If this had been Las Vegas, the Cleveland Browns would have been the player at the craps table with the hot dice. If it had been a prize fight, the Browns would have been the boxer pummeling a club pro as a tune up to a bigger match. But it was a football game and the Browns were simply the team that looked like it had the best record in the NFL instead of playing the team that did in dominating the New England Patriots 34-14 on Sunday.

Playing like they had red bull in their water bottles while the Patriots looked as if they hadn't yet had their morning coffee, the Browns literally overwhelmed the Patriots in every aspect of the game, offense, defense, special teams and coaching. At 3-5, the Browns aren't yet a playoff team yet, but you can at least say this: they are a credible NFL team once again. Welcome back.

The Browns were led mostly by a one two punch of running back Peyton Hillis and rookie quarterback Colt McCoy. Hillis shredded the Patriots defense for 181 yards and two touchdowns. McCoy established himself as a legitimate NFL starter and perhaps the franchise quarterback this team has craved with a bevy of signature plays of his own. The defense played solid throughout and was aided greatly by a Patriots' receiving corps that dropped enough passes to embarrass even Braylon Edwards. The special teams got a big fumble recovery early and rendered the Patriots return teams ineffective. And Eric Mangini, yes Eric Mangini, as beleaguered as any coach in the league, simply out coached his mentor turned tormentor, Bill Belichick, to get the best win in his short Browns' tenure.

From an opening drive that yielded a 38-yard Phil Dawson field goal to a gimmicky end around that Chansi Stuckey turned into a 11-yard touchdown run to a signature drive engineered by McCoy in the third quarter that effectively put the game away early, the Browns demonstrated that they are no longer the probable "W" on opposing team's schedule that they have been for the last few season.

The Patriots may eventually chalk this loss up as just one of those days but they certainly head back home knowing that they had their butts kicked by a team that was a four point home underdog. Quarterback Tom Brady didn't necessarily look as shell shocked as Drew Brees and the Saints two weeks ago, but it didn't necessarily matter much. He spent a good portion of the game exactly where the Browns had scripted it in their wildest mind's eye: on the bench with a ball cap on, waiting.

The opening drive was truly a harbinger of things to come. Josh Cribbs, fielding a bounding kickoff just inside the two yard line, returned the ball to the Cleveland 37-yard line. Recognizing that the Patriots were keying on Hillis, offensive coordinator Brian Daboll had McCoy use play action to great effect on the first play and hit receiver Mohamed Massaquoi for a 21-yard pass. Hillis then signaled that the bye week was good for his health as he blasted up the middle for 18 yards, leaping the New England safety in the process. But it looked like Hillis came down a bit tenderly on his ankle and sat out the rest of the drive.

With Mike Bell providing a poor substitute at running back, the Browns weren't able to get it much closer and settled for the Dawson field goal. Then it got weird, Eric Metcalf weird.

On the ensuing kickoff, New England tight end Rob Gronkowski signaled for a fair catch and then walked away from it as if it were a punt, leaving fullback Sammy Morris to try and field the catch. Morris, confused, muffed it and Ray Ventrone recovered giving the Browns the ball at the New England 19-yard line.

McCoy then hit tight end Evan Moore on a 17-yard pass that put the ball at the New England 2. From there Hillis powered his way into the end zone and the Browns had a 10-0 lead before Brady and the Patriots even took a snap on offense.

The Browns' defense, similarly inspired, sent a message early as it held New England to 3-and-out on its first drive.

The Browns offense seemed to be right back in business with Hillis hitting holes like he was Mike Pruitt in his prime. But on a 16-yard run, Hillis had the ball stripped and safety Brandon Merriweather recovered. It was the only mistake Hillis would make all day. As it was, the New England offense looked frustrated and couldn't capitalize. It left Brady barking at his offense

near the Patriots' bench as Zolton Mesko punted.

The Brady pep talk had its intended effect, but an effect that lasted exactly one series. With a renewed sense of purpose and passes that seemed to have more zip, Brady took the Patriots on a 11-play 79-yard drive that ended with a Brady to Aaron Hernandez two-yard touchdown pass. The ball appeared to be headed for Gronkowski but it was tipped and Hernandez made an excellent grab in the back of the end zone.

But just as it seemed like the Patriots were re-asserting themselves, McCoy and the Browns struck again. Starting at their own 40-yard line, the Browns marched down the field and scored when Stuckey took a handoff that no one expected and went around left end for and 11-yard touchdown. What made the play unusual was the way that the offense sold it. With the offensive line standing around looking confused, Cribbs positioned himself behind center Alex Mack, took the snap and while acting like he was going to run around the right end, put the ball in Stuckey's gut. Stuckey, in a crouch and barely visible behind the offensive line, then had a mostly free path to the end zone as he stretched for the pylon.

The Patriots tried to tighten the game late in the first half and were on the verge of pulling within 3. But on first and goal from the 9-yard line, Brady hit Gronkowski on a short pass. Gronkowski, already having the kind of day that can result in the coach asking to see you in his office on Monday, bring your playbook, then fumbled at the 2-yard line. It was recovered by Abe Elam and that effectively ended the half with the Browns holding a 17-7 lead.

Perhaps the best measure of progress of this team came in the second half. The Patriots, getting the ball first, had an opportunity to curb the Browns' enthusiasm. Instead it was Brady and the offense collectively doing their best Larry David impression as they couldn't quite do anything right and were forced to punt.

That opened it up for the series that should ensure McCoy's on-going status as starter and quell any talk that any other quarterback on this roster gives the Browns a better chance to win. It was one of those moments really where reputations are either made or loss. It wasn't like the Browns were exactly nursing their 10-point lead, but another score here would send the Patriots a message that the first half was anything but a mirage.

Given the opportunity, McCoy didn't just walk through the door, he kicked it off its hinges in the process. Leading a 10-play 72-yard drive that consumed nearly 7 minutes, McCoy first extended the drive with a scramble that avoided the blitz while throwing a pinpoint pass on the run to receiver Brian Robiskie that took the ball to the New England 11-yard line and then finished off the drive with a scrambling 16-yard touchdown run. On that run, McCoy stepped up in the pocket, couldn't find an open receiver and saw enough daylight down the left sideline that allowed him to stretch the last two or so yards for the touchdown. It was the kind of run that surely raised his respect level in the huddle and with the coaches as Daboll could be seen on the sidelines fired up as he congratuled McCoy. It was the defining moment for McCoy that a player like Brady Quinn could never quite find.

The Browns' defense, again similarly inspired, once again kept the Patriots out of the end zone. The Browns' offense then kept things rolling adding a 37-yard Dawson field goal as the game grew increasingly out of New England's reach.

Brady was able to engineer another touchdown that kept the score respectable, hitting on two key 4th down plays in the process. But the Browns' offense would answer once again as Hillis capped off a career day on the next drive with a 35-yard touchdown run that was the final margin of victory.

On the day, McCoy was a very efficient 14-19 for 174 yards. He had the 16-yard touchdown run and as importantly, didn't turn the ball over. Brady, meanwhile, was 19-36 for 224 yards, two touchdowns. Back up Brian Hoyer got into the game late and threw an interception to Eric Wright.

For Mangini, one thing is clear. The bye week was well utilized. He had every member of his team ready to play. He had well-scripted, aggressive game plans on both sides of the ball and the special teams were once again special. It was the kind of coaching performance that could be as meaningful for Mangini's future with the Browns as the third quarter drive was for McCoy's.

At this juncture, the Browns are no longer a league doormat. Heck, they aren't even the doormat in their division. That would be the Cincinnati Bengals. The Browns pulled off one trick already, demonstrating they could follow up one dominating performance with another. It's the hardest trick in pro football. All they need now is to do it again, against the team that put Mangini in Cleveland in the first place, the New York Jets.