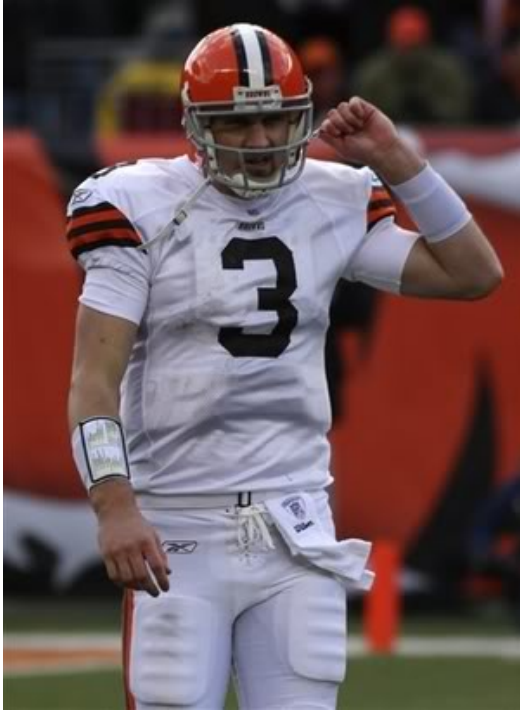


Heroes & Zeroes: Week 16

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Friday, December 28 2007 7:00 PM -

Big demerits for Derek Anderson. Big ups for Leigh Bodden, Shaun Smith, and Jamal Lewis. Those are the obvious ones from last weeks loss in The Queen City. But who else did Nick Allburn recognize as his heroes and zeroes from last weeks loss? Nick gives us his list, updates his year to date standings, and hits on Titans/Colts in the week 16 edition of H&Z.



The Cleveland Browns obviously enjoy celebrating [Festivus](#) just as much as I do. The only explanation for the egg that the Browns laid against the Bengals is that they felt their exuberant and burgeoning fan base was short on grievances. The Browns certainly succeeded; come Sunday night, there was no dearth of grumbling in the homes of the Cleveland faithful.

The loss cost the Browns control of their own destiny, and now the only game that matters in regards to the Browns' playoffs hopes is the Colts/Titans contest on Sunday night. Feel free to join me and write [Jim Sorgi](#) a "good luck" email. J-Bone, we'll all be pullin' for you!

This Week's Zeroes

Five Demerits: Derek Anderson

There's not much to say about Anderson's awful performance that hasn't already been written. Derek Anderson lost the game for the Browns about as single-handedly as you will ever see a player lose a game in the NFL. Anderson threw four interceptions against the Bengals, while he had a total of four turnovers in the previous three games combined.

Anderson's poor play is more disappointing than anything. By all accounts, Anderson has not corrected the problems that plagued him both in college and during the first two years of his professional career; he has trouble reading a defense, he forces passes into heavy coverage, he has no touch on short passes, he bird-dogs receivers and doesn't always go through his progressions, and he can be rattled when things don't go his way. More than anything, it's Anderson's inability to improve on his weaknesses and learn from his mistakes that is disturbing.

You can try to sell me on Anderson's rocket arm until the cows come home, and I'm well aware that having a strong arm is important. But I don't just want a quarterback who can throw, I want a quarterback who can think. Bernie Kosar had a great arm, but he won games between the ears. Kosar was able to read defenses like a book, and like a great chess player, he was able to see a few moves ahead of the defense.

The great contemporary quarterbacks don't just win because they have the strongest arms, they win because they're also extremely intelligent. Peyton Manning has a great arm, but he also plays the Colts' offense like a piano as he audibles at the line of scrimmage, tweaking routes and blocking schemes. Tom Brady doesn't have the best arm in the game - far from it - but he's an intelligent player who almost always makes the correct decision when the game is on the line.

If arm strength was everything, then guys like Kyle Boller, Aaron Brooks, and Jeff George would have had Hall of Fame careers. There's no doubt that Anderson has the physical tools to be a great quarterback, but until he gets the mental part

worked out, he'll never break through into that upper echelon of NFL signal callers.

Four Demerits: Bob Bratkowski

Bob Bratkowski has been the Cincinnati Bengals' offensive coordinator since 2001 and is one of the few holdovers from the Dick LeBeau regime. It's tough to argue with the job Bratkowski has done in the last few seasons, because the Bengals have been very productive on offense, even when Jon Kitna was under center. But nobody is to blame more than Bratkowski for letting the Browns climb back into the game late in the second half.

Holding a 19-7 lead early in the fourth quarter, Bratkowski kept calling for Carson Palmer to throw the football, when sitting on the ball to run the clock would have been a much wiser choice. Had the Bengals simply run the football until the Browns stopped them and forced a punt, they could have avoided Palmer's second interception and burned valuable minutes off of the clock.

This situation was eerily reminiscent of the Browns/Jets game on December 9th, during which Rob Chudzinski kept calling for the Browns to throw the ball late in the game when sitting on the football and burning the clock was probably the smart move. In both cases, had the offense simply run the football and punted, there wouldn't have been enough time left for the opposing team to mount any semblance of a comeback.

Three Demerits: Carson Palmer

Carson Palmer has owned the Browns during the last few seasons. In his last three games against Cleveland (prior to Sunday), Palmer

averaged over 342 passing yards and threw for 11 touchdowns. This time, Palmer threw for only 115 yards, and posted just one touchdown against two interceptions.

Cincinnati's offensive line has had its problems this season, but they got the job done against the Browns, yielding no sacks and opening up enough holes for the Bengals to average over 4.6 yards per carry. Considering that the Bengals ran the ball 12 more times than they threw it, that 4.6 YPC number is very impressive. Considering how well the Bengals' offensive line performed, Palmer must bear the onus of the Bengals' poor air attack.

And while Bob Bratkowski must be blamed for continuing to call passing plays, it was Palmer, not Bratkowski, who threw two interceptions in just 21 attempts. Hopefully the Browns can carry the momentum of their defensive success against Palmer into the 2008 season.

Two Demerits: Dave Zastudil

The game started out well for the Browns. Cleveland's defense stopped the Cincinnati offense, forcing a punt. The Browns then drove from their own 10-yard line to the Bengals' 22, where they were set to attempt a field goal until punter Dave Zastudil mishandled the snap. It was still a 40-yard field goal, far from a guarantee given the extremely windy conditions, but considering what Phil Dawson accomplished just one week prior against Buffalo, he had a legitimate shot of making the field goal.

True, it was only three points, but it could have completely changed the dynamics of the game. The field goal would have given the Browns the lead, and maybe they wouldn't have been so aggressive at the end of the first half. And even if everything else happened just the same, the Browns would have needed only a field goal to win the game on their final drive, which would have completely changed things. Coulda, woulda, shoulda...

One Demerit: Chad Johnson

To a certain degree, this is me venting on Chad Johnson for the entire season. Johnson dropped a few key passes against the Browns, and while Johnson's '07 numbers appear to measure up to his 2006 statistics, he hasn't scored with the same consistency in 2006 and 2007 that he did from 2003 to 2005. In fact, 10 of Johnson's 12 touchdowns over the last two seasons have come in just four games.

Part of Johnson's declining scoring numbers can be attributed to the emergence and continued development of TJ Houshmandzadeh, who may be a better receiver than Johnson, and is certainly a more potent red zone threat. But it seems that Johnson's antics have worn on the Bengals and especially on Marvin Lewis. Chad Johnson might be wearing out his welcome in Cincinnati, and rumors have been swirling that the Bengals may attempt to trade Johnson in the off-season.

It might not be a bad move; Johnson is no spring chicken (he turns 30 in early January), his numbers appear to have peaked and may in fact be declining, and his elaborate scoring celebrations and eccentric

interviews give the team headaches. With capable replacement Chris Henry waiting in the wings, and solid youngster Glenn Holt ready to take Henry's spot in the slot, the Bengals could afford to part ways with Johnson, and it might help them plug some holes on defense or the offensive line.

And one more thing: why do Johnson's antics get a free pass from the national media? Personally, when players score, I like to see them act as if they've been to the end zone before and simply return to the sidelines. But if a guy feels inclined to celebrate, then a dunk over the goalpost, a leap into the stands, or spiking the football are all perfectly fine. Here's the problem with what Johnson does: he does it knowing that he's going to cost his team 15 yards, and he does it anyone. Chad doesn't care about hurting the team with a penalty, he wants to get himself on SportCenter. I have no patience for players that exhibit such high levels of selfishness.

This Week's Heroes

Five Dog Bones: Leigh Bodden

Just as Derek Anderson practically lost the game on his own, Leigh Bodden kept the Browns in the game almost single-handedly. After Cincinnati gained momentum early following the Browns' botched field goal attempt, Bodden put the kibosh on that momentum with his first interception. Bodden's second interception deep in Cincinnati territory led to a Cleveland touchdown just three plays later.

Bodden added four tackles, as he and Eric Wright impressively held TJ Houshmandzadeh and Chad Johnson to a combined six catches for just 69 yards. Bodden's performance was all the more remarkable after he didn't practice last week due to back problems.

Four Dog Bones: Braylon Edwards

Edwards scored two touchdowns to become the all-time Browns leader in touchdowns by a receiver with 15, breaking Gary Collins previous mark of 13, which was set in 1963. Braylon's breakout season continued against the Bengals, and with one game to go Edwards is currently sixth in the league in receiving yardage and second in touchdowns. Edwards, with 1,222 yards for the year, is also poised to break Webster Slaughter's team record of 1,236 receiving yards, set in 1989. Before Edwards, Slaughter was the last Browns receiver to make the Pro Bowl (1989).

Three Dog Bones: Shaun Smith

Smith was one of the few players who even seemed aware that the Browns were just a win away from a playoff birth. Smith had his best game in Browns uniform, registering eight solo tackles while reeking havoc on his old teammates all game long.

Smith, who has spent most of the year at defensive end, replaced the injured Ethan Kelley at nose tackle and filled in admirably. While the Browns are in desperate need of defensive linemen, they appear to

have a very good lineman in Shaun Smith, and a very competent lineman in Robaire Smith. The Browns will need to determine where they want to use Shaun Smith next season, as an end or as the nose tackle. Regardless, this looks like another successful signing from Phil Savage's terrific free agent class of 2007.

Two Dog Bones: Jamal Lewis

Had Derek Anderson simply managed the game and limited his turnovers, this was a game that Jamal Lewis probably could have won on his own. Lewis was having his way with the Cincinnati defense, picking up 92 yards on 21 carries. Further illustrating the Browns' dominance on the ground were Jason Wright's three carries for 38 yards. Lewis added five catches for 42 yards.

Lewis has become a fixture in the Cleveland offense this season, and he's earned a contract extension. As long as Lewis isn't asking for the moon and the stars, the Browns would be foolish not to re-sign him. And it would be unwise to wait until the free agent period begins to negotiate with Lewis, who will definitely have high market value as one of the top free agent backs.

Jamal Lewis isn't going to be the Browns' featured back for the next five years because he's just too old. But Lewis can buy the Browns some time, most likely a year or two, as they search for that franchise running back. As effective as Jason Wright and Jerome Harrison have looked at times, it's unlikely that either runner could withstand the rigors of a full season receiving featured carries. The Browns need Lewis for at

least another year, and beyond that he will have value as a power/goal line runner in a dual back system.

Lone Bone: Todd Grantham

Grantham has drawn the ire of fans this season for the defense's inability to stop, well, anybody. But Grantham deserves credit for the job his defense did against Cincinnati. The Bengals dropped 45 points on the Browns back in week two, but the Cleveland defense wasn't so porous this time around.

The Browns gave up two touchdowns mainly because both scores were set up by Derek Anderson interceptions deep in Cleveland territory. In fact, the Bengals' two scoring drives were only 5 and 20 yards long, respectively.

If Romeo Crennel doesn't bolt for Miami, as the rumors have suggested he might, the Orange Man will almost certainly return next season. Unless he is fired, Grantham's contract will keep him in Cleveland for the duration of Crennel's tenure. One encouraging statistic: over the last five games, the Browns' defense has allowed an average of only 16.2 points per game.

Fasion note: Grantham dresses completely in orange for every game, and as a result many have criticized Grantham's "fasion sense." Two things; one, "fasion sense" doesn't have much bearing on one's ability to coach NFL football, and two,

Grantham dresses in Day-Glo orange not as a fashion statement, but to make it easier for his players to pick him out from the field so that he can relay the defensive signals to them.

Standings

Total Dog Bones

Offensive Line---27

Braylon Edwards---26

Jamal Lewis---21

Derek Anderson---17(t)

Joshua Cribbs---17(t)

Kellen Winslow---17(t)

Net Dog Bones

Offensive Line---25

Braylon Edwards---22

Kellen Winslow---17

Joshua Cribbs---15(t)

Jamal Lewis---15(t)

Total Demerits

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Romeo Crennel---30
Derek Anderson---21
Brian Billick---16(t)
Defensive Line---16(t)
Todd Grantham---14

Net Demerits

Romeo Crennel---22
Brian Billick---16
Defensive Line---12(t)
Todd Grantham---12(t)
Rich Gannon---7(t)
Willie McGinest---7(t)
NFL Rules Committee---7(t)

Dropping Like Flies

The Browns lost two good players to the Injured Reserve last week, Mike Adams and Ethan Kelley. Adams, a safety, was a big contributor on special teams and in select coverage packages. Kelley, who became the Browns' starting nose tackle when Ted Washington went on IR, had come into his own in recent weeks, and was one of the main catalysts for the Browns' resurgent pass rush.

***Up Next: 12/30, San Francisco, Cleveland Browns Stadium,
1:00***

After winning two straight games to start the year, the 49ers went on to lose 10 of 11. The Niners come to Cleveland the winners of two consecutive close games, but they're uncertain of who will start at quarterback.

San Francisco was already down to their third quarterback, Shaun Hill, a Maryland product who went undrafted, but Hill missed time in practice this week with back spasms. Hill is listed as questionable, and if he's unable to go, Heisman Trophy winner Chris Weinke will get the nod. Weinke, the longtime Carolina Panther, hasn't played in a game this season and has been pretty lousy pro, with 14 career touchdown passes against 26 interceptions.

San Francisco ranks dead last in the league in offense, scoring only about 14 points per game. The 49ers' defense allows about 23 points per game. Frank Gore is still a good running back, and stopping Gore should be the focus of Cleveland's defensive scheme.

In terms of the playoffs, this is a meaningless game for the Browns. Some have suggested that the Browns rest several starters in this game, and I think that's the right decision. That said, unfortunately I don't think Romeo Crennel will rest his starters in this game. This is a team that the Browns should handle, and if they play their starters as Crennel has implied, I expect the Browns to cruise to a record seventh home victory.

Be sure to tune in for the game that actually matters, Tennessee at Indianapolis, on Sunday night at 8:15 (NBC).

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My Call: Browns 27, 49ers 13