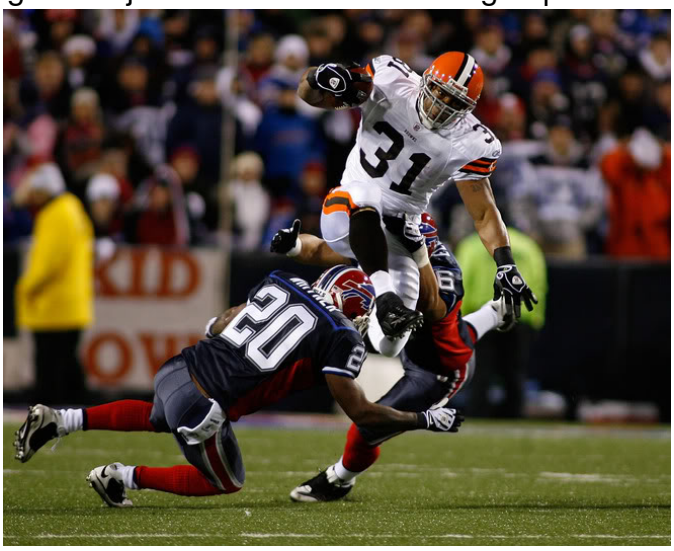
On the verge of putting themselves in one of the wrong chapters in the NFL's record book, the Cleveland Browns righted themselves just long enough, thanks to a 56-yard field goal by Phil Dawson and some timely running by Jerome Harrison to eek out a 29-27 victory Monday night against the Buffalo Bills at Ralph Wilson Stadium. The Browns had to wait out a 47-yard miss by Bills' kicker Rian Lindell that sailed wide right with just 35 seconds remaining to preserve the victory. Gary details the game in his latest.



Staring the kind of destiny squarely in the eye that could have had ramifications well beyond this season, it was the littlest players that came to the Browns' rescue Monday night against the Buffalo Bills.

Faced with the possibility of blowing their third straight lead of at least 13 points, something no NFL team has ever done, running back Jerome Harrison came out hibernation just long enough and kicker Phil Dawson hit a career-best 56-yard field goal, his fifth of the game, with 1:35 remaining to give the Browns a 29-27 win. The Browns still had to wait out a final missed field 47-yard field goal by Bills' kicker Rian Lindell that sailed just wide right with 35 seconds left before finally putting an end to their current two-game losing streak and keeping themselves out of the wrong chapters of the NFL's record book.

The win improved the Browns' record to 4-6 while the Bills sunk to 5-5 after starting the season at 5-1.

The Dawson field goal was the difference, but if not for some late heroics by

Harrison that helped make Dawson's field goal the game winner the finger pointing inside the Browns locker room would have taken on a fever pitch. On the first play of the fourth quarter and the ball at the Browns' 28-yard line, Harrison, on only his second touch of the game, took a handoff from Quinn, broke one tackle at the line of scrimmage and then scampered virtually untouched for a 72-yard touchdown run that momentarily turned a precarious three point lead into a 10-point margin at 23-13.

It was the Browns' longest run from scrimmage in three years and was certainly an unexpected and welcome change of pace for a team that was working hard to blow a 13-0 lead they had acquired early in the second quarter. It would have been nice change, too, if it had lasted even a series.

Leodis McKelvin, who had nearly broken two other returns earlier in the game, immediately took the Dawson kick off, cut left and then right across the field for a 98- yard touchdown return that again brought the Bills back to within three at 23-20.
It was the third time the Bills had cut a Browns' lead to 3 points.

This time though it was with momentum that more than suggested that the Browns' date with destiny was inevitable.

Except this time it was the opposing team, in the form of the Bills, that was doing all it could to make sure that didn't happen. Lindell's ensuing kickoff, one of the worst if not the worst in the league this year, went out of bounds at the Cleveland 43-yard line. Harrison ran for 9 yards line with 15 more tacked on when he was hit out of bounds.

That put the ball at the Bills 33-yard line.

Harrison then caught a crucial third down pass from quarterback Brady Quinn for 21 yards that took the ball to the Bills' 9-yard line.

The Browns couldn't punch it when a Lewis run fell short and Quinn overthrew both tight end Kellen Winslsow and receiver Braylon Edwards in the end zone.

It led to a Dawson 26-yard field goal and another precarious six point lead, 26-20.

With Bills' quarterback Trent Edwards afraid to throw it down field, thanks to three first quarter interceptions, the Browns' defense mounted one of their few challenges to the Bills' running game forcing them to punt with 7:40 left in the fourth quarter. With a 6-point lead, it gave the Browns the opportunity to control their own fate late and put the game away which is what good teams do and 3-6 teams can't.

It's why what happened next was a surprise to virtually no one. Bills' linebacker Kawika Mitchell, blitzing Quinn without any resistance from any member of the Browns' offensive line, forced a rainbow throw that seemingly floated into the waiting arms of safety Ko Simpson.

But head coach Romeo Crennel challenged the call, his first of the season, and was rewarded for his patience.

The pass was ruled incomplete.

Given a second chance, Quinn hit Winslow for a first down. It was only the second third down conversion of the night for the Browns.

The excitement was short-lived.

Quinn nearly hit a streaking Edwards at the Bills' 35-yard line but he was well covered.

On the next play, a key third and 6, Quinn did hit Edwards for an apparent first down, apparent because, naturally, Edwards dropped the ball, his fourth drop of the game, forcing the Browns to punt.

Rosco Parrish fielded the Zastudil punt at his own 15-yard line and returned it to the Cleveland 48 with 5:13 remaining.

It was as good a chance as the Bills could want to run out the clock and grab the

victory.

The Bills only got one of two of those correct, and until the Dawson field goal and Lindell miss, it seemed like the right one. Running back Marshawn Lynch, who along with fellow back Fred Jackson, spent most of the game shredding the Cleveland defense on the ground, ran for 29 yards and then followed it up with a 28-yard run that took the ball to the Cleveland 1-yard line.

Edwards, in a bit of redemption considering the breadth and depth of his mistakes early on, snuck it in for the touchdown that helped give the Bills the 27-26 lead with 2:25 remaining.
A freezing Ralph Wilson Stadium was suddenly the hottest place on earth.

Without wanting to resort to the trite cliché, it was nevertheless the quintessential gut-check moment for a team on the brink. Josh Cribbs was able to take the Lindell kick back to the Browns' 32-yard line.

Quinn hit Edwards at the Browns' 45-yard line for a first down.

Two plays later he hit Winslow for 16 more yards, taking it down to the Bills' 39-yard line at the two-minute warning, inching ever closer to Dawson's field goal range.

Quinn was then nearly picked off on a poor throw to Donte Stallworth and then overthrew Winslow and Edwards on consecutive plays to set up the Dawson game winner.

Though nearly blocked, the kick sailed through the middle and cleared the cross bar with room to spare that gave the Browns the final margin of victory.

Still, there was 1:35 remaining.

Not wanting to kick to McKelvin, Dawson bounced the kickoff into the waiting arms of Jackson, who merely took it to the Bills' 44-yard line. Edwards, still in the throes of a confidence crisis, now had no choice but to throw and he did,

immediately, naturally putting the Bills in field goal range by hitting tight end Robert Royal with a 22-yard pass down to the Cleveland 34-yard line.

Three straight running plays took it to the Cleveland 28-yard line with 43 seconds remaining as Cleveland was forced to use their final time out to preserve, if necessary, a last chance. It wouldn't be necessary.

Lindell, playing the part of Scott Norwood, but in a game with far less meaning, went wide right and with it went the Bills' last chance.

The flurry of activity, intermittent scoring and actual excitement in the second half belied a sloppy, inartistic mess in the first half. The Bills' Edwards was doing his part to try and give the Browns every opportunity for a blow-out, a gift the Browns continually declined.

On his first play from scrimmage, for example, Edwards saw his pass batted at the line of scrimmage by Shaun Rogers and intercepted by Kamerion Wimbley at the Cleveland 44-yard line. It was a theme that was preceded by another theme. The Browns weren't able to convert.

Quinn's first pass, for example, was dropped, naturally, by Braylon Edwards. Good field position, three plays, Bills' ball.

The Bills and Edwards tried to re-gift on their next drive by throwing this time to linebacker Andra Davis. Three Edwards passes, three complete, two to the Browns. This time the Browns capitalized, in the most expected way, a Dawson 40-yard field goal. As it's happened too many times this season, it was a drive that initially promised so much more.

It featured a new play, a quarterback bootleg that Quinn took for 11 yards.

It also featured a perfect pass to Edwards at the 5-yard line, which he dropped, naturally, as a thousand angry fans blasted the message boards on TheClevelandFan.com in response.

On their next drive Bills' offensive coordinator Turk Schonert showed the savvy of the back-up quarterback he was. He took the ball mostly out of Edwards' hands and put it in Lynch's hands instead, except for two very safe screen passes, also to Lynch. It was the best decision the Bills made all game as it ended up giving them their best chance to win..

In this instance, it was successful in the sense that there wasn't a turnover.

It proved far more successful later on as Lynch, first, and then Jackson, found hole after hole in a very porous Cleveland line.

But something should be said for Schonert. Apparently not convinced that the running game was the answer, he let Edwards thrown down field one more time. Schonert was rewarded for his confidence with Edwards' third interception of the game, this time to the beleaguered Brandon McDonald who took the ball to the Bills' 12-yard line. But perhaps Schonert knew what was to come.

A failed reverse to Stallworth was good for a 4-yard loss.

Another drop by Edwards on second down (three passes, three drops) and an incomplete pass to a well-covered Winslow led to a 33-yard field goal by Dawson.

Three interceptions, six points and only one touchdown away from being behind in a game they should have been dominating.

But of course, the Bills were on the same offensive pace that they were in last year's 8-0 loss in Cleveland. McKelvin took the Dawson kickoff back to the Bills' 49-yard line. Edwards didn't throw an interception this time, but neither was he able to move the team to a first down.

This time it was the Bills that punted brilliantly, downing the ball at the Cleveland 3-yard line.

But in a break that proved to be larger than any of the three interceptions, Quinn threw long to Winslow on third down.

Clearly interfered with, the official instead signaled for illegal contact.

Though it led to a Cleveland first down, it was only a 5-yard penalty.

Then Quinn went to work.

He hit Winslow on a nice crossing pattern at the Browns' 29-yard line. He then hit Edwards at the 49-yard line.

This time he held on and a thousand exasperated fans blasted TheClevelandFan.com message boards to collectively say "about time."

But Edwards wasn't done.

He then caught another Quinn strike at the 32-yard line.

A deep pass in the end zone to Stallworth was overthrown, but Edwards held on to a quick slant for another first down at the Bills' 22-yard line.

Jamal Lewis added 16 more yards on an end around that gave Cleveland a first and goal at the Bills' 2-yard line.

Sprinting around end, Cribbs took the handoff from Quinn, cut it back inside for the touchdown that helped extend the Cleveland lead to 13-0.

It was just enough of a lead to make the fans back on the message boards say "hey, I've seen this movie before."

Whatever one thinks of Trent Edwards, the one thing he's not is Jay Cutler and thus the movie didn't quite have the same ending this time. The three first-quarter

interceptions all but guaranteed that Edwards would be tentative the rest of the night. He was. But Lynch and Jackson were not.

Jackson broke through for a 19-yard run and then followed it up with a 17-yard run.

Meanwhile, with an opportunity to throw downfield, Edwards repeatedly opted instead for the outlet receiver, usually positioned safely near the line of scrimmage.

Unfortunately, one of those outlet receivers was Lynch.

Grabbing an essentially lateral pass at the Cleveland 18-yard line, Lynch then finished the drive, braking tackle after tackle on his way to a touchdown that helped bring the Bills back to within six points at 13-7.

It seemed to wake up the rest of the team. The Bills' defense forced a quick Cleveland three-and-out. Taking over with just under 5 minutes left in the half, the Bills used Jackson and Lynch to continually hammer the Browns' defense with one punch after another.

A direct snap to Jackson here, a great catch and run by Lynch there and the Bills again were quickly deep in Cleveland territory.

Luckily Edwards was still tentative.

With plenty of time to throw, Edwards instead opted for an ill-advised run that forced Buffalo to call their last time out with 15 seconds left in the half and the ball sitting at the Cleveland 7-yard line.

Edwards threw perfectly to safety Brodney Pool who should have had the Browns' fourth interception of the half.

Scared by that possibility Edwards then danced around in the pocket for nearly the rest of the quarter, finally throwing out of bounds with three seconds left.

Lindell hit the 24-yard field goal that brought the Bills to within 13-10 at the half.

For those counting at home, that was 10 straight Bills' points.

If the Browns had any notion of stopping the bleeding this time, they'd have to do something heroic even on a smaller scale, such as converting a third down, something they didn't do in the first half. That would take a few more series. Mea nwhile, the Bills seemed poise to at least tie it on their next drive but McDonald knocked the ball loose from Jackson as he tried to squirm for extra yardage at the Cleveland 28-yard line.

The loose ball was picked up Ahtyba Rubin who took it to the Browns' 37-yard line.

It was the first time anybody covering a Browns' game had to type Rubin's name all season.
It proved to be a good enough omen to at least allow Quinn a chance to lead the team into field goal range, which he did, and to actually help the Browns stop the bleeding.

Alternating between 10 and three point leads for most of the rest of the second half, the inevitable seemed poised to happen. Despite a plethora of turnovers and a quarterback who probably is still hearing footsteps, the Bills managed to remain within striking distance the rest of the game.
It was the classic set up of one team unable to put another away only.

Indeed, when Edwards' temporarily gave the Bills their only lead of the game, that's exactly what the lede to this game story looked like.

But this time it was another team that couldn't hold a late lead and now the Browns, while not exactly resurrecting their season, at least gained some measure of respectability since the game was on national television, as the thousands who watched can attest.

Other than Dawson's five field goals and the Harrison 72-yard run, there was nothing particularly spectacular about either the Browns' approach or their execution. It's just that wherever they fell short, the Bills fell justthismuch shorter.

Quinn, in his second start of his career, was able to get a better outcome this time despite playing a far more uneven game.

Facing repeated blitzes, Quinn avoided turnovers, but barely.

The Bills easily should have had two interceptions. But the constant pressure and an offensive line that seemed to have never learned how to pick up a blitz led Quinn to a less-than-impressive 14-36 for only 185 yards and no touchdowns. Still it was far better than his counterpart with the Bills.

Edwards was 14-26 for only 149 yards, most of which came on 1-yard passes that Lynch repeatedly turned into decent gains, and 3 interceptions.

He also had one touchdown, to Lynch, naturally.

In what is now a firmly established recurring theme, season after season, another set of running backs had their way with a Cleveland defensive front seven. This time it was Lynch and Jackson.

Lynch had 119 yards on 23 carries, his first career 100-yard game, and also had 58 yards receiving.

Jackson added another 60 yards on the ground.

The Browns had 161 yards on the ground, including 80 by Harrison on just 3 carries, 65 by Lewis and 18 by Quinn on two bootlegs.

The Browns' Edwards, despite four more drops, had an otherwise solid night catching 8 passes for 104 yards.

With the victory, the team that seems to play better (if not well) when shrouded in controversy returns home to face the Houston Texans, who stand at 3-7. It's a

golden opportunity for the Browns to get ever closer to the mystical .500 mark.

But unless a little controversy, contrived or otherwise arises, it's an opportunity that the rhythm of this season suggests has every chance of being squandered.