

## Browns Stumble on Road to Respectability

Written by {ga=tommoore}

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Fifteen minutes. All it took was 15 minutes on Sunday at Paul Brown Stadium for the Cleveland Browns to throw away the team's biggest opportunity in six years.

And even by the Browns standards it was pretty absurd.

The Browns took a 13-0 lead in the first quarter thanks to the defense – highlighted by Joe Haden's interception return for a touchdown – as the Cleveland made Cincinnati starting quarterback Andy Dalton look like the average (at best) quarterback that he is.

But the Browns squandered two opportunities when they could not convert a first-and-goal at the Cincinnati two-yard line into a touchdown and then, on their next possession, could not turn a first-and-10 at the Bengals 14-yard line into touchdowns. Instead, the Browns settled for field goals, which anyone watching the Browns for long enough knew was going to be a problem down the line.

Those miscues were nothing compared to the second quarter, however, when it seemed like someone decided to send in the clown car instead of the Browns.

A nine-yard punt from Spencer Lanning, a blocked punt returned for a touchdown, a fumble by Chris Ogbonnaya that was returned for a touchdown, two Dalton touchdown passes and a Mike Nugent field goal and somehow the Browns turned a 13-0 lead into a 31-13 deficit in just 15

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minutes.

“I think that, as I look at it, it was a lot of things that happened that were atypical,” [Browns coach Rob Chudzinski said on Monday](#)

. “It was less about a snowball and more about some things happening that were a little more out of the ordinary that you don’t expect necessarily in a game.”

Cleveland Browns football – where the atypical happens on a regular basis.

Chudzinski’s right, though, about the game producing some things that were out of the ordinary. Consider that:\*

- ·The Browns held the Bengals to just 108 yards of total offense and three first downs in the first half, but still trailed 31-13 at halftime.
- ·The 31 points in one quarter is a franchise record for the Bengals.
- ·Dalton was 1-of-3 for three yards in the first quarter, while also being picked off twice by Haden.
- ·Dalton’s 93 yards are the fewest **by any player in NFL history** who had 25 pass attempts and three touchdown passes.
- ·Cincinnati’s A.J. Green, who came into the game with five consecutive 100-yard receiving games, had two catches for seven yards. (Haden should just send tape of this game to the Pro Bowl voters. That is unless Chudzinski burns it first.)
- ·The Bengals offense was so inept that it “contributed” -21.2 expected points, their worst output in a win in eight years.

Depressed yet, Browns fans?

This loss falls on the special teams, certainly, but it mostly falls on the offense and quarterback Jason Campbell.

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Ever since Campbell took over as the Browns starting quarterback all we've heard is how much better he looks on the field than deposed starter Brandon Weeden. But Sunday should have reinforced the notion that style points mean absolutely nothing in the NFL and just having a quarterback who isn't Brandon Weeden isn't going to cut it on a weekly basis.

Campbell was high and/or off target on many of his throws on Sunday, despite operating a passing attack that makes Pat Shurmur's offense look dynamic. Campbell threw the ball 56 times, with a staggering 50 of those attempts being 10 yards or less. He is the first quarterback since 2006 to attempt that many short passes in one game.

The quintessential Campbell drive of the afternoon came in the fourth quarter following a Nugent field goal to put the Bengals up 41-20 with just a little over eight minutes to go.

It was pretty much a lock that the Browns were not coming back, but the situation called for a sense of urgency and maybe taking a few chances down the field. After all, what did they have to lose in a game that was already lost?

Instead, Campbell led the team on a 19-play drive that covered 76 yards and took five minutes and nine seconds off the clock – and resulted in zero points.

How is that even possible?

Despite playing it safe, Campbell still threw three interceptions and was sacked four times while repeatedly holding onto the ball for far too long. In three starts this season, the Browns are averaging 18 points a game with Campbell at quarterback – the same level of production they were getting from Weeden.

The one good part of Sunday's performance is we're pretty sure the Browns don't see Campbell as a long-term solution to the quarterback problem. If there was any doubt in Berea on that issue, Sunday put that to rest.

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OK, let's shift gears here. As bad as it was, the loss is only one game. It pretty much puts the kibosh on any hope the Browns had to catch the Bengals for the AFC North Division title, but the Browns still have something to play for.

The New York Jets still hold the final playoff spot in the AFC, but with their loss on Sunday they fell to 5-5. Miami, also at 5-5, is the only non-playoff team that currently does not have a winning record. The Browns are in a five-team mix of 4-6 teams, one of whom is Sunday's opponent, the Pittsburgh Steelers.

Of course, Pittsburgh comes to town winners of two in a row and four-of-six, so they may finally be getting things turned around just in time to play the Browns twice over the final six weeks of the season.

"I rely on the guys in the locker room and what I've seen out of them before," Chudzinski said about his team. "It's a resilient group, it's a group that is strong and, as I mentioned before, they're really a together group, one of the closest groups I've been around. I have no reason to think otherwise that they won't bounce back, and be ready to play and be excited to play this week. Again, being at home I think will bring more energy to it with the big rivalry that we have with the Steelers."

The Browns have shown a tendency this year to bounce back when you least expect it.

Of course, to bounce back you have to put yourself in a bad situation first; something this team continues to be far too good at.

\* [From ESPN Stats & Information](#)

(Photo courtesy of The Plain Dealer)