

## Heroes & Zeroes: Week 4

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Thursday, October 04 2007 7:00 PM -

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Think about it .... if not for a blocked field goal, the Browns would be 3-1 and tied atop the AFC North with the Steelers. Last weeks win was one of the biggest for the Browns since they returned to the league and Nick Allburn checks in this morning with his latest installment of &quot;Heroes & Zeroes&quot; for us here at TCF. And right atop the &quot;heroes&quot; list? The offensive line, which has been very strong so far this season.



Can you remember the last time the Browns won, the Tribe won, and the Steelers lost, all on the same day? Even the most meticulous stat-head would have to flip feverishly through his media guides to ascertain the answer.

Following the Cincinnati loss on Monday night, the Browns found themselves in a somewhat novel position, as the Bengals have, for at least a week, picked up the Browns' long-standing lease on the AFC North Cellar. Just like the Jeffersons, the Browns are movin' on up...

If not for a blocked field goal, the Cleveland Browns would be 3-1, and tied for first place in the AFC North. Think about this: during the '06 campaign, the Browns and Steelers both opened the year 1-3, tied in the North's basement.

Presently, the Steelers are perched atop the division at 3-1, while the Browns are

second at 2-2, holding the tie-breaker with Baltimore. What a difference a year makes.

### ***This Week's Heroes***

#### **Five Dog Bones: The Offensive Line**

The biggest reason for the Browns' improvement this season lies with, as Sam Rutigliano would say, "the five condominiums up front."

It wasn't necessary to launder Derek Anderson's jersey, as for the second time in the last three games the offensive line allowed zero sacks. In fact, after yielding six sacks to Pittsburgh in the opener, the line has limited Cincinnati, Oakland, and Baltimore to just one combined sack.

In addition to keeping Anderson's jersey clean, the line was able to give Jamal Lewis just enough running room to gain some hard-fought yards. Lewis' numbers are not staggering (23 carries, 64 yards, and a touchdown), but his success, albeit limited, allowed the Browns to burn valuable minutes off of the clock in the second half.

With Ryan Tucker returning from his suspension this week, the line will gain some much-needed depth. It remains to be seen whether or not Tucker will start, but it seems more likely that he will be eased back into action at right tackle, eventually replacing Kevin Shaffer as the starter.

### **Four Dog Bones: Braylon Edwards**

When Braylon Edwards, Mr. Michigan, gleefully joined the fans in singing “Hang On Sloopy,” you knew things were going well.

Edwards absolutely torched Baltimore cornerback Chris McAlister for a 78-yard touchdown reception early in the first quarter to give the Browns a 14-0 lead, and put the Ravens soundly behind the eight ball. Consistent performance is the mark of an elite receiver, and Edwards is well on his way, as he’s now found the end zone in three consecutive games.

Through four games, Edwards is on pace for a monstrous 1500 yards, and 16 touchdowns this season; pretty impressive for the “locker room cancer” that many wanted to trade for spare parts in the off season.

### **Three Dog Bones: Romeo Crennel**

Those who predicted a midseason coaching vacancy in Cleveland can probably nix those notions. Crennel seems to have exorcised his divisional demons, moving to 2-1 versus the AFC North on the year.

Under Crennel, the Browns have typically struggled early in ballgames, particularly on offense. On Sunday, the Browns sprinted out of the gate to an early lead thanks to big plays, and Crennel deserves much of the credit for how well-prepared the Browns appeared.

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After gaining a 24-6 advantage going into halftime, Crennel's defense went into the dreaded "prevent" mode. With this knowledge, the Cleveland faithful realized that the Browns were headed for a disaster of Biblical proportions, real wrath of God type stuff; fire and brimstone coming down from the sky, Lake Erie boiling, 40 years of darkness, earthquakes, volcanoes, the dead rising from the grave, human sacrifice, dogs and cats living together...except the prevent worked.

For once, the Browns ran the prevent to perfection by keeping the Ravens in the middle of the field, limiting large gains, and forcing Baltimore's lone second half scoring drive to be a lengthy one, taking crucial time off of the clock. The Browns haven't run the prevent that well in this decade. Kudos, Romeo.

### **Two Dog Bones: Kamerion Wimbley**

Four games into the season, the Browns have failed to establish a consistent pass rush. Thank God for number 95.

In spite of our well-documented problems on the defensive line, Kamerion Wimbley has a habit of ending up in opponents' backfields. Wimbley failed to record a sack on Sunday, but he gave Steve McNair fits the entire second half. The pressure applied solely by Wimbley was a major factor in keeping Steve McNair from finding a rhythm in the second half.

### **One Dog Bone: Leigh Bodden**

In week two against the Bengals, Bodden was noticeably hampered by a strained groin. It's not fun to watch the game with a strained groin, let alone to play with

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one, and the cornerback position is especially difficult to play with such an affliction due to the high degree of reactive cutting that's required. If Bodden wasn't fully healed against the Ravens, he seemed close.

Bodden's early interception helped the Browns open up their sizeable lead, although Bodden had a little bit of a brain freeze when it came to carrying the football. Regardless, Bodden played well, and helped contain, if not completely shut down, the Baltimore passing attack for the remainder of the game.

### ***This Week's Zeroes...***

#### **Five Demerits: Rich Gannon**

With their most dominating win in at least the last two seasons, the Browns simply didn't leave many facets of their game open for criticism. Color analyst Rich Gannon was there to help.

Here's a brief transcript of Gannon's pre-game discussion with fellow analyst Kevin Harlan.

KH: Rich, is the Baltimore offense different with Willis McGahee [instead of Jamal Lewis]?

RG: It is different; I think [McGahee] makes them more multiple. He's a good

receiver out of the backfield.

Right you are, Rich.

Gannon and Steve McNair need to get a room. Gannon kept referring to McNair as a “Pro Bowler.” Of course, McNair has made the Pro Bowl three times, the last time following the 2005 season, when he memorably lost two fumbles in two drives.

But McNair hasn’t been of elite status since his Co-MVP season in 2003. In fact, McNair hasn’t sported a quarterback rating higher than a very pedestrian 82.5 during the last four seasons. Maybe Rich is still reading scouting reports from his playing days.

And another thing: Rich Gannon was wrong to criticize Kellen Winslow. First, he ripped on Winslow’s blocking. Umm, Rich, you’re aware that Winslow is playing with a partially separated left shoulder, right? That makes it far more difficult to block effectively.

If you need evidence that Winslow’s shoulder is bothering him, how about his first catch on the initial drive of the game? On third-and-two, Winslow got vertical to grab a 25-yard pass from Derek Anderson, but instead of landing normally on his side, he shifted to land on his back, apparently to protect his already injured left shoulder.

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Gannon also implied that Winslow was unnecessarily missing practice during the week while still playing on Sunday, and that was why his blocking was off. Again, did you read the injury report, Rich?

Rich Gannon makes Joe Theismann look like Nostradamus.

### Four Demerits: Brian Billick

Brian Billick is a fellow that only a mother could love. The poster child for smugness, the “offensive genius” often prowls the sidelines with cool guy shades, and his straw hat, which seems oddly out of place on the football field.

At any rate, Billick dropped the ball on Sunday when he failed to replace noodle-armed Steve McNair with Kyle Boller. McNair is old, injured, and washed up. Like the Cross of Coronado, he belongs in a museum!

Believe it or not, Boller has looked pretty good this season, and the precedent for utilizing Boller as a “relief quarterback” had been set by Billick himself in the previous weeks.

Billick leaving Boller on the bench all game long was completely confounding. It made no sense whatsoever, particularly with the Ravens in serious catch-up mode for the entirety of the second half.

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And how about Billick's attempted challenge? The man couldn't do anything right against the Browns, throwing the little red flag just a little too late, and allowing Jamal Lewis' one-yard touchdown dive to stand up on a very questionable call by the officials.

### Three Demerits: Run Defense

In spite of the double-digit deficit that they were facing, it completely escapes me why the Ravens ever threw the football. Willis McGahee was picking up big chunks of yardage all day, finishing with 104 yards on only 14 carries. In spite of this, Steve McNair threw the ball 53 times!

Although the secondary has been much-maligned, the Browns' Achilles' heel on defense remains the run defense. Apparently the Ravens didn't get the tape from the Browns/Raiders game the week before, or the memo about their TPS reports.

Until the Browns prove that they can consistently stop the run, there's no reason for opposing teams to put the ball in the air, but don't tell anyone.

### Two Demerits: Willie McGinest

Should we be excited that McGinest is healthy again?

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Ummm.....yes???

McGinest got his first action of the season on Sunday, allowing the nicked up Antwan Peek (foot) to take a breather here and there. Slow Willie didn't look sharp.

Willie McGinest is to outside linebackers what Andra Davis is to inside linebackers: big, slow, and expensive. The major difference is that Davis still manages to make tackles with some consistency.

Plus, considering that OLBs are the primary pass rushers in the 3-4, being slow and bulky isn't exactly a positive. Willie McGinest was a great outside linebacker about five years ago, back when *The Eminem Show* was the year's best-selling album. Like Marshall Mathers, Willie McGinest's prime has come and gone.

Get well soon, Antwan Peek.

### **One Demerit: Cincinnati Bengals**

Congratulations, Cincinnati. For at least two weeks (the Bengals are idle this week), you are worse than the Browns. Take a lap.

### **Standings**

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### Dog Bones

Offensive Line---14

Joshua Cribbs---7

Braylon Edwards---6(t)

Kamerion Wimbley---6(t)

Kellen Winslow---5

### Demerits

Romeo Crennel---10

Rich Gannon---7

The Secondary---5

Derek Anderson---4(t)

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Brian Billick---4(t)

Chad Johnson---4(t)

Eric Wright---4(t)

### **Up Next: New England Patriots, 1:00, Gillette Stadium**

On paper, it takes some awfully thick rose-colored glasses to like the Browns' chances. But the Patriots have a short week due to playing on Monday night, and they might take the Browns lightly, right?

Actually, the latter is very unlikely, this is Bill Belichick we're talking about. His players have likely been forced to memorized lists of the Browns' tendencies, social security numbers, and greatest fears.

The Browns can beat the Patriots on Sunday. Strangers things have happened. But the Pats have looked nothing short of bulletproof thus far, and if the Browns can just keep it within two touchdowns, it can be considered something of a moral victory.

In all likelihood, the Browns will drop to 2-3 and move to 4-1 against the spread (a ridiculous +16.5). But don't fret, because the lowly Dolphins swim into town next weekend.

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**My Call: Patriots 34, Browns 24**