Despite grabbing four Indianapolis Colts turnovers, the Cleveland Browns offense was once again missing in action and for the second straight week could not find the end zone. And for the second straight week, the Browns found themselves on the short end of a low scoring game, this time 10-6, to a Colts team that was ripe for the taking. Robert Mathis' return of the Browns' only turnover, a fourth quarter Derek Anderson fumble, was the difference. Gary tells us about it in his latest.

On a day when the Indianapolis Colts were being generous with turnovers, it was one key turnover by the Cleveland Browns that made the difference in the game. With the Browns clinging to a 6-3 lead with 10 minutes remaining in the game, quarterback Derek Anderson dropped back to pass and lost the grip on the ball.

Colts' defensive end Robert Mathis picked up the bouncing ball and returned it 37 yards for the game's only touchdown, giving the Colts the 10-6 lead and, ultimately, the game.

It was the Colts' fifth straight victory. It was the Browns' second straight defeat and second straight game in which they failed to score a touchdown of any kind.

When the ship is sinking, the floor show hardly matters. The Browns' ship has been taking on water almost since the first game of the season and with five games left no one's thinking the ship can be saved anyway.

Thus these final games remaining are less about wins and losses and more about, well, just getting the whole damn thing over with so that we can find out who will be coaching the team next season.

In that context, that's exactly what the Browns did on a day when the Colts did almost everything they could to not only keep the Browns in the game but actually give it to them in the form of an early Christmas present wrapped in a pretty bow.

The Browns would have none of that.

Sunday's loss will ultimately be nothing more than a footnote to a season where the far bigger stories have taken place during the week. But it did answer some of the more burning questions, such as whether Anderson will suddenly find magic

and force head coach Romeo Crennel into rethinking his decision to keep the injured Brady Quinn entrenched as the starter heading into next season.

Anderson didn't light it up and was injured in the process, having to be carried off the field during the Browns' final drive.

The most pressing question is now whether Anderson can return next week or if the Browns really will have Richard Bartel as next week's back up quarterback.

If the Colts end up making the playoffs, which is looking more likely each week, they'll look back at this week's escape as the reason. Though moving the ball effecitvely, if slowly all day, all the Colts could muster was one Adam Vinateri field goal until the Mathis return gave them not only their first lead but ultimately the game.

In part, they can thank two fumbles and two Peyton Manning interceptions. But really those were only part of the story.

Just one turnover led to Cleveland points, a 34-yard Phil Dawson field goal in the first quarter after running back Joseph Addai fumbled on the game's first play.

Another turnover, a Manning fumble at the Browns 1-yard line on fourth down, may have stopped a Colts' touchdown but the Browns already looked to have Manning stopped short of the goal line when the ball popped free so that point is debatable.

It actuality it was a combination of a flat Colts offense that was missing some key players, including center Jeff Saturday, and a Browns' defense that was bending but not breaking that stopped the Colts. If only the Browns' offense could have done their part. But doing so would have taken an effort largely out of character for a team that can no longer be described as merely out of sync.

For a first half that had no punts and three Colts' turnovers, the Browns could only manage a 6-3 lead. The inability to get the ball in the end zone, particularly when in the red zone, is a familiar theme for the Browns, certainly, but somewhat unchartered territory for the Colts who never seem to have problems finding the end zone.

The Browns seemingly got the start and the break they wanted right away when Addai fumbled on the first play of scrimmage, giving the Browns the ball at the Colts' 47 yard line. The turnover ended predictably enough, with the Browns failing once again in close and settling for a field goal, the Dawson 34-yarder.

How the Browns covered the 30 yards of the drive was, however, instructive.

If there was one thing you can bank on it's that the Browns would try to run the ball. The reasons were two-fold. The Colts have one of the worst run defenses in the league. Second, the Browns run their offense with a squeaky wheel philosophy and for the second time this season, the run-up to the game featured a healthy dose of complaints from running back Jamal Lewis about the game plan.

Thus did the Browns run, somewhat effectively, on their first 9 plays from scrimmage.

But on 3rd and 8 from the Colts' 20-yard line, the Browns were forced to pass.

Anderson, scared silly by this point in his development, didn't even bother to look downfield, immediately finding Jason Wright out of the backfield for a short game, setting up the Dawson field goal.

The Colts, on the other hand, were hardly so constrained. Temporarily sidetracked on their opening possession, they came back and put together a long, efficient, diverse drive starting from their own 23-yard

line. There were runs up the middle and to the edges.

There were swing passes.

There were passes down the field and a few underneath.

But on a 3rd and 11 from the Cleveland 12-yard line, just when Manning seemingly found Reggie Wayne in the end zone, beleaguered cornerback Brandon McDonald broke up the completion, forcing the Colts to settle for a 30-yard Adam Vinatieri field-goal that tied the game a 3-3.

The Browns came right back with a long drive of their own, this time with a little less predictablility. Mixing in a variety of short passes and good runs, the Browns found themselves at the Colts' 8-yard line. In many ways, offensive coordinator Rob Chudzinski was using a game plan similar to the one he used effectively in Brady Quinn's first start. But seeing how well Quinn's mistakes went over last week, Anderson appeared wary of making his own and ate the ball on 3rd and 8 from the Colts' 8-yard line, forcing another chip shot Dawson field goal that gave the Browns the lead again at 6-3.

On the drive, Anderson was 6-7, the longest pass of which was a 16-yarder to Braylon Edwards.

The other five passes covered five or less yards each.

The Colts looked like they were taking control by putting together their second long drive of the half. Starting at their 33-yard line, the Colts once again moved down the field methodically, if not quickly.

But after getting to the Cleveland 1-yard line, the Browns stopped Addai for no gain on 3rd down.

Eschewing another field goal, Manning tried to sneak it in on fourth down with just over a minute left but fumbled short of the goal line.

Though seemingly recovered in the end zone by the Colts' Dallas Clark, by rule in the last two minutes of each half the ball cannot be advanced on a fumble unless recovered by the fumbling player, in this case, Manning.

As a result, the Browns took over at their own 1-yard line still clinging to the 6-3 lead.

Backed up, the Browns could not get a first down and were forced to punt, giving the Colts and Manning one

last play in the half.

Manning's pass was picked off by Sean Jones as the half ended.

It was the Colts' third turnover of the game.

The Browns were the first to punt, going three and out in their first drive of the second half. Anderson seemingly had Edwards open for the first down but threw low and behind him, forcing the punt.

After muffing the punt, the Colts got the ball at their own 15-yard line.

Manning immediately threw down field for Wayne but McDonald had perfect coverage and came up with the interception at the Colts' 49-yard line giving the Browns their fourth takeaway of the game.

Anderson moved the Browns quickly into the Colts' red zone on a perfectly thrown 20-yard pass to

Edwards and an 8-yard run by Lewis. But this drive died, too, only without the benefit of another Dawson field goal as he was wide left from 35-yards.

On the drive's crucial play, a 3rd and 2 from the Colts' 18-yard line, Anderson was forced to call time out.

Proving that having any time is too much time, Chudzinski changed plays and inserted Cribbs as quarterback.

The Colts were hardly fooled and stopped him for no gain.

Another opportunity squandered.

It was about this time that it looked as if all the lost chances would eventually catch up with the Browns. As it turned out, of course, that's

exactly what did happen, but barely.
With a game plan fixated strangely on the run, the Colts seemed flat on offense.

After moving ploddingly into Browns' territory, Manning couldn't find anyone open on 3rd and 8 from the Browns' 28-yard line.

Vinatieri then hooked a 46-yard field goal left leaving the Browns still clinging to the 6-3 lead.

After the Browns couldn't move the ball, punter Dave Zastudil dropped the ball at the Colts' 4-yard line where it was downed by Josh Cribbs. It was the Colts' worst field position of the game. The Colts were able to get one first down but no more and were forced into their first punt of the game with just under 13 minutes

remaining in the game.

That set up what turned out to be the game's most crucial play, the Anderson fumble. After that, the Browns had no answer. Taking over at their own 10-yard line following an illegal block penalty on the kick return, the Browns offense was able to get one first down but nothing more, giving the Colts the opportunity to run out the clock with 5:32 remaining. Milking every second from the play clock, the Colts got one first down but couldn't convert on a 3rd and 1 with two minutes remaining.

What was most interesting, though, was Crennel's clock management.

With the clock ticking to below three minutes and the Colts satisfied to keep the ball on the ground, Crennel opted to preserve the team's remaining two time outs instead of keeping more time on the clock.

It was a questionable decision, but then again what Crennel decision this season hasn't been?

Of course, it didn't work. With the ball at the Cleveland 30-yard line, the Browns moved with all their usual dispatch and were forced to burn their time outs quickly. After getting one first down, Anderson was

then sacked by Mathis all the way back at the Browns' 33-yard line and hurt his ankle in the process and had to be helped from the field.

That brought on long-forgotten Ken Dorsey with 1:07 remaining and no time outs and the Browns in need of their first touchdown in two games.

It would have hardly been a surprise if Dorsey had his street clothes on underneath his rain parka.

He didn't, but the outcome was as expected nonetheless.

He threw two incompletions and was picked off with 45 seconds remaining,

preserving the Colts' victory.

It was the kind of game that in many ways has characterized the Browns this season. At times throughout, the defense has held good teams in check.

Today was no different.

Manning was only 15-21 for 125 yards and the two interceptions.

He wasn't at his best, certainly, but the Browns' defense had their say in that as well.

The Colts had only 90 yards rushing as well and only 215 net yards on offense.

But the Browns offense was as bad as it's been nearly every week against a Colts' defense that was injured coming in and had bodies seemingly leaving the field nearly every series.

Anderson was 16-26 for only 110 yards and rarely through downfield.

Lewis had 77 yards on 24 carries, which should make him happy for another week.

Meanwhile, Wright and Jerome Harrison each got two carries.

The Browns in turn had only 193 yards of offense.

The outcome, which puts the Browns at 4-8, isn't going to make owner Randy Lerner any more sick. It won't make him feel any better, either.

But if it's symbolic victories that are now what the team is playing for, they can at least know they've come as close as anyone to beating both Mannings this season.