For the second time in a week, the Cleveland Browns wasted a second half lead and lost to a very iffy and injury-riddled Denver Broncos team Thursday night. The loss obscured a good debut by Brady Quinn as the Browns' new starting quarterback. But Quinn couldn't overcome a disastrous second half by Kellen Winslow and a defense that was shredded by Broncos' quarterback Jay Cutler. As a result the Browns now stand at 3-6 and will have to fight just to get to respectability in a seaon that once promised so much more. Gary chronicles the game in his latest.

For the second time in the last four days, the Cleveland Browns tried to resuscitate a season that has been in need of life support since September. And for the second time in the last four days, the Browns did all they could to kill the patient instead, again blowing a second half lead on their way to losing to a very iffy Denver Broncos team, 34-30 Thursday night.

The final blow of the game and likely the season came courtesy of Broncos quarterback Jay Cutler, who took a machete to the Cleveland secondary in the second half on his way to passing for a career high 447 yards. The coroner's report will show that it was Cutler's 11-yard touchdown pass to Brandon Marshall with 1:14 that officially flat lined the Browns.

But it was al that had led up to that moment that really did the damage.

The Browns' did have one final shot but it ended moments later when Brady Quinn's pass on 4th and 1 sailed right through the hands of Kellen Winslow.

It was a disastrous end to a disastrous half for Winslow that was a contributing

factor, at least, toward sending the Browns to their second straight loss and third in four games.

A pass interference call on Winslow on a ball thrown to Braylon Edwards helped kill one drive and a fumble by Winslow after getting a first down on the next drive lead to a Broncos touchdown that ultimately helped set the stage for the Broncos' comeback.

But Winslow was hardly the primary reason the Browns lost the game. That dubious honor goes to a defense that barely pressured Cutler the entire night, allowing him all the time he needed to spread the ball around to six different receivers.

The lack of pressure essentially exposed a weak secondary, and particularly an overmatched Brandon McDonald, who was burned for two touchdowns in the second half, a 93-yard Cutler to wide receiver Eddie Royal and the final touchdown to Marshall.

Perhaps most frustrating about the play of the defense was the fact that it knew what was coming on virtually every play and still couldn't do anything about it. The Broncos arrived in Cleveland with virtually no running game because of injuries and halfway through the second quarter literally had no healthy tailback on its active roster when fourth string tailback Ryan Torain went down.

Apparently that was a satisfactory game plan as it allowed Cutler to embarrass a defense that had been carrying the team until recently as he compelted 24 of 42 passes for three touchdowns.

Meanwhile, the defensive collapse obscured a good debut by Brady Quinn as a legitimate NFL starting quarterback. Looking confident and capable throughout, Quinn engineered a critical fourth quarter drive that temporarily gave Cleveland a 30-27 lead with just under five minutes to play. But the defense was essentially a chew toy for Cutler and as a result, the Browns' sixth loss of the season was firmly secured.

On the night, Quinn was 23-35 for 239 yards and two touchdowns, both to Winslow. Indeed, until it turned on him, Winslow too was having a strong night. He was Quinn's favorite target, catching 11 passes for 111 yards. But it was the interference call, the fumble and the final drop that fans will remember most, assuming they can get the image of the defense out of their heads.

For the first half anyway the Browns played like a team that seemed to thrive on turmoil. Just as they did two weeks ago against Jacksonville, the Browns used controversy, this time the controversy that grew out of the benching of quarterback Derek Anderson, to their advantage and had a 10-point half time lead that they stretched to 13 points early in the third quarter.

But the Broncos, despite a shortage of healthy bodies, were always able to stay within striking distance because of Cutler. That much was clear from outset.

On the Broncos' first play from scrimmage, he hit tight end Tony Sheffler for 39 yards.

Though that drive went for naught when kicker Matt Prater missed a

38-yard field goal a few plays later, it was certainly a precursor of what was to come.

On the Broncos' next series, they grabbled the early lead as Cutler picked apart the secondary, moving 86 yards in 9 plays, including an 18-yard pass to Royal that took the ball to the Browns' 1-yard line. Fro m there, Torain hurdled over the pile at the goal line for the touchdown.

The Browns quickly answered and answered and answered again and seemed well in control doing it. Josh Cribbs, fortifying his bid for a second straight Pro Bowl, took the Prater kick back to the Browns 41-yard line. Quinn then hit Donte Stallworth on a short out pattern that Stallworth turned into an 18-yard game.

It was the kind of short touch pass that has bedeviled Anderson, all season.

From there, Jamal Lewis took over, running first for 8 yards and then breaking loose on a 29-yard run, the Browns' longest run from scrimmage this season.

On the night, Lewis had 60 yards on 19 carries.

Then, on third and goal from the five, Quinn hit tight end Kellen Winslow with a bullet in the back of the end zone.

The Phil Dawson extra point then knotted the game at 7-7.

Following a Denver punt, the Browns added to their lead thanks to a 24-yard Dawson field goal. It was a drive that featured Jerome

Harrison ripping off one long run after another against the Broncos' defense. In all, Harrison had 44 yards on 4 carries on that drive. Oddly, Harrison had only one other carry the rest of the night.

Meanwhile, Cutler kept on slinging. After a holding penalty pushed the ball back to the Broncos' 15-yard line, Cutler tried to hit Marshall breaking long but instead hit Brodney Pool, who took the interception back to the Broncos' 20-yard line. Three plays later, Quinn hit Winslow at the Broncos' 5-yard line. Winslow was able to shake the tackle of Marquand Manuel on his way to the 16-yard touchdown, his second of the game, to help give the Browns a 17-7 lead with the second quarter barely four minutes old.

After a Prater 38-yard field goal brought the Broncos back to within 7, Cleveland answered with a Dawson 52-yard field goal to once again push the lead to 10, giving the Browns a 20-10 half time lead.

The Browns kept the pressure on the Broncos in the second half with a 10 play 54-yard drive to open the second half. But Quinn and Winslow couldn't quite connect twice in the red zone and the Browns settled for a 33-yard Dawson field goal.
Cutler and the Broncos answered on their opening drive with a field goal of their own, a 30-yarder by Prater. It seemed harmless at the time but as it turned out, the Broncos were just getting warmed up.

The Browns actually had a chance to perhaps put the game out of

reach for good on their next drive. In the process of putting together the kind of drive that tends to break the backs of a defense, Quinn first and then Lewis converted crucial third and fourth down plays.

But on 3rd and 6 from the Denver 41, Quinn hit Edwards for 15 yards, but the play was nullified because of the Winslow interference penalty.

The Browns couldn't convert on 3rd and 16 and were forced to punt.

What doesn't kill you apparently makes you stronger as Cutler hit Royal sprinting down the left side line for what turned out to be a 93-yard touchdown play. There was either a blown assignment or Royal just badly beat McDonald.

Either way, a game that the Browns were dominating had suddenly turned shaky with the Browns clinging to a 23-20.

And it seemed like it would only be shaky for as long as it took Prater to kick the ball to Cribbs. Fielding the ball at the 5-yard line, Cribbs nearly broke it for a touchdown before being dragged down at the 50-yard line.

But after catching a key 3rd

down pass from Quinn for a first down, Winslow fumbled the ball and Denver recovered, giving the Broncos the ball at their own 38-yard line with a chance to take the lead, which predictably is what happened.

The colossal mess that the game eventually devolved into for the Browns was typified on that Broncos drive. Throwing on virtually every down and with almost no pass rush to challenge him, Cutler had no problem finding a variety of receivers against a defensive secondary that was neither covering nor tackling well. Th e epitome came on Cutler's 27-yard touchdown pass to tight end Daniel Graham who essentially walked the final 10 yards into the end zone as both Mike Adams and D'Qwell Jackson whiffed on tackles.

It didn't help either that McDonald, fresh off giving up the long touchdown to Royal, had a chance to make amends in that drive but dropped what should have been his second interception of the game that allowed the Broncos drive to continue.

After the Quinn-engineered touchdown gave the Browns back the lead, the defense had a chance to shut the door

again but couldn't. On the Broncos' final drive, they faced a 4th and 1 from their own 45-yard line. After being forced to call a timeout in order to get the right personnel in, Cutler gave the ball to fullback Peyton Hills.

Sean Jones had Hills stopped behind the line of scrimmage but couldn't finish the tackle as Hills dove forward for the first down.

From there, Cutler continued to slice the defense as finely as a ginsu knife slices a tomato, helping his own cause with an18-yard run that took the ball to the Browns' 11-yard line. From there he put the knife to, who else, McDonald who couldn't stay with Marshall. The easy touchdown, along with the Prater extra point, gave the Broncos the 34-30 lead and the game.

With two games completed in just four days, the Browns now have 11 days off. They'll need it, but not to find a quarterback but to find a defensive

lineman who can pressure a quarterback or a cornerback that can cover.

Is that DeAngelo Hall's phone I just heard ringing?

More than likely, the Browns will just squander the time off instead in favor of some sort of self-inflicted controversy. But as we know now, not even turmoil can rally this team anymore. With the loss and the way it happened, the Browns have officially run out of excuses. It's time to unplug the monitor.