sideline to sideline sprints with a sun dial. Hall notched his first sack in the second half of Sunday's game, giving him one more sack than McGinest has recorded all year.

At 6-5 and 250 pounds, Hall has ideal size to play outside linebacker in

the 3-4 scheme. With a realistic shot at the playoffs solidly in the rear view mirror, the remainder of the season will largely be about developing and evaluating players like Hall. Linebacker has been a murky position for the Browns for years, and they need to decide whether guys like Hall, D'Qwell Jackson, and Wimbley can cut the mustard, or whether they need to rebuild that position from the ground up.

One Gold Star: Braylon Edwards

Once again, Edwards didn't make the impact that he needs to if the Brown are going to contend. But Edwards took some baby steps towards regaining his old form when he scored his first touchdown of the season against the Bengals. I'm not sure how I feel about the air guitar in the end zone, considering that Edwards has been lousy thus far an the Browns are just 1-3, but I'm willing to live with it if goofy celebrations can motivate Braylon to score more frequently.

Edwards also got into it on the sidelines with Derek Anderson, and rightfully so. Anderson continued his Suckfest '08 tour in the Queen City, and if I were Edwards I'd be frustrated too, especially with a capable backup QB sitting on the bench. Jamal Lewis acted quickly to back up Anderson, who looked like he was ready to dig a hole in the park and sit in it a la "Fragile" Frankie Merman . Dissent isn't always a bad thing when the wrong quarterback is on the field.

This Week's Zeroes

Five Demerits: Romeo Crennel

Romeo Crennel is an interesting specimen when you think about it. He's clearly inherited Bill Belichick's massive ego, because he doesn't like to have his choices questioned. This field goal kicking is getting

ridiculous, and retaining Derek Anderson as the starting quarterback not only stinks of pride - it's downright lunacy.

One thing Crennel clearly didn't inherit from the Hoody is a gut or a set of stones. Once again Crennel had a chance to go for a big score, but instead kicked a field goal on fourth-and-three during the Browns' opening drive. The Browns had the ball at the Bengals' seven, and Cincinnati had just gone three-and-out. What was Crennel afraid of? This is another prime example of the message he sends to the team and the fans: consistently playing conservative and losing close is alright with him.

Then Romeo let almost a minute roll off the clock at the end of the first half instead of calling timeout to give the Browns another possession. Forty-five seconds is more than enough time to work the sidelines and play for a late field goal. Nope, Romeo Crennel plays football not to lose.

But then Crennel used the ace up his sleeve, he spent that timeout to ice Cincinnati kicker Shayne Graham. Brilliant! That's the last thing anyone expected! Honestly, how played out is icing the kicker at this point? Number one, there's hardly pressure at the end of the first half in a game betweentwo winless teams. Number two, "icing" is done so much nowadays that it's probably more surprising to the kicker when that timeout isn't called. Good grief.

Four Demerits: Phil Savage

"Despite [Crennel screwing up and going for FG's] and Anderson's struggles in the first four games, Savage said the organization decided to stay the course. He said that in the meetings he was in, there was never any serious discussion about switching quarterbacks." -Phil Savage

Um...really, Phil? There was never any serious discussion? Your team

was 0-3, and your quarterback's rating was (and still is) lower than your head coach's pants size. If you weren't seriously considering a switch, then you weren't doing your job. Heck, if you're not *still* seriously considering a switch, you're not doing your job.

Whether Savage picks Derek Anderson or Brady Quinn at the end of the season, that choice will likely be the most crucial of Savage's career. How can the Browns adequately evaluate Quinn if he continues to be DA's designated clipboard caddy?

Three Demerits: Derek Anderson

If one person says, "Hey, Anderson won the game," you have my permission to slug them. Like Vince Young with the Titans ("he just wins games"), Anderson didn't win the game, the Browns won *in spite* of Derek Anderson. Why do we need to see more of this? I'm tired of seeing the ball thrown the same exact way whether it's going five yards or 50. I'm tired of nonexistent reads and seeing bad throws forced into coverage. I'm tired of watching inferior quarterback play when there's a guy who deserves a shot on the bench.

At some point, you've got to wonder what Anderson would have to do to get benched. How many interceptions would it take? Three? Four? Would Anderson have to commit some form of manslaughter?

Anderson came on like gangbusters early last season, but the league adjusted to him and he can't seem to counter punch. That's because Derek Anderson isn't bright enough to start at the NFL level, plain and simple. It's easy to fall in love with that rocket arm, but if a guy doesn't have it between the ears, he's not going to stick as a professional starter. Derek Anderson is one of those guys.

Two Demerits: Rob Chudzinski

Chud had a ton of praise sent his way last season, and I wonder how much different his play calling has really been this year. Is it possible that he's called plays similarly, but they just haven't worked? It's like a pitcher in baseball; if grooves one on the outside corner and the batter takes it for strike three, it's a perfect pitch. If the pitcher throws that same pitch and the batter takes him deep, it was a lousy pitch.

But I think it's fair to say that we've seen far less creativity from Chudzinski this season. Where are all of those Josh Cribbs gadget plays we heard about? Why can't Jerome Harrison see any steady time in the backfield? And why does it seem like 75 percent of Jamal Lewis' runs go straight up the gut. C'mon Chud, mix in a pitch, a run off tackle, any kind of a wrinkle. That's a big reason that Cincinnati was able to slow Lewis down; they knew that when he got the ball he was going to be running right down the pipe.

The other reason the Bengals slowed Lewis down was that Chudzinski's play calling was clearly designed to prevent Derek Anderson from having to make a play. The Browns had the ball inside the Cincinnati 10-yard line on their opening drive and ran the football all three times. *ALL THREE TIMES!* That's right, they didn't even attempt to pass, even though they have two Pro Bowl receivers who are a nightmare match up for any defensive back or linebacker.

That's weak, and if that's the kind of play calling that's in our future, maybe Chud needs to head towards the exit along with Romeo Crennel. Honestly, if you're calling plays just so as not to risk rattling your quarterback, you need to find another quarterback, or pass the play book to somebody else, because that isn't football.

One Demerit: Marvin Lewis

Do you remember when this guy was the next big thing? Lewis seemed to have turned around a rudderless franchise and had them poised to

become one of the NFL's elite teams. My, how the mighty have fallen.

The Bengals will be making a bid for a top five draft pick and Lewis may be headed for the unemployment line. It isn't all his fault. The Bengals don't have terrific personnel, though it doesn't help when half of the guys they draft consistently end up taking mug shots.

Lewis may have cost his team a shot at tying the game late by blowing all of their timeouts early in the second half, including a very questionable coach's challenge. Lewis challenged a 17-yard Derek Anderson completion to Syndric Steptoe that was clearly a legal catch, essentially giving away a timeout. Not only was Steptoe's catch clearly good, it wasn't a particularly crucial play.

Up Next: Monday, 10/13, New York Giants, Cleveland Browns Stadium, 8:30

This will be the Browns' first Monday night appearance since Butch Davis was at the helm, and my guess is that, sadly, it's going to make fans yearn for the Davis era. The Giants thrashed the Browns in the exhibition season, and there's no real reason to think that the undefeated Giants won't do the same this time around.

Whether it's Derek Anderson or Brady Quinn (it will be Anderson), the Browns aren't winning this football game. New York has a solid, balanced offense, which is paired with one of the league's best defenses. Prepare to be embarrassed on national television.

Prediction: Giants 30, Browns 10