

Browns vs. Steelers - Week 12

Written by {ga=tommoore}

Wednesday, November 20 2013 4:00 PM - Last Updated Monday, November 25 2013 10:13 AM



The Cleveland Browns return home on Sunday to take on the Pittsburgh Steelers.

It will be the first of two meetings over the season's final six games between the [longtime rivals](#) , and the outcomes will have a major impact on the race for the final playoff spot in the AFC.

Even though the Browns lost in disappointing fashion last week in Cincinnati, because of some fortuitous losses by other teams, both the Browns and the Steelers still find themselves in the playoff hunt despite sporting 4-6 records.

The winner of this weekend's game gets to continue on in the playoff race for at least another week, while the loser faces an increasingly difficult task on what is already an arduous journey.

The Opposition

Pittsburgh's record: 4-6

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Offensive rank: 15th overall/7th passing/30th rushing

Defensive rank: 14th overall/8th passing/26th rushing

All-time record: Pittsburgh leads, 65-57, and has won 23 of the past 27 meetings

Last meeting: Pittsburgh won, 24-10, to close out the 2012 season

[Injury report](#)

The line: Browns -2.5

What to Watch For

It's easy to excuse the Browns for losing last week against the Bengals. After all, it's not easy taking on a division foe in bad weather. It happens.

At least there's no fear of that repeating this weekend.

Oh, wait, Pittsburgh is a division foe. What's that? The weather report for Sunday's game calls for cold, wind and snow?

Let's try this again.

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With no running game and a suspect quarterback in Jason Campbell, the Browns are going to have to rely on their defense this weekend to beat the Steelers, especially on a day when the weather is expected to be less than ideal.

The plan actually worked well last week as the Browns held Cincinnati quarterback Andy Dalton to just 93 passing yards and wide receiver A.J. Green to just two receptions for seven yards.

It wasn't until the offense and the special teams took over that things went to hell.

The Browns could pull off a similar strategy this week as the Steelers somehow are worse than the Browns when it comes to running the ball. Pittsburgh is currently averaging just 3.4 yards per carry and only rushed for 40 yards last week against Detroit.

The big difference, of course, is that Ben Roethlisberger is not Andy Dalton.

Roethlisberger is 15-1 against the Browns in his career and has not thrown an interception on the road against the Browns since 2006. After a slow start that saw the team sitting at 0-4, Roethlisberger has led the Steelers to wins in four of their past six games.

The Steelers are getting it done through the air on offense, with Antonio Brown (74 receptions for 952 yards and five touchdowns) and Jerricho Cotchery (34-503-7) leading the way. The pair are [two of the 11 highest-graded wide receivers by Pro Football Focus](#) .

Brown should be in for a long day, however, as Joe Haden will be lining up opposite him. It seems like each week Haden faces a new challenge and has repeatedly stepped up. His two interceptions last week made for good highlights, but his superior play this season is magnified when you read [Bill Simmons' column on Calvin Johnson at Grantland](#) .

Everything Simmons writes about Johnson is true, although he left out one important fact: when they matched up in Week 6, Haden held Johnson to just three catches for 25 yards.

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With Haden locking down Brown, it will be up to the rest of the secondary to keep an eye on Cotchery to make sure he doesn't do any damage.

The Browns can certainly help their cause by bringing the heat on Roethlisberger, who has been sacked 37 times this season. That's the third most in the NFL and, with Roethlisberger being hard to bring down, highlights how poor Pittsburgh's offensive line is.

"Getting to him is probably the first step. Getting him down is something totally different," [Browns defensive coordinator Ray Horton said earlier this week](#)

. "I don't think there's been a quarterback in the league that's taken unabated shots, shrugged guys off and made more big plays than Ben in the history of the league."

With bad weather in the forecast, this would be a good time for the Browns to get their running game going. The Steelers are giving up 125 yards per game on the ground, 4.2 yards per carry and have allowed 13 rushing touchdowns – the second highest total in the NFL this season.

But the Browns can't run the ball, so there's no need to even focus on that part of the offense.

Instead, this will once again be Jason Campbell's game to win or lose.

This will be Campbell's fourth consecutive start and the Browns have progressed with Campbell from moral victories to an actual victory to last week's stench fest, where Campbell transformed into Capt. Checkdown.

Campbell threw the ball 56 times against the Bengals, with 50 of those attempts being 10 yards or less as he continually held the ball too long before dumping it off to a running back for a minimal gain. The highlight of the day came in the fourth quarter, when Campbell led the Browns on a 19-play drive that covered 76 yards and took more than five minutes off the clock, but resulted in no points.

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If that Campbell shows up on Sunday, the Browns better hope the defense can pitch a shutout.

“The key to the quarterback is how guys bounce back when they’re having some adversity or don’t play as well as they would’ve liked,” Chudzinski said. “Generally, teams are better at home (with) the energy, the crowd. I think the fans have been awesome, and our team feeds off that energy. You have to be able to win in both places, whether it’s on the road or at home and we need to do a better job on the road.”

The Prediction

The loss to the Bengals took a lot out of a fan base that was starting to believe in this Browns team. A win against Pittsburgh, however, and things suddenly look a little brighter.

The Browns are 3-1 at home since losing the season opener against Miami, and with consecutive home games against Pittsburgh and Jacksonville, if the Browns can keep playing well at home they can get back to .500 and stay in the playoff chase.

We keep waiting for the Browns to beat Pittsburgh in anything other than a fluke game (think last year’s game vs. Charlie Batch and the 2009 game when the Steelers had quit on the season). Sunday presents the best chance the Browns have had to do that in a long time.

“Our players can’t wait to play this game,” [Chudzinski said](#) . “It’ll be great to be back home in front of our fans. I’m pleased with our guys’ response this week. Practices and preparations have been very focused, and it was an outstanding week of preparation for us.”

The Browns let everyone down last week. This week they make amends.

Take the Browns, lay the points and enjoy the ride.

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