

Browns vs. Ravens - Week 2

Written by {ga=tommoore}

Sunday, September 15 2013 8:00 AM - Last Updated Sunday, September 15 2013 8:28 AM



The Cleveland Browns travel to Baltimore on Sunday to take on the Ravens.

It will be the home opener for Baltimore, which means they will be unveiling their Super Bowl banner and celebrating last season's victory in front of the home fans.

Yeah, that's going to be a laugh riot for the Browns.

Barring something strange happening, one of these teams will walk out of the stadium on Sunday with an 0-2 record on the season.

Let's try to figure out who it will be.

The Opposition

Baltimore's record: 0-1

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Offensive rank: 8th overall/6th passing/28th rushing

Defensive rank: 32nd overall/32nd passing/9th rushing

All-time record: Ravens lead, 21-7

Last meeting: Ravens won, 25-15, in Week 9 of the 2012 season

[Injury report](#)

The line: Browns (+7)

What to Watch For

The Ravens come into the game off an embarrassing loss to Denver to open the season. In that game, the Ravens gave up a franchise-record 49 points and allowed Broncos quarterback Peyton Manning to throw for seven touchdowns – only tying an NFL record.

So this will be a walk in the park for the Browns, right?

Well, not so fast.

The Browns have lost 10 in a row to Baltimore by an average of 12.9 points per game. Cleveland also comes into the game off a disappointing and dispirited opening performance in a loss to Miami.

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While the Broncos ripped the Ravens defense in the passing game, the Broncos only ran for 65 yards and 2.8 yards per carry. You can take that one of two ways: either the Broncos figured there was no need to run when it was so easy to pass; or that the Ravens defense, while still working through the kinks of replacing several starters, still knows how to play the run.

It may not matter how the Ravens run defense performs if the Browns continue to ignore running back Trent Richardson, who carried the ball just 13 times against Miami.

“I don’t think (Miami) really stopped the running game. I think we stopped it ourselves as far as just getting away from it,” [Richardson said earlier this week](#) . “No matter what, we have to stick to our game plan. And I guess coach had another game plan and it went that way.”

Working in Richardson’s favor is the fact that he rushed for more than 100 yards the last time the Browns faced the Ravens – just the second Cleveland running back to exceed 100 yards against Baltimore.

Bottom line is the Browns need to test the Ravens run defense to see what it is made of, because we all know what the alternative is and how well that plays out.

No matter how much success the Broncos had passing the ball against Baltimore, it would probably be a good idea for Browns offensive coordinator Norv Turner to remember that Browns quarterback Brandon Weeden is not Peyton Manning.

Weeden had his second consecutive opening day mess against Miami, and while it may be tempting, Turner needs to resist the urge to have Weeden throw 50-plus passes again this weekend.

One area the Browns may be able to [exploit in the passing game is at tight end](#) . Jordan Cameron caught nine passes for 108 yards and a touchdown in the opener, while the Ravens allowed Denver tight end Julius Thomas to catch five passes for 110 yards and two

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touchdowns.

If the Browns can get the Ravens worrying about Cameron that could open things up for the rest of the offense and take some of the heat off of Weeden.

It may not matter, though, if right guard Oniel Cousins and right tackle Mitchell Schwartz struggle again. A week after facing Cameron Wake, Schwartz gets to take on the combination of Terrell Suggs and Elvis Dumervil, while you can be sure the Ravens will target the ineffective Cousins as much as possible.

On defense, the Browns could be catching a break, even though they are going against quarterback Joe Flacco – who is 10-0 against the Browns since entering the league in 2008 – and running back Ray Rice – who has gained 922 rushing yards in his career against the Browns.

But Cleveland has the No. 1 rush defense in the NFL after holding the Dolphins to just 20 rushing yards and 0.9 yards per carry. (Yeah, it's only one week, but that is still pretty impressive.) And Rice only rushed for 36 yards against the Broncos.

“All those guys (up front) allow everyone behind them to play well,” [linebacker D'Qwell Jackson told *The Beacon Journal*](#). “We've been doing a great job of stopping the run, we emphasize it every day. Last week was a glimpse of how good we could be when we all play together.”

Offensive tackle Michael Oher practiced all week after spraining his ankle against the Broncos and is listed as probable for the game, but if the ankle slows him down that could mean good things for Cleveland linebackers Jabaal Sheard and Paul Kruger, who is making his first trip back to Baltimore after leaving the Ravens in free agency. The defense needs to get Baltimore into passing downs so they can put pressure on Oher, which will then result in pressure on Flacco.

The Browns may also see the debut of No. 1 draft pick Barkevious Mingo, who could see his

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first game action since the second preseason game against Detroit as he has been recovering from a bruised lung.

Even though the team has said that Mingo will have a "limited role" on Sunday, just getting on the field for even a few series could be a big boost for the defense.

The secondary may be catching a break as Jacoby Jones is out with a sprained medial collateral ligament in his right knee, which leaves Torrey Smith as the primary threat in the passing game. Joe Haden should be on Smith for the game and, as Haden showed last week against Miami's Mike Wallace, he can take Smith out of the offense.

But as we also saw last week, taking away a team's No. 1 wide receiver doesn't mean anything if corner backs Buster Skrine and Chris Owens can't hold up on their side of the field. So while it at first glance it looks as if the Browns have an edge with Baltimore playing Marlon Brown (a rookie free agent) and Aaron Mellette (a seventh-round draft pick out of football powerhouse Elon) opposite Smith, last week's performance from Skrine and Owens tells a different story.

An Interesting Stat That May Mean Something

While the Browns have lost 10 in a row to Baltimore, they are 8-8 against the spread over the past eight seasons, and 5-3 against the spread in Baltimore.

The Browns have been able to keep the score somewhat close when they play the Ravens, at least in the past two years. After losing by an average of 16 points a game in the two years Eric Mangini was coach, the Browns were able to cut that margin down to "only" 9.25 points under Pat Shurmur.

The Browns are getting 7 points this week; use that information as you see fit.

The Prediction

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There are certainly ways that we can see the Browns pulling out a win against Baltimore.

The Ravens are still adjusting to several new faces on the defensive side of the ball, and are struggling with injuries on offense.

Even without wide receiver Josh Gordon, who will miss the second (and final) game of his suspension, there should be opportunities for the Browns in the passing game. And even though the Ravens limited Denver's run game, the Browns should make a concerted effort to run in the Ravens and find out if their defense is for real.

Finally, the Browns have to beat the Ravens at some point, don't they?

We want to believe all that, we really do, but we are still a bit discouraged by what we saw on opening day from the Browns. Weeden still looked uncomfortable, the offense gave up on the run entirely too early, and the defense wore down just when the Browns needed them the most.

In other words, it was like every other Browns game from the past four seasons.

As we mentioned in the opening, one of these teams is going to walk off the field a little after 4 p.m. on Sunday with an 0-2 record.

How likely is it that Baltimore will be that team?

The Browns will keep it close, but the Ravens will pull out the win and the cover.

□ *(Photo by Getty Images)*