



After another solid day at the office, the Cleveland Browns defense has become the strength of the team.

The Browns are currently third in the NFL in total defense (291.5 yards per game), eighth in points allowed (and tops in the AFC North), fourth in rushing (79 yards per game), and tops in the league in yards per carry (2.9).

“They really, really have played well. I can’t be more pleased with our defense,” [Browns coach Rob Chudzinski said in his Monday press conference](#). “We’ve improved. You look at the secondary as a whole, that was the best performance and best game that they played to date this season. We just continue to get better and better in that area.”

And as the Browns get ready to hit primetime on Thursday against Buffalo, the defense is drawing some national attention.

At NFL.com, [Bucky Brooks highlighted what defensive coordinator Ray Horton is doing](#), writing that:

*“When playing in unison, Cleveland is capable of forcing opponents into a one-dimensional*

*game plan that is difficult to sustain against a defense that is stout at the point of attack and explosive on the edges.*

*“Additionally, he maximizes his personnel's talent by employing a number of exotic looks to put his best defenders in positions to make plays. By opting to build around his players' strengths rather than forcing them to fit into his system, Horton has been able to get his charges, particularly the young ones, to make immediate contributions.”*

The Browns depth along the front seven has also been on display through the first quarter of the season. First it was Billy Winn stepping up when Ahtyba Rubin was hurt; now it is John Hughes filling in for Winn. The same has been true of the outside linebackers, with Barkevious Mingo, Jabaal Sheard and Paul Kruger forming an impressive trio coming off the edge.

That depth along the defensive front will be tested against the Bills because of the short turnaround from Sunday's game. But it is clear that the Browns were smart to ignore some of the preseason nonsense from certain corners of the media saying the “must” trade (or in the case of Phil Taylor, simply release) some of their surplus talent.

It's been far too long since the Browns had a defense that the fans can get behind. It's still early, but so far it looks like this defense is working itself into that kind of unit.

### **It's a passing man's game – Part 1**

The good news about the Browns rushing attack is that backup safety Josh Aubrey is no longer the team's leading rusher.

The bad news is there is not a lot to get excited about.

The Browns currently rank 27th in the league in rushing at 76 yards per game, are averaging just 3.8 yards per carry (21st in the league) and have yet to have a rushing touchdown.

That is on level with the expansion Browns of 1999, who ran for 71 yards per game and 3.7 yards per carry.

We get that the NFL is now a passing league, but you still need to be able to run the ball, and when you are handing off to Willis McGahee (2.4 yards per carry) and Bobby Rainey (2.6 yards per carry), it makes it a lot harder to keep a drive going.

According to Pro Football Focus, the trio of [McGahee, Rainey and Chris Ogbonnaya combined for just two missed tackles on 26 rushes](#) against the Bengals, and only 32 of their 82 rushing yards came after contact. And, of the 48 running backs in the NFL with more than 20 carries, [McGahee is one of just two backs to not have a run of 10 or more yards](#)

The one positive is the Browns were able to run the ball when they needed to against the Bengals. On the game-clinching 91-yard touchdown drive in the fourth quarter, the Browns ran seven times for 41 yards, so there may be hope yet.

On the drive, McGahee ran six times for 33 yards.

“(Willis) has only been here a week, but he understands the scheme and he knows where the hole is and that not every run has to be a home run,” [Browns left tackle Joe Thomas told \*The Plain Dealer\*](#)

. “You don’t have to run a 4.2 to be able to hit the hole and put your head down and run for eight or nine yards. That’s all we need in the run game. He’s doing a great job for us.”

The Browns may not be able to run the ball consistently, but if they can find a way to run it when they want to, it may be good enough.

**It’s a passing man’s game – Part 2**

Browns fans everywhere know the extensive list of quarterbacks who have started for the team since 1999.

But every once in a while we come across a stat or two that really puts into perspective how many people have played quarterback – often not very well - for the team over the years.

Sunday's win was the second in a row with Brian Hoyer at quarterback – the first time a Browns quarterback won his first two starts since Mark Rypien in 1994.

The other one comes courtesy of *The New York Times*, which marked Eli Manning's 150th consecutive start for the New York Giants with an [info graphic showing the longest consecutive start streak by a quarterback for each NFL team](#)

Brian Sipe holds the longest streak for the Browns as he started 71 consecutive games at one point in his career. It's worth noting that Sipe last played for the Browns in 1983.

### **Until next time**

The Browns are home for an NFL Network Thursday night game against the 2-2 Buffalo Bills.

*(Photo courtesy of ClevelandBrowns.com)*