

In his regular weekly "The Morning After" feature, Erik Cassano takes a look back at the Browns victory over the Bills, and like me ... saw alot he liked. He argues that the team has proved resilient in the wake of the LeCharles Bentley injury, and that so far, many of the off-season free agent and draft acquisitions look as advertised.



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### **Browns 20, Bills 17** **Preseason record: 2-1**

If the third preseason game is supposed to be the dress rehearsal for the regular season, the Browns, for the most part, look ready to play. And that's saying something in of itself.

A month after LeCharles Bentley's injury cast a dark shadow over training camp, two weeks after a lackluster exhibition loss to the Eagles, the Browns have shown a resiliency that hasn't been seen from them in years. They beat Detroit on a last-second defensive stand, and have now beaten Buffalo on a last-second drive that culminated in a game-winning field goal by Jeff Chandler.

Charlie Frye looked surgically precise in a 6-for-6 opening touchdown drive. The best part was he spread the ball around, finding a different receiver on each pass. Few things keep an offense sharp like a quarterback who throws to everybody. Too often in the Browns' recent history, quarterbacks fell in love with pet targets (Tim Couch to Kevin Johnson, anyone?) and the offense often looked disjointed because of it.

Braylon Edwards made his first appearance in a game since tearing a knee ligament in December. He caught just one pass, but more importantly, his knee held up through game contact. With no other setbacks, he could be getting major playing time when the regular season opens in two weeks.

The offense can score at least some points, but consistency has to be the new focus. After the great opening drive, a long stretch of nothing ensued. Reuben Droughns netted just 17 yards on eight rushing attempts and Phil Dawson missed a 56-yard field goal. After the energetic opening drive, the offense's focus and intensity waned dramatically, and the Browns went into halftime

trailing 10-7.

“We got a little lackadaisical,” Edwards told The Plain Dealer. “The enthusiasm wasn't there.”

If the unit as a whole seemed to withdraw after the opening drive, there were outstanding individual performances.

Jerome Harrison has all but cemented himself as the change-of-pace back alongside Droughns. His nine-carry, 70-yard effort was his third straight attention-grabbing performance of the preseason.

Steve Heiden has been lost amid the hype of Kellen Winslow's return, but he continues to be an incredibly reliable short-yardage receiver for the Browns. Frye's sixth and final pass on the opening drive was a touchdown to Heiden. With Heiden and Winslow healthy, expect coach Romeo Crennel to run a lot of two tight end formations.

The offense is where most of the big names are supposed to reside, but the Browns' season is going to live and die with the defense. And the defense brings the most cause for cautious optimism as we head toward the start of the season.

In the past two exhibition games, the Browns have surrendered 33 points. If they continue to yield 33 points every two weeks for the rest of the season, they will put themselves in a position to win a lot of games.

The Bills managed to bookend the game with first- and fourth-quarter touchdowns. Between, they mustered a lone Rian Lindell field goal.

With a beefed-up front seven and hurting secondary, the statistical breakdown was predictable. The Bills outgained the Browns overall, 349 yards to 302. The secondary surrendered 293 yards passing to Buffalo while the big guys up front clamped the Bills' rushing game, holding them to 56 yards on 22 carries.

I've said it before and I'll say it again: if you hold down the other team's running game, you stand a much better chance of keeping them out of the end zone.

Saturday, the pass-rush tandem of Kamerion Wimbley and Willie McGinest were as good as advertised. McGinest, in his first action of the preseason, made several tackles and looked like he still had some spring in his step.

It's very early, but it's hard not to be impressed with Wimbley, who has been the quick-striking, backfield-penetrating presence GM Phil Savage must have been envisioning when he drafted him 13th overall in April.

A sack and strip of Bills' backup quarterback Craig Nall was the highlight of Wimbley's game Saturday.

After years of badly-flawed, injured and underachieving first-round selections, Wimbley is showing signs of being the first home run the Browns have hit in the draft since returning. Time will tell.

**Up next: Chicago, Thursday, 8 p.m. (preseason finale)**