

Can the Defense Carry the Browns to the Playoffs?

Written by {ga=tommoore}

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A week after Cleveland Browns defensive coordinator Ray Horton proclaimed that the defense had turned a corner, it appears that he may be right.

And if he is, it could mean a final seven-game stretch that could push the Browns into the playoffs.

Following Sunday's win over Baltimore, when the Browns held the Ravens to just 278 total yards (and just 55 on the ground), the Browns find themselves near or on top of the defensive rankings, a place that they have not occupied for a long, long time.

Heading into their Week 10 bye, the Browns defense currently are:

- Fourth in yards per game;
- First in average yards per play;
- First in average yards per pass attempt;
- Fourth in average yards per rush attempt; and,
- Second in sacks.

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In addition, after giving up 31 points in consecutive weeks to Detroit and Green Bay, the Browns have only allowed an average of 20.5 points in each of the past two games. They've also tallied 11 sacks in the past two games after only taking down the quarterback twice in the previous two games.

We'll get a good idea if the Browns defense is really legitimate when the team returns from its bye to take on the Bengals in Cincinnati. In two career home games against the Browns, Cincinnati quarterback Andy Dalton has completed 72.3 percent of his passes for 588 yards and four touchdowns.

If the Browns can bring the type of defensive pressure on Dalton that they did against Kansas City's Alex Smith and Baltimore's Joe Flacco, they stand a chance of beating the Bengals in Cincinnati for the first time since 2008.

Pull out a win against the Bengals and suddenly things could get very interesting for the Browns.

While it may seem silly to think of a team with a 4-5 record as a contender for a playoff berth, but as of right now the Browns are in the fight for the second wild card spot in the AFC North with a schedule that is not entirely unfavorable.

Among their remaining games after facing Cincinnati, the Browns still have two games with the reeling Steelers – who we have to point out gave up 55 points on Sunday – a game with Jacksonville, currently battling Tampa Bay for the No. 1 overall pick, and a Chicago team that started out 3-0 but has been up and down since.

The key game on the schedule looks to be the Week 16 contest with the New York Jets, who currently hold the final playoff spot. But since the Jets can only win on odd-numbered weeks, things could be looking good for the Browns.

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We are certainly getting ahead of ourselves here, but it is nice for change to be talking about the playoffs – no matter how remote they really are – in November rather than next spring's NFL Draft.

Maybe Being Better Than Weeden is Enough

Two games into his tenure as the Browns starting quarterback and Jason Campbell has looked incredibly calm – and he actually posted a real win against Baltimore.

The biggest thing that Campbell has going for him is he hasn't turned the ball over in his starts against the Chiefs and the Ravens. That alone goes a long way for a team that still struggles far too much to move the ball on offense.

Against the Ravens, Campbell led the Browns to a 14-3 lead and then almost led the team off the cliff. After hitting Davone Bess for his second touchdown of the game, the Browns had seven series that resulted in a combined 75 yards of offense and just an average of 3.4 yards per play.

But it didn't matter because the defense stepped up and Campbell was able to put the ball in the end zone after the Browns recovered a muffed punt on Baltimore's 11-yard line. That may not sound like much of an accomplishment, but we've seen the Browns fail to capitalize in situations like that time and again over the years, so seeing seven points go up in that situation was nice.

Campbell also put together the biggest drive of the game in the fourth quarter, moving the Browns 67 yards and earing up almost seven minutes off the clock and not giving the Ravens a chance at pulling out the win.

That drive could have easily stalled as the Browns quickly faced a third down after an incomplete pass and a Willis McGahee run. But Campbell didn't try to force the issue and, seeing no one open, scrambled 12 yards for the first down and things progressed nicely from there.

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“You don’t always have to make every play. Just let the guys around you make plays and stay within the game,” [Campbell told *The Beacon Journal* in talking about his recent play](#) . “You go the extra mile, but just believe in the guys around you more. I think that’s something that comes from experience and growth in the game.”

Campbell is most likely not the answer at quarterback for the Browns after the rest of the season plays out, but for the next seven games he may be just good enough.

Nothing Else is Working, So Why Not?

The Browns running game has been such an embarrassment this season that Browns coach Rob Chudzinski has reached the point where he is considering turning to fullback Chris Ogbonnaya as the team’s primary back.

“That’s something we’re taking a good look at this week, the running game in general,” [Chudzinski said](#).

“Getting Oby some carries is something we want to do.”

It’s not like things could get any worse.

Willis McGahee is the team’s “leading rusher” with all of 262 yards, a 2.6 yards per carry average, and the team’s lone rushing touchdown.

McGahee isn’t a threat in the passing game (he has just three receptions), doesn’t get better as the game goes along (his yards per carry by quarter is 2.3, 2.6, 2.8 and 2.7) and at this stage of his career doesn’t really do anything well.

So if the Browns want to turn the running game over to a back who has carried the ball all of 19

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times this season, well, who are we to question the move?

What's the worst that can happen?

(Photo by The Associated Press)