After missing the Dolphins game due to strep throat and flu-like symptoms, Peyton Hillis played a limited role in Cleveland's 31-13 shellacking of the Tennessee Titans . Many expected to see less of Hillis after losing 10 pounds during his bout with strep, and his 10 total carries against Tennessee on Sunday reflect that.

ESPN analyst Adam Schefter thinks it's something entirely different. Schefter reported yesterday that some of Peyton's teammates believe his limited role in yesterday's game was due to his ongoing contract negotiations.

Hillis is in the final year of his four-year rookie contract, which is set at the league minimum of $550,000 per year. After rushing for nearly 1,200 yards and 11 touchdowns last year, Hillis became one of the most productive running backs in the NFL. The long contract talks between Hillis and the Browns suggest he wants to be paid like one.

The question remains -- would his limited role in yesterday's game-plan be some kind of power move by the Browns? On many levels, that doesn't add up. Hillis was just one week away from an illness that took away a lot of his strength, so easing him back in seems to make sense. With how well Hardesty played last week, it also makes sense that the coaching staff would try to build on that momentum to give the Browns a more dynamic rushing attack. Not to mention the actual game, where the Browns were down 21-6 at halftime -- essentially putting Cleveland in *we-need-to-pass-the-ball-61-times-to-try-and-make-this-competitive* mode.

When asked about this issue after the game, Hillis rejected the notion, "That's not an issue in my brain. I'll go out there and I'll play." He further explained his limited impact on the game to his recovery from illness, "If I know I'm not 100 percent and I can hurt my team, I'm not going to risk myself."

Shurmer confirmed this with his comments after the game as well, "No, Peyton was sick. That was my understanding. "

So does that settle it? To a lot of people, it does. To others who watched yesterday's game and saw Hardesty drop 954 passes (a rough estimation), it made no sense as to why the always-reliable Hillis (who had 61 receptions for 477 yards a year ago) wasn't getting the call. Again, if the coaches were trying to ease Hillis back into the swing of things, then yes, they were stuck with stone-handed Hardesty.

The only thing that we can say for certain is that no one has any idea what's going on. Everything is speculation at this point, so trying to assume either argument has any validity to it is as pointless as, I don't know, putting your hope in any Cleveland sports team ever.

What are your thoughts? Is his near-complete absence in yesterday's game a dark, evil strategy by Holmgren and Co., or was it simply the result of Hillis recovering from strep?

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