The Hornless Rhino says an upset special in the makings this week, and could turn the Browns season around. He notes that the Browns have been playing better and their confidence is growing, while the Panthers have been exposed ... even in their last two wins. Lets find a way to get it done this week going into the bye!

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You know, I actually think the Browns have a shot today. Maybe I'm just giddy over an 18 point comeback against the worst team in the league, or maybe I've listened too much to the round-the-clock propaganda broadcasts airing on WTAM, but I think this is one game where an upset is a real possibility.

That seems crazy, doesn't it? After stumbling out of the gate, Carolina's on a bit of a roll. The Panthers have won two straight, and it's probably not a coincidence that those wins occurred after Steve Smith returned from his hamstring injury. Smith caught 10 balls for 87 yards last week against the Soon to be San Antonio Saints, and appears to be healthy again. With a gamebreaker like Smith on the field, it's not just the passing game that improves. The Panthers' ground attack was anemic during Smith's absence, but his return helped pave the way for an impressive 167 rushing yards against the Saints. Those numbers included a 105 yard performance from DeShaun Foster.

Defensively, Carolina is full of big names and big press. Kris Jenkins is a former pro bowler. Julius Peppers is tied for the NFL lead with five sacks. According to the media, DT Damoine Lewis is a force to be reckoned with in passing situations, and overall, the defensive line is one of the NFL's deepest. Hell, the defense is reportedly so ferocious that Chris Simms even exited a game against the Panthers minus one spleen.

Ooohh, scary! But on the other hand, this is a team that Drew Brees lit up for almost 350 yards passing last week, and that still hasn't won a game against a decent opponent. The vaunted Carolina defense ranks 11th in the NFC, and has given up over 340 yards per game.

Now, as for the Browns, we all know the story line. The team's secondary is banged up, and will have to try to slow down Smith with a makeshift group of DBs. That's a big job, but I think the Browns might just have a chance if they can get some kind of a pass rush together on

defense, and play a little ball control on offense. I think they've got a chance to do both of those things.

Much has been made of the Browns' injuries, but the Panthers also have injury problems, especially on the offensive line. That could also make things interesting, especially if Kamerion Wimbley continues to be the kind of pass rusher that Cleveland expected Courtney Brown to be when they drafted him. If they can put pressure on Delhomme, the Browns have a shot to contain Smith, or at least minimize the damage that he causes. The Browns may have a tougher job stuffing Carolina's running game, but I'm hoping that what we saw in key situations during the second half of last week's game wasn't a mirage.

A big part of the plan to stop Smith and company has to be to keep the ball out of Carolina's hands. In other words, the Browns have to be able to run the football. Why do I think they've got a chance to do that? Well, believe it or not, Arizona and Tampa Bay are the only NFC teams with worse defenses against the run than Carolina. Furthermore, there's the Reuben Droughns factor. Droughns had a big game against Oakland last week, and he loves to play against Carolina--his career best rushing performance came against the Panthers.

Finally, there's the confidence factor. The Browns are building on two weeks of decent performances, and are starting to think that they can win in the NFL. That's an unusual feeling for this franchise, and based on the recent performances of guys like Frye, Winslow, Edwards and Wimbley, they may have the talent to justify that confidence. Let's hope they can run with it.

Sure, it's a stretch, but I'm picking the upset. Feel free to heap scorn and ridicule on me in six hours, but in the unlikely event that I'm right, you heard it here first.

Browns 17, Panthers 10.