

Another Week, Another Streak

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

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After losing to the Denver Broncos on Sunday 27-6 at Denver's Invesco Field, the Browns kept in tact the NFL's longest drought for not scoring on an opening drive and the NFL's third longest losing streak. Meanwhile a new touchdown-less streak has begun and the Browns are now 0-2 for the third time in four seasons. Yes, the offense is that bad, again. Lacking much of an offense and stamina on defense, the Browns couldn't sustain drives when they needed to or take advantage of opportunities when presented. Gary talks about it in his latest.



The streak continues, take your pick.

After losing to the Denver Broncos on Sunday 27-6 at Denver's Invesco Field, the Browns kept in tact the NFL's longest drought for not scoring on an opening drive and the NFL's third longest losing streak, thanks Detroit, thanks St. Louis. Meanwhile a new touchdown-less streak has begun. Yes, the offense is that bad, again.

The Browns, lacking much of a passing game and less of a running game couldn't sustain drives when they needed to or take advantage of opportunities when presented. An earnest effort early undone by a lack of talent, the Browns were kept in the game for much of the game mostly because the Broncos offense under Kyle Orton is nearly as bad, despite the team being 2-0.

As an aside, here's something that was clear from the Broncos first drive. Orton is no Jay Cutler. When the Broncos stop plowing their way through the second division of the AFC North, head coach Josh McDaniels can blame himself for ushering out the temperamental but

far more talented Cutler for Orton. Orton defines NFL mediocrity in a position where it's hard to hide.

With an occasional good pass thrown in among the several bad ones, Orton almost single-handedly kept the Browns in this game until they imploded in the middle of the third quarter.

For now, the Browns are relegated once again to talking about getting better, fixing what needs to be fixed and moving on past their third 0-2 start in the last four years. At least it started promising.

Peyton Hillis fumbled the opening kickoff from Phil Dawson giving the Browns the ball at the Broncos 22-yard line. But the Browns weren't going to break a nearly two-year old streak of not scoring a touchdown on their opening drive on this day and, as usual, settled for a Dawson field goal.

With gifts few and far between for this team it felt as if the Broncos decided to spot the Browns a 3-point lead and then buckled their chinstraps and said, "let's play."

They could have spotted the Browns a lot more.

But so much of what the Browns do is for the benefit of others. On third and long from deep in their own territory on the game's second drive, rookie center Alex Mack dribbled a shotgun snap to Brady Quinn that Quinn couldn't handle.

The fumble was recovered by linebacker Darrell Reid at the Browns 10.

Broncos quarterback Kyle Orton then hit tight end Tony Scheffler on a

slant inside of a badly overmatch Kamerion Wimbley for a 3-yard touchdown pass on third down giving the Broncos the 7-3 lead.

It looked like the blowout it would eventually become.

At various points the Browns and Brady Quinn showed enough life to think that maybe with a few more games under their belt they'll start to convert a few of their opportunities. Just not on this day. On the Browns second drive, for example, Quinn moved the ball from his own 20 to the Broncos 29 on a combination of Jamal Lewis and Quinn's new found penchant for finding wide receivers instead of tight ends, but alas this drive too stumbled, yielding to a 47-yard Dawson field goal that closed the gap to 7-6.

The Broncos pushed the lead back to 4 with a 23-yard Matt Prayter field goal after their 13 play, 5 minute drive stalled at the Browns' 6-yard line.

The drive featured Orton hitting his favorite target, receiver Brandon Stokely, on a short pass over the middle that Stokely took 37-yards to the Cleveland 28.

The Broncos had a chance to make it a 7-point lead just before the half after another long drive, this time 15 plays, but that drive fizzled too and Prayter missed a chip shot field goal. It was another in a series of opportunities squandered by the Broncos' own brand of ineptness, offensively, despite almost no visible pass rush from the Browns' defense, even when it blitzed.

Here's another aside. I know that the television announcers want to appear as though they have something good to say about every team. But Steve Beuerlein took that to an extreme by twice referring to Browns' cornerback Eric Wright as one of the best in the league.

It must have happened when I wasn't looking and admittedly I don't watch the Pro Bowl, but Eric Wright?

Beuerlein took that as accepted fact because Orton, hardly the best judge of talent, supposedly called Wright one of the five best cornerbacks in the league, no doubt in a pre-game "Pay your respects to the opponent and don't give them any bulletin board material" interview.

A game within striking distance again at the half eventually turned into an ugly mess, this week a little later than last, although the Browns tried their best to help. In the second half's opening drive, Quinn hit Josh Cribbs over the middle on 3rd

and 9 from the Browns' 24-yard line but Cribbs fumbled it away.

At least he fumbled it forward as the Broncos recovered it at their own 38.

The reason that turned out to be such a good thing is that the Broncos offense is essentially Cleveland West.

A few predictable decent plays followed by the even more

predictable bad plays by Orton forced still another Prayter field goal and a 13-6 lead.

If the game had ended right there it would have mattered little. Broncos fans seemed bored and Browns fans, at least those still watching, were probably in the kitchen packing tomorrow's lunch. The Broncos had a chance to push it to a 10-point lead with just under 3 minutes left in the third quarter after another drive inevitably stalled for the Broncos but Prayter missed another field goal, this one from 37 yards as fans in two cities yawned in unison.

For just a bit it looked like the Browns were again showing some life after the Prayter miss. It was as if they awoke to realize that the game still was within reach, technically. Q

Quinn hit Braylon Edwards on back-to-back passes but then had three straight deflected, one to an open Mohamad Massaquoi and two at the line of scrimmage and were forced to punt after getting the ball to the Denver 44.

Then the wheels, wobbling mightily anyway, finally fell off. On the Broncos next drive, a short pass from Orton to Jabar Gaffney turned into a 37-yard play and got the ball to the Cleveland 2-yard line.

Even the Broncos couldn't miss that lay up and didn't when Hillis went in for the touchdown which helped push the lead to a now insurmountable 20-6.

Emboldened, the Broncos defense then blew up the Browns' next drive with two sacks and a false start penalty on tackle John St. Clair. It was a game that could cost him his job as Denver defensive tackle Elvis Dumervil treated him like a blow-up doll, running over him with regularity on his way to sacking Quinn 4 times.

Dave Zastudil had to punt from deep in his end zone, giving the Broncos good field position.

Three plays later running back Correll Buckhalter, doing his best Adrian Peterson imitation of a week ago, ran through the middle of the Browns defense

on his way to a 45-yard touchdown run that pushed the lead to 27-6 with just over 8:30 left in the game.

That loud sound a moment later was the signal that garbage time had officially begun.

But this week's version of garbage time wouldn't be nearly so prolific. The Browns took it from their own 31 to the Denver 32-yard line but the game mercifully ended when a Quinn pass for Cribbs was intercepted by Darcel McBath. ○

Orton, as unlikely a victor as you'll ever see, took a knee on the game's final play.

If there's a drawing board to head to, rest assured that where you'll find Eric Mangini. When he gets there, the pens will probably be out of ink.

His team, perhaps more disciplined, is every bit as awful as last year's version.

The defense is porous and can't rush the quarterback and the offense can't sustain drives or score touchdowns.

The numbing sameness of it all is wearing thin in every corner.

Quinn was about the same as a week ago, going 18-31 for 161 yards and 1 interception and one fumble. He didn't exactly own the job but the play of the offensive line didn't exactly give anyone reason to think that Derek Anderson, or Tom Brady for that matter, would have been any more successful.

In all the Browns had 3 turnovers, including the Cribbs fumble. The running game was nearly non-existent with Lewis carrying it 14 times for 38 yards. About the only real bright spot for the Browns was the re-emergence of Edwards, who had 6 catches

for 92 yards, a few of the acrobatic variety.

More importantly, he had no dropped balls.

The Broncos weren't exactly an offensive machine but did enough over the course of the game to wear down the Browns' defense and put the game away. Orton was a deceiving 19-37 for 263 yards, deceiving because most of those yards were the result of long runs after short passes. Knowshon

Moreno had 75 yards on 17 carries and Buckhalter, thanks to his 45-yard touchdown run, added 76 yards on 9 carries.

The story of this game, ultimately, is that it's the same old story. Mangini surely is trying his level best but is finding that no manner of discipline and order can turn this ship around

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quickly.

It won't just take time.

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