

The Cleveland Browns And The Makings Of An Identity

Written by {ga=papabearjere}

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Since the reincarnation of the Browns in 1999, the one criticism that has constantly been levied against them is that they are a team without an identity, which is really just a euphemism for saying that they stink in all phases of the game. Aside from possibly the almost-magical 2007 season ([sometimes dreams do come true](#)), the Browns really haven't had a season in which they've been, you know, "good" at anything; their identity has always been that they don't have an identity.

However, in 2013, despite being amidst the slog of another 0-2 start where even the [most menial tasks](#) on a football field seem like exercises in futility, the Browns may have finally discovered the makings of the what is beginning to look like an identity. Yes, the Browns may have finally found an identity in the ferocious and aggressive play of the defensive front seven.

It may not feel like much during an ugly 0-2 stretch to open the season, but the play along the defensive front has been impressive thus far. This is a talented unit, featuring several high draft choices (Mingo, Sheard, D'Qwell, Taylor) and free agent acquisitions (Bryant, Kruger, Groves), supplemented by players found on the periphery of the NFL (Rubin, Robertson, Hughes, Winn). Just looking at that list of players will prove that this unit has something that has been lacking on the Browns for the past 14 years: depth. One lasting impact the Heckert-Holmgren regime will have in Cleveland is that they bolstered the defensive line, adding Taylor, Winn, and Hughes to go with Ahtyba Rubin. The Banner-Lambardi regime has followed that up by bolstering the linebacker corps this offseason in anticipation of the switch to a 3-4 front.

Now, the Browns have a deep unit of front seven players that are equally adept at both stuffing the run and pressuring the quarterback. Don't be fooled by the early results this season. Right

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now the narrative is that the defense isn't quite there yet; they get tired late in games, and can't stop the pass when they need to. While it's true that the Browns have a porous secondary, that shouldn't color any judgment of the front seven.

Let's try a quick mind exercise: Let's imagine, and stick with me for a second, that for just one time in their miserable post-'99 existence the Browns actually *have a lead* in the second half, and not some 7-6 or 6-0 lead. Let's imagine that the Browns are winning by two touchdowns at some point in the second half (difficult I know, but just try).

How good could this front seven be if for once they could pin their ears back and go after the quarterback without worrying about being hit with a running play? Right now, especially late in games, the Browns have to be defending against both the run and the pass, which makes it tough to defend either very well. The secondary doesn't help matters either. The Dolphins and Ravens were both willing to keep extra pass blockers in against the blitz because they know they can win the battles on the outside and get receivers open down field.

Despite all of this, the front seven is quickly establishing itself as the lone bright spot on a dismal team. This is a unit that *expects* to be good. They play with a fire and passion that has been mostly missing since '99, which was made clear by the

[Ray Rice-Phil Taylor spat](#)

(sorry, I couldn't help it). The Browns finally have a unit that will set the tone for the rest of the team to follow, and that will prove invaluable as what looks to be a depressing season marches on (in fact, the front seven's intensity may lead to the team winning enough games down the stretch to knock them out of the Teddy Bridgewater sweepstakes, which is a different conversation for a different day).

Right now, the Browns have played two ugly games to start the season, and it can be tough to find something to latch onto through all the losing. However, looking past the results will show the Browns are slowly, slowly but surely, building something special on the defensive side of the ball. The Browns' front seven is young, undeniably talented, and perhaps most importantly brings an air of respectability to a team that is constantly being beaten down by superior opponents. It will be a long road for the Browns to contend for a Super Bowl, but they have taken the first step of forging a sustainable foundation from which they can build on.

Now, if they could ever find a quarterback...

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