The Cincinnati Bengals wouldn't need overtime against the Browns this time. Pounding the ball repeatedly at an overmatched Browns' defense, the Bengals ground their way to a 16-7 victory, though the game wasn't nearly that close. On the plus side, the Browns got their first rushing touchdown in more than a year but otherwise couldn't sustain much on offense. Brady Quinn was victimized by several dropped passes but also was his own worst enemy, repeatedly missing throws to his receivers. It was really just more of the same and now the Browns find themselves looking waaaaaay up at their former roomate in the AFC North basement. Gary tells us about it in his latest.

There'd be no overtime this week. The Cincinnati Bengals wouldn't need it.

With just a victory against the Cleveland Browns on Sunday being the only thing standing between them and a perfect record in the AFC North, the Bengals ground the Browns into submission with a dominating and not nearly as close as the final score would indicate 16-7 win.

The victory put the Bengals atop the division at 8-3 and facing only two teams, Minnesota and San Diego, with winning records in their remaining 5 games. The playoffs seemed assured and they can start printing the tickets now, but they shouldn't settle in for a long stay.

The Bengals aren't nearly good enough on offense to go very deep in the playoffs.

They are good enough, however, to beat the Browns without much trouble. The broader story of the game was mostly the gulf between these two teams that just a year ago shared door mat status in the AFC North.

Now the Bengals are sitting on top looking down after years in obscurity while the Browns remain a door mat, even more so if that's possible.

The Bengals, after trying to diversify early in the game with an offense built for the run, repeatedly pounded the ball with Larry Johnson and Bernard Scott from mid-second quarter on and gained 210 yards on the ground. It was 41 more yards than the Browns had in total offense.

For the Browns, theirs is a case of an offense built for nothing. It was clear from the outset was that the Bengals aren't the Detroit Lions, at least on defense.

The Browns offense, after its brief visit last week to the NFL's version of Lourdes, Ford Field in Detroit, was back stuck in the same muck that it's been in most of the season.

Able to neither run nor pass effectively, the Browns offense never really gave the team much of a chance to make the game competitive even when it had a chance to do so, the final score notwithstanding.

Credit to that goes to the Bengals defense. They didn't necessarily harass Quinn into poor throws. Mostly he did that on his own. It was more a case of the Bengals defense playing with integrity, sticking with their assignments and bottling up the Browns receivers and running backs all day.

The Bengals themselves showed that their offense was less than the sum of its parts. With good skills players abounding, the Bengals nevertheless have an anemic passing attack and will have difficulty against teams that can actually stop the run. Still, their trademark this season has been the long sustained drive which fit perfectly into the Browns' biggest weakness, an inability to make a big play on third down. It was a perfect match.

The Bengals first score was instructive. After a mind-numbing 16-play drive that consumed most of the first quarter, Shayne Graham hit a 37-yard field goal, giving the Bengals the early 3-0 lead.

The fact that the Bengals were held to a field goal was a victory of sorts for the Browns' defense and also mounting evidence that this Bengals team has its own set of offensive problems to contend with in the passing game. Bengals' quarterback Carson Palmer was able to connect on 4 short passes but was sacked once-by newly signed linebacker Matt Roth-and forced to scramble on another. More importantly, the Browns' defense, at least for this series and, really, for the entire game, didn't allow the opposition to turn short passes into long gains, something that's plagued this defense all season.

From there, the teams exchanged punt after punt, which is nothing particularly new for the Browns. For the Bengals, though, it should serve as a warning shot, particularly after their fumbles and foibles against the Oakland Raiders a week before.

The Bengals offensive line is strong in run blocking but weak in pass blocking. Th ey had trouble holding back a 3-man rush.

Palmer always seemed skittish in the pocket anyway and spent most of the game scrambling, even when he seemed to have time.

When he was able to throw, he was often off the mark, particularly in the first half, and when he was within the vicinity his receivers had trouble holding on the ball.

Despite these difficulties, where the Bengals were finding success early in the game was with the running game, which is hardly a surprise, even with Cedric Benson inactive. Johnson and Scott never broke off the huge runs of an Adrian Peterson but they were able to consistently find holes, keep drives going and keep the clock moving.

After dabbling unsuccessfully with the pass early, the Bengals figured it out halfway through the second quarter. In an 11-play drive that covered just 63 yards, the Bengals ran it 7 times, softening up the middle for the pass. Palmer

then hit tight end J.P. Fosci for a 4-yard touchdown pass that helped the Bengals extend their lead to 10-0. It was a prescription they followed most of the rest of the day.

But what would a Browns game be without the opposition getting the benefit of an untimed down? This week's comic relief came with the first half dwindling down.

After the Browns went 3-and-out following the Bengals touchdown, 30 seconds remained in the half. Hodges, punting from his goal line kicked it only 38 yards, allowing the Bengals to take over at the Cleveland 40 yard line.

But having to rely solely on the pass, Palmer was sacked on second down back to the 50 yard line, taking the Bengals out of field goal range with only 8 seconds remaining.

Then, on what should have been the Bengals last play before the half, Palmer was once again forced to scramble and looked to be sacked but a personal foul on Shaun Rogers for horse-collaring Palmer gave the Bengals an untimed down which they used to have Graham hit a 53-yard field goal and the 13-0 half time lead.

The Browns showed some life early in the second half. For any other team it would have been the equivalent to getting back into the game.

For the Browns it was merely a slight peak in an otherwise deep valley.

After shutting down the Bengals to start the second half, the Browns used a little trickery to get temporarily jump started. Quinn, handing off to Cribbs, then ran down the left side line with Cribbs hitting him for an 18-yard gain.

A Quinn to Mohamed Massaquoi completion took the ball to the Bengals' 20 yard line.

Then, on 2nd and goal from the Bengals' 9-yard line, Quinn ran straight up the middle on a quarterback draw for the touchdown.

It was the Browns' first rushing touchdown in more than a year.

Phil Dawson's extra point made the score 13-7.

The Bengals then responded with another lengthy drive, this time a 10-play drive that ate up most of the rest of the third quarter as the Bengals played it smart and mostly kept it on the ground. But the Browns' defense stiffened in enough time to keep the Bengals out of the end zone, forcing them to settle for a 28-yard Graham field goal and a 16-7 lead.

A series of yawns then followed, though if this had been a competitive game this was about the moment it should have gotten interesting. Inst ead it was perfunctory.

After Graham kicked the ensuing kick off out of bounds, giving the Browns the ball at their own 40-yard line, the Browns failed to capitalize.

Quinn threw low to both Massaquoi and Cribbs and the Browns were faced with a 4th-and-1 from their own 44-yard line.

Mangini gambled on 4th and 1 and Quinn gained the first down on a sneak. The drive continued,

but not really.

Three plays later it was over and the Browns punted.

Hodge, demonstrating why he was out of work earlier in the season, hit it down the middle and into the end zone for a touchback.

It was a net 20 yard punt.

If the Bengals had been playing a credible team or themselves were a top-tier team, this was the drive to put the game away. Failing that, they should have rightfully expected to see the opposition instead march right down field and turn the game on its ear.

But the Bengals aren't yet a top-tier team but they weren't playing a credible team either.

After getting 1 first down, the Bengals were forced to punt. No matter, the Browns offense played their part, quickly going 3-and-out, with the seemingly obligatory false start penalty thrown in for good measure.

The Bengals then had another chance to put the game

away but again could not. With the ball at the Cleveland 39-yard line and facing a 4th and 1, the Bengals then false started their way to a punt that gave the Browns the ball back at their own 10 yard line with just under 7 minutes remaining.

But after a few first downs, one of which was by penalty, the Browns too were relegated to the punt.

With 3:49 remaining in the game, it hardly mattered whether the Bengals would use this time to put the game away.

For all practical purposes the game already was bathed, in its pajamas and being read a bed time story.

As the game was winding down, Rogers was injured and had to be carted off. On any other team that would be a very costly loss.

But on a team that already sports one of the worst defenses, another injury, even to one of the team's few good players, will hardly make a difference.

If Quinn doesn't end up making it in the NFL as a starting quarterback, it's games like Sunday that will be the reason. As good as he looked against a weak Detroit team was as bad as he looked against a far stronger defense in Cincinnati.

Though Quinn was victimized plenty by dropped passes, that wasn't really the story of his game.

Quinn wasn't under siege so much as he too often was putting passes in the wrong location or too often was on a different frequency with his receivers.

The NFL demands consistency and following up a good game with its polar opposite is no way to impress the scouts.

Palmer didn't exactly light it up either, but he didn't have to. He had the benefit of a good running game, something the Browns simply

don't have.

Indeed, what the Browns don't have can take several pages to document. Suffice it to say, though, that it's best explained by just stating that even as flawed as the Bengals are right now they'll likely end up with at least a 10-game lead on the Browns by season's end.
Now that hurts.