

## Heroes & Zeroes: Week 11

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Friday, November 23 2007 7:00 PM -

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Last week seriously bolstered the Browns' playoff aspirations. Obviously, the Browns won and the Ravens lost. But in addition, Buffalo, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, San Diego, and Tennessee were all defeated. And as he does every week for us here at TCF, Nick Allburn goes over the playoff picture and crowns his heroes & zeroes from last week's game, updating his year-to-date standings in the process.



How sweep it is! Lousy pun aside, the Browns have swept the revolting Ravens for the first time since 2001, when Uncle Butch was running the show and Ben &quot;Analgesic Cream&quot; Gay was in his heyday.

Honestly, did that actually happen? Did the Browns just steal a game with a goofy last-second play? Considering how often the opposite has occurred, it's going to take time for this win to sink in. There hasn't been a more dramatic finish in the NFL this season, and for once, fortune has smiled on the Cleveland Browns.

For a few minutes, I thought the Browns had lost. I thought that Dawson had missed his field goal and I turned the television off immediately, only to receive a phone call from my Uncle Jack about five minutes later informing me that the game was, in fact, still underway. I'm glad I took that call.

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While watching sports on television, there is little that I enjoy more than seeing an opposing team, and especially their fans, completely vanquished and demoralized. But when it comes to fans of the Ravens and the Steelers, I don't want to see mere disappointment; I want to see soul-crushing defeat etched on their faces, I want to see quiet weeping in the stands, and I want to hear the (non) sound of complete silence in their stadiums.

Sunday was a rare instance when the collective discouragement of Baltimore fans was palpable, and it was delicious. It doesn't get any better than watching those idiots wearing that ridiculous shade of purple, quiet enough to hear a pin drop, and no longer waving their weird white phallus-shaped cheering devices. Savor the flavor.

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

#### **Five Dog Bones: Joshua Cribbs**

There isn't much to write about Cribbs that hasn't already been written, suffice to say that he's one of the few players on this team who is truly irreplaceable.

Cribbs' kick returning powers now border on supernatural levels. Wrap your head these return numbers; 32, 24, 35, 50, 24, 39, and 41 yards, good for an average of 35 yards.

One of the big reasons that Browns are scoring with such regularity is that thanks to Cribbs, they oftentimes don't have to go very far.

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Cribbs forced a fumble on punt coverage that set the offense up with a short field, but the Browns failed to capitalize on the turnover when Phil Dawson inexcusably missed a 35 yard field goal wide right.

As much as Derek Anderson and Phil Dawson deserve credit for tying the game and sending it to overtime, Cribbs needs to be recognized for returning the ball 39 yards to the Cleveland 43. Without that kick return, the Browns would not have had time to set up Dawson's 51 yard field goal. It was a Herculean effort; Cribbs bulled his way for an extra ten yards, carrying three Ravens for the last five yards.

And on top of his responsibilities with the Browns, the Kent State alumnus has managed to star in FSN Ohio's best (and only) [reality show](#). Versatility, thy name is Cribbs.

### Four Dog Bones: Defensive Line

Surprised? So am I.

I considered lauding the line after they performed admirably against the Steelers, but for good reason, I was still skeptical.

This week the defensive line proved that the Pittsburgh game was no mirage, as they applied fairly consistent pressure on Kyle Boller all day, although Boller played well in the second half.

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It might be that newcomers Shaun and Robaire Smith are finally settling in, or it might be that the Browns now start a nose tackle (Ethan Kelley) who can actually generate some leg drive (i.e. someone not named Ted Washington), but either way, the defensive line has shown signs of life the past two games. What's more, the last two contests have pitted the Cleveland D-Line against the much-ballyhooed offensive line of the Steelers, and a Ravens group that aren't slouches, either.

Only time will tell whether or not the line can continue their improved play, but one thing is certain: if the defensive line can reach even a level of mediocrity, it will be a serious boon to the porous Browns defense.

### Three Dog Bones: Jamal Lewis

It's obvious that Lewis circled this game on his calendar. J-Lew ran with a passionate fury, as if to chastise Baltimore management for shoving him out the door last winter.

Lewis looked revitalized against his old mates; it's too bad the Browns don't have six more games against the Ravens...

Baltimore hasn't allowed a back to crack the 100 yard mark this season, but Lewis came quite close, accumulating 92 yards on the ground and 30 yards receiving, in addition to a rushing touchdown. After the game, Ray Lewis had to steal a car and rob a liquor store just to take his mind off of the embarrassment.

Jason Wright also had success in limited action (4 carries, 19 yards), which

suggests that the offensive line was opening holes for Jamal Lewis, but I'll stow the "don't re-sign Jamal" spiel for at least one week. Lewis played inspired football on Sunday, and he earned each and every yard he gained against a Baltimore defense which allows less than 80 yards per game on the ground.

### Two Dog Bones: Derek Anderson

Derek "Neo" Anderson has struggled during the last two games, but considering the level of quarterback play we've become accustomed to over the last few seasons, Anderson's "struggles" aren't actually that bad. Numbers like 397 yards passing, three passing touchdowns, one rushing touchdown, one interception, and ratings of 83.4 and 73.8, respectively, look pretty good when compared to the likes of Charlie Frye, Trent Dilfer, and Jeff Garcia.

The Ravens obviously got a good look at the tape from the Steelers game, because they tried to force Anderson to throw underneath for a good part of the game. Anderson showed his mettle on the final drive of regulation, when he moved the Browns 24 yards in only 23 seconds (without using a timeout) before the Browns called their final timeout to set up Dawson's 51 yard field goal attempt.

Keep in mind that although DA has had a rough time in the last two contests, he's been up against two of the best defenses in the league (Baltimore is sixth, Pittsburgh is first). In spite of facing two quality defenses, Anderson has turned the ball over only once. Clearly, Anderson is going to have to prove that he can throw accurately on short slants and dump offs, or the opposition will continue their attempts to confound him with six, seven, and eight man zone coverage.

### **One Dog Bone: Mike Adams**

Joshua Cribbs receives most of the media attention when it comes to special teams, and for good reason. But the Browns play well on special teams as a whole, and consistent contributors like Mike Adams often fly under the radar.

During Sunday's game, Adams recovered a first quarter fumble on a punt return (forced by none other than Joshua Cribbs), and also recorded a sack on a safety blitz.

After going undrafted in the 2004 Draft, Adams played three seasons in San Francisco before being released by the 49ers last winter. The Browns signed Adams in April to provide some depth in the secondary, and Adams has given the Browns a decent third safety while quietly playing well on special teams. With Mason &quot;The Skunk&quot;&quot; Unck sidelined for the entire season, it's good to see a guy like Adams step up to complement J-Cribbs on punt and kickoff coverage.

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

#### **Five Demerits: NFL Officials**

Where is [Ed Hochuli](#) and his guns when you need him?

As I mentioned last week, I'm not a fan of whining about the officials. The referees have a difficult job, and they inevitably make one or two bad calls in every game. That said, Pete Morelli and friends had an extraordinarily bad game

last week.

Those refs were blowing calls left, right, and center. It started early, when Haloti Ngata clearly punched Joe Thomas in the helmet. Last time I checked, that was an automatic ejection, not unnecessary roughness. Had Ngata been ejected, it would have been a huge blow to the Baltimore defense, and overtime might not have been necessary.

But the mistakes weren't limited to the Ngata call, there were numerous officiating gaffes which usually hurt the Browns. Kamerion Wimbley appeared to be a victim of holding every single time he rushed Kyle Boller, there was a missed horse collar tackle on Cribbs, Lawrence Vickers was marked short on a third down when his forward progress had clearly earned a first down, Sean Jones was preposterously whistled for roughing the passer, and an obvious facemask call on Jamal Lewis in overtime was completely ignored.

True, the officials deserve some credit for finally making the right call on Dawson's game-tying fourth quarter field goal, but they should have had that call right from the start. Overall, this was a very poorly officiated game, and the Browns almost lost as a result.

### **Four Demerits: Brian Billick**

*&quot;I wouldn't begin to try to explain what happened at the end of the game. I'll leave that to those that think they know better. So you can save your questions with regards to it, because I have no clue what just happened in terms of the ruling and why they did what they did. I'm sure they'll explain it and I'll get the appropriate memo later in the week.&quot;&quot;*

*-Brian Billick*

Only from Billick's twisted perspective could the correct call be perceived as the wrong one.

Billick seems determined to become the NFL equivalent of Ozzie Guillen. After he spurned the 1999 expansion Browns and landed with Baltimore, Billick became a convenient villain for Cleveland fans. But it's been Billick's sardonic attitude, rock star (self) image, and propensity to pass the blame that have cemented his position as one of the Forest City's most hated sports figures.

Did I mention that he's an offensive genius?

Brian Billick is a pompous ass, and given his team's nose dive from 14-2 to a six or seven win club, he might find himself looking for work this spring.

### **Three Demerits: Romeo Crennel**

For reasons unknown, Crennel's staffs have never adjusted particularly well during the game. The Browns left a boatload of points on the field in the first half, and while the Ravens made the appropriate offensive adjustments at halftime, the Browns blew a sizeable lead. After being held scoreless in the first half, the Ratbirds offense put up 23 points in the second half. Baltimore's offense shouldn't score 23 points in an entire game, let alone a single half.

Frankly, the Browns stole a game in which they completely outplayed the Ravens, but still should have lost. The team can't seem to put together 60 minutes of quality football under Crennel, and that's an awfully disturbing reality.

I want nothing more than for Romeo to prove me wrong. Crennel's an easy guy to root for; he paid his dues and then some as a coordinator, he's one of the nicest guys in the NFL, and he's the embodiment of class. Unfortunately, wins, not character, are the bottom line the NFL.

I was far from sold on Crennel heading into the season, and ten games later nothing has changed much.

### **Two Demerits: Offensive Line**

The Ravens only logged one sack, but penalties have become a problem for the offensive line. On a second quarter drive that led to a 39 yard Dawson field goal, the line was penalized five times (four false starts, one holding) in addition to penalties on Jamal Lewis and Kellen Winslow. Those penalty yards kept the Browns out of the end zone, and kept points off of the board.

After two weeks in hostile territory, a return to the friendly confines of Cleveland Browns Stadium should reduce or completely eliminate those false starts. The Browns aren't good enough to overcome significant penalty yardage, and although Sunday's game was not well-officiated, the penalties on the offensive line were legitimate and must be minimized.

### **One Demerit: Braylon Edwards**

Edwards finished with eight catches for 85 yards and a lost fumble. Minus the fumble, that's not a bad day, but Edwards has averaged a very pedestrian 56 yards per game the last three weeks, with only one touchdown catch. Where is the dominant, unstoppable Braylon Edwards of the first seven games?

It's probably nothing to worry about, and Edwards will more than likely return to form this week against the Texans. However, it's a bit irksome that Edwards didn't step up and deliver big time performances during what was arguably the most important three game stretch of the year for the Browns.

As Joshua Cribbs is fond of saying, &quot;Big playmakers make big plays in big games.&quot; If the Browns are to break through and qualify for the postseason, they'll need Edwards to be the playmaker he was earlier this year.

## ***Standings***

### Dog Bones

Offensive Line---26

Joshua Cribbs---17

Derek Anderson---16

Braylon Edwards---13

Kellen Winslow---12

### Demerits

Romeo Crennel---21

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

### ***Playoff Picture***

Last week seriously bolstered the Browns' playoff aspirations. Obviously, the Browns won and the Ravens lost. But in addition, Buffalo, Kansas City, Pittsburgh, San Diego, and Tennessee were all defeated.

Winning the division still looks like a long shot, but Pittsburgh's upset at the hands of the lowly Jets gives the Browns a glimmer of hope. The Browns still must pick up two full games on the Steelers to be the top dog in the AFC North, but with six games remaining, that's not an impossible task.

Still, the Browns' best chance of getting into the bracket remains the Wild Card, where they are now tied with Tennessee at 6-4. The first Wild Card tiebreaker is winning percentage against common opponents, which makes the Browns' upcoming game against Houston even more significant, as Houston and Tennessee are both in the AFC South.

### ***Up Next: 11/25, Houston, Cleveland Browns Stadium, 1:00***

Houston is a pretty good team this year, and they arrive in Cleveland with a 5-5 mark. Obviously, this game has serious playoff implications, with the Texans only one game behind the Ohioans in the Wild Card hunt.

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Matt Schaub has breathed life into the Houston air attack, and his Texans pass for over 250 yards per game. Andre Johnson played last week for the first time since week two, posting 120 yards receiving and a touchdown. Johnson has averaged over 127 yards in his three games this season, while scoring four touchdowns, and the Miami product is an elite receiver when healthy.

The running game has been spotty. The Texans gave Ahman Green a ton of money to be their featured back, but apparently they didn't get the memo that Green is more washed up than Britney Spears. Green has nursed a knee injury for the majority of the season, and it's unclear whether or not he'll play on Sunday. Ron Dayne will probably get the bulk of the carries for Houston

On defense, the Texans are yielding more than 23 points per game, and are ranked 18<sup>th</sup> overall. Linemen Mario Williams and Amobi Okoye have five sacks apiece.

Once again, the Browns will probably be involved in a close game, but home field advantage should give them the edge. The Browns will win the game, if only because the Texans are the worst-named team in the NFL.

My Call: Browns 34, Texans 27