

Browns vs. Dolphins - Week 1

Written by {ga=tommoore}

Sunday, September 08 2013 5:05 AM - Last Updated Saturday, September 07 2013 2:29 PM



A little more than eight months after we last saw them in real game action, the Cleveland Browns return to the field on Sunday to open the 2013 NFL season.

The Browns will be at home, naturally, taking on the Miami Dolphins. Cleveland is 1-13 in season openers since returning to the NFL in 1999, a streak that would be nice to see them snap against the Dolphins.

Sunday's game will mark the first game for Rob Chudzinski as an NFL head coach, the fifth time we have seen a coach make his NFL debut with the Orange and Brown since 1999.

The Opposition

Miami's 2012 record: 2-1

Offensive rank: 4th overall/3rd passing/11th rushing

Defensive rank: 27th overall/28th passing/28th rushing

All-time record: Dolphins lead, 9-8

Last meeting: Browns won, 17-16, in Week 3 of the 2011 season

The line: Browns (-1)

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What to Watch For

For better or worse, one way or another, we are going to find out this season if Brandon Weeden can take hold of the quarterback position for the next few seasons and allow the Browns to focus on filling some of the other holes on the roster.

And Sunday against the Dolphins would be a great time for Weeden to do that.

A year ago, Weeden threw four interceptions and completed only 34 percent of his passes in the season-opening loss to Philadelphia. While he had better days throughout the season, that day gave Browns fans a preview of what Weeden can look like on his worst days.

New offensive coordinator Norv Turner, who knows a thing or two about developing good quarterbacks, is probably Weeden's best hope for becoming the type of consistent player the Browns need at the quarterback position.

“(Brandon’s) worked awfully hard to absorb this system, to learn it, to work on the physical things that he needs to do better,” [Turner said on the team’s website](#) . “To be successful, we all have to do our jobs at a high level, starting with me, (but also) the people he’s playing with, and then, he has to play at a high level.

“I think Brandon’s got the physical ability to play. I think he’s done the things we’ve wanted him to do. He’s made progress. Obviously, we want to see him go do it now.”

Weeden will be helped by having a healthy Trent Richardson to hand the ball to, but will be hurt by not having Josh Gordon on the field as the wide receiver starts his two-game suspension. The absence of Gordon leaves the Browns with just four wide receivers – Greg Little, Davone Bess, Travis Benjamin and Josh Cooper.

The Dolphins were bad against the pass last season, despite having Cameron Wake, who has

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43 sacks in four seasons and will pose a challenge for second-year right tackle Mitchell Schwartz.

“(Cameron) is just as good on film as you’d expect,” [Schwartz told *The Plain Dealer*](#). “He does a lot of things that disrupt tackles. He’s got a lot of moves. He’s also got a lot of counter moves, playing off of you and kind of taking advantage of your mistakes.”

If addition to Schwartz having to deal with Wake, the right guard position could be a concern as the Browns will have to go with journeyman Oniel Cousins and/or seventh-round draft pick Garrett Gilkey. If they don’t hold up, it could be a long day for Weeden and the offense.

On the defensive side, much of the talk will be about No. 1 draft pick Barkevious Mingo not being able to play as he is still recovering from a bruised lung. But while Mingo missing one (or even two) games at the start of what could be a very good NFL career is disappointing as we are excited to see what he can do, it’s really not as big of a deal as some people want to make it out to be.

Browns fans should be far more concerned, both for this week and possibly the weeks to come, about the state of the players in the Browns secondary not named Joe Haden or T.J. Ward.

Buster Skrine, who is the starting corner back opposite Haden, is questionable with a shoulder injury, Chris Owens is probable with a foot injury and then there is rookie Leon McFadden. Both Owens and McFadden were limited by injuries in the preseason, so if Skrine can’t go (or when Skrine struggles) it’s hard to know what the Browns can get out of his backups.

Just don’t tell that to defensive coordinator Ray Horton.

“I’m very happy, very satisfied with the status of our corners,” [Horton said on the team’s website](#). “We just go play football. We’re a reflection of what (the Dolphins) do. We just react to what we see and we try to put the best 11 on the field, whatever the match-up is.”

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If the secondary struggles, Horton better hope his rebuilt front seven can bring a lot of pressure on Miami quarterback Ryan Tannehill or it could be a long day.

An Interesting Stat That May Mean Something

The Dolphins were active in free agency and one of their biggest acquisitions is wide receiver Mike Wallace, who the Browns know well from the four seasons he spent with Pittsburgh.

In his career against the Browns, Wallace has 16 receptions for 333 yards (20.8 yards per reception average) and two touchdowns.

Those stats are a bit skewed, however, by the 195 yards (and both touchdowns) he posted against Eric Mangini's Browns in 2010. Over the past two seasons, Wallace has just six receptions for 77 yards and has not seen the end zone against Cleveland.

The Prediction

Every year we go into the season hoping for the best and the Browns disappoint, never more than on opening day.

This year we want to believe it will be different, that Turner and Horton can make a difference and help Chudzinski avoid many of the mistakes that are common for first-year coaches.

We want to believe that a healthy Richardson and a maturing wide receiving group will make Weeden a better quarterback. And that we will finally see a Browns defense that can make a difference when it matters in a positive way.

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We know the season will not end with a playoff berth, but we want to believe that we will be able to witness competent football being played by the Browns over the next four months.

Are we naïve to think that is possible?

“It’s been a long wait,” [Chudzinski said in his Friday press conference](#) . “You just look back to the first day I came as head coach on the job. All of the things that have happened, it seems like a long time ago, and it’s finally here. This game is finally here. This is why we do all of these things. This is why we work so hard. The team has prepared, as well. I can’t ask any more from them and what they’ve done. It’s going to be an exciting day for us, and I’m looking forward to it.”

If coach is excited, then that’s good enough for us.

Take the Browns and the points and enjoy the first season-opening win since we all thought Butch Davis was the answer.

(Photo by Getty Images)