



Week 10 – Cleveland vs New York Jets

No one can snatch Defeat from the Jaws of Victory (or, in this case, Tie) like the Cleveland Browns.

This was my first game this season, and possibly it was just the time and space making judgments, but that was as intense as I've seen CBS since I moved back to Ohio in 2003. It felt like the old days. God, it sucks the Browns lost.

After leaving the game, on my long sojourn up East 9th to the hotel where we were crashing for the night, I tried to gauge my level of emotional pain, which was not easy to do as I had been drinking heavily since 9 am. Was it the most painful loss since The Return? No, certainly not. One of the most painful? Ehhhhh... maybe.

I mean, it hurt. It blew llamas. It was another life incident which challenged my need to continually attach myself to causes (like sports franchises) over which I have no control and almost certainly is certain to bring me certain pain. But it wasn't the worst.

I cared more about this game than I have any other in quite some time, but I can remember a horrible, terrible, hellacious loss caused me much greater distress as recently as 3 years ago (Derek and the Bengals Defensive Backs – December 2007 concert). This was more “*Too bad we lost that – the national media would’ve been suckling at our teat. Instead, time to go back to suckling The Sanchize*

.” But that bitter taste was mixed with a healthy dose of “*There’s no way this is a 3-6 team, but they have a 3-6 draft slot*” and “

At least we don’t have a bunch of reactionaries freakin’ out about playoffs that will never come. We don’t play in the NFC West”

.”

Shallow reassurances, I know, but valid.

We got back to the hotel and sidled up to the bar. I sat near a solitary Jets fan, and, having lived in NYC for a while, struck up a conversation. I don’t like the Jets – not at all – but I have no problem with Jets fans. Some of my best friends are Jets fans.

After about an hour and several shots later (I was buying – he was a good guy), I discovered that he was NYPD. And he was at the South Tower when it fell. Obviously, the conversation steered away from football at that point.

One of my college roommates worked at the Wall Street Journal at the time of 9/11, which was basically a block away from the Twin Towers. He told me that when they evacuated his building, he and a bunch of other guys from the office ran towards the destruction to see what they could do. They stopped when they saw the bodies falling from the towers like rain. They realized there was nothing they could do – that something so horrible was happening that it was beyond their capabilities to comprehend it in the moment. So they left, got on the WSJ-chartered barge, and watched the Towers fall from the middle of the Hudson.

This Jets fan was in the South Tower when the bodies were falling. He said they didn’t know what the sound was at first, and, as they realized what was going on, that they felt sick imagining how bad it must’ve been up there that jumping seemed like a good idea.

I forgot all about the Browns game.

This is not one of those “*Let’s put this into perspective*” pieces. Hells no. People have the right to be pissed about this loss. You can take any situation and “

put it into perspective

”. I could be on the rack right now, my tendons popping and my joints dislocating, and think “

At least I’m not burning to death

” or “

At least rats aren’t gnawing at my genitalia

.”

Nah, this ain’t a morality play. This is merely a shout-out to that Jets fan that sat next to me in the bar for several hours on a Sunday night. Whenever you meet someone that has a tale like that, you don’t keep it to yourself.

God, it still really sucks the Browns lost.

Game Recap

The Browns' Offense started off right where it left off last week - solid, effective running from Peyton Hillis mixed with accurate passing from Colt McCoy. Thus it was that Cleveland produced 10 points in its first 3 drives (the middle drive was stopped only by a Hillis fumble). The early lead was very promising. *Browns 10, Jets 3.*

The Defense, however, didn't play anywhere near as well as they had the previous 2 weeks. The Jets, a physical running team, were able to rush the ball and control the clock on long, unpleasant, time-consuming drives. 'Twas my worry coming into the contest - the Browns will be fine as long as they can out-physical a team. If they can't (and there are only a few teams

they can't), they will struggle. The Jets... the Steelers... those are teams that Cleveland will have to fight like hell to beat.

Freakin' Mark Sanchez was freakin' John Elway out there. It's not that the Browns didn't get pressure on him, he was just slippery-er than a greased bluegill. Two long 2nd Quarter drives netted two Touchdowns, and the Jets took a lead to Halftime. *Jets 17, Browns 13.*

The 2nd Half was more of the same. The Defense just couldn't get off the field. The Jets started off the 3rd by holding the ball over 10 minutes and driving 60 yards... and doinked the FG off the crossbar. However, when a Defense can't get off the field, a 3 and Out by the Offense is even more scrutinized, and the Browns had a few in a row.

The Jets managed to finally get that FG on another time-draining drive with about 10 minutes left, leaving Colt & Cleveland only about 2.5 minutes to drive the length of the field for a game-tying TD. *Jets 20, Browns 13.*

And he did just that. Forced to open it up, the Coaches gave Colt the go-ahead to actually throw the ball down the field, and he did that very effectively (and impressively), nailing Ben Watson for 17 on 3rd and 10 and Evan Moore for 18 against that Island person. With 48 seconds left, he drilled Mo Massaquoi for a 3 yard score, and OT was inevitable. *Browns 20, Jets 20.*

Apparently, right before starting the final drive of Regulation, McCoy told the troops that they were gonna score and they were gonna win the game. In his 4th game. And he went ahead and accomplished the first part of his promise. That, boys and girls, can be the start of the stuff of legend. Or maybe not.

New York got the ball first in OT, but their drive was short and sweet. The Browns returned the subsequent punt to their own 36. From there, they drove to about midfield, where Colt hit Chansi Stuckey in the flat on 3rd and 4. Stuckey easily picked up the 1st, spinning and driving down to the 32, where it appeared that he fumbled. The hopes and dreams of Cleveland Browns Stadium was crushed in a nanosecond.

But - what's this? - Stuckey stepped out of bounds just before the fumble! Whew. The Browns retained possession, and, after a couple safe Hillis runs up the middle, Phil Dawson calmly trotted out and nailed the game winning 43 yarder.

The ensuing celebration was epic - both on the field and off.

Final: Browns 23, Jets 20.

Conclusion

Time of Possession: New York – 37:50, Cleveland – 22:10

Total Yards: New York – 456, Cleveland - 303

First Downs: New York - 28, Cleveland – 19

Well, these are just ugly. A lot of the unbalance between the two teams' stats came in the 2nd Half, where the Jets dominated every category except the scoreboard. I'd like to say that the numbers are misleading, that the game was pretty much even to such an extent that it almost ended in a tie... but that wouldn't be entirely true.

The front 7 got pushed around a bit by the Jets rushing attack, and New York did seem like the superior team that just let their opponent hang around too long due to some missed Field Goals.

The match-up wasn't nearly as lopsided as the stats, but I think it was clear that the Browns still have a little way to go before they are consistently on a level with a team like the Jets.

But that's a Super Bowl contender, one of the top 2 or 3 teams in the entire league. So there's no reason to hang your heads, BrownsWorld. This wasn't a step backwards at all.

Gameballs

Peyton Hillis – Especially in the 1st Half. Still dominating the carries, but really needs to work on not fumbling.

Ben Watson - 5 catches for 74 yards, he was basically THE receiving threat.

Joe Haden - Solid coverage all day as the de facto star to the fallen Sheldon Brown. Kinda wish he had dropped that pick though...

Lawrence Vickers - That was a helluva block on Hillis' TD run. Lots of "helluva" blocks from you.

Honorable Mention

Colt McCoy – Missed a couple passes that might've won the game, but the game tying drive at the end of Regulation was very impressive.

Ahtyba Rubin – Deserves love for playing well at a loveless position.

Eric Barton – 7 tackles and was solid all-around (except that last play).

David Bowens – Had to play a lot more than normal due to the injury to Scott Fujita, and was very active.

Shaun Rogers – Noteworthy penetration in the middle made his presence known.

Wall of Shame

The Defense - Many people have laid the blame for the loss on Chansi Stuckey's doorstep. I say it was your inability to make stop after stop after stop.

Chansi Stuckey - But you certainly helped.

TJ Ward - I hate to do this to you, cuz you made some very nice plays, but... what the hell were you doing on that last play?

Abe Elam - On New York's final FG drive, Sanchez threw it right to Elam, who seemed to catch it, then randomly throw it up in the air. I have no idea WTF happened there. Uh, Abe, you catch that, we probably win in regulation. Just so you know.

Matt Roth - Every time someone was missing a tackle, he seemed to be wearing #53.

Eric Wright - And you would've gotten this honor even if you hadn't given up the game winning TD catch.

Whoever was supposed to cover Cotchery on the Jets' first TD - The nearest defender was in Canada.



I've been amongst the many to call Mark Sanchez "overrated" and "all hype". And there are certainly weeks where he'll revert to his markedly non-superior Rookie season. But I have to quit trying to convince myself that he sucks in some sort of rationalization of the Browns trading out of the spot so the Jets could get him.

More than any other player on the field, he was responsible for his team's win. It wasn't like the Browns weren't getting any pressure on him. They were. Plenty. He just seemed to find ways to wriggle out of it, slip around in the backfield, and find some open guy for a back-breaking play.

He was great.

Maybe I'm able to admit this now because the sting of admitting that the Browns passed on yet another player of high caliber is the fact that we have Colt McCoy now, and, at this point, I don't see why his future can't be every bit as bright as Sanchez's.

This point of view was even aped by a Jets fan on the walk out of the stadium as he discussed Sanchez with a Browns fan.

"*What do you care?*" he asked the Browns fan. "*You guys got Colt. You're gonna be fine.*"

Let's hope you're right.

There has been some discussion this week about whether or not the Browns should have gone for 2 at the end of the game rather than settle for OT.

If they were playing on the road, against a markedly superior opponent, and they were exhausted, dying, unlikely to survive extra playing time, then I think there's an argument.

They weren't. Kick the extra point and go to OT.

This whole conversation is horribly hindsighted. If they go for it and don't make it, all of Northeast Ohio goes ballistic. The calls for Mangini's head would be French-Revolution-ian.

If Chansi doesn't fumble that ball, they probably win in OT anyway. I wonder how many people would be second-guessing not going for 2 if they had won it in the extra session? It wasn't like

the Jets marched down the field and ended it in short order. The Browns could've/would've/should've won it anyway.

I'm not giving it a second thought.

There has also been some discussion about whether or not the Browns should've played for a tie.

This argument probably has some validity. There's 1:35 left in the game. You're on your own 3 yard line. The odds of going far enough to get in FG range are low. You run the ball 3 times and the game is over and you take your .5 win over to your sister's house and give her a big smooch on the lips.

But here was my feeling at the time at the game: *They'd better not f-bomb be going for a f-bomb tie. If they're gonna f-bomb settle for a tie, I will lose my f-bomb mind. Who gives a f-bomb about a f-bomb tie? Go for the f-bomb win!*

And despite the fact that - in retrospect - a tie might feel better right now than that stupid loss... I still think it was the right call. This is football. You should NEVER EVER settle for a tie unless you are absolutely forced to.

They went for it. Colt missed Watson. Then Wright, Ward, and Barton missed Holmes.

It sucks (I sense a theme here). But I still think it was right to go for the win.

The onside kick at the beginning of the game would've worked - easily - had Joe Haden just been looking for the ball. Miscommunication, not an error in execution.

After the game, Shaun Rogers (who had great penetration late in OT and should've sacked Sanchez at about the NYJ 8 only to see him slip away and complete a 21 yard pass that changed field position and ultimately helped lead to the loss) [tweeted](#) :

Tough loss today...feeln bad I let a big one get away (gotta get Sanchez down for the & it's a W)

Now, if I'm translating Tweet correctly, it seems Rogers felt he let the team down and should've made the play. Which is obvious... except he probably wouldn't have felt that way earlier this season.

Over the last 2 games, I've actually noticed him. A lot. He's talking and playing and acting like his heart's in it. Whatever his issue was earlier this season - be it injury or pouting or narcolepsy - seems to be in the past, and he's ready to contribute for at least the rest of the year.

That can't be a bad thing.

Eric Wright needs to be benched.

There are about 1000 reasons why this is (for him, for us, for the team, for the Middle East peace process). I don't need to go into them all. You know what they are. It's just getting ridiculous at this point, and Haden did a fine job filling in for the injured Sheldon Brown.

So just make Haden the starter opposite Brown, throw Wright out there as Nickel, and be done with the inevitable already. Geez.

Next Up

Jacksonville Jaguars (5-4).

Ahhhhhhhhhh. The Gauntlet is finally over. Man, that went on forever.

Waiting at the end is the Jaguars of Northern Florida, an inconsistent team with a winning record. Yes, they are contending for a playoff spot, but they've been blown out of every one of their losses, and most of their wins have been at least mildly lucky.

Take their Point Differential: The Jaguars, at 5-4, have scored 54 points less than they've allowed. The Browns, by comparison, have only scored 10 points less than they've allowed, which is actually pretty amazing for a 3-6 team.

What that means is that the Jags win close and lose big, while the Browns do the opposite.

Nothing really scares you about Jacksonville. For the most part, they're paper jaguars. Maurice Jones-Drew is still a solid RB (the Jags are 6th in Rushing), but David Garrard doesn't strike fear into the hearts of even our porous secondary (27th Passing), and that's our primary

weakness.

Combine that with the 28th ranked Defense (the Jags are 29th against the Pass and 21st against the Run), and the Browns should be able to put up a respectable score.

In other words, I think the Browns are the better team, and should show it IF they are able to maintain the poise they had the last 3 games. If they dwell too long on the Jets loss and let it creep into this game... well, the Jags are easily good enough to win.

But I'm taking Cleveland to keep their heads on straight and start another streak where their mantra becomes "*Who's Next?*"

Browns 27, Jaguars 21.

Thing That I Dislike More Than Aaron Goldhammer

Throwing Out Your Back

I woke up in my hotel room Monday morning, an empty box of pizza resting on my chest and a horrible pain in my back. One of my legs was tucked back the wrong way, and there was some kind of pillow shoved under my hip. I had no idea how I came to end up this way, which is probably par for the course when you were hanging with friends nicknamed Bowl, Reefer, and Dragon.

Here it is, several days later, and the back pain plows on. I don't know what I did to it, but this is a bad one. I can't sleep at night. I can't sit at my desk. I'm popping pills like I'm Lindsay Lohan,

and it does little to abate the attack on my sensories that causes me to hobble from point A to point B like I'm Moleman from the Simpsons.

I know I should go see a doctor or a chiropractor or Dr. Kevorkian, but my medical insurance has suddenly taken up the art of sucking, and the idea of hanging out in a waiting room as my back twinges like a freakin' banjo on crack does not appeal to me. So I'm going to lay here and moan and suffer and listen to my girlfriend have no sympathy for me and contemplate how Kurt Cobain's back probably doesn't hurt right now.

Whoever designed this fleshy shell really needs to put out a recall on the lower back region.

