

Heroes & Zeroes: Week 2

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Although we've been well-conditioned of late, losing to Pittsburgh never gets any easier, particularly in a game that easily could have been ours. What's more painful: losing close or suffering a blowout? When it comes to the Steelers, it all feels about the same. Nick Allburn checks in with his weekly look at the Heroes & Zeroes from the Browns painful loss to their bitter rivals.



Two deflating wins were not what fans had in mind for the start of the Browns' season. But here we are, sitting at 0-2, buried in a two game hole behind Pittsburgh and staring down the barrel of what could prove to be the most anticlimactic season since 1995. To say that the wind has been sapped from the sails is an understatement.

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This Week's Zeroes

Five Demerits: Romeo Crennel

Romeo Crennel has basically run his course in Cleveland. It's been more than three years, and the guy still can't handle the most menial of coaching tasks like clock management.

Hey Romeo, when you're going to call a timeout, you should do it right after the play; you shouldn't wait 8-10 seconds. No, I'm not kidding or anything. I know it's a little confusing, but when you're trying to save time in the game, you want to stop

the clock earlier rather than later. Knowledge is power!

The Browns have mishandled snaps in consecutive games. That indicates undisciplined coaching. An illegal procedure call on a freaking onside kick? Again, coaching. This team is consistently under prepared and their execution is generally poor.

Did you watch the sidelines at all on Sunday? Mike Tomlin was constantly talking to his guys; giving them pointers and getting their feedback on what was and wasn't working. When's the last time you saw Crennel do anything but stand stoically on the sideline? It's a football game, Romeo, not a tea party! You need to get fired up once in awhile, and you need to communicate with your players during the game.

And about that fourth quarter field goal... C'mon Romeo, it's wet and windy, your offense hasn't moved the ball consistently all day, and you're up against a tough Pittsburgh defense. Furthermore, if you're stopped on fourth down, you still leave the Steelers with lousy field position. Plus, in those weather conditions, a 38-yard field goal is anything but a lock, even for Dawso-matic. Once again, Romeo was caught playing not to lose, and it's why he'll never be a winner in Cleveland. Romeo must go.

Four Demerits: Derek Anderson

If I were a musician I'd write a love song about Derek Anderson, because as much as I love his arm and his pocket presence, he just keeps teasing me and breaking my heart. I'm not ready for a clean break yet, but I'm starting to have my doubts about whether or not the two of us have a future. I want to love you, Derek, but I won't let you yo-yo with my heart forever.

We can't blame this performance on the weather, and let's not sugar coat it: DA sucked. Anderson's answer to the weather was to simply throw the ball harder, which didn't make his already laser-like passes any easier for his receivers to catch. Once again Anderson is not going through his reads, and often seems to be looking for only one or two receivers.

I can live with the long interception that Anderson threw, but the pick he threw at the end of the first half was inexcusable. One of my biggest fears with DA is that he may not be a very cerebral fellow, and that interception at the end of the first half only reinforced my opinion. With only eight seconds left in the half and no timeouts, Anderson had to be aware that there were a few things he couldn't do; he couldn't (a) run, (b) take a sack, (c) throw short of the end zone, (d) run a play that lasted eight seconds, or (e) force a ball into coverage, risking an interception. Unfortunately, DA chose option E.

Anderson has so much potential that we shouldn't be giving up on him, not even close. But if he keeps playing such lousy football, then Brady Quinn might get his shot sooner than we originally thought.

Three Demerits: Braylon Edwards

Game number two was largely the same as game number one for Braylon; he was virtually non-existent, and when the ball came his way he had butter fingers. Edwards is arguably the best player on the team and perhaps the team's most valuable player. As long as Dontè Stallworth is out of commission it's even more important that the Browns get a big contribution from Edwards, and had Edwards delivered a big catch or two, the Browns might be 1-1 right now.

Part of Edwards' struggles can be chalked up to the weather, Derek Anderson, and seeing a ton of double coverage, but at the end of the day his problems may be largely a residual effect of the time he missed

with that cut foot. Let's hope that this is the week when Braylon gets it all turned around, because the Browns desperately need their stud receiver to start acting like one.

Two Demerits: Rob Chudzinski

Chud has raised a few eyebrows during the first two weeks with some questionable play calling. The flipside is that had those plays worked, Chud would be having the "genius" label tossed in his direction quite liberally.

The inclement weather significantly hindered the Browns' vertical passing attack, but Chud never seemed to fully adjust and adopt a "dink and dunk" attack. Short passes are obviously not Derek Anderson's strength, but the Browns probably should have at least given this strategy a shot considering how tough it must have been to catch Derek Anderson's speeding bullets when they were affected by the wind for 25 yards.

One Demerit: Hines Ward

I don't like to get too worked up about players' celebrations as long as they're all in good fun, but Ward's celebration after his second quarter touchdown was openly disrespectful to the Browns and their fans. After scoring, Ward went to the back of the end zone and wiped his feet like the turf was a doormat, clearly indicating that he thought the Browns were the Steelers' doormat.

That was pretty bold considering that Pittsburgh was only leading by one score, but it didn't make it any less disrespectful. Celebrating and having fun is one thing, but showing up the opposing team and their fans is bush league, and it's not something you'd expect from a guy who frequently has that "one of the nicest guys in the league" label attached to him.

Actually, I have a very different image of Hines Ward: he's a cheap shot. Pundits rave about his blocking, but nobody chastises Ward for his shady blocks on players far away from the play and some of his blind side blocks. I'm all for receivers blocking, but using blocking as an excuse to get a free shot at someone isn't cool. Hines Ward might be smiling all of the time, but he's a total punk in my book.

This Week's Heroes

Five Gold Stars: Kellen Winslow

Kellen Winslow was the only Browns receiver who made a big impact on Sunday. Winslow caught seven balls, while the rest of the team grabbed just 11. The tipped ball that Winslow grabbed while being covered by Troy Polamalu in the fourth quarter was one of the greatest catches I've ever seen him make.

He's said some abrasive things from time to time, but you have to love Kellen Winslow. In spite of all those injuries, Winslow straps it on every Sunday and grabs passes like a Hoover with those giant paws of his. The guy is as intense as anyone in the league and unlike many of these Browns, he really appears to care whether or not the team is succeeding. You can say what you want about Winslow, but he's one of the few guys who seems to take losses just as hard as the fans. In today's "it's a business" NFL, that's a rare thing.

Four Gold Stars: Shaun Rogers

I can't believe I ever doubted the Shaun Rogers trade. The Big Baby was a total beast against the Steelers, taking on and frequently blowing up multiple blockers. Recording five tackles and a sack, Rogers lived in the Pittsburgh backfield, and he made Sunday's game pretty stressful for Ben Roethlisberger.

Conservatively listed at 350 pounds, Rogers is kind of like Ted Washington...except he can move. Guys that big should not be able to move that fast. The defensive line as a whole looked much better against Pittsburgh, and hopefully they continue to gel as the season progresses. As for the Big Baby, as long as he doesn't suffer a major injury, I wouldn't be surprised to see him in Honolulu in February.

Three Gold Stars: Ike

Note: I'm not trying to make light of the hurricane or the destruction it left in its wake down in Texas. Please don't send me emails suggesting that I am.

I'm not sure if what we saw at Cleveland Browns Stadium was actually the remnants of Hurricane Ike or not, but considering the extreme wind and rain that the whole region experienced, it's fair to say that Ike had some effect. As miserable as those conditions must have been to play in, they were a huge equalizer for the Browns.

With Dontè Stallworth still sidelined with a mysterious random injury, the Steelers' receiving corps had the Browns overmatched both in depth and explosiveness. The lousy weather was exactly what the Browns needed to slow down the Steelers' speedy receivers, particularly Santonio Holmes and Nate Washington. Holmes still finished with five catches for 94 yards, but considering how he's absolutely gouged the Browns for big plays and touchdowns in the past, those totals were acceptable. Nate Washington wasn't even in the box score.

Two Gold Stars: Phil Dawson

What can you say about Phil Dawson? Considering the murmurs about his leg strength during last summer's training camp, it's amazing how he's silenced his critics over the last year or so. Dawson has expanded his range up to about 50 yards, he's as accurate as ever, and there may

not be a better bad weather kicker in the league. He's our guy, he's the last remaining expansion Brown, and I wouldn't trade Phil Dawson for any kicker in the league.

Dawson added to his bad weather r sum  on Sunday, nailing two field goals in the swirling wind and rain. Those field goals weren't as amazing as Dawson's pair of kicks during the Snow Game against Buffalo, but they were still pretty impressive. As long as he doesn't grumble too much about his [contract](#), Phil can consider himself solidly on my good side.

One Gold Star: Jerome Harrison

What's it going to take to get Jerome Harrison some consistent touches? He doesn't have to split carries with Jamal Lewis, but the guy clearly deserves a solid 4-6 touches per game, and maybe more if he's successful. Harrison only had one catch for 23 yards, but his 23-yard scamper was one of the most exciting bits of running that we've seen from a Browns running back years.

Harrison is fast, shifty, and appears more muscular than he has been in past years. There's a chance that this guy could come out of nowhere to become the Browns' featured back in the next couple of years, a la Willie Parker. Jamal Lewis isn't getting any younger, and giving a few of his carries to the youthful Harrison will not only keep Lewis fresher and reduce his chances of injury, but it will also give the Browns a chance to evaluate Harrison to decide whether or not they will need to sign or draft another running back in the near future.

Up Next: At Baltimore, 4:15, M&T Bank Stadium (*"nic e name...not"*;)

The Browns have another divisional game lined up this week, although it's against a slightly softer opponent. Baltimore was hurricaned out last week in Houston, so they should be pretty fresh, but unfortunately for them they'll still be sporting the same lackluster roster.

Look for the Browns to come after rookie signal caller Joe Flacco early and often, look for the Browns offense to finally get off the shnide, and here's hoping that Dontè Stallworth will finally make his regular season Browns debut.

Prediction: Browns 24, Ravens 13