The official reason the Cleveland Browns are now 2-1 instead of 1-2 is because defensive back Mike Adams intercepted a crucial 4th and 10 pass from Miami Dolphins quarterback Chad Henne with 21 seconds remaining as the Dolphins were attempting to angle their way into field goal range to kick a game winner. But the real reason the Cleveland Browns are now 2-1 instead of 1-2 is because it was the Browns quarterback, Colt McCoy, who made plays when plays had to be made, tossing a game winning 14 yard pass to an acrobatic Mohamed Massaquoi that helped push the Browns to a 17-16 victory.

It's not like any aspect of the win was easy, but let's just start where it ended. McCoy, struggling most of the day under the pressure of the Dolphins' defensive line, put together a career-defining 65-yard drive that culminated with the pass to Massaquoi. With the Browns trailing by 6 with 3:23 remaining and appearing mostly stagnant all day, McCoy pulled it all back together at just the right moment.

Starting from the team's 20-yard line after a Dan Carpenter 38-yard field goal had extended the Dolphins lead to 16-10, McCoy started first by finding Greg Little who turned what should have been short passes into longer gains to keep the team moving forward. By the time the two-minute warning was given, the Browns were on their own 46-yard line and sitting with two time outs.

Little then turned another short pass into a first down and, for good measure, stopped the clock by going out of bounds. Then came the first real gut check moment. McCoy threw incomplete to Brian Robiskie (suspend the disbelief). A pass to tight end Ben Watson yielded 6 yards but a comebacker to Watson fell incomplete. With 4th and 4 at the Dolphins' 37-yard line, McCoy found Montario Hardesty wide open in the flat and Hardesty turned it into a crucial 10-yard gain and first down.

McCoy then threw incomplete twice to tight end Alex Smith. On third down, an aging Jason Taylor tried to get a jump on Browns' left tackle Joe Thomas and went offsides. It nullified an incomplete pass to Josh Cribbs that would have been another pucker-inducing moment. McCoy used the opportunity to find tight end Evan Moore for 8 yards and another first down. Then, with 45 seconds remaining, McCoy found Massaquoi in the corner of the end zone. Massaquoi leaped and, like Cribbs on an earlier touchdown pass from McCoy, caught the ball, got two feet in and fell to the ground. Dawson added the extra point to give the Browns their margin of victory.

Here's where things got strange. As bad as the Browns' offense struggled all day, especially on offense, the officiating crew struggled more. They called personal fouls on both sides of the ball that demonstrated that they were watching the game about as closely as Don Criqui. (Let me stop progress for a moment to tell you one of the great unintended but funniest lines I've heard in awhile. Criqui referred to Dolphins' guard Robert Incognito as underrated. What else could he be with a name like that?)

But here is where the officiating crew's foibles almost cost the Browns. After Massaquoi caught the ball, he fell to the ground, by himself, exhausted but exhilarated. Watson, by himself, came over to the prone Massaquoi and congratulated him. The officials threw a flag claiming that this was essentially an impermissible group celebration. Television replays demonstrated just how poor of a call it really was.

It was a 15-yard penalty that forced Dawson to kick off from the Browns' 20-yard line, assuring the Dolphins an opportunity for a decent return. To make matters worse, Dmitri Patterson was then flagged for a horse collar tackle on the return (a questionable call as well as it appeared that Patterson had kick returner Clyde Gates by the left shoulder pad and not the back) giving the Dolphins the ball at the Cleveland 47-yard line.

But Henne, who was efficient early but not when it counted, threw incomplete three straight

times and then threw it into the arms of a waiting Adams to send the Dolphins and their beleaguered head coach Tony Sparano to an 0-3 loss.

Had Henne been able to move the Dolphins into field goal position and win the game, you could almost count the seconds it would take for the league office to issue an apology to the Browns because they were victimized but such an awful call. Now it will probably be dealt with behind the scenes.

Where it all went wrong for the Dolphins is both simple and complex. The Dolphins aren't really a very good team. They have some skill players but lack the ability to put it all together in a cohesive manner. Henne runs hot and cold but even when he's hot he's just very average anyway. Brandon Marshall is a good receiver but is mentally weak and easily distracted, particularly when the ball isn't coming his way. Reggie Bush is a change of pace back masquerading as a feature back and Brian Daboll, who's charged with coordinating all this mess, is probably going to be out of work at the end of the season. He's not very good at what he does and I'm being nice here.

And yet the Dolphins for the most part controlled the game, which says something as well about the Browns. Games are supposedly won in the trenches but this one was not. The Dolphins controlled those trenches on both sides of the ball. Their offensive line mostly had its way with the Browns' defensive line despite giving up 5 sacks. Most of those were on Henne who tends to alternately hold on to the ball too long or scramble around just enough to get sacked.

Meanwhile the Dolphins' offense was dictating the pace of the game. Henne, stepping outside himself early, completed pass after pass, helped tremendously by a lack of pressure, and seemed to move the ball almost at will. Couple that with a poor tackling day by the defense generally and it's difficult to explain exactly why the Dolphins only came away with 16 points. They just did and heads will roll in Miami. Good.

It's not all that hard though to explain why the Browns only had 17 points. Perhaps they were undone just a bit from the outset by the inability of Peyton Hillis to play due to strep throat. Hardesty though showed some of the same flashes both as a runner and as a receiver. He had 14 carries for 67 yards and 3 receptions for 19 yards.

Mostly though McCoy was just off on his throws. He missed open receivers and through to the wrong sides of others. He tried repeatedly to squeeze in passes that looked ill advised. He was only 19-39 for 210 yards. As a result the West Coast offense was mostly a Dead End offense except on three drives, the most important of which was the last.

Before that, it wasn't until the Browns' fourth drive of the game that they looked like they were even all that much interested in playing the game. On that drive, McCoy hit Watson for 13 yards on a 3rd and 12 play for only the second first down of the game. Two plays later, McCoy, rolling to his right, threw the ball purposely high to the back of the end zone and in the direction of Cribbs. Either Cribbs was going to jump and get it or it would fall incomplete. Cribbs jumped and got it and the Browns pulled to a 7-7 tie. It more than made up for a bad drop Cribbs had on an earlier drive. In total it showed why Cribbs is still a work in progress as a receiver and also why patience when it comes to Cribbs is a good thing.

The Browns offense wouldn't get going again until its opening drive of the second half. Looking fresh after the 15 minutes rest, the Browns moved from their own 20 to the Dolphins' 20-yard line. But then Watson had a false start penalty, pushing the Browns into a 1st and 15. Watson got 13 of those yards back on the next play on a toss from McCoy but then a Hardesty run gained nothing and McCoy threw incomplete to Watson, setting up a 30-yard Dawson field goal that tied the game at 10-10.

From that point forward, which was, sadly, the 10:37 mark of the 3rd quarter, the Browns defense went back to sleep. Fortunately they woke up just in time, with 3:23 remaining, and it made all the difference in the game.

It's a measure of progress in some ways that fans can now complain about how a win was more difficult than it had to be. There was certainly a time (and if you have the time I'll be glad to recount it again in excruciating detail. Didn't think so.) when any Browns win was a reason to overturn cars and set couches on fire. Now we're being just a tad picky, which is definitely a more fun place to be.

Though this wasn't a beauty, it was certainly all right. Besides, it's not like there wasn't something substantial accomplished. For all the missteps in the game, McCoy demonstrated what comes of hard work and study. When the Browns and head coach Pat Shurmur needed McCoy most, the product of that hard work and study was at hand.

McCoy wasn't improvising at the end so much as he was running an accelerated version of what he well understood the offense to be. There wasn't panic and there wasn't confusion. It was mostly methodical, which is what these things are supposed to be.

It may be awhile before the value of McCoy's clutch performance will be properly appreciated, but rest assured that time will come. The next time the Browns and McCoy face a similar situation, and in the NFL that's an almost weekly occurrence, they won't do so with their hands on their hips and a defeatist "here we go again" thought running through their heads. The Dolphins won't be able to say the same thing and that's why the Browns are now 2-1 and the Dolphins are 0-3.