



During their first two years back in the league the Browns displayed only a faint resemblance to an actual NFL team. They went a combined 5-27 in 1999 and 2000, sustained losing streaks of five, six, seven and seven games and were shut out five times. For Cleveland fans that had spent three years in a fever pitch waiting for those familiar orange helmets to re-take the field, it was a nightmarish initiation into expansion football.

A loaded schedule didn't do the fledgling Browns any favors either. In 1999 and 2000 Cleveland played six games against the four Super Bowl contestants from those seasons and eight other games against teams that won eleven games or more. One of the chief tormentors of the new Browns was the old Browns- the Baltimore Ravens, Super Bowl Champions in 2000. Baltimore gave Cleveland the baby harp seal treatment in '99 and 2000, clubbing the Browns four times in four games by an average score of 29-7.

Matters between the teams got really ugly in their second meeting of the 2000 season. Baltimore was merciless in its 44-7 demolition of the Browns, outgaining Cleveland 461-112 and blitzing quarterback Doug Pederson long after the game had been decided. When Browns head coach Chris Palmer criticized Baltimore's take-no-prisoners approach, Ravens tight end Shannon Sharpe was [blistering in his response](#). *"We do you a favor. When we beat you bad, we let you know you need to go get some new players or a new coaching staff."*

## Yesteryear: 2001 @ Baltimore

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}

Thursday, September 23 2010 11:00 AM - Last Updated Thursday, September 23 2010 8:17 AM

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Cleveland did get a new coaching staff prior to 2001, firing the hapless Palmer and bringing in Butch Davis, a former Jimmy Johnson assistant that had revived the fortunes of the Miami Hurricanes. And in 2001 the Browns suddenly began to look like an honest-to-goodness NFL team. They won three of their first four and four of their first six, including a 24-14 upset of the Ravens in Cleveland on October 21<sup>st</sup>. An aggressive Cleveland defense forced three Baltimore turnovers while Tim Couch pierced the vaunted Ravens defense for two long touchdown passes.

The 2001 Ravens were not the same overwhelming force they'd been the previous year. Head coach Brian Billick had jettisoned Super Bowl quarterback Trent Dilfer for Elvis Grbac, hoping Grbac, who had thrown for more than 4,000 yards with Kansas City in 2000, would bring more explosiveness to Baltimore's offense. But the move wasn't working. Grbac's gun-slinging style was at odds with the percentage-football style that had brought the Lombardi Trophy to Charm City. The Ravens stumbled to a 3-3 start, their 2000 edge and swagger seemingly diminished.

Every expansion team has its share of characters and fly-by-nighters and the Browns were no different. The biggest character on the 2001 team was 21-year old rookie running back Ben Gay. A former Texas schoolboy legend, Gay had washed out of Baylor, Garden City Community College and the Canadian Football League [before washing up](#) on the shores of Cleveland. He played sparingly in the first half of the 2001 season, returning kicks but never getting a chance to carry the football on offense. But he would get his name called when the Browns traveled to Baltimore for their second meeting with the Ravens on November 18

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Both the Browns and Ravens were in playoff contention when they took the field at PSINet Stadium. Cleveland had lost a pair of overtime games to the Bears and Steelers to fall to 4-4; Baltimore, winners of three straight, was 6-3. It seemed that the planets had returned to their proper alignment, with the Browns struggling and the Ravens taking off. But Cleveland was about to pull a surprise.

Rookie Quincy Morgan got the Browns started early, returning the opening kickoff 51 yards into Baltimore territory. From there Cleveland moved to a 3-0 lead on Phil Dawson's 29-yard field goal. The Ravens responded with a drive to the Cleveland one-yard line. But instead of tying the game with a chip-shot field goal coach Billick elected to go for it- and Grbac's fourth-down pass fell incomplete, keeping the score at 3-0.

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On Baltimore's next possession Grbac, who had thrown nine interceptions in nine games, began to display his generous side. Rookie nickel back Anthony Henry picked off the ex-Cleveland St. Joseph's star at the Baltimore 39. The Browns took advantage of the turnover by driving to score and a 10-0 lead. Ben Gay did the honors, scoring his first NFL touchdown on a seven-yard run.

Moments later Grbac's fortunes went from bad to worse. Jumping a flat route, safety Devin Bush intercepted the Baltimore quarterback and dashed 43 yards untouched to the end zone. All of a sudden it was 17-0 in favor of the Browns. Boos and calls for backup Randall Cunningham rained down from the stands. The defending World Champions were committing suicide in front of the home fans- and their quarterback was the man pulling the trigger.

Baltimore recovered its equilibrium somewhat on its next possession. Grbac finished a drive with a 21-yard scoring pass to Brandon Stokley to cut Cleveland's lead to 17-7. Ben Gay responded with a 42-yard kickoff return to set up another scoring march, this one ending with Phil Dawson's second field goal. Grbac's third interception short-circuited Baltimore's last scoring chance of the half, and the Browns went into intermission with a 20-7 lead. Despite a disastrous thirty minutes of football, rife with turnovers and special-teams breakdowns, the Ravens were still in the game with plenty of time to mount a comeback.

That comeback began in the third period- but not without more gaffes from Baltimore's quarterback. Grbac short-circuited the opening possession of the half with his fourth interception. As Grbac went to the sidelines amid the jeers of the crowd, [he appeared to be weeping.](#)

Rod Woodson's interception of Couch midway through the period opened the door for the Ravens. Grbac this time threw to his own receiver, hitting rookie tight end Todd Heap for a touchdown to make it 20-14. Moments later Baltimore appeared to be in business again, with Ray Lewis recovering a Quincy Morgan fumble of a Couch pass at the Cleveland seven. But after a replay challenge, Morgan was ruled to have never gotten possession of the pass, making it an incomplection. On Baltimore's next possession Grbac committed his fourth turnover of the day, fumbling to kill a Ravens drive at the Cleveland 26.

Baltimore's defense again gave the Ravens an opportunity when Michael McCrary snagged a tipped pass at the Cleveland 29. Matt Stover followed with a 42-yard field goal to make the score 20-17 at the end of the third quarter. With the Browns in hibernation offensively and the

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partisan crowd of more than 69,000 in full throat, it appeared that Cleveland was on its way to a third heartbreaking loss in succession.

Here the Browns displayed their character. Starting at its own 32-yard line Cleveland ground 68 yards in 12 plays, taking nearly six minutes off the clock. The drive was studded with clutch plays. Jamel White converted one third down with a seven-yard catch, while Dennis Northcutt took an end-around 12 yards on fourth-and-one. That put the Browns on the Baltimore 23. Ben Gay ripped off a 21-yard run, bouncing off tacklers before being brought down at the two-yard line. White finished the drive, and the Ravens, with a one-yard touchdown plunge.

Cleveland's 27-17 victory completed the new franchise's first-ever sweep of the Ravens. Afterward Shannon Sharpe again ran his mouth- but this time his acerbic tongue was directed not at the Browns, but at his own quarterback. *"He was brought here to do a job, and the job is not getting done."* What a difference a year had made.

For the Browns, heroes were aplenty. The defense forced five turnovers, three of them interceptions by Anthony Henry. Dennis Northcutt had five receptions and the twelve-yard end-around on Cleveland's game-clinching drive. And the enigmatic Ben Gay ran for 56 yards, caught a pass for seven, ran a kickoff back for 21, and scored what would turn out to be his only NFL touchdown. Despite being outgained 350-232 the Browns, unlike Elvis Grbac, had gotten the job done.