

## Heroes & Zeroes: Week 9

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Thursday, November 08 2007 7:00 PM -

---

A 15-point comeback, 58 first downs, over 850 total yards of offense, a game-tying field goal as time expired, and a Phil Dawson walk-off winner in overtime. Sunday's game was not for the faint of heart, and it was the biggest win of the year for the Browns, who are now 5-3 and in the thick of the playoff hunt. Nick Allburn picks his heroes and his zeroes from last week's contest.



What a game! A 15-point comeback, 58 first downs, over 850 total yards of offense, a game-tying field goal as time expired, and a Phil Dawson walk-off winner in overtime. Sunday's game was not for the faint of heart, and it was the biggest win of the year for the Browns, who are now 5-3 and in the thick of the playoff hunt.

This season has been a trip to the Bizarro World. Think about it: the Browns can score at will, multiple Browns are having Pro Bowl caliber seasons, and the team is receiving high praise from the national media. Don't pinch yourself too hard, because you might wake up.

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

**Five Dog Bones: Kellen Winslow**

## Heroes & Zeroes: Week 9

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Thursday, November 08 2007 7:00 PM -

---

Winslow was clearly banged up on Sunday, still bothered by knee and shoulder pain. Nevertheless, Winslow came up huge with 11 catches for 125 yards. In the second half K2 dropped a touchdown pass in the end zone, but he deserves a mulligan for what was otherwise a terrific effort.

As Browns fans, we're privileged to watch a guy like Winslow each week. Winslow never takes a play off, plays through injuries, and always plays inspired, passionate football. As a fan, particularly a Browns fan, how is possible to dislike this guy?

Even the media is changing their tune on Winslow, whose &quot;[soldier](#)&quot; rant had turned him into a football version of [Howard Dean](#)

. Remember Winslow's motorcycle accident? ESPN's talking heads seemed to revel in it.

Winslow was featured on ESPN's *E60* this week, as reporter Michael Smith (of *Around the Horn*) revealed that Kellen Winslow is, in fact, not the Antichrist. Even Jim

Rome, who for years periodically blasted Winslow, complimented K2 for his competitive drive and the incredible commitment it took to recover from his devastating motorcycle crash.

It's amazing how winning can alter poorly-formed perceptions.

## Four Dog Bones: Derek Anderson

## Heroes & Zeroes: Week 9

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Thursday, November 08 2007 7:00 PM -

---

After throwing an interception early that made fans scratch their heads, Anderson could have crumbled. Instead, he showed a remarkable resiliency that's quickly becoming the defining characteristic of this Browns team, as he brought the Browns back from a 15-point deficit.

For the first time this season, Anderson didn't record a touchdown pass, but to be fair, he was the victim of several end zone drops. Plus, Rob Chudzinski wisely elected to run the football inside the Seattle 5-yard line.

Touchdowns or not, DA threw for a career-high 364 yards against a good Seattle secondary. Note that the Seahawks were clearly working to neutralize Anderson's favorite target, Braylon Edwards, who had only five catches for 67 yards. DA responded by looking for Winslow early and often, in addition to completing four passes to both Joe Jurevicius and Jamal Lewis.

It's still too early to be completely sold on Derek Anderson, but he led a stirring comeback against a good defense, as he continues to blossom right before our eyes. DA's success is beginning to look less like a mirage, and more like reality.

### Three Dog Bones: The Fans

In my many trips to Cleveland Browns Stadium, Sunday was the loudest I'd ever heard it. The Browns are winning again, the prospect of making the playoffs no longer sounds all that far-fetched, and we can all feel it in our bones.

On the way out of the stadium, complete strangers were hugging, Cleveland's finest were giving fans high fives, and many declared an unmitigated hatred for all

## Heroes & Zeroes: Week 9

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Thursday, November 08 2007 7:00 PM -

---

things Pittsburgh. Browns football is alive and well in Cleveland, Ohio.

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

The revamped offensive line is the most significant reason for the Browns' marked improvement this season. Over the last seven games, the line has allowed only seven sacks.

Starting right guard Seth McKinney injured a shoulder against the Seahawks, but reserve Lennie Frieman filled in admirably. For once, the Browns appear to have quality depth on the line.

McKinney probably won't play this week against the Steelers, and he'll likely be replaced by a platoon of Friedman and Ryan Tucker, who last played guard in the late '90s with St. Louis.

Left guard Eric Steinbach strained his back on Wednesday and did not practice Thursday, but it seems likely that Steinbach will play on Sunday.

Pitted against the Steelers, the offensive line will square off against a defense that manhandled them in week one, when they allowed six sacks. The line has come a long way since the opener, and hopefully that progress will show during Sunday's crucial showdown in the Steel City.

### **One Dog Bone: Jamal Lewis**

## Heroes & Zeroes: Week 9

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Thursday, November 08 2007 7:00 PM -

---

Although Jamal was criticized in this column last week, he proved a valuable asset against Seattle, especially as a goal line back. Lewis pounded the Seahawks for four short yardage scores.

In spite of the touchdowns, Lewis' biggest play came during the overtime period, when he turned a screen pass into a 34-yard gain. Lewis had an opportunity to duck out of bounds, but he stayed in bounds and picked up an extra 15 yards as a result, pretty impressive for a back who isn't known for his receiving abilities.

Although Lewis played well this week, I still don't think he has a future with the Browns beyond this season. The numbers simply don't bode well for running backs in Lewis' age bracket. Guys like Jerome Bettis and Curtis Martin, both of whom played well into their 30's, are the exceptions to the rule. Awarding Lewis a long-term extension would be equal parts short-sighted and foolish.

If the Browns want to throw cash at a running back, they should pursue a back who's coming into his prime, like San Diego's [Michael Turner](#), who becomes an unrestricted free agent this off season.

## This Week's Zeroes

### Five Demerits: Todd Grantham

Grantham appears determined to keep the Browns from giving up big plays. That's all well and good, but it's allowing the opposition to march up and down the field at their leisure.

## Heroes & Zeroes: Week 9

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Thursday, November 08 2007 7:00 PM -

---

Grantham dropped eight men into coverage far more than he should have, giving Matt Hasselbeck time to make his own wacko Seattle low carb mocha latte cappuccino, watch an episode of *Frasier*, and film one of his lame Chunky Soup ads, all before completing a pass to Bobby Engram without breaking a sweat.

Grantham's obviously afraid of getting burned, but playing a perpetual prevent is not going to get the job done against quality opponents. Eventually, the Browns are going to have to roll the dice and experiment with this new &quot;blitzing&quot;&quot; fad.

Early in the fourth quarter, the Browns caught a break when a 25-yard Seattle completion was wiped out due to an illegal formation penalty on the Seahawks. The very next play, Hasselbeck found Bobby Engram for a 26-yard gain. And who was covering Seattle's number one receiver? None other than Willie McGinest. Somebody, stop the insanity.

Last year, the Browns gave up 22.3 points per game. This year, that figure has increased to 29.1 PPG. Part of the increase can be attributed to the fact that opponents now actually have to score in the second half to defeat the Browns, whereas 14-21 points was sufficient to down the Browns last season. However, does that account for allowing an extra touchdown every game?

The Browns made defensive upgrades in the off season by bringing in Robaire Smith, Shaun Smith, Antwan Peek, and Eric Wright, while losing only one key player, Brian Russell. If anything, the Browns should be better defensively, not worse. Grantham deserves at least some of the blame for the Browns' regression.

Eventually the Browns are going to have to hold a good team under 30 points in

order to win. But with what we've seen so far, does anyone really have confidence that Grantham's defense can accomplish even such a pedestrian feat?

### Four Demerits: Defensive Line

This group is awful. At least it's encouraging to know that for the remainder of the season we won't have to watch Ted Washington's patented &quot;&quot;hold your hands up and stand still&quot; method of rushing the passer. *Good grief.*

Nobody's expecting a prevent-heavy scheme to yield dozens of sacks, but if the defensive line could at least make the quarterback think that he's at risk for a sack, maybe that would break up his rhythm a bit. Unfortunately, the front three looks older than [Lou Holtz](#) , and slower than, well, Lou Holtz.

I'll stand by my claim that Phil Savage should have drafted Haloti Ngata in 2005. That's not to say Kamerion Wimbley isn't an excellent player, it's just that stud nose tackles are far more rare than &quot;tweener&quot; athletes who can rush the quarterback. It makes me sick to know that Ngata will anchor Baltimore's front three for the next half decade.

### Three Demerits: Stadium Security

A friend of mine was hassled by stadium security for no good reason. He wasn't smuggling beer into the stadium, starting fights, or even using four letter words. (Don't even get me started on the pat downs at the gate, which may or may not be illegal, and exist for the sole purpose of preventing beer smuggling.)

## Heroes & Zeroes: Week 9

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Thursday, November 08 2007 7:00 PM -

---

My friend Chris carved a pumpkin into a half-helmet and meticulously painted the brown and white stripes on top. Needless to say, when placed on his noggin, it was the most original fashion item of the week. Stadium security made him throw it away at the gate.

Obviously they were worried that he would throw the pumpkin, but if that was his goal, why take the time to paint it? As we learned back in 2001, [anything](#) can be thrown (onto the field or otherwise). Let the man have his pumpkin.

Stadium security should concentrate on fans who are causing actual problems (e.g. fighting, stealing, etc.), instead of fans who are trying to enjoy the game without bothering anyone.

### **Two Demerits: Punt Coverage**

Nate Burleson's second quarter touchdown on a punt return really took the wind out of the Browns' collective sails, and left them with a 15-point deficit late in the second quarter. Frankly, it was strange to see another team get the best of the Browns on special teams, which is one of Cleveland's strengths.

Dave Zastudil put solid hang time on his punt, which actually caused the Browns to over-pursue in coverage. It's a mistake that the coverage team should learn from.

### **One Demerit: Baltimore Ravens**

## Heroes & Zeroes: Week 9

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Thursday, November 08 2007 7:00 PM -

---

Baltimore is finished. Yes, they're 4-4, but they're done.

The first half of their schedule was pretty soft, with a collective winning percentage of .354, while the balance of their schedule is playing at a .569 clip. Baltimore needed to mop up against their first eight opponents, and they failed to do so.

The Ratbirds have already lost more games than they did last season, when they were 13-3. The Ravens have a broken down quarterback who can't get the ball downfield, a defense that no longer dominates, and a coach who thinks he's Nostradamus with sunglasses. They're all but mathematically eliminated.

Regardless of whether or not the Browns ultimately qualify for the postseason, we can take solace in the fact that we won't have to see those hideous purple uniforms next January, unless it's on the clearance rack.

## Standings

### Dog Bones

Offensive Line---22

Derek Anderson---14

Braylon Edwards---13

Kellen Winslow---12

Romeo Crennel---8

### Demerits

Defensive Line---16  
Romeo Crennel---13  
Todd Grantham---10  
Derek Anderson---9  
Andra Davis---8

## Playoff Picture

I'm not afraid of ghosts, goblins, gremlins, or the &quot;p-word&quot;. Let's talk playoffs.

The Browns are currently 5-3, and there are five other AFC teams with the same record or better. With their schedule on the verge of weakening, the Browns are a few wins away from controlling their own destiny.

The Steelers are still the overwhelming favorite to win the AFC North, and if the Browns want to give them a run for the division, they'll have to win this week's game in Pittsburgh. The Browns probably have a better shot at a wild card birth.

Last Sunday's win was huge, as it put the Browns in a great position heading into two tough divisional match ups. If the Browns can just split the next two road games (Pittsburgh, Baltimore), they'll be 6-4, and their last six games don't include a single team with a winning record. There's a very real possibility that the Browns will be playing football in January.

**Up Next: 10/11, At Pittsburgh, Heinz Field, 1:00**

The excitement is building for the first meaningful Browns/Steelers clash in years. Since 2000, the Browns have beaten the Steelers only twice, and they've now lost eight consecutive match ups with their rust belt rivals.

Although the Browns can put up scads of points, it seems unlikely that they'll end their losing streak this season. It's just tough to envision the Browns stopping the Steelers, who have a very balanced and potent offensive attack. Willie Parker will get the nod early and often for Pittsburgh, and the Browns can only hope to contain him.

The key for the Browns might be preventing Pittsburgh's big plays. Ben Roethlisberger is at his best when he's rolling right to buy extra time for a deep ball to one of the his pesky receivers: Hines Ward, Nate Washington, or former Buckeye Santonio Holmes.

Monday night's game against Baltimore was a perfect example of why you can't let Big Ben roll right . Roethlisberger does a great job keeping his eyes downfield when he's rolling out, and the Browns need to make a concerted effort to keep him in the pocket, or at least force him to scramble to the left, where he's less effective.

On defense, the Steelers aren't blitzing as often as they used to, but they've been just as effective. This high octane Cleveland offense can score on anyone, but the Steelers should be capable of slowing them down a bit. The Browns can't win this game if the defense doesn't step up with some big stops.

Until the Browns prove they can beat the Steelers or at least keep the score within a touchdown, there's little reason to expect a different result this time around. Nothing would thrill me more than to be wrong.

## Heroes & Zeroes: Week 9

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Thursday, November 08 2007 7:00 PM -

---

Like [Agent Mulder](#), I want to believe...

My Call: Steelers 27, Browns 20