

Browns Should Stick with Weeden in 2013

Written by {ga=tommoore}

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As a new regime and a new coaching staff in Berea face the same old questions during yet another off-season of change for the Cleveland Browns, there is one eternal question that stands above all the rest:

What should the Browns do about the quarterback position?

But unlike years past, where fans were forced to debate the merits of Tim Couch vs. Kelly Holcomb, Trent Dilfer vs. Charlie Frye or Derek Anderson vs. Brady Quinn, this time the answer is as simple as it is obvious.

Brandon Weeden should be the Browns starting quarterback in 2013.

Now this more of a pragmatic approach to the quarterback situation than it is an endorsement of Weeden, but there are still plenty of solid reasons to give Weeden another year under center.

In Norv We Trust

The first is a belief in Norv Turner as offensive coordinator because he runs a legitimate NFL offense that has been successful with a wide variety of quarterbacks running the show.

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“The most important thing you do as a coach, and I learned a lot of this from Norv, is to be able to adjust to the people that you have,” [Browns coach Rob Chudzinski said during Turner’s introductory press conference](#) . “Really focus on the guys that you have, finding roles for them, finding what they do the best and putting them in the situations to be able to let them have the success that they can have. From that stand point, the first thing we have to do is look at the guys that we have here and see what they can do and see where they would fit in and how we can adjust and grow the Browns’ offense to doing what they can do best and then going from there.”

After years of watching inept football under the likes of Maurice Carthon, Brian Daboll and Pat Shurmur, having Turner running the Browns offense should make fans feel a little easier on Sunday afternoons.

The impact that Turner has made as an offensive coordinator of course starts at the beginning – with his first coordinator role in Dallas.

The Cowboys were one of the league’s worst offenses in 1990 under coordinator Dave Shula, finishing 28th in yards and 26th in points with an offense that included Troy Aikman, Emmitt Smith and Michael Irvin.

Turner arrived in 1991 and, despite the Cowboys only adding one offensive skill player to the team (Alvin Harper), helped the team jump to seventh in points scored and ninth in yards.

Aikman only made 12 starts that year, but his completion percentage shot up from 56 percent to 65 percent and his interceptions dropped from 18 to 10. He also made the first of what would be sixth consecutive trips to the Pro Bowl.

Smith also saw his production take off under Turner. Following a rookie year that saw Smith rush for 937 yards and a 3.9 per carry average, the second-year running back ran for 1,563 yards and averaged 4.3 yards per carry in Turner’s offense.

That is good news for running back Trent Richardson, who put up similar numbers as Smith as

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a rookie (950 rushing yards, 3.6 yards per carry) while playing a large part of the season with broken ribs and in an offense that didn't seem to know how to use him correctly.

Now, one could make the argument that Aikman, Smith and Irvin would have figured things out on their own, but it seems pretty clear that Turner had a positive influence on their development.

The impact that Turner's offense has on the running game has followed him throughout his career. After taking over as offensive coordinator in Miami in 2002, the Dolphins run game went from 23rd in the NFL to second; in his one year in San Francisco, Turner helped take the 49ers from 17th in rushing to sixth.

From Smith, to LaDainian Tomlinson and Frank Gore (who had his best rushing season with Turner calling the plays), Turner knows how to get the best out of his running backs.

"I always compare production more than types of players," Turner said during his introductory press conference. "I got to see Trent firsthand. I've been fortunate through most of my stops to be with outstanding running backs, great running backs. Guys who have characteristics like Trent. I've been fortunate to be able to coach five backs that have led the NFL in rushing. I think that experience will help me in terms of understanding what we need to do."

A strong running game will not only help take some of the pressure off of Weeden, but it's a must with the Browns playing in the AFC North and in not always the best weather conditions.

"Some of our best passing games have come in the real cold, the people think are the tougher conditions to play in," Turner said. (You need to be) not only a physical team, but being a complete team so if you're in the conditions where you're not going to make a lot of big plays, being able to be more of a high percentage team and run the football.

"You look at the games that were played this past weekend and the games that were played in the weather, I didn't see a limit in terms of big plays or of production offensively so I've never really felt, other than when it gets real windy and rainy that it limits you. In fact, some of the big passing games that I've been involved with have been in the real cold weather. Places like New

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York, Philadelphia, those types of places.”

Lack of Better Options

Granted, sticking with what you have just for the sake of continuity isn't the best game plan, but if you are going to make a change, the Browns have to be realistic about what is available at the quarterback position.

So who's is out there that can unquestionably be better than Weeden?

Alex Smith? Well, it looks like that San Francisco will release him now that they have turned to Colin Kaepernick, and Turner did coach him for one year in San Francisco, but is he really the answer?

The Seahawks are probably going to release Matt Flynn just a year after signing him as a free agent. But if [Flynn was the wrong answer last year](#) when the Browns were running the West Coast Offense, why would he be a fit now?

Seriously, [take a look at this list](#) . Would anyone really feel comfortable watching the Browns take the field in Week 1 with any of these guys under center (we're not counting Joe Flacco, obviously).

The Browns could always turn back to the draft to fix the quarterback problem, especially holding the No. 6 pick, but that [option is just as unappealing as the free agency route](#) .

The quarterbacks on display during Saturday's Senior Bowl were less than impressive (for what that is worth) and unless you believe in someone like Matt Barkley or Landry Jones, this may be the year to let some other team over-reach for a quarterback in the draft.

Just as important, despite the work that former general manager Tom Heckert did over the past three years the Browns still have several holes to fill. They still need a pass rusher to pair with

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Jabaal Sheard, a couple of linebackers and help in the secondary.

Trying to fill all those spots and worry about find a quarterback (all without a second-round pick) may be too big of a job for this year, even with an “incredible talent evaluator” like Mike Lombardi on board.

Now if Chudzinski and Turner want to bring in their Seneca Wallace to help teach Weeden not the only the offense but also how to learn on the NFL level, that would be a good move (as long as it's not Derek Anderson). One of the biggest areas that young quarterbacks struggle with is learning how to properly watch film and prepare during the week – anything the Browns can do to help Weeden in that area can only be a positive.

Sometimes it is OK to Do Nothing

When you look at the options available to the Browns it becomes clear that the best course of action is for the team to stay the course at quarterback.

Given Turner's track record, we are interested to see what Weeden can do in Turner's offense. Even though he faced Big 12 defenses in college, Weeden couldn't put up the numbers he did unless there was something about him.

As [Grantland's Chris Brown pointed out following last April's draft](#) , at Oklahoma State Weeden played in one of the best pass-first systems in all of football. The problem is that system has produced a lot of passers who have not been able to duplicate their college success on the NFL level.

But if anyone can get the best out of Weeden, it sounds like Turner is the man.

“Weeden will step up and be a better quarterback because of coach Turner,” former San Diego wide receiver [Chris Chambers told *The Plain Dealer*](#) . “There's no way (Turner) picked Cleveland just to go. He must have seen something there.

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“He gets everyone involved with the offense. He’ll work on things for weeks and months and then pull it out at the right time. And since he isn’t the head coach, he’ll really be able to dial in.”

The Browns can’t keep turning over the quarterback position every year and hope to succeed; just because Weeden was misused in Shurmur’s offense doesn’t mean the Browns need to move on.

Giving Weeden a year in Turner’s offense also fits into a philosophy that Lombardi learned from spending time with San Francisco coach Bill Walsh.

Heading into last year’s draft Lombardi, never missing a chance to remind people that he’s worked with highly successful people (and everything that implies) wrote a column for NFL.com about [the six draft lessons he learned from Walsh](#) .

That one that stands out is this one: *The first year we will teach the players the system, the second year we will develop the skills within the system.*

While Weeden operated under a different system with Shurmur and former offensive coordinator Brad Childress, that may not be a big issue, especially since he only spent one year in the offense. And there should be enough tape on Weeden for Turner to figure out how to maximize whatever skills the quarterback has.

“The way this league is now and I know people want to label different styles of offense, but most of the labels now are based on the terminology you use and the background of the people who are coaching it,” Turner explained. “I think the way this game has evolved most people are trying to do a lot of the same things, they just maybe name them different so I never get caught up in systems.

“I think you look for the things that, in terms of the style of offense we have, you look at the tape and identify things that I think Brandon does well that we’re going to ask him to do. I look at things where I know he has to improve and needs to get better to do the things we want him to do, but I think he has a lot of the skill set that we’re looking for.”

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The Browns have taken big steps in the past two years in building up their offense. With the right guidance and a little bit of luck, they may actually start resembling an NFL team for the first time since Lindy Infante was calling plays in the late 1980s.

Weeden remains the big question mark in all of this and it's Turner's job to find the answer to making Weeden into a productive NFL quarterback.

The Browns owe it to themselves to find out if Weeden can cut it at the NFL level. They have to stop the quarterback carousel from spinning and the combination of Weeden and Turner present the team with the best option since the franchise returned in 1999.

The choice is pretty simple when you look at it; now the Browns just have to be willing to make the call.

(Photo by Getty Images)