

## Remembering Heartbeats- TheKardiac Kids: Week 11

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Tuesday, November 16 2010 7:00 PM - Last Updated Monday, November 15 2010 12:44 PM

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Once upon a time, the Cleveland Browns had simply owned the Pittsburgh Steelers, regardless of where they played.

From 1950 through 1969, the teams played 40 times and the Browns won on 31 occasions – including a dazzling 15-5 record in Pittsburgh.

By the middle of November 1980, those days were a distant memory. Not only were the Steelers now the reigning Genghis Khan of the NFL, winning four of the previous six Super Bowls (and 11 of their last 13 meetings with the Browns), they had turned the Browns' trips down the Pennsylvania Turnpike into terrifying ordeals.

As the Steelers gradually began putting together the pieces of their dynasty, a switch was flipped in the rivalry in 1970 when the concrete cookie-cutter known as Three Rivers Stadium

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opened. While the powerful Steelers remained vulnerable to losses to the Browns in Cleveland (dropping five of 10 games over the course of the decade), Pittsburgh was untouchable where the Ohio, the Monongahela, and the Allegheny rivers came together.

Ten times the Browns had played at Three Rivers Stadium, and 10 times they had lost. They'd been defeated in every fashion imaginable: blowouts, heartbreakers, in the final minute, in overtime. In 1978, they'd even lost a game they'd appeared to have won when the officials incorrectly disallowed a Pittsburgh fumble in overtime that would have given the Browns the football in chip-shot field goal territory.

Would the red-hot Kardiac Kids – riding a five-game winning streak – finally break what had become known simply as The Jinx?

If the first quarter was any indication, clearly not.

On a sunny, chilly November afternoon, the Steelers dominated play in the first period, maintaining the football for an astonishing 14 minutes. Yet they had nothing to show for it. Pittsburgh's opening drive ended when Terry Bradshaw was picked off by Browns' corner Clinton Burrell, who returned the football to the Steeler 29. Three plays later, Don Cockroft was wide right on a 47-yard field goal, and the game remained scoreless.

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Bradshaw atoned for his miscue on the next possession, driving the Steelers 70 yards in 15 plays and putting the home team ahead when he hit Jim Smith for a 10-yard touchdown pass on the first play of the second quarter. Though it was only 7-0, to the Browns the deficit felt much deeper.

The resilient spirit of the 1980 team rose up on the ensuing drive. Starting at their own 13, the Browns marched efficiently down the field, three times successfully converting third downs. The final conversion came at the Steeler 4 when Sipe hit Ozzie Newsome for a touchdown. But Pittsburgh remained in the lead when Paul McDonald mishandled the center snap on the extra point – another common symptom of The Jinx.

Yet the drive seemed to change the complexion of the entire game. Burrell once again intercepted Bradshaw on the next series, and thanks to a gutsy fourth-down conversion, the Browns drove deep into Steeler territory. They surged into the lead when Dave Logan leapt over Donnie Shell to pull in a Sipe pass in the end zone. The extra point was successful this time and the suddenly the Browns were up, 13-7.

The margin held up to halftime, then in the second half the teams began a ferocious defensive struggle. Both teams saw scoring opportunities thwarted – Pittsburgh when Bradshaw was sacked on third down, pushing the Steelers out of field-goal range; Cleveland when a pair of 46-yard field-goal attempts fell short.

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Midway through the fourth quarter, the Steelers finally got rolling. A pair of long passes to Lynn Swann gave them a first down inside the Cleveland 5, but the Browns' defense held firm, and Pittsburgh faced fourth-and-goal from the 1. Bradshaw completed a pass to tight end Randy Grossman, but he was dropped for a two-yard loss and the Browns took over with 2:44 remaining. The Jinx was on the brink of being snapped.

Facing third-and-eight from the 5 at the two-minute warning and the Steelers out of timeouts, Sam Rutigliano rolled the dice. Rather than playing it safe with a run that could melt another 30-plus seconds off the clock, he called for a pass. Calvin Hill, the intended receiver, was well-covered by linebacker Jack Ham, and, with Sipe dropped back into the end zone, he was forced to quickly throw the ball out of bounds, stopping the clock and giving the Steelers a huge break.

On fourth down, Sam swerved back into cautious mode and punter Johnny Evans took an intentional safety to avoid the possibility of a blocked punt in the end zone. The lead was now down to 13-9 and after a nice return by Theo Bell on the free kick, the Steelers had the ball at their own 46 with 1:44 left. Once again, the Kardiac Kids were providing pulse-pounding drama.

A Bradshaw pass to Bell moved them to the Cleveland 30, then a 23-yard toss to Swann pulled the Steelers out of a second-and-18 hole and set them up at the 6 with the clock ticking down under 30 seconds. After a Browns penalty, with 17 ticks showing, Bradshaw rolled to his left and fired a pass that Swann caught in the end zone just before he was belted by Thom Darden. Eleven seconds remained – one second for each loss the Browns had now suffered in Three Rivers Stadium.

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The final was 16-13 and just as close as it appeared. The ordinarily cocky Steelers appeared physically beaten in the locker room and knew they'd been fortunate to survive. Bradshaw had been intercepted four times with a trio of sacks, Franco Harris had been held to 40 rushing yards on 15 carries, and the vaunted Steel Curtain defense had only gotten to Brian Sipe once. Clearly, these were not the same Browns the Steelers were used to pancaking on their home field.

With Houston picking up a narrow victory over the Bears at Soldier Field, the 7-4 Browns slipped into a tie for second place with the Steelers in the AFC Central with key divisional games coming up each of the next two weeks, including a showdown with the Oilers in the Astrodome that would serve as the hinge on which the remainder of the race would swing.

But first, a pair of former Browns coaches would return to Cleveland wanting nothing more than to spoil things for the Kardiac Kids.