

Browns Pick Up First Win, But Problems Persist

Written by {ga=tommoore}

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The Cleveland Browns prevailed on Sunday in the battle of the winless teams, beating the Minnesota Vikings, 31-27.

The Browns pulled out a back-and-forth game that featured plenty of big plays – and bad quarterback play – from both teams, with quarterback Brian Hoyer hitting tight end Jordan Cameron with a seven-yard touchdown pass with 51 seconds left in the game. Those were the only points the Browns scored in the second half and they came at a most-opportune time.

The win breaks a five-game losing streak, dating back to last season, and is the first time this year the Browns were able to turn a halftime lead into a victory.

But more than all that, the Browns hopefully learned an important lesson in the Metrodome: the problems of the offense can no longer be laid solely at the feet of Brandon Weeden and Trent Richardson.

Things were going well early for the Browns as Hoyer hit Josh Gordon for a 47-yard touchdown pass and Cameron for a 19-yard pass to give Cleveland a 14-7 lead five seconds into the second quarter.

But after that, Hoyer started playing like what he is – an average (at best) quarterback. Over the

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ensuing 10 drives, Hoyer lead the Browns to a single field goal. The other drives finished in a punt four times, in an interception three times, and the Browns turning the ball over on downs.

The Browns were able to squeeze in a touchdown to Cameron on a fake field goal after Hoyer was unable to capitalize on a Minnesota turnover that handed the Browns the ball on the Vikings' 38-yard line.

On the day, Hoyer finished 30-of-54 (55 percent) for 321 yards, and a trifecta of three touchdown passes, three interceptions and three sacks. He posted a quarterback rating of 68.5.

By comparison, in two games Weeden completed 54.7 percent of his passes with three interceptions and a quarterback rating of 62.

So, let's hold off on building the Brian Hoyer statue outside of First Energy Stadium for at least another week, shall we?

In Hoyer's defense he received even less help in the running game than Weeden did from the since-traded Richardson.

The Browns came into the game averaging 56 yards on the ground and 3.4 yards per carry. But on Sunday, the three main running backs combined to rush 14 times for 49 yards – a 3.5 yard per carry average – and no touchdowns. The numbers breakdown like this:

- Chris Ogbonnaya – two rushes for 22 yards
- Bobby Rainey – four rushes for 17 yards
- Willis McGahee – eight rushes for nine yards. Which is actually worse, if you can believe it, when you factor in that McGahee had a nine-yard run on one of his carries.

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So who's fault is it now that there is no running game, Browns fans? And just what are the Browns going to do to fix the problem?

While the running game did him no favors, Hoyer was helped out by the return of Gordon, who had 10 receptions for 146 yards and the long touchdown, and ran once for 22 yards, in his first start since being suspended for two games. (And on a day when reports came out that the Browns would be open to trading him. But they are committed to winning this year. Seriously.)

Take away Gordon's 168 yards and the Browns finished the game with 241 yards of total offense – 34 yards below their season average coming into the game. It's not hard to see how much Gordon's absence hurt the offense the first two weeks of the season. It's also easy to believe the Browns would have pulled out at least one of the first two games if Gordon had been on the field.

Gordon was not the only bright spot on the day, of course, as several other players had big days and/or big plays. See if you can spot the common thread:

- Cameron finished with six catches for 66 yards and three touchdowns.
- The Browns sacked Minnesota quarterback Christian Ponder six times, with Jabaal Sheard, John Hughes, Billy Winn and Phil Taylor all recording a sack.
- T.J. Ward had an interception.
- Craig Robertson tipped the pass that Ward intercepted and recovered a fumble caused by a Sheard hit on Ponder.

In a week where far too much of the discussion surrounding the justification of the Richardson trade focused on the fallacy that the previous regime left the Browns without playmakers, it's interesting that so many of former general manager Tom Heckert's draft picks made big plays on Sunday.

"If you let the distractions that are outside of the locker room affect the way you play, then you are tanking the season and you will have no chance," [Browns left tackle Joe Thomas said](#) .

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Overall the defense was active and had another (mostly) solid day defending the run. The Browns held Adrian Peterson to just 88 yards on the ground (and a 3.5 yard per carry average). The attention they paid Peterson may help explain how Ponder was able to score not once but twice on quarterback draws, but if you take something away from an offense you have to give them something, so we can live with that.

And even though the offense mostly took the second half off once again – the Browns have been outscored 41-10 in the second half this season; so much for “halftime adjustments” – the defense hung in there and got the job done when it needed to.

Bottom line is the Browns won the game, which is always better than losing. And with everything that went on during the week off the field, it would have been easy for the players to not show up today. After all, if the front office is not trying to win this year, why should the players?

All in all it was a fun day – the Browns even dipped into the Pat Shurmur playbook with a fake punt, the first since Ray Ventrone pulled off the trick last season against Pittsburgh.

But the Browns should not read too much into today’s performance as they still have a lot of work to do on offense.

After all, they don’t get to play against a quarterback like Christian Ponder every week.

(Photo by The Associated Press)