

Preview: Browns at Steelers

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Friday, November 09 2007 7:00 PM -

Who woulda thunk it? Browns/Steelers, week 10 ... playing for the division lead. Yet here we are, winners of three straight and with one of football's most dynamic offenses. The Browns face a tough task tomorrow, and figure to have to play a near perfect ballgame to go into the big ketchup bottle and knock off the Steelers. Jesse previews tomorrow's big game for us.



Time: Sunday, November 11, 1.00 PM

Location: Heinz Field, Pittsburgh, Pee-Ay

Network, Announcers: CBS- Jim Nantz and Phil Simms, who speaks halting English, like he came over from Romania ten years ago.

Line: Pittsburgh by a healthy, robust nine-and-a-half

Team W/L Records: Cleveland is 5-3, its best record after eight games since 1994, when Belichick's boys were 6-2. Pittsburgh is 6-2 and can put a hammerlock on the AFC North with a win.

Coaches: Romeo Crennel is 15-25 in his third season with the Browns. Mike Tomlin is 6-2 in his first season with the Steelers. Thus far in 2007, RAC is 1-2 against first-year coaches, with losses to Tomlin and Lane Kiffin, and a place in the conga-line notching W's at Cam Cameron's expense.

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Last Week for the Browns: Came back from 21-6 down to beat the Seahawks in overtime, 33-30, in a game people will remember, for the right reasons, for a long time.

Last Week for the Steelers: Blasted the Billick-Ray Ray Ravens into the dustbin of history, 38-7. I can't say I didn't enjoy this one. Pittsburgh being good doesn't bother me- I just want the Browns to be superior. I'd actively like to see the Ravens go 2-14 for roughly the next twenty-five years, however. They might be playing in Belo Horizonte by then.

All-Time Series: Pittsburgh, for the first time, leads 56-55

Last Meeting: Week One, 2007. You and I remember this game, but Charlie Frye doesn't. He thinks it's still the week before Opening Sunday, and he's running around demanding to know what he's doing way the *&^% up near Alaska when he needs to be in Berea to prep for the Steelers. Attempts by Coach Holmgren and the rest of the Seahawks to explain to Charlie that Opening Sunday has come and gone, and that on it he in fact gave the worst quarterback performance since the invention of the T-Formation, have elicited only resentment from the Willard Wonder, who is convinced all of this is somehow Brady Quinn's doing. Fortunately, he's seeing a brilliant yet quirky shrink with some issues of her own, and she might just be able to unravel the memories of Charlie's painful, traumatic past.

Out or Questionable for Pittsburgh: S Ryan Clark (spleen) and TE Jerame Tuman (back) are out

Out or Questionable for Cleveland: G Seth McKinney (shoulder) is out; LB D'Qwell Jackson is doubtful (ankle), LB Antwan Peek (knee) and G Eric Steinbach (back) are questionable

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What to watch for the Steelers: As formidable a defensive team as the Steelers are, it's my opinion that a quarterback with a quick release, decent protection, and willing targets, and who is consistently able to beat the rush, can pass all day and all night on them. Pittsburgh is first in the NFL against the pass, but the impressive figures have come almost exclusively against teams with bad line play, bad quarterback play, or a combination of both. The pass-offense rankings of Pittsburgh's opponents minus the Charlie Frye Browns in Week One:

Buffalo- 29th

San Francisco- 32nd

Arizona- 16th

Seattle- 11th

Denver- 13th

Cincinnati- 5th

Baltimore- 24th

Kudos to the Steelers for shutting out potent Seattle and holding Carson Palmer to his second-lowest yardage output of the season, but they haven't encountered the combination of pass efficiency and pass protection like Cleveland's. We've all seen what a guy with a quick release and willing targets can do to a Dick LeBeau defense, given time in the pocket. I believe on Sunday the throwing lanes will be open for Derek Anderson, that the protection will be solid, and that he and his crew of powerful receivers will have the opportunity to excel.

What to watch for the Browns: Watch Derek Anderson and his crew of powerful receivers excel. Actually, I don't believe anybody will stop anybody. It's going to look like a BYU-San Diego State game from the late '80s.

Good Past Win over the Steelers: It's a package deal- the seven straight over the Steelers from 1986 to 1989; truly, a what's what of glory at the expense of the black-and-yellow. There's the first-ever win at Three Rivers and the overtime thriller at the Muni won on Webster Slaughter's catch, both in 1986. There's the division-clinching season finale, also at Three Rivers, in 1987. And last but far from least, there's 51-0, in

1989. The Steelers of my youth were Mark Malone, Walter Abercrombie, Louis Lipps, Weegie Thompson, Lupe Sanchez, an over-the-hill John Stallworth, an over-the-hill Donnie Shell, an over-the-hill Mike Webster, and the most-blocked punter of all time, Harry Newsome, who wasn't good enough to have a hill to be over. I remember them all fondly.

Bad Past Loss to the Steelers: A threesome, but not the good kind- the troika of ignominious home losses to the Yinzers since the return: 43-0 on Opening Night 1999, 41-0 on Christmas Eve 2005, and 34-7 on Opening Day 2007. These scores live in infamy.

Next Week for Both Teams: Cleveland is at Baltimore; Pittsburgh heads to the Meadowlands to take on the Jets

Trivia: The highest combined point total in the history of the Browns-Steelers rivalry is 86, in Pittsburgh's 51-35 victory at the Stadium on October 7, 1979.

Correction: In a previous article, I wrongly named the 403 points the Browns scored in 1966 as the team single-season record. The record is actually 415, by the 1964 World Championship team.