The Texans rallied past the Bengals on Dec. 11 in Cincinnati to earn their first playoff berth. But they didn't look like they'd last very long after dropping their last three regular-season games.

HOUSTON (AP) -- Andre Johnson hugged his coach at the end of Houston's first playoff victory - a moment a decade in the making.

"This is something not just for me, but for the whole organization," the Texans star receiver said. "It's a very special feeling. That's probably the most I've smiled in a long time."

As well he should.

Johnson, the face of this 10-year old franchise, scored on a 40-yard pass that powered the Texans to a 31-10 victory over the bungling Cincinnati Bengals on Saturday in an AFC wild-card game.

Johnson had plenty of help, too, from rookies J.J. Watt and T.J. Yates to running back Arian Foster's two touchdowns and 153 yards.

Watt came through with a leaping interception return for a touchdown late in the first half, Yates threw a pinpoint pass to Johnson in the third quarter and Foster followed with his second touchdown - a 42-yard run in the fourth quarter - to finish off the Bengals (9-8).

Houston will play at Baltimore (12-4) next Sunday, a rematch of a regular-season game won by the Ravens.

"I'm just very proud of all the guys, and the job they did," Texans coach Gary Kubiak said. "Hopefully, there are some more to come."

The Bengals were in the playoffs for the third time in seven seasons, but haven't advanced since beating the Houston Oilers following the 1990 season. They were done in this time by mistakes and a lack of pass protection.

"We have to get beyond this," Bengals coach Marvin Lewis said. "We play in a very difficult division. We have to win games in the division, that is important and it sets up opportunities like this, all the time."

Watt returned the first of rookie Andy Dalton's three interceptions 29 yards for a score that broke a 10-all tie with 52 seconds left in the half. It sent the full house of 71,725 fans at Reliant Stadium into a frenzy, and the Texans into the locker room with all the momentum.

"You can see that they were all so proud of their team," Houston owner Bob McNair said of the team's long-suffering fans. "We want to have a team everybody can be proud of and want to feel an attachment to. I think they have that."

Dalton was 24 of 42 for 257 yards, while Yates was 11 of 20 for 159 yards in the first playoff game in the Super Bowl era matching two rookie quarterbacks. Foster's first TD was an 8-yard run in the first quarter.

The Texans' second-ranked defense had its best performance in several weeks, sacking Dalton a season-high four times. Houston also forced four turnovers.

"We got back to our type of football," Kubiak said, "and that was the key."

Houston used six draft picks on defensive players. The Texans took Watt with the 11th overall pick, a cornerstone for the reconstruction of the defense. He started all 16 games and led the team with 13 tackles for loss.

But he'd never picked off a pass.

Watt saw this one coming, measuring his jump when Dalton dropped back and snatching the ball with both hands. He sprinted to the end zone as the capacity crowd erupted, and he raised both hands after reaching the end zone.

"I was really just trying to put my hands up and get in the way of the passing lane," the 6-foot-5 Watt said. "It happened to kind of stick. I realized I had the ball so I just ran to the end zone just trying not to fall down."

Watt became the sixth defensive linemen to return an interception for a touchdown in postseason history - excluding the Super Bowl - and the first rookie to do it.

"It changed the momentum of the game," Houston linebacker Brian Cushing said.

Dalton rolled his eyes and shook his head as he walked to the Cincinnati bench and watched the replay on the giant scoreboard. It was just his second interception in his last seven games.

"We feel like we have a bright future," Dalton said. "It's still unfortunate that it ended this way."

The Bengals outplayed the Texans for most of the first half before that, holding down Houston's offense and controlling time of possession.

Late in the third quarter, Yates got away with a pass that safety Chris Crocker simply dropped. Three plays later, Johnson broke free from cornerback Adam "Pacman" Jones and caught Yates' pass down the sideline to put Houston up 24-10.

"It was a touchdown if I would have caught it," Crocker said. "They made those big plays and we didn't and that's why they're moving on."

As Johnson rested on the bench, Foster walked up to him and gave him a bow, the running back's customary celebration after a touchdown. Foster has said that the bow is a Hindu gesture of respect.

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Johnson said the losing streak proved to be beneficial.

"Everybody was riding high, the city was going crazy, we were in the playoffs for the first time," Johnson said. "Over those last three weeks, that brought us back down to reality and let us know what we needed to do."