Bittersweet is probably the best word to describe the Browns' loss to the Broncos last week. Although the loss euthanized the Browns' playoff hopes, which had previously been living a bleak existence on life support, hopefully it marked the beginning of the Brady Quinn era. As he does each week, Nick Allburn looks back at last week's game, giving us his Heroes & Zeroes from the loss to the Broncos.

Bittersweet is probably the best word to describe the Browns' loss to the Broncos last week. Although the loss euthanized the Browns' playoff hopes, which had previously been living a bleak existence on life support, hopefully it marked the beginning of the Brady Quinn era. With the playoffs out of the picture, and Romeo Crennel's fate likely decided (Caesar would give him the thumbs down), the rest of this season is about evaluating Quinn. Phil Savage needs to decide whether or not Quinn can develop into the franchise quarterback that has eluded the Browns since the days of Bernie Kosar . If Quinn's development can give fans some light at the end of the tunnel, then this season won't be a total loss. If not, well...pitchers and catchers report in about three months.

This Week's Zeroes

Five Demerits: Brandon McDonald

This is tough for me to write, because McDonald has become my favorite defensive player this season, but he was thoroughly torched by Jay Cutler and the Broncos. McDonald was victimized by Cutler and

receiver Eddie Royal on a 93-yard touchdown pass early in the fourth quarter that marked the first of three Denver touchdowns in that final period.

McDonald deserves credit for recognizing that the Browns' coverage was inadequate and signaling for help. At the same time, if McDonald ceases his gesticulating and just covers Royal as best he can, maybe Royal doesn't run 93 yards topaydirt . The real problem wasn't that McDonald was beat, it was that he had an opportunity to make a tackle on Royal and minimize the damage. Instead, he went for the ball and was a split second tardy. Neither safety came over to help, and instead of Royal picking up a big chunk of yardage, he waltzed into the end zone.

Four Demerits: Romeo Crennel

Everyone seems to be in agreement that unless the Browns do something crazy (e.g. run the table), Romeo Crennel should be canned. The Browns have blown a pair of sizable second half leads in consecutive weeks, and said implosions have come against less talented clubs. Sooner or later, you've got to point the finger at the ship's captain.

Bill Simmons recently called the Browns "the worst-coached half-decent team in the league," and I'm inclined to agree. There is talent on this team. Edwards and Winslow are good receivers. Harrison and Lewis are good running backs. The offensive line has been banged up, but Joe Thomas has been injury-free, and EricSteinbach is a premier guard when healthy. Brady Quinn appears to be a promising young quarterback. The defense has its problems, but Shaun Rogers is having a monstrous season, and the secondary is very talented, if lacking depth. The Cleveland Browns are better than a 3-6 football team. Romeo must go.

Three Demerits: Mel Tucker

Just as Crennel deserves some of the blame for the last two weeks, so does defensive coordinator Mel Tucker. Tucker's defense has been shredded in the fourth quarter of the last two contests, and they've been burned by some inexcusable big plays. In fairness, Tucker has faced two pretty solid offensive schemers (MikeShanahan, Cam Cameron) in the last two games, but 564 yards allowed is inexcusable -- I don't care if God himself is calling the plays.

Opponents are obviously adjusting to Tucker's scheme, and these last seven games are going to test Tucker's mettle, as he'll have to counter-punch. Not only that, these last seven games will play a large role in whether or not the Browns' new head coach will consider retaining Tucker for 2009 and beyond. (Is anyone else writing "BillCowher" at the top of their Christmas lists?)

Two Demerits: Jamal Lewis

As a guy who typically loves Jamal, this is difficult for me to say, but Jamal needs to shut up. It's pretty ballsy to call out your teammates publicly for "quitting," especially when you barely averaged 3 yards per carry against Denver while Jerome Harrison ran roughshod over their defense. Lewis is likely just venting after a pair of tough games, but you can't call out your teammates like that; it's something I'd expect fromBraylon Edwards or Kellen Winslow, but not Lewis, who is normally the consummate professional.

One Demerit: Braylon Edwards

The patience of Browns' fans is beginning to wear thin with Braylon Edwards. C'mon Braylon, get open and hang onto the football -- it's not rocket science! Edwards had just 1 catch for 15 yards against a Denver defense that didn't feature acecornerback Champ Bailey, and there were at least two occasions when Braylon dropped passes he should have caught. Sure, Brady Quinn spread the ball around (8 different receivers), but he also threw 35 times, and when the Browns are

throwing that much, Edwards should have more than 1 catch.

This Week's Heroes

Five Gold Stars: Jerome Harrison

If any fans weren't completely sold on Harrison, I assume they put their checks in the mail about 15 minutes after the game was over. Harrison picked up 48 yards on just 5 carries, which is nearly 10 yards a carry (just in case Jessica Simpson is reading this). By contrast, it took Jamal Lewis 19 carries to accumulated 60 yards. Harrison looks fast, shifty, and surprisingly powerful. If you put a black number 39 jersey on him, I might mistake him for Willie Parker.

There's been a strong faction within the fan base clamoring for Harrison to get more carries. If Jerome doesn't get the ball more against the Bills, RobChudzinski should be fired. The Browns are a different team when Harrison is on field. Harrison reaches holes quicker and hits them harder than Jamal Lewis. At this point, Harrison should at least be splitting carries, if not starting outright. Lewis is still a valuable part of the team, but at this point in his career he's better suited for short yardage or wearing down the opposition while sitting on a lead. In addition, by putting Harrison on the field more often the Browns may force their opponents to respect their running game outside of the tackles, which might soften the defense for Lewis between the tackles.

Four Gold Stars: Brady Quinn

It was only one game, but it's tough to curb enthusiasm about Brady Quinn. Quinn looked awfully poised for a guy making his first start and seeing his first significant NFL action, as he completed nearly two-thirds of his passes (23-for-35) for 239 yards and a pair of touchdowns to Kellen Winslow. Even more impressive: Quinn didn't turn the ball over.

The offense looked different, but we expected that. There were fewer deep passes, but more sustained drives. The difference between Anderson and Quinn on short passes and screens is like night and day. I'd like to see Quinn throw some more deep and intermediate routes, and that should come with time. But let's face it: if Quinn played every game like he played against Denver, he'd be a very solid NFL quarterback.

But perhaps most impressive (and something that won't show up in the box score) was Quinn's mobility and pocket footwork. True, he's following Derek Anderson, who is blessed with the speed of a tortoise and frequently resembled a rhino while moving in the pocket. But Quinn faced some decent pressure all night, and yet the Denver defense recorded no sacks. That's not a coincidence. Quinn displayed an unexpected elusiveness, something that never stood out to me during his collegiate days or his limited action with the Browns. It was only one game, but realistically, Brady Quinn played as well as any of us could have hoped.

Three Gold Stars: Joshua Cribbs

I ripped Joshua Cribbs less than a month ago, claiming that he lacked his usual explosiveness, which was probably a result of

his high ankle sprain. Well, the explosiveness is back, andCribbs is terrorizing opponents not only on special teams, but on offense as well.

Cribbs had a solid day returning kickoffs, which included returns of 34, 37, and 43 yards. But for the first time this year, Cribbs made a big impact on offense, logging 3 carries for 48 yards, including a 27-yarder that helped set up the Browns' first score of the second half. Cribbs is a unique weapon, and as the Browns continue to develop their "Flash" package on offense, hopefully he can be used as a dual threat, running and passing a la AntwanRandle El in Pittsburgh. Opposing teams will begin to stack the box when they see Cribbs in the backfield, anticipating a run, and that's when I'd like to see the former KSU quarterback throw his first pass.

Two Gold Stars: Phil Dawson

It's a point that's already been raised many times, but where in the wide world of sports did Phil Dawson get his range from? Dawson's always been a solid kicker, practically automatic from inside 40 yards since his rookie season in 1999. But over the last several seasons Dawson's range has been mysteriously improving, and he's now hit field goals from outside 50 yards in consecutive games. Dawson's the only expansion Brown remaining, and he's been with the club a full decade. That's almost unheard of in the modern NFL.

One Gold Star: Kellen Winslow

K2 seemed destined to receive high praise until that unsightly

fumble in the second half, but he must be happy that Quinn's under center. Winslow grabbed 10 catches for 111 yards and scored twice.

If Winslow and Quinn develop a strong chemistry, it will be very interesting to see what Phil Savage does with Winslow in the off-season. Winslow probably will still be seeking a salary bump, and I suspect Savage intends to trade him. That might be more difficult if he becomes Brady Quinn's favorite target. But depending on the market, trading Winslow wouldn't be such a bad idea. He probably doesn't have 5 years left in his career, he wants more money, and he tends to go rogue with the media from time to time. It will be an interesting winter.

Up Next: 11/17, Buffalo Buffaloes, Ralph Wilson Stadium, 8:30

The Browns have lost three of four, and the Bills have lost four or five, but someone has to win this Monday night. The Bills started the season 4-0 because they played disciplined football and won the turnover battle. But quarterback Trent Edwards has had butterfingers of late, and the Bills have struggled as a result. Buffalo isn't a particularly talented team, and they largely rely on letting opponents beat themselves. If Quinn looks like he did against Denver, I think the Browns win that turnover battle, and ultimately the game. I can't believe I'm doing this, but...

Prediction: Browns 24, Bills 20