



The Cleveland Browns beat the Baltimore Ravens on Sunday, 24-18, the Browns first win over the Ravens in 12 tries.

And they have Ray Horton and the defense to thank for it.

The game turned into one that showcased why the Browns brought Horton to town to oversee the defense, which deserves a lot of credit for making sure the Browns walked off the field late on Sunday with an actual victory rather than yet another moral victory.

Cleveland jumped out to an early lead 14-3 lead thanks to two touchdown passes from Jason Campbell to Davone Bess, who bounced back nicely after his dismal day in Kansas City.

For the game, Campbell was 23-of-35 for 262 yards and three touchdown passes. Most importantly, for the second consecutive week he did not turn the ball over. And that was huge because, after that second touchdown pass, the offense went into hibernation until it was almost too late.

On five of their next six possessions, the Browns punted three times, had the first half run out and saw Willis McGahee lose the ball on a fumble. McGahee continued to lower the bar for running backs, finishing the day with 21 carriers for 31 yards, a 1.5 yard per carry average. If he

is still seeing significant playing time after the bye week, someone in Berea has some serious explaining to do.

The Browns also finished the day just 4-of-15 on third downs.

The one possession that the Browns were able to do something positive in an otherwise ineffective stretch came thanks to the special teams as Eric Martin recovered a muffed punt by Baltimore's Tandon Doss on the Ravens' 11-yard line.

Two plays later, Campbell hit Gary Barnidge for a four-yard touchdown pass, giving the Browns new hope in a game that had started to slip away from them.

That the Browns were able to stay in front of Baltimore while the offense floundered was because of the defense, which carried over its strong play from the second half of the Kansas City game.

Cleveland held the Ravens to just a field goal on their first six possessions of the game, forcing four punts and intercepting Joe Flacco. And while the Ravens twice cut the Browns lead to less than seven points, they were never able to take the lead and force the Browns offense to do something.

A defensive breakdown right before the end of the first half allowed the Ravens to score and cut the Browns lead to 14-10 at halftime, but the Browns forced punts on both Baltimore possessions in the third quarter, which coupled with the short-field touchdown, was enough to continually give the Browns breathing room.

The offense was finally able to put together a solid drive when the Browns needed it the most, going 67 yards in 15 plays after Baltimore had cut the lead to 21-18. The drive ended in just a field goal, but more importantly it took six minutes and 30 seconds off the clock, leaving the Ravens with no time for one final comeback.

The biggest play of the drive came when Campbell hit Bess with a three-yard pass on fourth down, the type of play that Bess was brought in for and one that he has struggled with lately.

A week after posting five sacks in the second half, the Browns added five more on Sunday, a performance that meant that Flacco could never get into a real groove. Horton believed that the Browns defense turned a corner in the second of against the Chiefs, and on Sunday the defense backed him up.

The Browns now head into a much-deserved bye week at 4-5, in second place in the AFC North Division and just two games back in the win column of Cincinnati.

With the Bengals playing at Baltimore next week against a Ravens team that is fighting for its life, the next time we see the Browns take the field – against those same Bengals – they may have the opportunity to cut that deficit to just one game.

And while we may be getting ahead of ourselves a bit, stranger things have happened so far this season. This Browns team has a resiliency that has been lacking in previous years.

Through quarterback changes, a running attack that would embarrass a high school team, and stretches of poor play, the Browns keep bouncing back.

Now with Campbell giving the team effective – if not overly productive – quarterback play and the defense seemingly returning to the level of play it showed earlier in the season, it suddenly doesn't seem so far-fetched to think the Browns can put some pressure on the Bengals for the division lead.

If nothing else, the win against Baltimore means the last seven games of the season have the potential to mean something.

And it's been a long time since we could say that.

*(Photo courtesy of The Associated Press)*