

Browns vs. Packers - Week 7

Written by {ga=tommoore}

Tuesday, October 15 2013 11:00 PM - Last Updated Monday, October 21 2013 9:45 AM



The Cleveland Browns hit the road on Sunday for Green Bay to take on the Packers in the first of two games away from home.

The Browns are coming off a frustrating loss to Detroit that broke a three-game winning streak, while the Packers come home after doing something the Browns have never done – beat the Baltimore Ravens with Joe Flacco at quarterback. The Packers are also looking for their 11th consecutive home win.

Speaking of quarterbacks, Brandon Weeden is back for another week as the Browns starter and is looking to break a five-game losing streak as the starting quarterback.

The Opposition

Green Bay's record: 3-2

Offensive rank: 2nd overall/4th passing/5th rushing

Defensive rank: 18th overall/28th passing/3rd rushing

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All-time record: Green Bay leads, 10-7

Last meeting: Green Bay won, 31-3, in 2009

[Injury report](#)

The line: Browns +9.5

What to Watch For

It will be strength vs. strength when Green Bay has the ball and strength vs. weakness when the Browns are on offense on Sunday – and which side can exert its dominance will go a long way toward deciding the outcome.

The Packers come into the game on a roll in the running game, averaging 5.2 yards per carry (second-best in the league) and 140 yards per game. They are led by Eddie Lacy (4.4 yards per carry), who has rushed for 219 yards the past two weeks, and James Starks (5.5 yards per carry).

Apparently Green Bay did not get the memo that running the ball is so 2009.

This will be the biggest test for a Browns rush defense that started out the season strong but has begun to show some problems the past two weeks.

Through the season's first four games, the Browns gave up just 2.9 yards per carry. And while the defense is still fourth in the league in giving up just 3.5 yards per carry, and eighth in

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allowing 98 yards per game on the ground, the past two games have been a different story.

The Browns gave up 273 yards on the ground and 4.6 yards per carry combined against Buffalo and Detroit and, if they can't reverse that trend, it's going to be a long day at Lambeau.

The defense should be bolstered by the return to the lineup of linebacker Jabaal Sheard, who missed the past three games with a knee injury.

"Having (Jabaal) back is a lot more important than I think a lot of people realize," linebacker [Paul Kruger](#) told

[The Beacon Journal](#)

. "He's an explosive player, big-play type of guy. You can't run on his side – he's a dominant player."

One area that the Browns clearly need to work on is stopping the opponent on third down. The team currently ranks 29th in the NFL as opposing offenses are converting 44 percent of the time on third down. It's even worse in the second half of games, as the Browns have only held on third down five times in 26 chances.

Having Sheard and Groves (who returned against Detroit after missing three games with an ankle injury) healthy should help as they can resume their rotation with Kruger and Barkevious Mingo, keeping those two from wearing down as the game goes along.

On the opposite side, if the Browns were ever going to have a day where they need to run the ball, Sunday against Green Bay is it.

Weeden is coming off a rough start against the Lions and with the weather forecast calling for a 40 percent chance of rain, turning to the run game sounds like a great option.

Of course, how the Browns can actually accomplish that remains an ongoing question.

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Cleveland is currently 22nd in the NFL in rushing, averaging just 86 yards per game. They are 18th in yards per carry (3.9) and 29th in the league with just one rushing touchdown.

The Browns will be going against a Packers defense that is third in the NFL in yards allowed (78 per game) and is giving up just 3.4 yards per carry.

Green Bay won't have to worry about Bobby Rainey and his 2.6 yards per carry as the Browns released Rainey this week. (It only took them six games to realize why the Ravens released Rainey twice in training camp.)

Instead, the Browns will kick off the Fozzy Whitaker era, as the Browns will turn to a player they claimed off waivers two weeks ago as their second running back. Whitaker was released by San Diego, was with Arizona last season as an undrafted free agent, has spent his career primarily on special teams, and has yet to run the ball in an NFL game.

"The coaches told me to be ready for whatever," [Whittaker told *The Plain Dealer* this week](#) . "There's a couple of situations where I may get into the game. Obviously it's not for certain I'll get in, but whenever my number's called, I'll be ready and make sure I'm focused in on everything that's going on."

Don't worry, Fozzy. You're getting into the game on Sunday.

We've also reached the point in the season where "leading rusher" Willis McGahee (and his 2.8 yards per carry) is sitting out practice during the week to rest his rapidly aging and surgically repaired knees.

McGahee is averaging 1.5 yards per carry less than he did last year with Denver and, [according to Pro Football Focus](#) , is averaging just 1.7 yards after contact.

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What could go wrong?

Once the Browns running game stalls again on Sunday, the team will have to rely on Weeden to get something done on offense, much to the delight of Browns fans everywhere.

Probably the best thing that Weeden has going for him is this game in the road, so he may have a chance to try and steady himself without hearing the boos before he even takes an offensive snap. Throw in the fact that the Packers are 28th in the league against the pass and there may be a glimmer of hope for the Browns offense.

“At the end of the day you have to be productive and you have to make the play, whatever the play is and however you can,” [Browns coach Rob Chudzinski said on Friday](#) . “As we’ve coached and talked with Brandon, he is the guy that has the ball last and, as the quarterback, you have to make the right decisions.

“You can see (Brandon) doing things (in practice), specifically working to improve in areas that we’re talking about where he needs to improve. You come out here and work on it in practice, and the idea is to be able to transfer it and bring it to the game. We’re hopeful that he’ll be able to do that.”

The Packers have a weak spot on defense when it comes to covering tight ends, so it seems like a good idea for Weeden to look early and often toward tight end Jordan Cameron.

Cameron leads all tight ends with 38 receptions and is third in receiving yards with 460. He is the second-most targeted tight end in the NFL and will be going against a Green Bay defense that has allowed 31 receptions, 386 yards and four touchdowns to tight ends this season (according to Pro Football Focus).

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If Cameron can be involved in the offense, and Josh Gordon does Josh Gordon things, it may not matter that the Browns have the rushing attack of an expansion team.

Historical Note of Interest

Jim Brown played his final game in a Cleveland uniform on Jan. 2, 1966, in a playoff loss to Green Bay.

Brown rushed 12 times for 50 yards that day.

It's extremely likely that no Browns running back will surpass that total this Sunday.

The Prediction

It has been a strange year for the Browns so far, even by their standards.

Normally a 3-3 record after six games would be cause for jubilation from a fan base starved for something to cheer about, but that hasn't been the case.

The Browns – and Weeden especially – missed a huge opportunity against Detroit to really engage with the fans and show the league they are not the same old Browns.

From here on out things only get tougher for the Orange and Brown.

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The team can't run the ball; Brandon Weeden can't stop doing Brandon Weeden things at the worst possible time; and the schedule only gets more difficult, as the Browns next five games come against Green Bay, Kansas City, Baltimore, Cincinnati and Pittsburgh.

The Packers are eventually going to lose a home game, and we want to believe the Browns defense can keep the team in the game, but it's pretty hard to see the Browns pulling out a win on Sunday. And it is very easy to see the Packers covering.

We'll take Green Bay and the points and hope the reverse jinx properties kick in.

(Photo by Getty Images)