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Sports

## Browns' Vickers provides great lead to follow

### Vickers key to clearing paths for Cribbs, Harrison

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Thirty-four carries, plus two catches and blocking for Josh Cribbs on kick returns, all in one game, can take a toll on a football player's body.

"I feel like a pinata," running back Jerome Harrison said Tuesday in the Browns locker room.

If Harrison felt like a pinata, then the linebackers flattened by fullback Lawrence Vickers as he cleared a path for Harrison must have felt like the squirrel that didn't see an 18-wheeler barreling down the highway.

Vickers has been making road kill out of opponents for four years, but it wasn't until Harrison rushed for 286 yards and Joshua Cribbs returned two kicks for touchdowns when the Browns beat the Chiefs, 41-34, that Vickers was thrust into the spotlight for his blocking.

"I told him whatever he ate, share it and have some more," Coach Eric Mangini said. "He pancaked a guy on (Cribbs') first touchdown — pancaked him.

"In the running game, he had as a good a game for a fullback as I've been around. In terms of the running game this past week, he was killing guys. He was killing them. I'm not lobbying for him Pro Bowl wise — that's just coincidence — but I'm telling you he was killing guys this week."

Vickers says he deserves to be in the Pro Bowl. The voting ended on Tuesday for fans and on Wednesday for players and coaches. Vickers wants to show in the game against the Raiders on Sunday the voters got it right or prove they made a mistake. The Pro Bowl teams will be announced Tuesday.

Vickers earned a game ball for helping the Browns rush for 351 yards against the Chiefs, one yard short of the team record set in 1958.

So did every player on the offensive line. Mangini named Harrison the offensive player of the game.

On Dec. 10 the Browns rushed for 175 yards against the Steelers, the No. 1 run defense in the league at the time, and Vickers was the leading force behind that surge.

The squatty 250-pound fullback from the University of Colorado, a sixth-round draft choice in 2006, has not carried the ball once this season. He never has been a workhorse with the ball. He had three carries as a rookie, 10 in 2007 and 15 last year. When he did get the ball on third-and-1 he usually bulled his way for a first down.

But with Vickers blocking for him, Jamal Lewis rushed for 1,304 yards in 2007 and 1,002 last season. Harrison is averaging 4.8 yards a carry this season on 122 carries for 587 yards.

"If you're a running back in the NFL, you want Lawrence Vickers in front of you," Harrison said Wednesday, his screaming bruises finally silent. "He's an old-school fullback that isn't appreciated much in the NFL. Nowadays they want a fullback that can catch and play wide receiver, which Vickers can do as well. He's a hard-nosed guy that's going to clear a hole for you. I'm never worried while he's in there."

Harrison and Vickers were teammates at the Senior Bowl in January of 2006. Of course they had no idea at the time they would become teammates again less than four months later when Harrison was drafted in the fifth round and Vickers in the sixth round.

"It makes you feel like all the hard work you did pays off," Vickers said when told what Mangini and Harrison had to say. "All the hard work I put in during camp and coming in here trying to prove myself and trying to let people know that I'm the best fullback in the game — I want to put some action behind those words that I'm putting out there."

Vickers did not debate the point when he was told the game against Kansas City was his best in four seasons with the Browns, but he said the reason it appeared that way is he got more opportunities to show what he could do.

He fancies himself a blend of Lorenzo Neal, Tony Richardson, Sam Gash and Moran Norris — all fullbacks who blocked for better known running backs. Richardson, for example, blocked for Larry Johnson with the Chiefs and later Adrian Peterson with the Vikings. Neal blocked for Eddie George with the Titans and LaDainian Tomlinson with the Chargers, among others. Gash blocked for Jamal Lewis in Baltimore.

"I try to mold myself after the way they played and use my versatility in my own way," Harrison said. "I take the best from each one of those guys and try to put in my game."

Vickers has eight catches for 27 yards and a touchdown this season. He caught 29 passes over his first three years.

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