

## Heroes & Zeroes: Week 12

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It was the worst loss in a season filled with bad ones. The Browns let the hapless Houston Texans come into Cleveland Browns Stadium and embarrass them with a 16-6 victory. The loss likely sealed the fate of embattled head coach Romeo Crennel, and put General Manager Phil Savage on even shakier footing. Nick Allburn checks in with his Heroes & Zeroes from last Sunday's disappointing loss.



There were dozens of better ways I could have spent my Sunday. I could have gotten some school work done, gone out to catch the new Bond flick, taken a leisurely jog, or even watched a different football game. But like hundreds of thousands of other Browns fans, I spent it watching one of the most boring and uninspired football games I've seen in years. Why do we do this to ourselves? There must be some kind of masochistic streak in the collective subconscious of Browns fans. I'm told the first step toward recovery is admitting you have a problem. Well, my name is Nick, and I'm a Cleveland Browns fan.

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

#### **Five Demerits: Romeo Crennel**

If there was any doubt if Romeo Crennel would be fired, it was erased Sunday. The Browns came out of the tunnel flatter than an old can of Pepsi, as has become a hallmark of Crennel's tenure. There's simply no excuse for losing to the Texans at home, let alone posting just a pair of field goals. The Browns were completely uninspired, and sooner or later, Crennel has to take the blame.

But Crennel's inability to motivate his team is old hat. The real reason he's on this list is how he handled the quarterback situation. Brady Quinn was having a lousy game -- no doubt about it. But pulling Quinn in favor of Anderson to try to give the offense a "spark" was totally ridiculous. Being loyal to Derek Anderson is one thing, and I think we all know that the QB switch prior to the Denver game was forced on Crennel, but Crennel was totally unfair in his treatment of Brady Quinn.

The remainder of this season is about developing and evaluating Quinn, and if Crennel's going to pull Quinn out of the game when he's struggling, it makes it awfully difficult for either of those things to happen. Being loyal is one thing, but showing blatant favoritism is another. I'm not sure what Crennel was thinking. Maybe he really thought Anderson could turn things around, or maybe he thought he had nothing to lose. Maybe Crennel thought that regardless of how Anderson performed, he could use Quinn's injury as an excuse for his decision. Maybe Anderson promised Crennel a dozen Krispy Kremes for after the game. Regardless, it was the wrong decision, and it now serves as more evidence that Crennel should be fired.

### **Four Demerits: Gary Kubiak**

With a 16-6 lead halfway through the fourth quarter, the Texans had the ball on their own 29-yard line. The clock read 7:34, and the Browns had just missed a 39-yard field goal after a shaky possession that was kept alive by a pair of illegal contact penalties on the Texans. The obvious choice for the Houston offense was to run the ball and not even consider putting it in the air, even if it resulted in a punt. Cleveland's offense was playing so poorly and the clock was working against them, so the Texans just had to play conservative and force the Cleveland offense to beat them; an unlikely proposition.

Instead, Kubiak elected to throw on second and third down, resulting in an interception that kept the Browns' chances alive, even if they were on life support. I'd say that we're used to seeing decisions like these in Cleveland, but we'd never see this from the ultra-conservative Romeo Crennel. But just because a decision is aggressive doesn't make it right, and Kubiak's choice to throw was 100-percent wrong.

### **Three Demerits: Rob Chudzinski**

My, how the mighty have fallen. Rob Chudzinski was practically worshiped by Browns fans a year ago, and now he's taking some of the blame for this disappointing season. Chud deserves some of the heat he's taking, and some of it is undeserved. That said, he was completely enamored with the pass against Houston, and if someone can figure out why, maybe he or she should be the Browns' next offensive coordinator.

The Browns only handed off to their running backs (meaning Lewis and Harrison) 17 times, but gained 89 yards, good for 5.2 yards per carry. Quinn and Anderson were 13 of 32 for 145 yards and 3 interceptions. What gives? At no point was this game out of reach, so it's not like the Browns had to throw to catch up. No, this one falls squarely on Chudzinski's shoulders. Had the Browns simply pounded the running game all afternoon, they might be 5-6 right now.

### **Two Demerits: Brady Quinn**

Quinn just didn't have it this week. I'm not sure if it was the finger, or just an off day, but the combined play of Brady Quinn and Derek Anderson probably cost the Browns the football game. Quinn was 8 of 18 for 94 yards. He also threw two interceptions.

What really irked me about Quinn's performance was that he was forcing passes into tight coverage. Quinn is usually an intelligent player, and doesn't typically make those throws. I was interested to see how Quinn would handle the adversity, but Romeo Crennel pulled him before we could really find out.

### **One Demerit: Derek Anderson**

If Derek Anderson had taken more reps with the first team, he'd be higher on this list. In relief of Brady Quinn, Anderson was 5 of 14 for 51 yards. DA also threw one interception and lost a fumble. To say he was ineffective is probably an understatement. Anderson probably would have played better if he'd been given a full week to prepare as the starter, but that's purely speculation.

We saw the same throws forced into tight coverage and the same lack of touch on short passes that ultimately got Anderson benched in the first place. At this point, it almost seems prudent to keep Anderson on the bench to keep his value from declining further.

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

#### **Five Gold Stars: Shaun Rogers**

Normally it would take more than a blocked field goal for me to put a guy in the top spot, but good performances were in short supply this week. Rogers' blocked kick helped keep the Browns in the game during the second quarter.

Shaun Rogers just keeps outdoing himself, and aside from intercepting a pass and taking it to the house, it's difficult to imagine what he can do for an encore. I've said it before, but it bears repeating: it's downright tragic (and at least a little ironic) that Rogers' monster year is coming in the midst of a lost season for the Browns. Hopefully Rogers can maintain this high level of play and stay relatively injury-free for the next few seasons, and hopefully the Browns can build a defense around his considerable girth.

#### **Four Gold Stars: Jamal Lewis**

While Lewis has been criticized lately (present company included), he was played a terrific game against Houston. Had Lewis and counterpart Jerome Harrison received more carries, it's a game the Browns may have won. Lewis is a guy who is most potent in the fourth quarter when the defense is a little worn down, but he never really got a chance to tear up the Texans' defense due to Rob Chudzinski's questionable play calling.

Yes, Lewis fumbled early, but he's high on this list because he showed the fans (much to their relief, I'm sure) that he still has some petrol left in the tank. Furthermore, this was the first game that saw Lewis in some semblance of a plowshare with Jerome Harrison, and both seemed to excel in this scenario. It will be interesting to see what happens if the two split carries more evenly in the coming weeks.

#### **Three Gold Stars: Brodney Pool**

Facing a 13-6 deficit at the start of the third quarter, the Browns went three and out. With the way the offense had looked up to that point, the defense had to be aware that another Houston touchdown might put the game out of reach. Brodney Pool did more than stop the Texans, he came up with a crucial interception that should have helped swing momentum in the Browns' favor. Unfortunately, the

offense didn't cooperate.

Pool, along with Sean Jones, form a very promising young safety tandem for the Browns. Prior to this season, conventional wisdom stated that Jones was clearly the better of the two, and that while Pool was very athletic, he was extremely inconsistent. That was true at one point, but Pool has quietly improved this year, and should be a solid, if unspectacular, part of the defense for a long time to come. Jones' season has been hampered by injuries, and while I'd like to see him back with the Browns next season, who knows what kind of offers will be out there for Jones, who will be a free agent this winter.

### **Two Gold Stars: Jerome Harrison**

One of the few things I liked about this game was that Jerome Harrison and Jamal Lewis almost split carries (7 and 10, respectively). As usual, Harrison played well, gaining 31 yards on his 7 carries and catching one pass for 8 yards. It's a sin that the Browns don't call at least two screen passes for Harrison every game.

As I mentioned above, I'm itching to see a Harrison/Lewis plowshare. It could prove to be the Browns' answer to Willie Parker and Jerome Bettis. Harrison could be used early to wear the defense out a bit and force them to respect stretch plays, and Lewis could be used for short yardage and in the fourth quarter when the Browns are looking to put the game away. I'm not a doctor, so I'm not sure if this would work. But one thing I am sure of is that the Browns need to get a better look at Jerome Harrison before this season is over.

### **One Gold Star: Steve Slaton**

It may be a little unconventional to give a tip of the cap to an opposing player, but it's not like the Browns provided many candidates for kudos this week. Slaton was one of my favorite college players when he played at West Virginia, and I'm glad that he's been so successful at the next level. Lots of teams passed on Slaton; he wasn't drafted until late in the third round, but I'd be willing to bet a few of those teams wish they had pulled the trigger on the shifty little running back from southeastern Pennsylvania. Slaton's speed and receiving ability make him a great fit for a dual-back system, and if the Texans can find a good power runner to pair him with, they'll have an excellent back field on their hands. Also: choosing Steve Slaton in round 17 saved one of my fantasy teams.

## **Up Next: 11/30, Indianapolis Colts, Cleveland Browns Stadium, 1:00**

The last thing the Browns need right now is a Colts team that looks like they're heating up. But there's no rest for the weary, and that's exactly what the Browns will get this Sunday. Regardless of who ends up playing quarterback for Cleveland, Peyton Manning is still running the show for the Colts, and I weep to think of what he'll do to the Browns' defense, which is mediocre on its best day.

**Prediction: Colts 34, Browns 17**