



Through the first six games of the season, the Cleveland Browns defense has been one of the team's bright spots.

The team is seventh overall in the NFL, giving up just a shade over 300 yards a game, is giving up a decent 20.8 points per game, and after so many years of not being able to stop the run has finally been solid against the rush, giving up just under 100 yards per game and 3.5 yards per carry.

But we can't help but wonder if it is time to start worrying a little bit about the defense.

Most (all?) of the focus has been on the offense and specifically the quarterback situation. That won't change anytime soon – certainly not this season – but that doesn't mean the defense should be let off the hook.

The Browns have taken a lead into the locker room at halftime of every game this season only to come out in the second half and be outscored 82-40. Some of that is on the offense as a weekly series of three-and-outs in the second half, along with a sub-expansion team running game, allow for plenty of opportunities for the opposing offense to put points on the board.

But just because the offense is struggling doesn't mean the Browns have to give up points on defense.

Sunday's game was the latest example as the Browns allowed 24 second-half points to Detroit in the loss and barely got close enough to Lions quarterback Matthew Stafford to make him sweat. They also somehow managed to let Lions tight end Joseph Fauria catch three touchdown passes.

There was plenty of blame to go around but the Browns starting linebackers had a particularly bad day.

Craig Robertson was beaten repeatedly in the passing game and D'Qwell Jackson was just as bad in the run game. [According to Pro Football Focus](#) , on the fourth-quarter touchdown that gave the Lions the lead, Robertson (who earned a -4.1 grade) missed a tackle on Brandon Pettigrew to allow a first down on third-and seven and on the next play allowed a 23-yard touchdown pass to Fauria. All told, Robertson allowed eight catches for 104 yards and two touchdowns in pass defense.

Outside linebackers Paul Kruger and Barkevious Mingo combined for just four pressures on Stafford in 63 plays, earning a combined pass rushing grade of -3.5.

Only once this season has the defense given up fewer than 10 points in the second half and that is not a formula for continued success.

The Browns put a lot of money and effort into rebuilding the defense in the off-season, drafting linebacker Mingo with the sixth-overall pick in the first round, and giving \$34 million to defensive lineman Desmond Bryant and \$40 to Kruger.

Bryant got off to a hot start with 3.5 sacks in his first three games, but since then he has been shut out. As for Kruger, he picked up his lone sack of the season in the opening game against Miami and that's been it. Kruger has also added just seven solo tackles.

We're not looking to single out one player, and we know that sacks are not the only measure of how a defensive player is performing, but it seems like we go entire games without ever hearing Kruger's name being mentioned.

The defense also continues to have problems on third down, giving up a first down 44 percent of the time (the Lions were eight-of-14 on Sunday, including six-of-seven in the second half), which leaves them ranked 29th in the NFL.

At this point in the season the offense is what it is. Weeden is not going to get any more consistent and running back Willis McGahee isn't going to get any younger. If the team is going to have a chance week-to-week it is going to have to rely on the defense.

A few weeks ago that seemed like a sound plan. Now, we're not so sure.

Paging Jordan Cameron

Tight end Jordan Cameron started the season on fire, pulling in 20 receptions for 269 yards and four touchdowns in the first three games of the season.

He has cooled off a bit since then, pulling in 18 catches for 191 yards and a lone touchdown in the past three games.

So what's going on?

The lazy answer is that Weeden is not looking to throw the ball to Cameron the way quarterback Brian Hoyer did in his two games as starting quarterback.

There is a small amount of truth to that as in the three games that Weeden has started, he has targeted Cameron 26 times, while in the two games with Hoyer as starter, Cameron was targeted 23 times.

It seems more likely that after seeing Cameron catch three touchdown passes against the Vikings that opposing defenses realized that he is one of two players on the Browns offense that they actually have to worry about and have adjust their coverage accordingly.

It would be great if the Browns could get the ball to Cameron more often, but does anyone really want to see Weeden force the issue?

“Every game is different. What’s there in different games can be different and how the plays that come up and the coverage that comes up when those plays are called,” [Browns coach Rob Chudzinski said in his Monday press conference](#)

. “Obviously Jordan is going to take people by surprise so people are paying more attention to him.”

Opposing defenses know they don’t have to pay any attention to the Browns running game, so they are focusing on Cameron and Josh Gordon and are willing to let the Browns throw to Davone Bess and Greg Little.

It’s time now for offensive coordinator Norv Turner to start making some adjustments of his own to get Cameron back involved in the offense.

Weeden is the man ... for now

While it probably wouldn’t make much of a difference, we really wouldn’t mind seeing Jason Campbell take over for Weeden as the starting quarterback.

But that’s not going to happen, for now at least, as Chudzinski confirmed on Monday that

Weeden will remain the team's starting quarterback.

"This was just one game," [Chudzinski said \(while showing he has a very short memory\)](#) . "I thought Brandon played well in spurts. Brandon's doing some good things. It's really just a matter of cutting out the critical mistakes."

Weeden was so close to getting out of Sunday's game with a least a little bit of the fans confidence. Even if the Browns had stalled on the game's final drive and lost, it would have still been disappointing but somewhat understandable. After all, the Browns were not going to close out the season with 14 consecutive wins.

The drive started out so well, too, as Weeden hit three nice passes to move the Browns to Detroit's 44-yard line. But after Weeden threw a ridiculous underhand flip in the direction of Chris Ogbonnaya that was intercepted and killed the Browns hopes of tying the game, any chance he had of winning back the fans went out the window.

"It really just boils down to mistakes that (Brandon) made yesterday and I know he wants them back, but there's mistakes from other guys there, too," Chudzinski said. "Obviously, the quarterback is the guy that everybody sees and that's part of the job, but we all have to get better and play more consistently overall."

We do have to wonder how much the Browns going on the road for the next two games played into Chudzinski's decision. It's not hard to imagine the reception Weeden would have received if the Browns had a home game this upcoming Sunday.

But with road games against Green Bay and Kansas City, Chudzinski has bought Weeden some time to show that he can at least be competent over the final 10 games of his Browns career.

This is the second time that the coaching staff has chosen Weeden as the starting quarterback. They picked him in training camp over Hoyer and they are sticking with him now over Campbell. Clearly they see something in practice and the meeting rooms that tells them Weeden is the

best option for now.

How long he remains the best option is really up to him.

Running into a brick wall

If you are tired of hearing about how horrible the Browns running game is then you probably want to skip ahead.

But the Browns are so bad at trying to run the ball that we are going to keep beating the drum until the situation changes.

The Browns have four runs this season of more than 20 yards. Two of them have come from wide receivers Travis Benjamin and Josh Gordon, one has come from back-up safety Josh Aubrey and only one has come from a player whose primary job is to run the ball – Ogbonnaya.

The Browns have one rushing touchdown after six games,

McGahee “leads” the team in rushing with 164 yards and is averaging 2.8 yards per carry, which ranks him 43rd out of 44 qualified running backs.

On Sunday, the Browns ran five times for 11 yards in the second half.

Chudzinski won't come out and admit it, of course, but the coaches have come to the conclusion that the running game is not going to take this team anywhere.

“I think that what we really need to do is stay the course from a philosophy-strategic standpoint,” he said. “The run and the pass really go hand-in-hand of where we’re at right now and I think we’re improving in the running game. Just to ditch the passing game and go 100 percent run, I don’t think it will be in our best interest.

“I think that we need to continue to get better in both, whether it’s Brandon, whether it’s the offensive line. I thought our offensive line really responded and played their best game yesterday. I think that we’re improving in running. They go hand-in-hand. You can’t do just one thing in this league.”

Chudzinski’s right that you can’t be a one-dimensional team, but the run game isn’t improving in any measurable way. The Browns may not be able to run the ball at will, but it would be nice if they could run the ball when they need to and help take some of the heat off the passing game.

At this point, we’d settle for just having opposing defenses not openly ignore the run game.

But that doesn’t seem like it is going to happen anytime soon.

Until next time

The Browns travel to Green Bay on Sunday for a rare 4:25 p.m. game.

(Photo courtesy of DetroitLions.com)