

Bring on the Bye Week

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

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For the true believers, there were some positive trends heading into the Browns' game against the Chicago Bears. They had won three of their last four and held the lifetime series edge at 9-4. But these are the new Eric Mangini Browns where no positive trend is safe. Sunday's 30-6 loss may not have been a step backward, but that may be because there are no steps backs. The defense, so awful for the season, at least played semi-inspired and kept the game relatively close, considering the Browns had 5 turnovers. At the end, even Mangini had seen enough of Derek Anderson and inserted Brady Quinn to mop up. As the team spirals further out of control, at least there's a bye week to look forward to. Gary tells us about it.



For as much controversy that has swirls around the Cleveland Browns, and this past week was no different with owner Randy Lerner letting it be known that this team could desperately use a legitimate football man as its franchise leader, there were some reasons for the naïve among us to at least be optimistic about the matchup with the Chicago Bears on Sunday.

After all, the Browns had won 3 of their last 4 against the Bears. Then there was the fact that the Browns were 9-4 lifetime against the Bears.

There also was the fact that the Bears were coming off a humiliating loss to the Cincinnati Bengals and were perhaps taking the woeful Browns a little too lightly.

And if none of that was good enough, then there was always the hope and a wish that things couldn't possibly get worse.

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Depending on your perspective, things didn't get worse, if only because that would be impossible. They didn't get much better either, unless you consider progress as measured by a semi-inspired effort by the league's worst defense coupled with the fact that Derek Anderson may have taken his last snap in Cleveland. Even then, the Browns still were manhandled by another NFC North team, losing 30-6 in a game that was closer than it should have been, considering the Browns turned it over 5, count 'em 5, times.

Credit for the relatively close score goes mostly to defensive coordinator Rob Ryan. Ryan, one of the best quotes and more fascinating coaches in the league, had his defense constantly pressuring Bears quarterback Jay Cutler, sacking him 4 times. It didn't keep the Bears from scoring more than enough points but it did give Bears fans something further to consider, like maybe they really did get the wrong end of the Kyle Orton/Jay Culer trade. Ryan's edge-of-the-cliff game plan kept the Browns in it, technically, until the roof fell in for good during the fourth quarter.

And fall in it did. After trailing the bears 16-0 at the half, the Browns had an opportunity to get back into the game quickly in the second half.

After the defense held the Bears to a quick 3-and-out to start the half, the Bears' first punt by Brad Maynard was nullified by a penalty. His second punt was shanked like an 22-handicapper's 4 iron and traveled 12 yards, giving the Browns the ball at the Bears' 30-yard line.

And for one of the few times this season, the Browns stared at good fortune and didn't blink. Jamal Lewis, taking advantage of gaping holes along the Bears' defensive line, ran for 13 yards on first down, added 6 more on his next run and another 10 yards after that.

Anderson then snuck it in from inside the 1-yard line.

The Phil Dawson extra point was blocked and the Browns trailed 16-6.

The defense then held serve on the Bears' next possession. Maynard this time hit a nice punt which the Bears downed at the Cleveland 1-yard line.

The Browns were able to move it out of the shadow of the end zone on a nice Jerome Harrison run but the drive died three plays later.

There was still nearly 7 minutes left in the game but it was at this spot where most other games have died. The offense, having done something positive for one of the few times this season, had just seen its momentum come to a screeching halt.

The defense, though, was doing its best to make sure it didn't happen, containing Cutler and a Bears offense that was more stagnant than stunning.

If only the Browns' offense could respond.

And just when it seemed it might, a pass from Anderson to Heiden that looked to extend a key drive was fumbled by Heiden and picked up by Manning. For as hard as it had been playing, the defense looked spent and dispirited after the fumble. It gave up a 31-yard pass from Cutler to Johnny Knox that took the ball to the Cleveland 10-yard drive and then Forte drove home that fact with a 10-yard touchdown run that helped give the Bears a 23-6 lead with just under two minutes left in the third quarter.

Not quite dead but clearly dying, the Browns looked to have something going on their next drive but it wasn't much. The drive and the team died its natural death at the Bears' 27-yard line when a 4th

and 1 pass by Anderson to Heiden fell incomplete, giving the Bears the opportunity to put the game away for good.

The Bears couldn't do it, at least not initially. Cutler, after seeing one pass almost intercepted, saw his luck run out two plays later when Brodney Pool intercepted a pass off a Kaluka Maiava tip, giving the Browns the ball at the Bears 35-yard line.

Anderson then completed his best pass of the day, a 19-yarder to Mohamed Massaquoi, but Massaquoi fumbled it and the Bears recovered. It was the Browns' 4th turnover of the game.

This time the Bears put the game away for good, perhaps not the way their fans would have initially liked, but for good nonetheless. After recovering the Heiden fumble at the their own 15-yard line, Cutler drove the Bears down to the Cleveland 1-yard line.

4th But on 1st and 1, Cutler couldn't connect in the end zone, giving the Browns the ball with just under 5 minutes remaining, 1st

and 99 yards and 17 points to go.

As he exited the field, Cutler and Ryan could be seen barking at each other, with Ryan dropping a few f-bombs in Cutler's direction. Perhaps Ryan should have waited before beating his chest.

After all, Anderson was still behind center at that point, clinging to his career.

The pressure proved to be too much. After two handoffs to Lewis almost resulted in safeties, Anderson, eschewing taking the safety when he could find no one downfield, threw it up for grabs.

Bears defensive back Charles Tillman apparently called for it and then promptly returned it for a touchdown giving the Bears the 30-6 lead.

Even that was too much for head coach Eric

Mangini, who must be feeling the pressure himself. Apparently after getting word from the press box that it would now be impossible for Brady Quinn to earn any sort of bonus for snaps taken, he turned to Quinn with just 3 minutes remaining.

Quinn hit his first pass but saw Heiden drop a potential first round pass on third down. Mangini will likely blame Quinn and start Brett Ratliff following the bye week.

If this is indeed Anderson's last start, barring an injury, then he went out with a blaze of glory. Already the worst rated quarterback in the league, and by a healthy margin, Anderson completed 6 of 17 passes for 76 yards and 2 interceptions.

It gave Anderson a rating of 10.539.

It dropped his league low rating from 40.6 to 36.1.

But really, the story of Anderson is the story of the Browns this season. Although Anderson was the lowest rated passer last season because of some pretty significant shortcomings as a passer, he's worse this season for the simple reason that there is even less talent surrounding him, both on the field and on the sidelines.

All its done is highlight every single shortcoming in his very limited game.

Quinn, too, has his share of shortcomings, but they aren't nearly as fully developed. Where he is better than Anderson is on short to mid-range passes and right now that's the area where the

Browns suffer the most.

If Quinn does indeed get the starting job back, it probably won't make a huge difference.

Same players, same coaches.

The running game, not particularly strong, was at least finding enough holes to keep the offense moving on occasion, particularly in that second half. Lewis had 69 yards on 16 carries, Josh Cribbs had 28 yards on 6 carries out of the Wildcat formation and Jerome Harrison added another 19 yards on 5 carries.

Those aren't great stats, certainly, but enough to suggest that the onus wasn't just on Anderson.

Although Ryan's defense gave up 23 points, it could have been far worse. With 5 turnovers to go along with their general ineffectiveness, the offense was constantly putting pressure on the defense.

After holding the Bears to 3-and-out on their opening two possessions, the defense gave up four straight scores, 3 of which were Robbie Gould field goals. On the drive that led to their first field goal, for example, the Bears had the ball at the Cleveland 15-yard line but couldn't advance it any further.

After Anderson was picked off on a great effort by Danieal Manning, who returned it to the Browns' 13-yard line, the defense again held Cutler. On another drive started

by a Cleveland turnover-an Anderson/Lewis botched handoff, the Bears took it to the Cleveland 9-yard line but had to settle for another field goal after Kamerion Wimbley sacked Cutler for an 11-yard loss.

The problem, though, is that this third field goal put the Bears up by two scores and given how little the Browns were doing offensively, it looked like a huge hill to climb.

The hill got even higher when the Bears finally found the end zone on their next drive thanks to 1-yard Matt Forte run that helped give the Bears a 16-0 lead. That drive would have ended much sooner and without a score but on 3

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-and-8 from Chicago's 31-yard line, Wimbley went helmet-to-helmet with Cutler and was flagged for the roughing penalty.

It will probably cost Wimbley about \$10,000.

It also cost Cutler a few moments of clarity, but only a few.

Cutler completed his next 4 passes to put the team in position for the Forte touchdown run.

As this most miserable of half seasons comes to an end, the Browns and their fans get a much needed week off. That's probably bad news for those in the league that look at playing the Browns

the same way that someone with allergies looks at a bottle of Zyrtec.

Relief will just have to wait.

As for what the second half of the season holds there's no way of knowing.

Everything the Browns have done to this point has been a crashing disappointment.

But at least there's one bit of good news.

The only NFC North team remaining on the schedule is the Detroit Lions.