Beating Pittsburgh has been hard enough for the Browns, what with eleven in a row and seventeen of eighteen going Pittsburgh's way, but now Cleveland is finding it well-nigh impossible just to get the damned ball in to the end zone against the Inbred. It's been nine quarters since the Browns scored a touchdown in this series, with the last score coming via Josh Cribbs' marvelous 100-yard kickoff return in the third period of the second meeting in 2007. Can we pull off a miracle in this one? Jesse previews Browns at Steelers.

Time: 1:00 pm, Sunday, October 18, 2009

Location: Heinz Field, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Network, Announcers: CBS- Kevin Harlan and Solomon Wilcots.

Line: Pittsburgh by 14

Team W/L Records: Cleveland is 1-4; Pittsburgh is 3-2

Coaches: Eric Mangini is 23-29 overall, 0-4 with the Browns; Mike "Dr. Foreman" Tomlin is 25-12 in his third season with the Steelers.

Last Week for the Browns: Broke their ten-game losing streak the same way they got their last win eleven months ago: ugly and unconvincingly over the Bills in Buffalo.

Last Week for the Steelers: Kind of yawned their way to a 28-20 victory over Detroit in front of a Ford Field crowd filled with swirling piss-yellow towels..

All-Time Series: Steelers lead 59-55.

Last Meeting- December 28, 2008 : Pittsburgh out-gained the white-flagging Browns 369-126 and got 114 rushing yards from Willie Parker as they breezed to a 31-0 shutout in the season finale.

Out or Questionable for Pittsburgh: None, although Rashard Mendenhall has missed Friday's practice with the flu.

Out or Questionable for Cleveland: LB Eric Barton (neck), DE Kenyon Coleman (groin), K Phil Dawson (right calf), G Rex Hadnot (knee), TE Steve Heiden (knee), LB D'Qwell Jackson (hamstring) and DE Robaire Smith (calf) are questionable.

What to watch for the Steelers: They're 3-2 and right in the thick of the AFC North race, but Pittsburgh, who in case you missed it just added another Lombardi Trophy to their annoyingly large collection, is playing with a notable lack of crispness and urgency thus far in 2009. In their last four games the Steelers have blown fourth-quarter leads at Chicago and at Cincinnati, frittered away most of a 28-0 third-quarter lead against San Diego, and let the woeful Lions hang around

far longer than they should have.

The culprits for this, what passes for a poor stretch in Pittsburgh, are many. The Steelers are 18th in the league in rushing; they're not forcing turnovers- only four going into Sunday, leading to a -5 turnover margin, the defense has found itself struggling to close out games, and Jeff Reed personally blew the Chicago game with a couple of missed field goals down the stretch. The peripherals are good- 8th in the league in total offense, 5th in total defense- but this team really hasn't played good football yet.

So, while it's always nice to welcome the Browns to town if you're Pittsburgh, it's even more on-time than usual here in '09. After Cleveland, the Steelers face a potentially nasty three-game stretch in which they play Minnesota, at Denver and Cincinnati. There is way too much competition at the top of this division for the Steelers to screw around against the likes of Cleveland. It's like the AL Central: when you're locked in a tight race, you don't want to give away those games against the Royals.

Recent games in this series tend to trend two ways: Pittsburgh dominates from the opening snap, or storms back from a late deficit on the arm of Roethlisberger and the unwilling compliance of Cleveland's soft, wimpy defense. I have to thing this game is going to trend toward the latter. It's not just that the Steelers are more talented, better coached and better run than the Browns. They also generally bring their A game to this series. Occasionally they're gift wrap a game for an inferior opponent, but Browns haven't gotten the benefit of that kind of largesse.

Kosar and Slaughter aren't walking through that door. Cleveland needs to bring the Steelers down to their level to win. That has not happened yet. With a lot on the line, and a case of red-ass from their previous poor showings this season, it's hard to expect Pittsburgh to join the Browns in the gutter tomorrow either.

What to watch for the Browns: Beating Pittsburgh has been hard enough for the Browns, what with eleven in a row and seventeen of eighteen going Pittsburgh's way, but now Cleveland is finding it well-nigh impossible just to get the damned ball in to the end zone against the Inbred. It's been nine quarters since the Browns scored a touchdown in this series, with the last score coming via Josh Cribbs' marvelous 100-yard kickoff return in the third period of the second meeting in 2007. It's been ten quarters since the Browns scored an offensive touchdown against, the last being Braylon Edwards's spectacular sideline grab in the second period of that same game. Cleveland was held to a total of two field goals in the two losses last season, including the 31-0 whitewash in the finale.

Of course, it isn't as if the Browns' unfamiliarity with the end zone applies only to this "rivalry." Cleveland has scored three offensive touchdowns in its last nine games, including last week's 6-3 victory in Buffalo. Lindy Infante is rolling in his grave, and he isn't even dead.

So for the moment, forget breaking this accursed losing streak against

the Inbred. Let's just see if this team can score a touchdown, then start thinking about winning.

Good Past Win over the Steelers- October 5, 1986 : After sixteen consecutive defeats, the Browns finally killed the Jinx and got a win at Three Rivers with a thrilling 27-24 victory. Earnest Byner ran for 79 yards, caught five passes, and went over from four yards out to give Cleveland the lead for good midway through the fourth period. Pittsburgh drove to the Cleveland 35-yard line, but Mark Malone was stripped by Sam Clancy on an option play and Chris Rockins recovered with 1:35 to play. Gerald McNeil provided the game's biggest highlight late in the second quarter when he flew 100 yards with a kickoff to give the Browns a 17-14 lead.

Bad Past Loss to the Steelers- September 24, 1978 : In perhaps their most galling regular-season loss in the entire series, the Browns gave the Steelers everything they could handle before falling in overtime on a schoolyard gadget play, 15-9. Pittsburgh had the ball on the Cleveland 37-yard line on its first OT possession when Terry Bradshaw handed off to Rocky Bleier, who gave the ball Lynn Swann crossing the backfield, who in turn flipped it back to Bradshaw. Thom Darden was sucked into the play and couldn't recover in time as Bradshaw hit tight end Bennie Cunningham for the game-winning touchdown. Steelers return man Larry Anderson had fumbled away the overtime kickoff at his own 21-yard line, but the officials, erroneously calling Anderson's knee down, gave the ball to Pittsburgh.

Next Week for Both Teams: Pittsburgh hosts Minnesota; Cleveland hosts Green Bay.

Trivia: It's been seven games and thirty-one quarters since the Browns scored a rushing touchdown against the Steelers. Last man to do the honors was Ruben Droughns, who hit pay-dirt from five yards out in the first quarter of a 34-21 Sunday Night loss in Pittsburgh on November 13, 2005.