It's almost as if you can actually hear "I've Got You, Babe" playing the minute the clock strikes 1 p.m. eastern standard time each Sunday. Playing as if they are stuck in a NFL version of "Groundhog Day" the Cleveland Browns once again played football mostly at its tedious best on their way to losing to their second straight league doormat, this time the Cincinnati Bengals, 19-17, in a game that seems closer than it actually was.

The Browns are now 5-9, assuring themselves of another losing season. Lather, rinse, repeat.

Losing to one doormat can happen. But when you lose to two straight, what does that say about your team? Exactly.

Maybe it was only fitting. The Browns' started the Bengals 10-game losing streak with a 23-20 win in week 4 and it only seemed right that they ended it, too.

The story of the game was a Bengals rushing attack, led by Cedric Benson. As CBS announcer Don Criqui repeatedly reminded the hundreds watching on television, the Bengals only rushed it once in the second half of last week's loss to Pittsburgh. Well, they rushed it a lot more than that as Benson had 150 yards on 31 carries. Bernard Scott was effective in spelling Benson with 40 yards on just 8 carries.

The question perhaps is why were the Bengals so effective running the ball in the first place? Was it simply a matter of lulling the Browns into complacency with an anemic running attack all season that left them 30th in the league entering the game? Maybe it was because they ran it only one time against Pittsburgh last season. Maybe it had something to do with a defense that looked as if it had last minute Christmas shopping it needed to get to.

Those are mysteries for another day. All that is known right now is that the Bengals put on a frustratingly effective display of football at its most basic by running, running and then running some more while holding the ball a full 15 minutes more than the Browns. It gave the Browns' offense very little time to find any rhythm. Of course, it could be argued that if the Browns' offense had made a few more first downs sometime between the first and last drives the time of possession stat wouldn't have been so lopsided. Again, though, who am I to argue at this point? Let's just say that both are true.

Despite all of that, it wasn't as if the game had no value. Colt McCoy confirmed that he should be the starting quarterback, making it far easier for the Browns to concentrate on trying to fill about 20 other holes on the team. Oh yea, Brian Robiskie caught a touchdown pass. That isn't a typo.

Let's go to the video tape.

It all started so well, but then again isn't that the way it started last week?

Inserting McCoy at quarterback gave the Browns' offense a jolt in the way a can of Red Bull at 11 p.m. on Saturday night gives you a jolt. Alternately living dangerously and easily McCoy led the Browns straight down field on the Browns' opening drive, going 3-4 for 55 yards, including a 20-yard pass to tight end Robert Royal for the touchdown that helped give the Browns a quick 7-0 lead. At least the Browns did one thing right. They extended their streak of leading in a game to 18 straight, dating back to last season.

McCoy had a few high passes in that drive and a pass or two that could have been intercepted. But McCoy has a charm about him at the moment that at least gives you the sense that he

really is the team's best chance to win. It's just that he's fighting such headwinds, like a running game that other teams have figured out and an offensive line that has weakened considerably as the season has worn on. Still on that first drive McCoy had completions, of 17, 18 and 20 yards on the drive which lasted all of 6 plays and covered 75 yards. Unfortunately, it wasn't until the Browns' last drive that they were able to look as effective.

On that last drive McCoy, frustrated all day by a running attack that wasn't working and a pocket that collapsed more often than a folding chair at a graduation party, put together a nifty 5 play 88-yard drive that culminated with a 46-yard touchdown pass to Robiskie. That isn't a typo. McCoy found Robiskie streaking (relatively) down the left sideline, hit him perfectly and Robiskie went into the end zone untouched. The onside kick wasn't recovered and it gave the Bengals the ball at the Cleveland 44-yard line.

As befit the rest of the game, the Browns couldn't keep Benson and the Bengals from gaining the one first down it needed to run out the clock.

While the Bengals were the better team today and perhaps on the season, despite the records, it isn't as if the Bengals are a model of efficiency. They ground out yard after yard all day but could only finish off one drive for a touchdown, which explains a whole lot about their problems.

The Bengals only touchdown of the day came on their second drive and it showed why they can still be a dangerous team, particularly when you consider they have far better skill players than the Browns. Using a heavy dose of Benson and some timely third down passes by Palmer, who went 5-5 on the drive, the Bengals marched 91 yards in 11 plays with Benson finishing off the drive by carrying it in nearly untouched from 18 yards out. Clint Stitser's extra point tied the game at 7-7.

The Bengals took a 10-7 lead on their next drive on a Stitser 25-yard field goal. It was a drive that established a pattern of sorts with the Bengals using Benson to push the ball down field only to see the drive end prematurely. The only thing it did was keep the game from getting out of hand. The Browns' defense couldn't contain Benson all day and even when they did, Palmer usually had enough time to find an open receiver.

The Browns, meanwhile, were painfully repeating a game plan that was unveiled against Miami

two weeks ago and used to even lesser effect last week against Buffalo and now against Cincinnati. It featured a heavy dose of trying to run the ball into the middle of a defense with 8 players near the line of scrimmage. It ended, usually, with a Reggie Hodges punt. Lather, rinse, repeat.

That said, it's only fair to note that the Browns did find a little fire late in the third quarter with a drive that was nearly reminiscent of their first, but with better running, McCoy and Hillis pushed the ball from the Browns' 34 yard line down to the Bengals' 5 yard line. Then on 3rd and 1, Hillis couldn't get the yard as the hole closed that quickly. Head coach Eric Mangini, once again eschewing a 4th and 1 deep in opposing territory, opted to have Phil Dawson kick the 23-yard field goal that brought the Browns back to within one score at 16-10 just as the fourth quarter was getting underway. The decision not to go for the touchdown on 4th and 1 was far more defensible than a similar decision a week ago on the Browns' opening drive.

And it's a decision that may have seemed like a good idea at the time but it became a moot point a few minutes later when Palmer hit Andre Caldwell on what turned out to be a 53-yard screen play. It got the ball down to the Browns' 20-yard line. The Bengals got it to the 5-yard line but once again were forced to settle for a Stitser chip shot field goal that again pushed the lead to 9 at 19-10.

The Browns made it respectable with the Robiskie touchdown at the end (that's not a typo) but because touchdowns still don't count for 9 points and onside kicks usually aren't recovered in the NFL, especially when the other team knows it's coming, the Browns weren't able to truly threaten the Bengals.

One of the abiding mysteries as the Browns get deeper into the season is what, exactly goes on in the locker room at halftime. The Bengals' game plan was well established in the game's first half and yet the Bengals were able to pretty much pick up in the second half where they left off when they went into the locker room. That meant two things, really. First, the Bengals kept moving the ball but not getting into the end zone. Second, whatever else the Browns defense and their coordinator Rob Ryan talked about at halftime, we know it wasn't adjustments.

As for the offense, same question. The Bengals' defense was mostly selling out on the run, stacking 8 players near the line of scrimmage on running plays. When it was time to pass, the offensive line was giving McCoy about as much time as Republicans give Barack Obama and with similar results. McCoy had little time to throw anything more than a quick swing pass and

those generally aren't going to be successful when it's 3rd and long.

In that context it's actually quite surprising that McCoy was a respectable 19-25 for 243 yards, 2 touchdowns and no interceptions, though most of that yardage came early and late. Hillis though could only manage 59 yards on 15 carries. More to the point, though, is that the offense just isn't creative enough at this point to scare anyone.

The Browns may be one of the more confounding teams in the league this season. It seems like they are improved from last season and have the stats to back that up but each week the gap between Browns circa 2009 and circa 2010 closes a bit more. They aren't talented by most measures but they do have some interesting players on both sides of the ball. They appear to play hard, usually, but then have too many lapses on both sides of the ball to say they are disciplined. They've beaten two of the league's best teams and yet struggles with teams at its level. It all adds up to a confusing record that isn't great, certainly, but yet seems to indicate that it's a better unit than a year ago. Whether that's really true will be known in a few weeks because with games against Baltimore and Pittsburgh upcoming, the Browns have a very real chance of matching last season's win total. All the difference in the world though comes in how each of those teams got to their 5 wins.

At the end of the movie Groundhog Day, Bill Murray is finally able to move on once he becomes the man he always should have been. If the Browns are going to ever exit their own private Punxsutawney, they are going to have to be the team they always should have been. From the looks of things right now, there's no reason to think that "I Got You, Babe" isn't going to play on the radio right before kick off next week against Baltimore.