

Ice Cube heats up Browns fans

By ROGER NEGIN
C-T Sports Writer

Browns spotlight

CLEVELAND — The Ice Cube commeth — finally. USFL refugee Gerald McNeil turned in one of the game's key plays as the Browns beat the Detroit Lions, 24-21, Sunday.

His 84-yard punt return was the longest in team history, breaking a 27-year-old record set by Hall of Famer Bobby Mitchell against the Giants (78 yards).

tenheimer. "He's an exciting football player."

"Every line drive or short kick I try to get over and field," McNeil said. "Some guys let those go, but I try to field them because they don't have as much time to get downfield."

The Browns had been expecting big things from the Ice Cube. They cut Glen Young, last year's kick returning star, and gave the job to Gerald. He had averaged nearly 12 yards for 70 punt returns in the USFL and had been an outstanding pass receiver.

"I needed this for my confidence," he said. "Once you have that, no one can stop you. I'm feeling a lot more comfortable now. I'm trying to slow myself down a half step for the blockers and then making my cut. My confidence started on the first kickoff return (29 yards)."

On the punt return, McNeil made a quick step to the right and broke down the right sidelines. He was virtually untouched with only one man — punter Mike Black left.

"I THOUGHT he'd better not tackle me," said McNeil. "I just gave him a move and they usually go for it." From then on he used his 4.4 speed to run away from the Lions. By the time he got to the Detroit 15 he raised his right hand (the ball was in his left) in triumph. When he got to the endzone, he ran through it — and pointed to his fiancée.

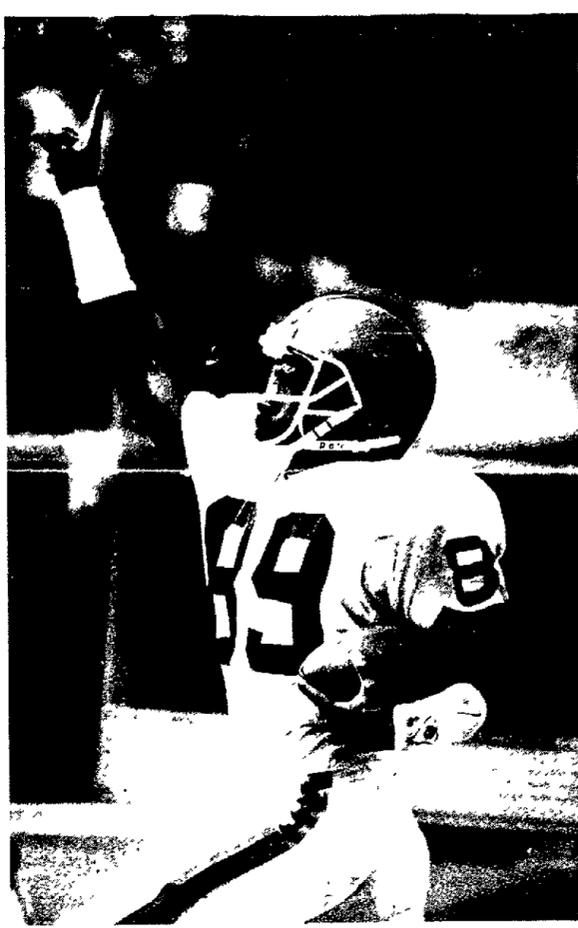
The couple met in Houston where she was going to Prairie View College and he was playing for the Houston Gamblers, catching passes from Jim Kelly. When the Gamblers merged with the New Jersey Generals, McNeil came under contract to Donald Trump, from which he bought his way out.

Paula, who followed him to New Jersey, is a computer programmer there. She is expecting a baby in May.

"I just hope my son is as fast as I am," said McNeil, who might not be as good at predicting gender as he is returning kicks.

But just in case, he has the game ball — for his first NFL touchdown — tucked away.

"I'm going to give the ball to my son," he said.



GERALD MCNEIL tells the world he's Number One even before he gets to the goal line as he crosses the 15 en route to completing the Number One punt return in Cleveland Browns history Sunday. (C-T photo by Mat Brown)

Browns

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steps on (the defender), I would have been gone. I was supposed to throw a pass today, too, but the situation never developed."

The Lions moved down for a meaningless TD in the closing seconds — a three-yard pass from Hipple to wide receiver Carl Bland with 14 seconds left — before Newsome recovered an onside kick.

"We played good football in the second half," said Schottenheimer. "It all came together — offense, defense and the kicking game. We've been wanting to do that and we got it done."

The Browns' defensive effort was encouraging, holding Detroit fullback James Jones to 68 yards on 23 carries.

Cleveland also recorded three sacks (by defensive ends Sam Clancy and Carl Hairston and linebacker Chip Banks) and held the Lions to 105 yards rushing (the Browns had allowed 197 yards a game).

Inside linebacker Anthony Griggs, criticized for his lackluster play against Cincinnati,

responded to the challenge with 18 tackles. Banks, who never left the field on defense, had 12 tackles and broke up two passes.

"Chip is in the groove right now and playing very well," Schottenheimer said. "He came late to camp (because of a contract holdout) and we didn't want to put too much burden on him early. He's an excellent player."

The Browns, tied for first place in the AFC Central Division with the Bengals, moved out to a 7-0 lead with 11:41 left in the first half.

Kevin Mack, making his first appearance after a two-week layoff due to injury, ran three yards to the 1-yard line before being hammered by Lions safety Devon Mitchell. Mack coughed up the ball and wide receiver Brennan pounced on it in the end zone for a touchdown.

"I MISSED my block on the play and my man hit Kevin," Brennan said. "I saw the ball come out and I fell on it. I was thinking to myself: 'I hate to see this one on the films.'"

The Lions nickel and dined their way down the field to tie the score minutes before halftime. With quarterback Eric Hipple displaying almost a perfect performance in the first half — 13-of-14 for 111 yards — Detroit scored with 3:19 remaining in the second quarter when the Lions quarterback hit Leonard Thompson in the end zone with a three-yard TD strike. Eddie Murray added the conversion kick and the score was tied 7-7, and that's the way the first half ended.

Hipple finished with a 33-of-48 passing performance for 251 yards and one TD (his first of the year). Twelve of those passes went to Jones for 85 yards. Browns quarterback Bernie Kosar was 17-of-27 for 139 yards.

Plymouth 20 South Central 18

PLYMOUTH — Plymouth jumped out to a 20-3 halftime lead but then had to hold on to defeat South Central, 20-18. The game was halted by rain Friday night and continued on Saturday.

Jason Robinson was the offensive leader for the Big Red scoring on a 2-yard run, a 43-yard pass interception and a 27-yard pass.

South Central made a valiant comeback try scoring twice in the final period.

Plymouth is now 2-3 for the year and 1-2 in the Firelands Conference. The Trojans are 2-3 and 1-3.

Team Statistics	S. Central	Plymouth
First downs	11	6
Rushing	8	3
Passing	2	1
Penalty	1	2
Yards rushing	142	75
Yards passing	59	47
Total offense	201	122
Passes att.-comp	17-4	10-2
Intercepted by	0	4
Fumbles-lost	5-4	4-2
Yards penalized	5-48	8-65

Score by Quarters	T
S. Central 1 2 3 4	- 18
Plymouth 3 0 0 15	- 18
6 14 0 0	- 20

Scoring
 P - Randy Kinsey, 25 field goal
 P - Jason Robinson, 43 pass int (kick failed)
 P - Robinson, 2 run (pass failed)
 P - Robinson, 27 pass from Chuck Kosee (Robinson pass from Kosee)
 S - Mike Lowery, 28 run (Lowery run)
 S - Greg Conway, 19 pass from Al Beckman (Lowery kick)

down. Luckily for the Browns, it wasn't a fourth down play or in the last two minutes of the half or game.

NFL rules prohibit a fumble from being advanced into the endzone on fourth down or in the last two minutes of each half, a reaction to the play that Ken Stabler made many years ago when he "fumbled" the Raiders to a victory.

STREAKS AND FIRSTS — Browns kicker Matt Bahr has kicked 39 straight field goals from inside the 30-yard line. Bahr has yet to miss this year.

Curtis Dickey and Gerald McNeil each scored their first touchdowns as a member of the Browns Sunday. For Dickey, it was his first NFL touchdown since 1984.

Cleveland's Ozzie Newsome, who was questionable for Sunday's game, extended his pass-catching streak to 102 straight games. It wasn't a gift pass either. Oz caught a 10-yard throw from Bernie Kosar in the third quarter. The Browns had tried to go to him three times earlier without success.

Lions coach Darryl Rogers hasn't had much luck with football in Ohio. He brought his Michigan State team to Columbus in 1979 and lost to Ohio State and the following year he revisited Ohio State as coach of Arizona State. Again, the Buckeyes won.

The Browns' newest star Gerald McNeil returned three punts in the USFL for touchdowns and, ironically, one of them was kicked by Browns Jeff Gossett, who nicknamed McNeil "Ice Cube".

Clarence Weathers caught his first pass of the season — a three-yard gain — in the second quarter.

The last Browns' player to return a punt for a touchdown was Brian Brennan last year against the Giants.

Rogers:

'He beat us himself'

BY JERRY ROMBACH
C-T Sports Editor

CLEVELAND — "Their player McNeil (Gerald) was exceptional today," Detroit Lions Coach Darryl Rogers praised after Sunday's 24-21 loss to the Browns.

"In fact, I felt the little guy (he weighs only 146 pounds) beat us himself. He was their main defense and offense."

The Browns' kick returner had 106 yards in punt returns, including a Cleveland-record 84 yards on a touchdown, and 54 yards in two kickoffs.

"The kicking game, all aspects of it, really hurt us. Our returns, our punts, our punts and other things. Defensively we did a good job. They only had 10 yards rushing through three quarters. But we repeatedly lost field position because of the kicking game."

EARLY IN THE GAME the Browns were going to settle for a field goal, but a roughing the kicker penalty gave Cleveland a first down and the hosts went on to score a touchdown. Then there was McNeil's long punt return.

"You give them three points instead of seven, and take away that punt return and you're talking a swing of 11 points and we would have won the game."

Rogers also pointed out mistakes of his own team on returns, such as the opening kickoff when the Lions' returner caught the ball and stepped out of bounds on the D-2.

Lions quarterback Eric Hipple, who had a great game personally with 251 yards passing on 33 completions out of 48 attempts, also felt the kicking situation, with its resulting field position, was a key to the defeat.

"It's a game of inches, so they say, but we're talking about a lot of yards here," Hipple said. "The Browns had field position all day

Lions lockerroom

while we had to usually start deep in our own territory. Seventy to eighty yards is a long way to go."

ABOUT HIS OWN good game. Hipple said, "You can talk about stats all day, but at the end of the season it's whether you win or not that really counts. I want to win, not get good stats."

With the Lions off to a 1-3 start Hipple admitted the pressure is really on.

"It was a tough loss. I don't know if we can afford it. The fans in Detroit aren't 100 per cent behind us as it is. Being 1-3 is definitely not going to help. We're facing adversity, not only from our opponents but the fans."

"But we can't panic. We did some good things today, but also did some bad things. It's a matter of putting everything together. That's the difference between winning and losing."

"Our offensive line did pretty well, except for picking up the linebackers which is where the sacks came from. We approached the game with the idea of taking anything they (the Browns) would give us. And they gave us the short stuff. We tried going deep several times early but they knocked them down."

ROGERS ALSO SAW some positive things about his team.

"We played a great deal better offensively and defensively than we have the past several weeks," the coach said. "Our offense moved the football. If that progresses it will help us in the long run. And we earned out touchdowns. The last touchdown was the first all year that we got after a turnover."

N.Olmsted takes a weekend romp

BY JIM JABLONSKI
C-T Sports Writer

NORTH OLMSTED — The North Olmsted road show picked up right where it left off when the rains hit Friday as the Eagles blasted Amherst 34-15 Sunday afternoon.

Brad Strnad, a 5-foot-11, 185 pound senior fullback, scored all five touchdowns for the Eagles, two Friday night in the first half and three more Sunday. In addition, the two-year letterman collected 249 yards in 27 carries, good for a 9.2 rushing average.

The Eagles led only 14-7 following Friday's first half and coach Tom Watts of North Olmsted was worried. "We had them on the run Friday but I was worried about a shift in momentum following the post-ponement."

"We expected more changes from them. Friday, when we went in motion they were sending their free safety out and that cleared things out for us on our pitches and sweeps. But they didn't make the adjustments we thought they might and the opportunity was still there."

It must have been. Starting the third quarter at their own 34, the Eagles, behind the running of Strnad, marched to the Amherst 33 in four plays. From there the Eagle fullback broke up the middle, then cut to the right and raced for paydirt and a 21-7 lead.

"The first score was the end of the game as far as I was concerned," said Watts. "It showed we could still run on them." The Eagles had piled up 197 rushing yards Friday night and wound up with 359 on the game.

DON RICHARDSON, coach of Amherst, essentially agreed with Watts. "We felt the first series would set the tone for the rest of the half, and it did."

"We did not control the line of scrimmage, either offensively or defensively. Our youngsters have to realize they have the ability to play with a team like North Olmsted." The Comets, 1-4 overall and 1-1 in the Southwestern Conference, must now prepare to host Westlake Friday.

Strnad scored on runs of 5 and 6 yards to round out the North Olmsted scoring. With Eagle substitutes in, the Comets marched 80 yards in five plays with Rusty Evans scoring from a yard out.

The Eagles are off to a 2-0 start in the SWC following a rocky 1-2 non-conference sched-

Prep football

ule. They play Olmsted Falls, also 2-0 in the league, on the road Friday.

Team Statistics	Amherst	N Olmsted
First downs	9	23
Rushing	5	20
Passing	2	1
Penalty	2	2
Yards rushing	97	359
Yards passing	62	24
Total offense	159	383
Passes att.-comp	12-2	8-3
Intercepted by	0	0
Fumbles-lost	3-2	4-1
Punts-yards	8-248	2-65
Average	31.0	32.5
Yards penalized	7-64	7-60
Rushing plays	30	54

Score by Quarters	T
Amherst 1 2 3 4	- 15
N Olmsted 7 0 0 8	- 34
6 8 14 6	- 34

Scoring
N O-Brad Strnad, 32 run (kick blocked)
A-Tony Leghart, 20 fumble recovery (Pat Bray kick)
N O-Strnad, 6 run (Marcus MacCalla, pass from Mike Lenkatis)
N O-Strnad, 33 run (Larry Coyne kick)
N O-Strnad, 5 run (Coyne kick)
N O-Strnad, 6 run (kick failed)
A-Rusty Evans, 1 run (Jim Pine pass from Evans)

Berea 16 Strongsville 14

BEREA — Berea stretched its record to 5-0 with a 16-14 Pioneer Conference victory over Strongsville.

The second half was played at Finnie Stadium Sunday after being postponed from Friday due to rain and lightning.

The Braves, leading 13-7 at the half, had just three points in the second half, a 32-yard field goal by Jeff Jones. That proved to be the margin of difference as Strongsville's Rob Licursi caught a 51-yard scoring pass from Tom Martin later in the period.

Berea and rival Midpark remain tied for the Pioneer lead with 2-0 records.

Score by Quarters	T
Berea 1 2 3 4	- 16
Strongsville 7 6 0 3	- 14
0 7 0 7	- 14

Scoring
B - Kevin Adams, 1 run (Brad Burns kick)
B - Adams, 17 run (kick failed)
S - John Hogtel, 6 pass from Tom Martin (Brian Cobb kick)
S - FG Jeff Jones 32
S - Rob Licursi, 51 pass from Martin (Cobb kick)

Prep standings, this week's schedule on Page C-5

Prep tennis

Midview's Cindy Spicer teamed with Amy Moore for a doubles win over Elyria High in tennis action last Thursday.

Cindy's name was misspelled in Friday's edition.

Browns notebook

The Kevin Mack nightmare continues.

Mack, who missed the last two weeks with a deep shoulder bruise, reinjured himself in the second quarter and didn't return to action.

The injury occurred the play before Mack fumbled into the end zone, recovered by a teammate for Cleveland's first touchdown. Kevin said afterwards that his hurting shoulder caused the fumble because he carried the ball in the opposite arm, the wrong one to protect against a fumble.

"He's about the same as he was 10 days ago," said Browns publicity director Kevin Byrne. Mack will be listed as doubtful for the Pittsburgh Steelers' game next Sunday.

"(Mack) fell on it," said Earnest Byner, the game's leading rusher with 69 yards on 12 carries, including a 37-yard gain in the fourth quarter. "It's a very discouraging thing," he said. "We have to put things together and pull each other up."

"If there's one thing we have, it's depth at running back," said tight end Ozzie Newsome. "Curtis Dickey is a 1,000-yard rusher. If he gets the opportunity 15 to 20 times a game, he'll do the job." Schottenheimer said all good backs turn it on in the fourth quarter. "When you look at a great backs, I guarantee 50 percent of their yardage comes in the fourth quarter," the head coach said. "The running game happens with patience."

The Browns have won two games this year and, in both games, they've had to recover outside kicks to preserve the victory.

They were on their way to a comfortable win Sunday, but an Earnest Byner fumble and a subsequent Lions touchdown made the outside kick inevitable. Ozzie Newsome recovered it.

The Browns had to recover an onside kick to clinch the Houston game two weeks ago and, ironically, the team's last win in 1985 was in Houston and, again, the Browns had to recover an onside kick.

Someone asked the Browns' Gerald McNeil if he wanted to be in the game as a wide receiver.

"I'm a football player," he said, nodding.

But McNeil acknowledged that he sometimes has difficulty making the right reactions to the Browns' offense, and the coaches feel he is behind.

The man nicknamed "Ice Cube" is the one who likes the hot weather.

"The hotter and more humid it is, the better I like it," said Gerald McNeil. McNeil, the smallest man in the NFL, says his muscles get loose in the hot weather.

McNeil didn't know his punt return set a Browns' record until he saw it on the scoreboard. When told the previous record was held by Hall of Famer Bobby Mitchell, he said, "That's fantastic."

Browns Coach Marty Schottenheimer took a big gamble by wiping three points off the scoreboard in the second quarter, but it paid off. Matt Bahr had already kicked a field goal, but the Lions were guilty of roughing the kicker, so the Browns took the penalty and a first down. Eventually they scored a touchdown.

Many times that strategy backfires. Former Southern Cal Coach John McKay did the same thing in the 1975 Rose Bowl against Ohio State and wound up trying another field goal — and missing. Fortunately for McKay, his Trojans won, 18-17, on a two-point conversion, and the field goal made no difference.

That Rose Bowl game, incidentally, was the one in which McKay's son caught the winning TD pass from Pat Haden, who was the color commentator on CBS at the stadium Sunday.

Schottenheimer, too, might have been second-guessed if the Browns' Brian Brennan hadn't recovered Kevin Mack's fumble in the endzone for the touch-