Just as we'll no doubt look back at this week as the time of the year that the Browns' 2010 season started to slip into the category of "painful," 30 years ago, this was the week when things started to get fun.

As welcome as the home victory over Kansas City the week before had been, in order to claw back to respectability – and a .500 record – Sam Rutigliano's Browns would have to conquer an incredibly stiff challenge. They'd hit the road in Week Four for a contest in Tampa against the upstart Buccaneers.

Up until the previous season, such a trip would have been the equivalent of a three-day vacation, capped by an hysterically easy victory. The Bucs were born into the NFL in 1976 and promptly lost their first 26 games, collecting only seven victories in their first three seasons. But in 1979, Tampa Bay had transformed from the league's punch line to one of its greatest Cinderella stories, exploding out of expansion purgatory to become one of the NFL's strongest teams. Just two years removed from their record losing streak, the Buccaneers rolled to a 10-6 record and the NFC Central Division title, then came within a game of the Super Bowl. Naturally, hopes were high for the swashbucklers in pumpkin orange heading into 1980.

True to form, the Bucs had won two of their first three, including a thriller over the defending conference-champion Los Angeles Rams in Week Two. With the Browns still trying to find themselves, a trip to the sauna known as Tampa Stadium – where the temperature would top 95 degrees on this day with the heat index well over 100 – was hardly what the doctor had ordered.

The script unfolded just as many expected in the early going. Brian Sipe regressed into the Mike Phipps-ian struggles he'd encountered in the season's first two games, misfiring on his initial six passes as the Buccaneers sprinted to a 13-3 advantage early in the second quarter. But ever so slowly, things started to change. And once they did, the steamy afternoon took on an entirely different flavor.

A Charles White sweep around right end from eight yards out cut the margin to 13-10, then a long pass to Reggie Rucker set up a short scoring toss from Sipe to Calvin Hill just before the half to give the Browns their first lead. Sipe, who'd started the game as cold as a Cleveland February, would mirror the red-hot conditions of the city of Tampa in the second half.

He completed 13 consecutive passes and fired his second touchdown strike of the day in the final minute of the third quarter, targeting wide-open Ricky Feacher in the back of the end zone to make it 24-13. Not only was the Browns' offense truly cooking for the first time in 1980, but the defense was holding its own after a rough start. With both phases cruising for the first time all year, the Browns had quietly taken control of a game they'd seemed highly unlikely to win.

Then with 10 minutes left, they went for the jugular. On third-and-six from the Tampa 43, the Bucs made the mistake of blitzing a confident Brian Sipe with a dominant offensive line in front of him – now more dominant than ever with new addition Joe DeLamielleure settling in at guard just three weeks after joining the team. Sipe saw the blitz coming and looped a pass down the sideline for 33-year-old Calvin Hill, who caught it and traipsed in for another touchdown. It was now 31-13 and apparently over, especially when the Browns picked off Tampa quarterback Doug Williams on the following possession.

But as if realizing that a comfortable blowout victory wouldn't be true to the character they'd established throughout the previous season, the Kardiac Kids saddled up to show everybody why they'd earned the nickname.

After the Browns gave the ball right back to the Bucs on a fumble, Williams atoned for his miscue by quickly driving his squad down the field and into the end zone to cut the margin back to 11 with five minutes left. Once again, after recovering the ensuing onside kick, it appeared the Browns were in the clear, especially when Don Cockroft tacked on a short field goal to stretch the advantage to 34-20 with under two minutes to play.

And that's when the wackiness began.

Tampa Bay marched 82 yards in 10 quick plays and Williams' third touchdown pass of the afternoon made it 34-27 with 45 seconds showing. Still, by simply recovering one more onside kick, the Browns could kneel out the final two plays and head back to Cleveland sun-tanned and relaxed at 2-2.

But this onside kick bounced off the shoulder pads of Cleveland cornerback Clinton Burrell and the Bucs recovered at the Browns 48.

Forty-two seconds remained. Williams connected on a short pass over the middle that gained six, but, with Tampa out of time outs, kept the clock moving. After an incompletion and a quick sideline completion stopped the clock with twelve seconds left, the Buccaneers were within striking distance at the Browns 35.

Then Doug Williams, still seven years away from the defining performance of his career in Super Bowl XXII, made a critical mistake. He lofted a pass over the middle to his tight end, Jimmie Giles, who caught it and was dragged down at the 20 as the clock ticked down. Before Tampa could get another snap off, the game ended. For the second straight week, the Browns had escaped by the hairs of their chinny-chin-chins.

"This," a beaming Sam Rutigliano said afterward, "was like the good old days.

The teams had combined for more than 800 yards of offense as Sipe and Williams both threw for better than 300 – yet were each sacked but once. Adding to the wild flavor of the afternoon, both squads also racked up more than 100 penalty yards.

With hearts still fluttering back in Cleveland, the Browns returned home having notched a road victory over one of the league's top teams. And now they were within a game of front-running Pittsburgh and Houston in the AFC Central.

"Refill the digitalis, or whatever pill you pop to calm the nerves," Jim Braham wrote that Monday in the *Cleveland Press*. "The Kardiac Kids are back."