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Once good friends became bitter rivals while standing on opposing sidelines in The Battle of Ohio.

It was the first edition of what has become known as The Battle of Ohio, but neither that nor even the teams involved were the prime focus when the Browns and Cincinnati Bengals met for the first time in the regular season on Oct. 11, 1970 at Cleveland.

Rather, all eyes were on the opposing head coaches. It was the ultimate teacher-vs.-student matchup.

On one side was the Bengals' Paul Brown, the man who had coached the Browns to seven championships, and 10 straight league title games, in their first 17 seasons – the man for whom the team is named, and the man who had coached Cincinnati since its inaugural season in the American Football League just a few short years before in 1968. He was back at Cleveland Stadium, the site of so many of those glorious successes, for the first time since being dismissed by the Browns following the 1962 season.

On the other side was the Browns' Blanton Collier, who had served as Brown's top assistant for the first eight seasons of the Browns' existence, from 1946-53, and then again in 1962. He was elevated to head coach after Brown was let go. He had asked for Brown's blessing to take the job, and he thought he had gotten it. But Brown thought differently. He was upset that Collier had said yes to the offer, viewing it as a personal affront to him. In his eyes, coaches should stick together.

It probably didn't help, either, that Collier took the Browns to the 1964 NFL championship with a stunning 27-0 victory over the Baltimore Colts, or that he got the club into the postseason four more times, causing some to say he would have joined Brown in the Pro Football Hall of Fame had he coached more than just eight seasons and enhanced his resume. The way Brown saw it, those should have been his teams, his playoff appearances, his resume getting bigger and better.

As such, the two men's relationship, once so strong – they were best friends – had dissolved, much to the chagrin of Collier, who was upset that Brown was hurt. He would have continued the friendship in a heartbeat.

Brown, on the other hand, didn't seem affected by the falling-out. If he did, then he didn't show it. Proud and principled, he had strong convictions, and nothing was going to change it.

Brown always looked at the two Cleveland games every year as the biggest ones on the schedule for his team, not just through his coaching tenure, which ended after the 1975 season when he retired, but also during the next decade and a half when he continued to serve as owner/president/general manager of the Bengals before he died in August 1991. It was a chance to beat his old team and gain some revenge for his dismissal, and this early-season game in 1970 was the first time he could try to do that.

Football battle of Ohio today Browns vs Bengals

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The teams' preseason meeting at Riverfront Stadium – a 31-24 Bengals win – though pleasing to Brown, didn't really count in the big scheme of things, and he knew that since coaches are judged at what they do in the regular season, then the postseason.

But this meeting three weeks before Halloween did count – very much so, in fact – and in it, the Browns got the leg up on their down-state rivals.

The Browns, who were 2-1 and coming off a 15-7 win over Pittsburgh eight days before in their annual Saturday night home battle with the Steelers, really struggled at first against the very well-prepared Bengals (1-2). They trailed 10-0 in the first quarter and 17-9 in the second quarter, then, with Collier leading the way in getting Cincinnati's schemes figured out, the Browns completed a big comeback by scoring two straight touchdowns to open the fourth quarter on the way to a 30-27 win, much to the delight of 83,520 fans, which is still the largest crowd ever to see the Bengals play in Cleveland.

Horst Muhlmann opened the scoring with a 50-yard field goal and Jess Phillips ran two yards for a TD to make it 10-0. The Browns cut it to 10-2 when big defensive tackle Walter Johnson tackled quarterback Virgil Carter for a safety to close out the first quarter.

The Browns scored two TDs in the second quarter on short Bill Nelsen passes – a three-yarder to HOF running back Leroy Kelly and a four-yarder to tight end Milt Morin, whose greatness was overshadowed by the man who would follow him Ozzie Newsome – sandwiched around a 58-yard fumble return by Bengals defensive end Royce Berry as Cincinnati led 17-16 at halftime.

The lead went to 20-16 on another Muhlmann field goal, this one from just 23 yards, in the third quarter.

Then, as the fourth quarter began, the Browns really went to work. Kelly, who would rush for 84 yards on the day, scored on a one-yard run, then ex-Ohio Stater Bo Scott added a one-yarder of his own to give Cleveland a 30-20 advantage.

The Bengals closed it to 30-27 on Carter's 16-yard TD pass to wide receiver Speedy Thomas, but could get no closer.

The Browns, who had played in the NFL (AFC) Championship Game the previous two seasons, would go on to finish 7-7 and fail to make the playoffs for the first time in four years.

The Bengals started 1-6 overall, then caught fire and won their last seven to end 8-6 and win the AFC Central title in the division's first year of existence after having finished just 4-9-1 and 3-10-1 in their first two seasons. Key to that surge was a 14-10 victory over the Browns at Cincinnati before 60,007 fans, which was still the largest crowd in Riverfront history when the stadium closed following the 1999 season.

But Brown's Bengals continued to struggle at Cleveland after that 1970 game, also losing to the Browns the next three years, not winning there until 1974. Collier, however, wasn't around to see it. He retired after 1970 season because of poor hearing, though he returned to the Browns at the request of coach Forrest Gregg to serve as quarterbacks coach – a special tutor to Mike Phipps and some young unknown by the name of Brian Sipe – in 1975 and '76.

Thus, Brown never beat Collier in Cleveland. In their only meeting there, in that 1970 season, Collier had the three-point edge. The victorious Collier ran across the field following the game to find Brown and shake his hand. But as soon as the final gun went off, Brown made an obligatory wave toward Collier and then hurried off into the third-base dugout and up through the tunnel into the Cincinnati locker room.

Nick Skorich, who never worked for Brown in Cleveland or Cincinnati, took over as Browns coach, ending that special, but very short-lived, coach-vs.-coach rivalry within the clubs' rivalry.

And with that, The Battle of Ohio and the teams themselves took center stage again.