

Browns vs. Bengals - Week 4

Written by {ga=tommoore}

Saturday, September 28 2013 1:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, September 28 2013 1:03 PM



The Cleveland Browns return home to take on the Cincinnati Bengals.

The Browns are coming off a last-second victory in Minnesota over the 0-3 Vikings that set the town a buzz with (Brian) Hoyer Mania.

Can Cleveland kick off of a stretch that will see them play three consecutive home games in the span of 14 days with a win and reach the .500 mark for the first time since Week 4 of 2011?

Let's try to find out.

The Opposition

Cincinnati's record: 2-1

Offensive rank: 16th overall/10th passing/21st rushing

Defensive rank: 12th overall/14th passing/14th rushing

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All-time record: Cincinnati leads, 42-37, and has won seven of the last nine meetings

Last meeting: Cleveland won, 34-24, in Week 6 of last season

[Injury report](#)

The line: Browns +5

What to Watch For

Cleveland quarterback Brian Hoyer will make his second start of the season – and first at home – on Sunday against the Bengals.

Last week against Minnesota, Hoyer was average, balancing out his three touchdown passes with three interceptions and a low quarterback rating as the Browns beat the Vikings.

Hoyer is from Cleveland, used to have season tickets to watch the Browns, and is not Brandon Weeden, which for many Browns fans is enough.

“Obviously, playing at home with the Cleveland fan base here, it’s going to be special, but once they kick that ball off and you’re between those white lines, that’s what you’ve got to worry about,” [Hoyer said earlier in the week](#) . “It’s cool to see how many people are wishing you well and are happy for you, but you can’t get caught up in it.”

It’s refreshing to hear Hoyer say that, because none of the off-field stuff matters to the Bengals – although they may not be in a position to do much to stall the Hoyer bandwagon.

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Just like last week, when the Vikings lost three defensive backs to injury, Cincinnati comes into the game with major issues in the secondary. The Bengals may very well be without starting corner back Leon Hall, starting safety Reggie Nelson and backup corner back Dre Kirkpatrick, who are also listed as doubtful for the game.

Things are so bad that the Bengals may be forced to play Brandon Ghee – who has taken 13 defensive snaps since being drafted in 2010 and hasn't played in a game since the 2011 Wild Card game – and Chris Crocker, who was signed off the street this week.

That's a huge break for the Browns, especially when you consider that the Bengals held Green Bay's Aaron Rodgers last week to his worst game grade (-2.0) since Week 1 of 2010, [according to Pro Football Focus](#)

It is also great news for wide receiver Josh Gordon (10 catches for 146 yards and a touchdown vs. Minnesota) and tight end Jordan Cameron (20 receptions and four touchdowns on the season).

The Bengals are also struggling to mount any kind of a pass rush as they have just six sacks on the season. The Browns offensive line will have to keep that streak going as Hoyer was just three-of-12 against the Vikings when he was under pressure.

Things would be easier on Hoyer if the Browns had anything resembling an NFL running game. The team's leading rusher is currently backup safety Josh Aubrey, whose 34 rushing yards came on a fake punt. The three players actually tasked with running the ball – Chris Ogbonnaya, Bobby Rainey and Willis McGahee – have *combined* for 45 yards and 3.5 yards per carry.

The lack of a consistent running game has forced the Browns to throw an average of 48 passes a game, which is great if Peyton Manning is your quarterback, but not a long-term recipe for success if you are the Browns.

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“You can’t (throw that many passes) every week,” [McGahee said](#) . “That’s when the run game has to come alive. It’s going to come alive. It’s going to be a dramatic improvement.”

Yeah, well, show, don’t tell.

On defense it looks like this Sunday will be linebacker Barkevious Mingo’s time to shine. Jabaal Sheard and Quentin Groves are both out with injuries, so Mingo should see a lot of action.

In two games, Mingo has two sacks, six tackles and a batted pass.

“What impresses me is (Mingo’s) resiliency,” Groves [said](#) . “He’s got that kind of perseverance that doesn’t let him quit. Rookies come in and they don’t know how quick the game is going to be or how to keep fighting. He keeps fighting.”

The biggest matchup, as it always is when the Browns play the Bengals, comes from corner back Joe Haden vs. wide receiver A.J. Green. In three career matchups, Green has caught 11 passes for 286 yards and three touchdowns.

“He’s just an overall great receiver with talent,” [Haden said](#) . “He’s really tall, fast, runs good routes, goes up and gets the ball. He’s one of the best. He’s the best receiver I’ve been playing against since I’ve been in the league. And then with him and (quarterback Andy) Dalton coming in together, they have that chemistry and he trusts him.”

Speaking of Dalton, in four career games against the Browns, he has completed 70 percent of his passes for 1,050 yards and eight touchdown passes. The Browns have sacked him 13 times.

If Cleveland, which has 12 sacks in three games, can up the pressure on Dalton they may have a chance to pull this thing out on Sunday.

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A couple of stats that may mean something

The Browns have only rushed once on third down this season, the fewest rushing attempts in the league.

The Browns have scored 10 points in the second half - tied with Tampa Bay for the fewest in the league.

Since 1990, 36 percent of teams that started the season 2-2 have found a way to make the playoffs. But for teams that start 1-3, that number drops to 14 percent. A win today would put the Browns at 2-2 on the season.

The Prediction

We want to believe the Browns have found something in Hoyer and that he can do just enough to stabilize the position.

And that the defense, which has looked good at times this season, is building up to being a dominant force as they become more comfortable with defensive coordinator Ray Horton's schemes.

And we admit to feeling a wee bit giddy at the thought of the Browns pulling out a win with a Thursday night home game looming just four days later.

But we're just not sold ... yet.

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Hoyer made too many mistakes against Minnesota, mistakes that were covered up by the fact that Christian Ponder was running the show on offense for the Vikings. Maybe those mistakes were just Hoyer shaking off the rust and we will see better quarterback play this week.

Or maybe not.

And even if you buy into the notion that the NFL is now a passing league, teams still need to be able to run the ball when they want to, and the Browns simply cannot do that right now.

Not having Sheard, Groves or Billy Winn on defense doesn't help the Browns depth and, even on the best of days, the defense has a tendency to wear down.

We'll take the Bengals and the points and hope for a better day against Buffalo.