The big adjustment got all the attention but it was head coach Eric Mangini's other adjustment, the insertion of receiver Mohamed Massaquoi into the lineup that almost turned the tide. In the end, though, it just wasn't enough as the Cincinnati Bengals won an overtime thriller against the Browns, 23-20. It was the Browns' fourth straight loss this season and 10th overall, continuing one of the worst streaks in the franchise history. But for the first time all season the Browns do have something to build on and Browns' fans have a reason to believe that the season may not be a complete bust. Gary tells us about it in his latest..

The big adjustment is the one that got all the attention but it was the little one that made far more of a difference, just not enough. Mohamed Massaquoi, starting at receiver in place of Josh Cribbs, was a major difference maker of the unexpected kind but in the end the Cleveland Browns' inability to finish and Cincinnati's Carson Palmer's abject resiliency gave the Bengals a 23-20 overtime victory against the winless Browns. It was the Browns' 10th straight loss dating back to last season.

The Browns, clinging to a precarious 20-14 lead late in the game couldn't find a way to finish off a reeling Bengals' team even as they were seemingly stepping on their throats the entire second half. After slowing down the Bengals nearly the entire game, Palmer hit a wide open Chad Ochocinco in the end zone on a 4

th

and goal from the Cleveland 6-yard line with 1:44 left in the game to tie the score at 20-20.

But Shaun Rogers blocked to go-ahead extra point, his second blocked kick of the day, giving the Browns one final chance in regulation.

Operating without any time outs, two had been blown needlessly and one was lost on head coach Eric Mangini's second unsuccessful replay challenge of the game, quarterback Derek Anderson was not able to get the Browns into kicker Billy Cundiff's field goal range. It sent the game into overtime and ultimately into the hands of the Bengals.

The overtime had the look and feel of the waning rounds of a heavyweight fight by two club pros. Despite winning the coin toss, the Bengals punches lacked any zing and they were forced to punt. The Browns' counterpunch likewise lacked any sting as they were a quick 3-and-out.

Two more changes of possession each set up the Bengals' winning drive with 3:23 remaining.

Taking over at their own 20, Palmer and the Bengals put together an 11-play drive that ended with Graham's 31-yard

field goal and the Bengals pulling victory from the gaping jaws of a defeated but spirited Browns' defense.

But oh what could have been.

Like a long putt that looks good until it doesn't, the Browns looked like they were on the way to ending one of the worst losing streaks in franchise history, thanks in large part to Massaquoi, Rogers, Cribbs, Derek Anderson and Jerome Harrison, but not necessarily in that order.

While Massaquoi was in large measure the story of the game from the Browns' perspective there were plenty of supporting characters. Anderson, for one, shook off a slow start and came on strong, repeatedly finding an open Massaquoi.
Harrison, taking over for the injured Jamal Lewis, repeatedly helped his quarterback by being a credible threat on the ground, running for 121 yards on 29 carries.

It was a nice turnaround for Harrison, whose fumble early in the second quarter led to a 78-yard Robert Geathers return and 14-0 Bengals lead.

Rogers' right hand alone was responsible for saving four points and ensuring the game got into overtime.

He blocked Graham's first field goal attempt and then blocked the critical extra point that sent the game into overtime. And then there was Cribbs.

It was his long kick returns that repeatedly put the Browns' offense in good position throughout the game.

The re-insertion of Anderson into the starting lineup certainly garnered all the attention in the run-up to Sunday's game and it had the impact that Mangini likely expected. But it might have gone for naught if not for Mangini's less-publicized by just as important decision to end the Cribbs-as-receiver experiment in favor of Massaquoi and now, perhaps, a new star is born.

Massaquoi had 8 catches for 148 yards and gave the Browns another legitimate offensive weapon that opposing defenses will now have to worry about.

To all this it's worth wondering, what took so long?

Anderson, as is usually his wont, started off slow and at one point in the first half was 3-11 for 61 yards. But as is also his wont, Anderson got hot, repeatedly finding Massaquoi and moving the ball in a way that left fans scratching their heads asking where this all had been in the first three games of the season. In all, Anderson was 26-48 for 269 yards and two touchdowns, a

1-yarder to tight end Steve Heiden and a 1-yard run on 4th down that tied the score at 14 halfway through the third quarter.

Meanwhile, the Bengals, after two long opening drives, only one of which resulted in points, went into the kind of offensive and defensive funk that has defined head coach Marvin Lewis' tenure with the team. But the Bengals are nothing if not opportunistic this season and despite being behind in the 4th quarter of every game this season, the Bengals find themselves on top of the AFC North with a 4-1 record, performing one miraculous escape after another.

At the outset, the game looked to be heading the way every Browns' game has gone this season-over early. With the precision of every other opponent the Browns have faced this season, the Bengals took the opening kickoff and marched from their own 12-yard line to the Cleveland 5 before seeing their drive blow up via the Rogers' block of what should have been a Graham chip-shot field goal.

Still the drive didn't seem to portend well for the Browns as it chewed up over 7 minutes of the first quarter. Indeed, the trend continued on the Bengals next drive, coming as it did after a Browns 3-and-out, chewed up nearly 7 more minutes.

In all, the Browns defense was on the field for nearly 14 minutes of the 1st quarter.

That drive ended when Palmer found Ochocinco on a 5-yard fade pass that helped give the Bengals a 7-0 lead. Mangini unsuccessfully challenged the catch.

As the Bengals were dominating the time of possession, Anderson was busy making a case for Brett Ratliff. Anderson's first pass was in the gut of receiver Braylon Edwards, which is the exact wrong place to throw to Edwards.

It was dropped.

His next pass, on 3rd and 7, was well off the mark to Massaquoi and the drive was over nearly as quickly as it started.

The Browns might have continued to founder somewhere deep in their own territory but for a nice return by Cribbs after the Bengals' touchdown. Cribbs put together one of his trademark knifing returns through the opposition and scampered 58 yards to the Bengals' 34-yard line. It didn't end well, thanks to the Geathers fumble return that pushed the lead to a usually insurmountable 14-0.

This was the point that the game looked to be another death march on Lake Erie. But in what really did portend the future of this game at least the Browns showed a bit of life on their next drive, particularly when Anderson hit a 30-yard pass to Massaquoi for one first down and then rushed for another on a sneak before the usual offensive gremlins, dropped passes, passes knocked down at the line of scrimmage, forced another punt anyway.

The Browns then did do something on defense that they hadn't done all season, and this time it was something good. Palm er, perhaps getting greedy, threw from his own end zone long only to see it intercepted by Brodney Pool at the Cleveland 43-yard line.

But enthusiasm was quickly tempered when Anderson was sacked for 12 yards.

Harrison ran for 4 yards and then Anderson had another ball knocked down at the line of scrimmage.

Another Dave Zastudil punt followed.

This was Anderson's low point of the game.

After another Bengals' punt and a Cribbs' 39-yard return to the Cincinnati 38-yard line, the Browns had the opportunity with 3 minutes left in the first half to tighten a game that was surprisingly closer than it probably should have been. And faith, for once, was ultimately rewarded. Anderson lofted the ball to a streaking Massaquoi

down the right side line for an apparent 30-yard touchdown that, on review, indicated that Massaquoi was down at the half-yard line.
On the next play, Anderson rolled right and hit tight end Steve Heiden for the touchdown.

The extra point by Billy Cundiff cut the Bengals lead to 14-7.

Two things about the sequence were worth noting. First, the replay reversal of the apparent Massaquoi touchdown actually helped the Browns. When Massaquoi made the catch there was nearly 2 minutes left in the half.

By running another play the Browns were

able to take another 20 or so seconds off the clock.

The Bengals were never able to get much of a drive going thereafter.

Second, the pass from Anderson to Heiden was just the kind of mid range pass that's bedeviled Anderson his whole career.

This one was on the mark.

It looked to be the turning point of the game.

Opening the second half Anderson and the Browns were in the process of putting together their best drive of the season, featuring their best run of the season-a Harrison 21-yard burst-before another of

Anderson's gremlins, the interception, paid a visit at exactly the wrong moment.

On 3rd and 8 from the Cincinnati 8-yard line, Anderson dropped back and tried to force a pass in the end zone to Heiden but it was picked off by cornerback Jonathan Joseph at the goal line and returned 32 yards.

Mangini burned his second replay challenge on the interception and was wrong again. That coupled with the timeout that Anderson needlessly burned on the half's second play left the Browns with one time out for the remainder of the half. It came back to

haunt them.

The turnover was not the dramatic momentum turn that if appeared it might be, at least for the Bengals. Struggling on offense after their first two drives, the Bengals were forced to punt when a third down pass slipped out of Palmer's hands. The Browns, on the other hand, were full of fight.

Taking over at their own 23, the Browns put together a 10-play 77-yard drive, capped off by an Anderson 1-yard run on 4th down, that helped tie the score at 14-14. The drive featured a healthy

dose of Anderson-Massaquoi with enough hard runs by Harrison to keep the Bengals' defense off-balance.

The Bengals, reeling by this point, then turned the ball right back over after returner Andre Caldwell fumbled the kickoff and Blake Costanzo recovered, giving the Browns the ball at the Cincinnati 18-yard line. But the Browns couldn't punch it in and head to settle for a 26-yard field goal by Cundiff that gave them the 17-14 lead just as the fourth quarter got underway.

As important as those four points would have been the Browns really had the chance to finish off the Bengals on their next drive after Cribbs returned a Kevin Huber punt 50 yards to the Cincinnati 14 with just under 9 minutes remaining. But Anderson lost 8 yards on a sack and the Browns had to settle for a 31-yard field goal that gave them the 20-14 lead. Th ose four lost points turned out to be the difference in the game.

The Bengals then rallied with the Palmer to Ochocinco touchdown pass

that was set up by a key 16-yard pass from Palmer to Chris Henry on 3rd and 14.
The Browns had one final chance in regulation but, operating without any time outs, couldn't get into field goal range.

Unlike, really, any game this season this loss, coming as it did in last second fashion, at least gives the Browns something to build on for the rest of the season. Anderso n was rusty, certainly, but showed more than enough to quell any

further quarterback controversy for the time being.

Harrison probably secured his role as a feature back and he did so in grand fashion.

Massaquoi now gives the Browns another option that they didn't have before this day.

It will force teams to stop concentrating on Edwards, who was held without a reception while Massaquoi was having a career day.

For all the good, it just wasn't enough. The game ended as most probably expected anyway but for the first time this season Browns fans at least have a legitimate reason to believe that the entire season will no longer be a complete bust.