

## Difficult To Defend

Written by {ga=riverburns}

Monday, September 17 2012 1:01 PM - Last Updated Monday, September 17 2012 7:41 PM

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When on defense, whether it's a game of chess, football, or even a heated debate, you always want to have your best resources available, be it your queen, a shut-down cornerback, or the hardcore facts. Sometimes, you are forced to go about your defense without one of your more useful devices, which doesn't necessarily render you helpless, but it tends to make the task at hand a lot more difficult.

You have to improvise, adapt, overcome; use your pawns and late-round draft picks efficiently, and really just hope for the best.

It's all easier said than done, I suppose.

After Sunday's loss in Cincinnati, the tenth consecutive defeat for the Browns leaves me to wonder what about this 0-2 football team is worth defending, if one were to have the desire to do that. On the bright side, the first-round picks showed inevitable progression from their dreadful debuts a week ago, but there is, unfortunately, a flip side to that coin. That defense, the one any Browns fan or sympathizer was willing to sell to anyone with remote interest after Week 1, proved itself to be Fool's Gold.

But, you have to wonder how much of that mirage you put on the absence of Joe Haden, who is going to miss a quarter of this 2012 season.

Simply put, the third-year player from Urban Meyer's Florida program will be away from the team for three Sundays and a Thursday because he's selfish. Now, Haden has created a bit of a buffer for himself in Cleveland by becoming

[Mr. Cleveland Fan](#)

when the football town is killing time between football seasons,

[being seen at The Q](#)

, and even Progressive Field, but

[an Anderson Varejao wig](#)

and

[an Opening Day cameo](#)

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aren't going to ease the pain of an 0-5 start for Browns fans.

Playing on a reprieve, awaiting a verdict on his appeal, in Week 1, Haden showed us all what we'd be missing over the next month.



He played a solid sixty minutes in Week One against the Eagles, holding DeSean Jackson to four catches, while intercepting a pass himself, but he did offer apologies to his teammates after the game. He knew the worst-kept secret of Training Camp, the information about his four-game suspension for violating the NFL drug policy wasn't supposed to be public until his appeal was rejected, was about to hit him and this young team like a ton of bricks. He knows he let this team down; he's probably really ashamed and remorseful, even beyond the gloom of losing \$1.4 million in salary.

His positive test for Adderall, a banned substance, was used more for recreation, a "pick-me-up" in Las Vegas, than to enhance any performance, but the punishment is just the same for Haden, who doesn't have a prescription for the ADD medication. I'm told it's a crush-and-snort drug, and I am here to pass no judgment for the action itself; I remember what it's like to be Haden's age, and I don't want to get caught up in the whole pot-kettle finger-pointing deal.

Of course, I wasn't getting paid \$5.8 million a year to show up at the office and keep my urine clean either.

And, that's just the thing. You can sell insurance, drive a delivery van, or greet people at Wal-Mart, and no one outside your immediate circle of family and friends is going to care much about what you did in Vegas. What happens there stays there, right?

Pictures might pop up on Facebook and Twitter, not TMZ and ESPN, and if for whatever reason, your employer is concerned with cleanliness or filth of your urine, the demographic that

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you're going to let down is exponentially smaller.

Of course, Haden didn't know that the buzz-saw of a drug test awaited him upon his return from Sin City; he either never considered that this party drug would cost him so much, or gambled that no one would ever know of it.

The possibility that he was gambling in Vegas is just so fitting, especially considering he lost his bet.



Of course, I like Joe Haden, mostly for how much he improves the odds of the Browns being victorious when he plays, but I'm also a sucker for the [character he's been courtside for a Cavaliers team](#) that hasn't been very good over the last two seasons.

That's why it pains me to say this; I am going to spend the next three weeks disliking him for his actions.

If I could defend them, I would, but I would laugh if a Browns opponent were forced to take on the intimidating corps of Little, Gordon, Massaquoi, and Benjamin without their best defensive back, especially for something dumb like this.

In their first game sans Haden, the Bengals lit the Browns secondary up. Andy Dalton threw for 318 yards and 3 TD, hooking up with three different receivers for scores, against a despicable Browns secondary.

AJ Green, who Haden likely would have shadowed, ended up with a 10 yard scoring catch, humiliating Dmitri Patterson in the process.

Now, maybe I can't put Andrew Hawkins embarrassing 50 yard scamper, or especially Adam Jones punt return completely on Haden being M.I.A., but it speaks to the margin of error that the Browns are not permitted without one of their best defensive players.

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I can't cede that Haden is the best defensive player on the Browns with the way D'Qwell Jackson has been playing, and it's hard to grant him that "shut-down corner" label when he's not on the field. The fact is receivers are licking their chops at the chance to take on a Browns secondary that's missing Sheldon Brown and Haden at the moment. All due respect to Buster Skrine, Patterson, and Trevin Wade, you can't expect to win games when you don't have your best defensive backs in a passing league.

The sledding doesn't get easier in the weeks ahead with Stevie Johnson, Torrey Smith, Anquan Boldin, Hakeem Nicks, and Victor Cruz waiting in the balance.

Haden has basically made his teammates into lambs for the slaughter there.



Perhaps, Dick Jauron can game plan to accommodate for deficiencies in the secondary, but I'm not so sure you want to open up the running game for CJ Spiller or Ray Rice. In Week 1, Shady McCoy got his when Andy Reid gave him a chance, so I wouldn't be at all surprised to see a steady dose of Spiller, who is getting about ten yards per touch so far.

The fact of the matter is the Browns do need to attack the running game, and put things on the shoulders of Ryan Fitzpatrick this Sunday, basically daring him to throw at a secondary that doesn't include the talent of Joe Haden or the experience of a healthy Sheldon Brown (who played just one snap at Cincinnati).

After what many considered a solid defensive effort in the opener, the defense of the Browns appeared to have raised more questions than it answered in its first road test. Despite six sacks, compared to just two a week ago, the Browns looked a lot more vulnerable against Andy Dalton, AJ Green and faces from milk carton than they did against the young reputable playmakers from the Eagles.

After trading Week 1 opponents with Baltimore, it appears as though the Browns caught a Philadelphia offense having a bad week, which strips the credibility from the praise the defense received.

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Now, the Browns did get to Dalton for six sacks, three from Jackson, but they appeared to be coverage sacks, which is a strange occurrence, given how little we think of the secondary's performance.



That tells me that Dick Jauron was able to scheme well enough to get the best of Jay Gruden on those plays, and opens up the possibility that we could have seen even more favorable results with the right personnel on the field. Right now, it's just easier to criticize the guy that isn't on the field, than to put it on the guys that aren't supposed to have these responsibilities yet.

For the time being, we have to explore any and all possibility of every defensive mishap being pinned on Joe Haden.

It might not be fair, but what's keeping him out was completely avoidable, and the direct result of not understanding or accepting his responsibility, but right now, it's entirely his fault. He can't defend himself, because he isn't available to defend AJ Green or Stevie Johnson.

And that, in and of itself, is indefensible.