

A Shiv to the Ribs

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Sunday, November 14 2010 6:13 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, November 16 2010 10:37 AM



It was a sudden ending to a game that seemed destined to end in the tie it was supposed to end up in. The Ryan Brothers, Rex for the New York Jets and Rob for the Cleveland Browns seemed locked in their own personal battle, as if fighting over the last turkey leg at the Thanksgiving table. Neither was willing to yield to the other but in the end it was Rob's defense succumbing to Rex's offense as Santonio Holmes caught a 37-yard pass from Mark Sanchez with just seconds remaining in overtime to win the battle royale, 26-20.

It could have been worse. It could have been Braylon Edwards with the catch, except for that to happen Sanchez would have had to have confidence that Edwards could make that catch. It's why he went to Holmes.

What set up that winning touchdown was an improbable turn of events that conspired to give the Browns their 6th loss of the season against 3 wins. With the Jets driving but out of field goal range and under two minutes remaining in overtime, Sanchez threw deep to Edwards but cornerback Joe Haden had the inside coverage and easily intercepted at the Cleveland 3-yard line. It was probably more effective than the likely punt would have been anyway.

That left 1:35 remaining in the game and the Browns decided, rightly, to try and win the game instead of milking the clock and settling for a tie, a tie that would have meant nothing as opposed to a win that would have meant everything. (Note: at some point someone will whine about how the loss cost the Browns position in the next NFL draft and then we can spend the next 10 years debating what decision the Browns would have made with that pick instead of the one they had and, well, you get the idea.)

A Shiv to the Ribs

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Sunday, November 14 2010 6:13 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, November 16 2010 10:37 AM

Offensive coordinator Brian Daboll called for a pass on first down and Colt McCoy overthrew tight end Ben Watson deep, which stopped the clock. The Jets' defense was ready for the inevitable hand off to Peyton Hillis on second down and it yielded just 3 yards. With the Jets waiting to utilize their last time out, the Browns took the clock down to 41 seconds and called time. Then on third down McCoy dropped back to pass and as the pocket collapsed he darted back to the line of scrimmage, setting up fourth down. Reggie Hodges hit a 53-yard punt but returner Jim Leonhard returned it for 18 yards, back to the Cleveland 37-yard line, setting up the shiv that Sanchez and Holmes delivered to the ribs of the Browns and their fans, not to mention the bragging rights Rex now has over Rob.

It could have gone the other way. After the Jets were unable to score on the first possession, the Browns took over and seemed to be moving in for the victory. After gaining one first down, McCoy found Chansi Stuckey down the right sideline for what would have been another and then some as Stuckey danced his way to the Jets' 32-yard line and into the outer edges of kicker Phil Dawson's field goal range. As he was doing so, however, Stuckey had the ball stripped and it was recovered by Antonio Cromartie, killing the Browns' best chance to win the game.

The Jets weren't able to capitalize on the turnover when kicker Nick Folk missed a 47-yard field goal, his third miss of the day. The Browns took over at their 37-yard line but couldn't manage a first down and had to punt. On the Jets' next series came the Sanchez interception which, in retrospect, set up the victory.

As difficult of an ending as it was, the Browns did well to get to that point in the first place. Trailing 17-13 at halftime, the Jets took the opening kick in the second half and seemingly held on to it for the entire quarter. Actually it was a 19-play drive that covered over 10 minutes.

The only problem for the Jets is that they had nothing to show for it as Folk hit the right upright. As tiring as the drive was for the Browns' defense, the outcome had to leave them a bit energized. The Browns' offense, however, had been sitting idle and apparently needed more of a boost as it quickly went 3-and-out, giving the Jets the ball back once again.

From there the teams traded punches, counter punches and punts until the Jets pushed the lead to 20-13 with another clock eating drive that lasted over 8 minutes and ended with a Folk

A Shiv to the Ribs

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Sunday, November 14 2010 6:13 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, November 16 2010 10:37 AM

24-yard field goal. It left just 2:36 remaining in the game.

With only 14 total yards under their belts for the entire second half and not having put together one scoring drive with 2 minutes remaining the entire season, McCoy put his own little dagger in the guts of the Jets as he led a stunning drive that ended with an 11-yard touchdown pass to Mohamed Massaquoi with 44 seconds remaining. Dawson's extra point tied the game at 20-20. On the Jets' next drive, they were content to settle for overtime and regroup.

The second half, with the Jets controlling the clock, lacked the intensity of the first half, at least until the last Browns' drive. But the first half had the kind of atmosphere that's been missing from this franchise for years now, an atmosphere that underscored that this was a game in November that had meaning. Heck, CBS sent it's number one broadcasting team of Jim Nantz and Phil Simms to cover the game and at the very least they came away convinced that whatever this Browns' team lacks in talent it makes up for in chemistry.

The Jets won the coin flip and opted to kick off to start the game, hoping to establish its defense early. Not quite. The Browns' offense, at least for that first half, kept the Jets defense on their heels, just as they had with the New England Patriots' defense last week and the New Orleans Saints' the week before that.

After starting the drive on their 16-yard line, McCoy and Hillis led the offense to the Jets' 17-yard line but the Browns were forced to settle for a 35-yard Dawson field goal and the early 3-0 lead.

The Browns then tried to catch the Jets napping by attempting an on-side kick. The problem: some of the Browns' were napping as well. Haden looked as surprised as the Jets that the onside was being tried and was unable to secure the ball as it bounded out of bounds. It gave the Jets a short field which they converted into a 27-yard Nick Folk field goal that tied the game at 3-3. Sanchez tried to find Edwards late in the middle of the field and the pass was broken up by T.J. Ward. Defensive back Abe Elam then gave Edwards a little shove, just because he could.

The Browns' next drive started promisingly but ended quickly when Hillis lost his 4th fumble of the season at the Browns' 31-yard line. Sanchez and the Jets couldn't convert a first down

A Shiv to the Ribs

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Sunday, November 14 2010 6:13 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, November 16 2010 10:37 AM

however and Folk's 48-yard field goal went wide right.

The Browns ended up getting the ball at their own 40-yard line or about 9 yards further than where Hillis fumbled in the first place. Hillis quickly made amends as he bulled his way through the Jets, eventually scoring on a 12-yard run that was sprung by a Lawrence Vickers block. It gave the Browns a 10-3 lead.

The drive was notable for another wrinkle the Browns' offense installed this week. It featured Hillis taking a direct snap, handing off to Cribbs who then gave the ball to Massaquoi on an end-around. It worked, but Hillis oddly was called for a hold and it put the Browns in a 1st and 20 from the Jets' 30-yard line. McCoy got almost all of it back on the next play when he hit Watson on an 18-yard crossing pattern, setting up the Hillis touchdown run.

But the Jets came right back as Sanchez hit a wide open Jeremy Cotchery on a 25-yard touchdown pass that again tied the game. The Browns' responded but not quite in kind, trading touchdowns for field goals. With the ball at the Jets' 42-yard line, McCoy hit Cribbs on a short route that Cribbs turned into a 37-yard play. It took the ball to the Jets' 5-yard line but Cribbs was injured on the play and did not return. The Browns were not able to punch it in from there and settled for a 23-yard field goal that gave them a 13-10 lead.

The Jets again came right back on the strength of LaDarian Tomlinson's running and eventually scored when Sanchez ran it in from the Browns' 1-yard line on what appeared to be a broken play near the end of the first half. It gave the Jets the 17-13 halftime lead.

Still the game was well within reach, never more so when McCoy led the Browns down the field to tie the game in regulation. But the Jets aren't an easy team to beat and did what good teams do, hung in there until someone, anyone could make a play.

If there was a concern that McCoy might eventually start to show the jitters a rookie is supposed to show, especially in a game like this, there shouldn't have been. Except for a fluttering sideline pass to open the game that missed its mark badly, McCoy again played above his experience level, the best evidence of which was that drive at the end of regulation. It helps certainly, just as it helped Ben Roethlisberger when he was a rookie, to have a running back that is difficult to bring down and an offensive line that can open holes for the run and protect

A Shiv to the Ribs

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Sunday, November 14 2010 6:13 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, November 16 2010 10:37 AM

the quarterback on the pass, but to this point McCoy still looks special.

For the game he was 18-31 for 205 yards and that late touchdown. Again, he went without an interception and took the best pounding the Jets' defense could dish out and came back for more.

Hillis, bottled up by a Jets defense that stiffened in the second half, still had 82 yards on 19 carries and the 1 touchdown.

For the Jets, Sanchez was 27-44 for 299 yards, 1 touchdown and 1 interception. Tomlinson and Shonn Green split the carries at running back with Tomlinson gaining 57 yards on 18 carries and Green gaining 72 more on 20 carries.

Oh yea, then there is Edwards. After some initial jawing early in the game, he was mostly quiet with 4 catches for 59 yards. A few of those catches helped the Jets continue drives but he was held mostly in check by an inspired Browns' defensive backfield.

It's a disappointing loss but there are a number of ways to look at it. But before getting to that let's dispense with any sort of talk about moral victories or trite phrases like "they have nothing to be ashamed of" though that is true.

The Browns have now shown enough as a team through 9 games of this season to be out of the moral victory category. When they win, it is not viewed as a surprise. And when they lose fans have a right to now be upset, especially when a game like this gets away from them.

That said, there still is context. The Browns went toe-to-toe with a far more talented Jets team for 74 minutes and 36 seconds. They did it with Cribbs on the sideline the whole second half and overtime. They did it with a rookie quarterback whose best, most reliable, most consistently open targets are tight ends and wide receivers. In other words, they did it without the benefit of the bevy of playmakers dotting the the Jets' roster.

A Shiv to the Ribs

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Sunday, November 14 2010 6:13 PM - Last Updated Tuesday, November 16 2010 10:37 AM

It was that last 24 seconds, just like the dwindling minutes and seconds in the seasons' first few games, where the Browns' defense buckled when it needed to tighten. They'll learn, certainly, but it will also take some more firepower on this team before they start winning more of these types of games.

And so the Browns' enter another week of woulda and shoulda instead of on the backs of a momentum train that has been carrying the team to emotion-filled highs. But it was another week of character building, another week when they played with the league's best and gave them more than they had a right to expect. And the good news is, with a more favorable schedule in the second half, there still are plenty of reasons to get excited about the rest of the season, even if the playoffs are just a technical possibility at this point.