It's far too early to call anyone on the Cleveland Browns "the Closer," but if and when that time comes, running back Peyton Hillis will be the most likely candidate. Eschewing a trend where his team couldn't seem to close out games with 4th quarter leads, Hillis took matters into his own hands. With 4 minutes remaining and the Browns nursing a precarious 5 point lead, Hillis turned a simple off tackle run into a 24-yard scamper that helped push the Browns to a 27-19 win over the (wait for it) winless Indianapolis Colts.

A late Phil Dawson followed by the Colts' first touchdown in two games provided the final margin of victory.

For much of the game, it looked as if NFL films had used some technical wizardry to run a loop of last week's Browns-Bengals match up, colorizing the Bengals to look like the Colts. The Browns' defense looked flat-footed as the Colts moved the ball twice early, giving the writers in the press box all sorts of really clever ideas about how they could say that the Browns looked to be as stuck in the mud as their charter plane was on the Hopkins airport runway.

But the Colts, like the Bengals the week before, had to settle for field goals when they really needed touchdowns allowing the Browns once again to stay close in a game that could have gotten out of hand early.

And while the Browns' offense wasn't exactly dynamic, it wasn't stuck in neutral either. Behind a far more efficient Colt McCoy, the Browns used the second quarter once again to great effect

with two touchdowns to run out to a 14-9 half time lead which had to give some in the crowd a sort of "uh oh" moment.

This time the Browns' defense didn't get caught napping, Colts quarterback Kerry Collins couldn't channel Bruce Gradkowski, and the Browns were able to secure for Pat Shurmur his first win of his career with 13 fourth quarter points that sent Colts fans home miserable and scratching themselves.

But let's be honest with each other for a moment. It's not like this victory came easy, especially in contrast with the Houston Texans' beat down of this same, pitiful Colts team a week before. But the Browns needed a victory, especially one in which they demonstrated they can hold on to late leads, and it matters little whether it was frustrating or folly.

For any Browns fan watching the game (and gosh is it painful at times to listen to Marv Albert and Rich Gannon), the cameras panning a despondent Colts' crowd had to look familiar.

We know that look, don't we? It's the elbows on the knees, the chin resting on the hands feeling of resignation as your team runs one futile series after another. But no one in this neck of the woods is going to feel sorry for the Colts. Football tends to show no mercy and the Colts are being punished for building both an offense and a defense around Peyton Manning, who may not play again this season.

Collins, of course, is a big part of the problem. He's always just been good enough to stay in the league but never good enough to be a consistent threat. I'd say he looked like an aging Joe Bauserman (my second straight Browns' game story reference to Bauserman, by the way) but I actually think Bauserman might be older. In any case, Collins' inability to have anything resembling a grasp of the Colts' offense allowed the Browns' defense to mostly contain the Colts until the last gasp end of the game touchdown.

While the Colts these days aren't particularly stout opposition, let's at least acknowledge some progress for the Browns. As noted, McCoy was far more efficient. He was 22-32 for 211 yards and 1 touchdown, a nice 16-yard pass that McCoy squeezed into tight end Evan Moore in the back of the Colts' end zone. (Not to pick nits or anything, but in truth McCoy picked the tougher of the two throws on that play. Moore was open, but so too was Hillis near the goal line with no

one near him. A simple pitch to Hillis would have resulted in a score as well.)

But perhaps the biggest improvement on offense anyway came in the simple fact that third down was not the enemy this week. The Browns were 8-16 on third down, a significant step forward from last week's rather Buckeyes' like 4-15. And it wasn't necessarily due to the Browns consistently being in short yardage situations on 3rd down although that helped. It was more due to good decision making by McCoy, some slippery running by receivers who caught the ball short and turned it into first downs and, occasionally some good inside running by Hillis.

The other thing that's trending for this Browns' offense is the emergence of both Cribbs and Greg Little as its two main receivers with Mohamed Massaquoi the third option. Brian Robiskie, though he did start the game, doesn't appear as though he'll ever figure out the pro game as he becomes increasingly irrelevant. Indeed if Robiskie sticks around and stays active for every game this season it will be solely because the receiving corps generally is among the thinnest groups on the roster.

It's sad, really, that Robiskie isn't any sort of threat. He runs good routes and he has good hands. But there is no elusiveness in his game, he can't break out of a route to help his quarterback and he simply rarely is open. Oh well, that's fodder for another column. Let's stick to the main themes.

Heading into the game, the conventional wisdom was that the Browns would work the run and try to be opportunistic with the pass. And while they did work extremely hard to try and establish the run, the Colts were mostly ready for it. Look at it this way. Hillis had 26 carries for 70 yards and 1 carry for 24 yards.

Unquestionably Hillis is the Browns' best runner, but it will be interesting to understand the thinking of Shurmur, who, after all, serves as his own offensive coordinator, as to why Montario Hardesty only got three carries. Perhaps even more interesting will be why, when the Browns had the ball inside the Colts' 5-yard line early in the 4th quarter and the first real chance to put the game away, Shurmur had Hillis out of the game in favor of Hardesty. Two Hardesty runs that went for naught and then an incomplete pass on third down forced a Phil Dawson field goal that made it 17-12. A 21-12 lead at that moment would have been huge.

The Browns' defense, still themselves learning new schemes and likewise in need of more practice time, were in their usual bend but don't quite break mode. Of Adam Vinitieri's 4 field goals, three were from the 21-yard line or less and each followed drives of at least 9 plays. That's a testament both to the Colts, with Collins behind center, not being able to finish drives and the Browns' defense tightening at just the right time.

The Colts did have some success in the running game. Joseph Addai had 14 carries for 64 yards and Copley's Delone Carter had 11 carries for 46 yards,. But with Collins unable to connect with his receivers until garbage time late, the running game became mostly an interesting diversion.

The Browns' defensive line got decent pressure on Collins throughout the game. He was sacked twice, once each by Jabaal Sheard and Ahtyba Rubin, and pressured into fumbling deep in Colts' territory. That fumble, recovered by Sheard, led to a 23-yard field goal by Dawson with just over three minutes remaining. In fact, as much as young players like Joe Haden and T.J. Ward get most of the love from the press on defense, Sheard and Phil Taylor might be more talented. With Rubin in the middle, the Browns' defensive line is something other teams will have to scheme against. The Colts certainly did.

If there was one thing more than anything that was troubling was that the Browns fumbled four times, though they lost only one. That would be the fumble by Hillis at the Colts' 40-yard line on the Browns' first drive of the third quarter. It led to a Vinitiari field goal when, again, a Collins-led touchdown was needed.

Bad teams may not be able to overcome mistakes, but when one bad team plays another and they're both making those kinds of mistakes (Collins had a fumble and an interception) someone is going to overcome it. It's a measure really of the state of the Colts at the moment that it would be the Browns.

There is an adage in the NFL that the biggest leap teams make is from the first game to the second. For the Browns it wasn't so much a leap as it was a puddle jump. On the other hand, they didn't go backward and for the first time since 2007 they have won at least one game before losing at least three. That should keep the locals chomping for another week as an average Miami comes to town giving the Browns a real chance to have their first winning record after three games since 2002.