It wasn't easy, and it sure as hell wasn't pretty early on, says Papa Cass. The Browns toyed with disaster. It should never have come down to rallying from an 18-point deficit, tying the second-largest rally in Browns history. But they pulled themselves together and got into the win column. And after three losses, that's what matters.

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Browns 24, Raiders 21
Record: 1-3

This game wasn't so much manna from heaven as it was an opportunity for the Browns to finally pick on someone their own size.

Even then, it was far too close to being the Disaster by the Bay. For the first 20-odd minutes of play, before the team finally woke up and realized they were playing a football game they had no business losing, the Browns looked every bit the collection of limp noodles they were throughout the New Orleans and Cincinnati contests.

I thought for certain that the Browns had, once again, swallowed their own hype like a fishing lure and ran onto the McAfee Coliseum field figuring "Heck, if we took Baltimore to the 59th minute, we should be able to cruise past the Raiders."

The proof was in the pudding. Reuben Droughns was bowled over by Sam "Who?" Williams, causing the burly Droughns to cough up the ball, easy pickings for Williams, who scampered 30 yards in the other direction for the first score of the game.

It didn't get much better. LaMont Jordan was starting to look like Jamal Lewis circa 2003. The Browns bit on cutback after cutback as Jordan rushed for 100 first-half yards, 59 coming on a touchdown run that should have humiliated the Browns defense.

I think it actually did. That TD made it 21-3, and the Browns, showing a spark of resolve that eventually became a fire, decided to finally fight back.

It probably helped that the Browns were facing one of the few teams in the league that could actually be worse than them, but right now, we are only concerned with results, not under what circumstances they are achieved.

Charlie Frye and Reuben Droughns rushed to the rescue against an Oakland defense that would probably have a hard time stopping Ken Dorsey. That awful interception against Baltimore was flashing through everyone's mind when Frye dropped back to pass over the goal line in the second quarter, but this time, the play worked as drawn up. Stuffing the box, the Browns drew the entire Raider defense to the line of scrimmage, allowing tight end Darnell Dinkins to slip around the corner. Frye found him for a touchdown pass that made it 21-10.

An energized return game consistently gave the Browns good field position. Raider kicker Sebastian Janikowski and punter Shane Lechler tripped up Josh Cribbs and Dennis Northcutt respectively or else we'd be talking about a rare day for the Browns' special teams. As it was, Cribbs and Northcutt combined for 191 return yards and made life a heck of a lot easier on the offense in the second half.

The Browns settled nicely into their preferred run-set-up-the-pass game plan in the final three quarters, but the comeback wasn't without flaw. Frye was sacked two more times, both by Derrick Burgess. Frye's touchdown passes only outpaced his interceptions by one, 3-2. The Browns lost the turnover battle 3-1, which would likely be a recipe for defeat against most of the rest of the league. But, unlike the Ravens the week before, the Raiders offense wasn't able to do anything with either of Frye's interceptions.

The ghosts of last week continued to try and haunt the Browns, but the Raiders weren't playing along. Frye once again threw a critical interception in the end zone with time winding down in the fourth quarter and a chance to put the game away. Unlike last week, when Chris McAllister plucked a dart out of the air from Frye and Steve McNair promptly drove the ball into field goal range, allowing Matt Stover to sink a 45-yard free throw and win the game, the decidedly less-experienced Raiders offense took Frye's perplexing paper airplane of a throw and punted it away after three plays.

There's a reason why Art Shell went years between coaching stints in the NFL, and why the Raiders are the only team that's ever employed him as a head coach. You saw it right there. With 3:58 remaining, Shell put the Browns in a position where one first down and some poor defensive clock management could win the game. The Browns got two first downs, and needed just seven plays to wrap it up.

Perhaps there are different philosophies on what to do with the ball late in the game. I just think that once the clock has ticked inside four minutes and you're trailing, it's almost always four down time. Curiously, the Raiders did try -- and fail -- on fourth down on the previous possession thanks to a clutch tackle of Jordan by Orpheus Roye.

Two defensive plays summed up each Browns half for me. In the first half, Leigh Bodden went up for an interception, dropped the ball and came down hard on his ankle causing yet another injury for the depleted Browns secondary. While all that was going on, Alvin McKinley got a little too up close and personal with Oakland's Andrew Walter for a roughing the passer penalty, essentially nullifying what was still a great break-up by Bodden.

It was the three-cut: missed interception, injury and penalty.

In the second half, Kamerion Wimbley continued to make his case for defensive rookie of the year, absolutely leveling Walter for one of his two sacks. And unlike the first two weeks of the season, the Browns' run defense was good enough to make Cleveland's four quarterback sacks stand for something.

The Browns toyed with disaster. It should never have come down to rallying from an 18-point deficit, tying the second-largest rally in Browns history. But they pulled themselves together and got into the win column. After three losses, that's what matters.

Just so long as they realize there are going to be no 18-point rallies next week against the Panthers.

Up next: at Carolina, Sunday, 1 p.m.