With or without Shawne Merriman, the Chargers will provide quite the test for the Browns and their sudden one game winning streak this week says The Hornless Rhino. Traveling cross country, with a banged up defense, to face the NFL's top rushing attack seems like too tough a task for the orange and brown. But are the Chargers all they're hyped up to be? The Rhino is here with the preview of todays game.

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Nobody gives the Browns much of a chance this weekend. The Pumpkin Heads started the week as 12 1/2 point dogs, and the line didn't move off that number even after Shawne Merriman decided to begin serving his suspension this weekend. A lot of prognosticators think it will be much worse than that. For example, one preview that I came across pegs the score at 35-17 in favor of the Bolts, while another guy predicts a 41-6 blowout.

The Chargers organization must be reading the clippings as well, because if you visit their website, you'll see that they can hardly contain their glee at the prospect of a visit from the Browns. And why not? The Chargers have the AFC's top running back in LaDainian Tomlinson, and its best backup in Michael Turner. Not surprisingly, San Diego leads the AFC in rushing, and are averaging almost 158 yards per game. On the other hand, the Browns have held opponents to less than 100 yards on the ground only twice this season, and rank 13th in the AFC (and 28th in the NFL) against the run.

The Chargers can also throw. Philip Rivers has been impressive in his first year as a starter, although as Ben Toothlessberger can tell you, there's no better friend to a young quarterback's stats than a solid running game. Good receivers help plenty too, and the Chargers have several of them. Former Kent State hoops star Antonio Gates has blossomed into one of the NFL's premier tight ends. Wide Receiver Eric Parker is averaging almost 16 yards per catch, while former Brown and future Hall of Famer Keenan McCardell adds veteran experience to the receiving corps.

Oh yeah, I almost forgot about their leading receiver--some guy named LaDainian Tomlinson. Believe it or not, he sometimes throws the ball too, and currently has a 95.8 passer rating . Unfortunately, Tomlinson didn't play his college football in Florida, so he didn't meet Butch Davis's criteria for a first round pick . That's okay, because nobody would ever second guess Butch's selection of Gerard Warren instead of Tomlinson.

I hate Butch Davis.

Defensively, the Chargers will miss Merriman, but let's not get carried away here. They lead the AFC in total defense and rank second overall in the NFL. The Chargers are strong against the run and the pass, and while Merriman's out, their defensive line will improve with the anticipated return of Igor Olshansky . The Chargers also enjoy the second best turnover ratio (+7) in the AFC.

In short, the Browns have a mountain to climb this weekend. Is there any reason for hope? Well, one interesting thing about the Chargers is the fact that they've had one of the NFL's easiest schedules to this point. They've only beaten one team with a winning record (St. Louis), and their other four victories have come against teams with a combined record of 6-20. So, just maybe, they aren't as daunting as they look.

Then again, they're playing the 2-5 Browns, who are exactly the kind of team they've feasted on this season. While Cleveland's offense looked better last week, it will have to get a whole lot better to make this game competitive, and with McGinest, Roye and Holly potentially added to the endless injury list, Todd Grantham is going to have to figure out some way to patch together a defense yet again. I wish him all the luck in the world.

Sorry guys, but this one looks like a blowout. San Diego 34, Cleveland 9.