



After a 10-day layoff, the first place Cleveland Browns return to action on Sunday as they host the Detroit Lions.

The game also marks the return of Brandon Weeden as the Browns starting quarterback, with Weeden looking for his first win as a starter since Week 14 of last season.

The Browns are looking to close out a stretch of three consecutive home games with their fourth consecutive victory to maintain a share of first place in the AFC North.

The Opposition

Detroit's record: 3-2

Offensive rank: 9th overall/6th passing/22nd rushing

Defensive rank: 25th overall/21st passing/27th rushing

All-time record: Detroit leads, 17-5 (including playoffs)

Last meeting: Detroit won, 38-37, in 2009

[Injury report](#)

The line: Browns +3

What to Watch For

This being Cleveland and the Browns, it all starts and ends with the quarterback.

Weeden came off the bench to a chorus of boos against Buffalo and rallied the Browns back from an early 10-0 deficit for the win. He put up 23 points – more than the 20.5 points that Hoyer averaged in his two wins – in his first action of the season with wide receiver Josh Gordon in the lineup.

Having Gordon (18 receptions for 303 yards and two touchdowns) and tight end Jordan Cameron (33 receptions for 396 yards and five touchdowns) has benefitted Weeden, as he is completing 80 percent of his passes when targeting those two (according to ESPN Stats & Information). When he throws to anyone else, Weeden is completing just 47 percent of his throws.

Most importantly, Weeden didn't turn the ball over, which goes a long way when you are running an offense that has problems that go beyond just the quarterback play.

"I've never really been in a situation where I've been doubted like this – and it lights a fire, motivates me to get into this building before anybody, study at night more than anybody

because I want to prove everybody wrong,” [Weeden told USA Today earlier this week](#) . “I want to prove to everybody that I can be the guy to lead this franchise to the places we want to go.

“If I’m worried about making mistakes, I’m making it harder on myself. So I just want to go out, have fun, just let it rip, and try to make the plays to help this team win. I have confidence in my ability and in everybody on this football team. So when I do it, hopefully, everybody will come back and say, ‘I can’t believe we doubted him.’ ”

It’s clear what Weeden needs to do for the Browns to have success on offense – make a decision and get rid of the ball quickly – but the question remains if Weeden is actually capable of doing just that.

“We all talked to him – ‘Just relax, settle down, try to get us the ball out quickly as possible, let us try to make a play, quit thinking as much and just let it go,” [Gordon told The Plain Dealer earlier this week](#) when talking about Weeden and the Buffalo game. “I said, ‘think a little less, just react, go out there and have fun with it – just trust us. He did exactly that and we went out there and made the plays.”

The extra time off before this week’s game should have benefitted Weeden as he works to get back to game speed after missing two games with a thumb injury.

The biggest benefit comes from the fact that he know has Gordon on the field.

“I went back and watched the first two weeks and, honestly, not having Josh was an issue,” [Browns offensive coordinator Norv Turner said](#) . “When we beat Minnesota, when we beat Cincinnati, we had a lot of guys play a lot better than they did in the first two games. Part of that was getting Josh back, but part of that was getting a lot of guys that played better.”

If Weeden continues to be slow to get rid of the ball it could be a long day for the Browns.

Even though the Lions have a lot of big-name players on defense, they rank near the bottom of the league. But the numbers – at least when it comes to pass defense – may not tell the true story. The Lions only have 10 sacks on the season, but [Pro Football Focus grades their team pass rush at +18.1](#), which is the fifth best in the NFL.

Leading the way is Ndamukong Suh, whose +17.2 grade and 29 quarterback pressures lead all interior defensive linemen in Pro Football Focus' grades. Shawn Lauvao, who returned to the lineup against Buffalo and struggled, is tasked with slowing down Suh and keeping Weeden on the field.

"I like (Suh's nasty streak)," [Lauvao said](#). "I think that's one thing that's lacking in the NFL. There's not too many guys who have some juice to themselves. It's a good thing."

The best thing would be if – or should we say when – Suh gets out of line on Sunday, someone from the Browns steps up and puts him in his place. One aspect that we've really liked from this year's Browns team is that, at least on defense, they are not afraid to hit back when someone tries to bully them. This would be a good week for the offensive line to take that same approach.

The Browns could go a long way toward helping Weeden's cause if they could actually run the football and, if that is ever going to happen, this would be the week.

The Lions are horrible against the run, giving up 5.3 yards per carry (second-worst in the NFL) and nine runs of 20-plus yards (also second-worst).

On the flip side, the Browns are just as bad in trying to run the ball, averaging just 3.5 yards per carry, with just one rushing touchdown and only one run of more than 20 yards from a running back.

Leading rusher Willis McGahee is averaging 2.6 yards per carry and No. 2 running back Bobby

Rainey is pitching in with 2.8 yards per carry.

If the Browns can't run the ball against this Detroit team, we may not be very far from seeing the Browns making NFL history by becoming the first team to go an entire game without a rushing attempt.

On defense, the Browns may be catching a huge break as Detroit wide receiver Calvin Johnson is listed as questionable with a knee injury. Johnson practiced Thursday and Friday and it's expected that he will play on Sunday, but how effective he will be remains a question.

If there was ever any doubt how much a wide receiver makes a quarterback look better (think A.J. Green and Andy Dalton in Cincinnati) then look no further than Johnson and Detroit quarterback Matthew Stafford.

Since coming into the league in 2009, Stafford has relied on Johnson for a ridiculous amount of his success. Stafford has completed 32 percent of his passes to Johnson, thrown for 42 percent of his yards to Johnson, and 48 percent of his touchdown passes have been thrown to Johnson.

"You can tell if you're missing a player like him, a dynamic player," [Browns corner back Joe Haden said of Johnson](#)

"For Stafford, it's like his comfort blanket basically. So if he's missing him, it's going to be a completely different offense. But with him, you've always go to know where he's at."

The Browns should be able to get pressure on Stafford, especially as linebacker Jabaal Sheard is back from injury and will rejoin the rotation with Paul Kruger and Barkevious Mingo.

Whoever lines up opposite Detroit left tackle Riley Reiff could have a big day. Reiff is ranked 46th (out of 62 players) in Pro Football Focus' Pass Blocking Efficiency rankings and his -2.8 pass block grade is 23rd among starting right tackles (where Reiff played before being switched to the left side).

An interesting stat that may mean something

In his NFL career, Matthew Stafford is 2-23 against teams with a winning record.

The Browns currently have a winning record.

The Prediction

Even though they have been playing Detroit since 1952, the Browns have only managed to beat the Lions five times. They have lost five of their past six against Detroit, with the most recent loss coming in 2009 when the team inexplicably called a timeout with no time on the clock to allow an injured Stafford to catch his breath and throw a game-winning touchdown.

The Browns have not won four games in a row since that same 2009 season, and have not won three consecutive home games since 2007.

It seems almost unbelievable, with everything that has gone on this season, to be talking about the Browns possibly winning four games in a row – but here we are.

The elements are there for a Browns win. Calvin Johnson may be limited, the Lions can't stop the run, and the Browns are playing with a lot of confidence right now.

"It's a great time to be in the city," [linebacker D'Qwell Jackson told the team's website](#) . "The fans deserve a winner, and that's what we're trying to do here. We've just got to keep building, keep putting out good practices, and actually be able to win some tough games."

In a season with so much unpredictability, what would be more unpredictable than the Browns at 4-2?

Take the Browns and the points and enjoy it while it lasts.