

In his regular "Morning After" feature, Papa Cass takes a look back at the Browns win over the Jets this past Sunday, and comes to a couple of conclusions. The offensive line loves having their position coach calling the plays. And the Browns' collective confidence is so fragile, a paper cut could burst it right now. But they can still win games in spite of it.



Browns 20, Jets 13

Record: 2-5

I watched the first six games of the season. Then I watched Sunday's win over the Jets. And I came to two unwavering conclusions:

- 1) The offensive line loves having their position coach calling the plays.
- 2) The Browns' collective confidence is so fragile, a paper cut could burst it right now. But they can still win games in spite of it.

The offensive line showed their hand during the first half. Inept, they aren't. Sandbagging? Maybe. But the bottom line is they suddenly looked competent with Maurice Carthon out of the picture and offensive line coach Jeff Davidson calling the plays.

Reuben Droughns returned to his 2004-05 form, netting his second 100-yard game of the season. Charlie Frye was well-protected for three quarters. The end result: A 20-3 lead the inconsistent Jets couldn't overcome.

The startling turnaround of the offensive line would be a story in of itself. But the most amazing story of the game to me was the fact that the Browns committed blatant, horrible, game-killing mistakes and still won.

That hasn't usually happened to the Browns, an adversity-soaked team with a feather-fragile collective ego.

In the third quarter, Frye yet again tried way too hard to make something happen with his arm and flung a deep-ball interception that your average fan knew was going to get picked the instant it left Frye's hand. The Jets, however, turned it into a missed Mike Nugent field goal.

The game really had a chance to go south when Justin Miller returned a kickoff 99 yards for a touchdown to pull the Jets to within 20-10 in the third quarter.

After that, the Browns had a palpable drop in confidence. The Jets dialed up their pressure on Frye and Droughns, and the offense couldn't respond. A Nugent field goal early in the fourth quarter made it 20-13, and it looked like the Browns were in for another late loss.

But, just like turning the page from Carthon to Davidson, the Browns displayed a subtle little-extra-something to gut out the win against an overachieving Jets team.

In the end, it was a controversial non-touchdown pass from Chad Pennington to Chris Baker that sealed the deal. Baker might or might not have come down in bounds with the game-tying touchdown catch. The mere fact that it was in question was thanks to Brodney Pool, who slammed Baker out of bounds as he came down across the goal line.

It's so fundamental, yet so important: Just make the play, hit the guy, because you don't know what the side judge is going to call. That's the smart, heady football the Browns have been missing in recent years.

We can only hope the offense is going to have the same mental breakthroughs the defense has been experiencing these first seven games. If that happens, the Browns might be able to gather the tatters of this season and sew it into something to build on.

And isn't that what we've been crossing our fingers and hoping for every fall?

Up next: at San Diego, Sunday, 4 p.m.