



The Cleveland Browns rode a defense that is getting better by the week to a 17-6 victory over the Cincinnati Bengals on Sunday.

The win is the Browns second in a row and, coupled with Baltimore's loss in Buffalo, leaves the Browns tied for first place in the AFC North with the Bengals and the Ravens.

The Browns took a 7-0 lead with 2:13 left in the first quarter on Jordan Cameron's fifth touchdown reception of the season on a two-yard-pass from quarterback Brian Hoyer.

For the day, Cameron had 10 catches for 91 yards and, though four games this season, has already surpassed his career total in receiving yards (360 this year vs. 259 career yards) and receptions (30 this year vs. 26 coming into the year), clearly thriving in Norv Turner's offense.

It turned out that those seven points were enough, as the big story of the day was the Browns defense, which continues to get better and, in the process, is giving the rest of the division a heads up that it is no longer going to be a day off when they face the Browns.

The Bengals came into the day averaging 25 points a game and the Browns held them to just two Mike Nugent field goals. It was the first regular-season game in more than two years that

the Bengals did not score a touchdown.

The Browns continue to be strong against the run, limiting the Bengals to 63 yards on the ground and just 3.2 yards per rush, with the Bengals longest run of the day came on a 10-yard scramble by quarterback Andy Dalton.

And even though they only sacked Dalton twice on the day (with Barkevious Mingo picking up his third sack in as many games), the Browns did a really good job in the passing game.

Dalton finished the day just 23-of-42 for 206 yards and an interception. Considering that Dalton came into the game completing 70 percent of his passes against the Browns in four career games, that is a pretty impressive accomplishment.

“We didn’t make enough plays,” Dalton [said](#). “I didn’t play well enough. I expect better out of the offense. To not score a touchdown, we’ve got too good of players and too good of a team not to do that. We have all the ability in the world on this team and we didn’t get it done.”

Don’t worry, Andy, we’re pretty sure you’re not going to be the last quarterback feeling that way after facing the Browns.

The Browns also limited wide receiver A.J. Green to just 51 yards on seven receptions – with corner back Joe Haden having a particularly strong game. And when you take away Green as a security blanket, it really exposes Dalton as being an average quarterback.

“I thought Joe had a great game,” [Browns coach Rob Chudzinski said](#). “He continues to show the type of player he is, and rises to all the challenges along the way. I can’t say enough about the defensive staff and (coordinator) Ray Horton and the job they’ve done with the defense and the secondary.”

The biggest stat of the day for the defense came on third down. The Browns held Cincinnati to

just four-of-14 on third down, a huge accomplishment when you consider that the Browns came into the game allowing opposing offenses to convert 49 percent of the time on third down.

On offense, Hoyer avoided the mistakes he made against Minnesota (no interceptions on the day) and game-managed the Browns offense well enough to pull out the win.

Hoyer was 25-of-38 on the day for 269 yards and two touchdown passes. He effectively spread the ball around to seven different receivers.

Of their 10 offensive drives against the Bengals, the Hoyer-led offense punted five times and two other drives resulted in missed field goals. In the two games that Hoyer has played this year, he has led 24 offensive drives and 67 percent of them have ended in a negative result.

On the flip side, both of the Browns touchdown drives on Sunday against the Bengals covered more than 90 yards, so maybe we have entered an era of Browns football where stats simply don't mean anything.

"I think he did a great job, particularly managing some of the things early," Chudzinski said. "We were a little too hyped up early on. He stepped up and made some great decisions and throws."

For the fourth week in a row the running game did the offense no favors, as the Browns finished with just 89 rushing yards on 30 carriers (a 3.0 average). Bobby Rainey had nine yards on six carries (1.5 yards per carry), while Willis McGahee rushed 15 times for 46 yards (3.0 yards per carry).

But for the first time this year the Browns were able to run the ball when they needed to.

Following a Cincinnati punt with 11:31 left in the fourth quarter, Cleveland took over on its own nine-yard-line and holding a 10-6 lead. The Browns put together a 12-play, 91-yard touchdown drive that featured seven runs for 41 yards.

It seems pretty clear that the Browns can't produce that kind of effort for an entire game – between them, Rainey and McGahee have rushed 33 times for 81 yards, which works out to 2.45 yards per rush – and that the offense still has more questions than answers.

But if they can figure out how to run the ball when they need to, it may be enough – especially if they can avoid turnovers.

The win by the Browns sets up what is sure to be one heck of a week for Cleveland sports.

The Indians will host either Texas or Tampa Bay on Wednesday night in the Wild Card game, followed by the Browns hosting Buffalo on Thursday night in a primetime game.

It may seem hard to imagine waking up Friday morning with the Browns still in first place and the Indians heading to Boston to open the Divisional Series against the Red Sox.

But after what we've seen the past couple of weeks, anything seems possible right now.

*(Photo by The Associated Press)*