

Preview, Of What?

Written by {ga=jb}

Wednesday, July 29 2009 7:00 PM -

Training camp starts in a couple days. The first pre-season game? Two weeks from Friday. And it's a mere six weeks until the 2009 Cleveland Browns kick off the regular season at home against the Brett Favre-less Minnesota Vikings. Mansfield Lucas can't help but be excited, as he is every year for the start of the season. But will this version of the Browns make him hate them by week 8? He talks about the prospects of this year's team in his latest.



Pancakes. With apologies to the late, great, Mitch Hedberg, I believe.

Ever order a big ass plate of pancakes? From Bob Evans? IHOP? Some greasy spoon? Make them at home? It doesn't matter. They look soooooo good on the picture, and then they show up on your plate all hot and fluffy, not unlike a 1980's super model? You load up the butter and watch it melt like Tawney on the car hood. You hide the butter under the top couple cakes knowing it will spread, undercover, in all its creamy goodness? Then you gently place a tiara of syrup on top in patterns, or maybe you just drown them all with a big explosive gush. And then you look forward to those first luscious bites. Mmmmmmmmm.....

Fast forward ten minutes. That which you longed for and anticipated is now cold. There wasn't enough syrup and the server is seemingly in the witness protection program. You are uncomfortably full after you ate the bacon side dish and you are out of chocolate milk. You swear they tripled in size in your stomach. You have about a quarter of a stack to go and you're just sick of the damn pancakes. You

Preview, Of What?

Written by {ga=jb}

Wednesday, July 29 2009 7:00 PM -

don't even want to look at them anymore.

That has been the Cleveland Browns to me for most of the resurrection. Every new season I start off at training camp time drooling missing those pancakes. Then they just aren't as good as I thought after the first few bites. Then I'm just sick of them near the end and throw them away, swearing I'm doing an egg white omelet next time.

Will this season yield a different outcome? One thing is for certain, the input variables are one hell of a lot different. Let's cut to the chase. If you are an avid reader of TCF, it means that you're an obsessive fan. You know all there is to know about the team, and there have been some epic preview features here the past several weeks. So I'm just going to break down the few things I think that will make or break the season for y'all to keep an eye out for closely.

Everyone is talking quarterbacks and most have assumed that Brady Quinn will get the starting nod. Let me put it this way. It may be irrational to believe that DA can't get any better with only a few starts under his belt as a young quarterback. Who is to say that his yips on the short passes will always be there or he can't be more consistent? It is hard to ignore how many former player analysts remain unsold on BQ and continue to believe that DA will emerge as DA Man based on his strong arm. But if BQ steps forward, as I suspect based on draft status and the overall vapidness DA's persona spews, know this. Like any young QB, defenses will stack the line and try to blitz the pretty out of him. It will likely snuff out the run on the way to the passer. It will be up to Quinn to beat the blitz and silence the rush, or fail on Sunday. Hard, cold, but like my dead homie Walt used to break it down at the end of it all, "that's the way it is". BQ against the blitz will be the real QB competition; not BQ against DA.

This competition won't be a fair one unless the right side of the offensive line solidifies and gels like good puddin'. First it needs to cook, and then it needs to chill. What does that mean? If there is going to be competition at guard and tackle, let it happen brutally and quickly and decisively. Then settle on an OL by

Preview, Of What?

Written by {ga=jb}

Wednesday, July 29 2009 7:00 PM -

the first exhibition game and stick with it, dammit. Any OL is more a living organism than a collection of athletes. It needs timing under live fire. Here's hoping whatever physical and allegedly emotional demons that have haunted Ryan Tucker over the years get out, commanded in the name of Christ. But I have extreme doubts he can last more than a few snaps in a row. He's as reliable as a drive through order at crappy McDonalds (like the one in Boardman on 224, for example.) I'm thinking Foster will eventually step up, and we'll have the big TE's to help him on passing situations. I'm also thinking Pork Chop Womack steps in at right guard. I await the chants of "The Other White Meat"™ emanating from the stands. But suffice to say that if the center left of the OL represents shopping at Hugo Boss, the right side is all Gabriel Brothers' close outs. If the right side ends up unserviceable, the whole offense will be fatally doomed this season. No, that's not an over statement. If it is awe-ite, Quinn tells the story. If somehow it is stellar and overachieves, this will be a fun season. Side note: this is also why I expect a come-back season for Bray-bray. Blitz beating single coverage + contract season + a coaching staff that seems to understand limits = mad production potential, even with drops. One or both of the vets and 'biske should be able to fill the second receiver and slot positions just fine. Unlike many, the wide out situation freak me out not at all. It is all about Quinn and the right side of the line.

The key to the defense is whether the Browns' faith in David Veikune was well founded, or a reach only Manute Bol could have made. Hear me out, then judge... Is there anyone who isn't pretty pleased by the defensive line? I mean, hey, had Phil not "snookered" Ozzie we could have Ngata too, but bygones, you know? As it is, the DL is deep, solid, big, productive, experienced, and boasts one premier player. For a 3 - 4 defense, that's about as good as it gets. The defensive backfield is young and has some talent at the starters. Mankok did a good job lining up veteran depth just in case. The safety position is thin as Pool has racked up concussions like Jennifer Aniston has failed relationships. Brodney is one or two more from having to hang it up. But I am OK with Pool and Abram starting. And as we know, the 3 - 4 is all about the linebackers. I don't care if they play Kam Wimbley at water boy bringin' the high quality H2O. Until he shows me

Preview, Of What?

Written by {ga=jb}

Wednesday, July 29 2009 7:00 PM -

something in the way of production beside the Gumby-bend move where he is seemingly rushing the opposing goal post, I see athlete when I should see football player. Can you imagine what Dexter Manley, to name one mad man defensive end, would say to this young man one on one? He's Courtney Browns with good knees and no buttocks. Alex Hall is intriguing. Maybe. Just maybe. Do we ever get that lucky? The new Jets' B - Boys are solid but not world beaters. I'll take them for a transition year. And this brings us to NyQuil. Once again, I don't believe the hype. I see a very active, quick, smallish linebacker with good football instincts who is steady, reliable, smart, but in no way impacts a football game in a changing manner. All tortoise and no bunny. On the Browns' entire defense, they lack a true playa, for which we might raise our Rollie's to the aye-ir. That's where the Big Kunehuner comes in. You can't put all that on a second round rookie from a mid-sized program that didn't play any defense, I know. But he's the only guy who appears, on paper, to have the right combination of speed, size, and quicks to impact a football game outside of a team and scheme context. He's our only hope as if I'm talking to you from a hologram out a R2D2. If you can move this kid around like Ryan says he will, and he's got instincts and the athletic ability that Mankok saw that made him a reach as well, then he should be in some great playmaking positions. Will he make the plays?

The other big question is Jerome Harrison and his real-dealosity. If he can step in like a Leon Washington or Brian Westbrook, a smaller sized multi-purpose back, paired with a dinker and dunker controlled QB in Quinn, the entire complexion of this offense changes. I believe that JayLew will again be a hammer and get us some tough yards. I look forward to seeing the kid from Clemson, James Davis, and if he's got some game like he did on Saturday. Noah Herron is also more than a throw in as far as I'm concerned. But to change the tenor of the O, especially if Quinn is the guy and the short pass is a staple, Harrison has a big role to play. Can he pick up a blitz now in year three, when

Preview, Of What?

Written by {ga=jb}

Wednesday, July 29 2009 7:00 PM -

teams will bring the house at BQGQB, and still swing out for a swing pass against an overcommitted defense? That'd be huge, especially if he can also run inside the tackles on first down.

Much has been made about the changes in philosophy and discipline and approach Mangini has brought. I see it now and as far as coherence and process, I believe. I see vision and more importantly, I see a plan. All that is left to establish is competence. I'm willing to give the new guys a chance, and that includes all the Rob Ryan hype. But as I've written above, there remain far more pivotal agenda items in play.

Lastly, let me just say that Josh Cribbs' threat to hold out is the funniest thing I've read in a while. I love the man's heart, I live his success story, and I think he's a game returner and gunner. Personally, I think he needs to have an attitude of gratitude he's not still living in Section 8 selling weed in Kent, Ohio to get by, and as a millionaire in this economy he should be grateful. Not that he hasn't busted his butt to get there with his mad work ethic, but he voluntarily signed an extension, and now it dawns on him that he might - gasp - still have to work after football to live comfortably instead of pulling a Len Dykstra. Having gotten all the personal opinions out the way, here is the hard, cold reality. Go to NFL.com and hit the stats for kick returners. Psssstttt..... He's not THAT good. Sure, he has punt return TD's and runs hard as a tank on nitrous. But the difference between the best and mediocre returner is paltry, just a few average yards, and that's all Josh is and will ever be; a special teamer. The Browns' receiver situation was so dire last season that if he had any receiving game at all, he'd be on his way to being Hines Ward (spit) by now, not permanently stuck behind guys who will be released this camp while the team spent TWO, that's TWO, day one draft picks on wide outs when the rest of the team still had holes. And now some fans dream that a mid twenty-something special

Preview, Of What?

Written by {ga=jb}

Wednesday, July 29 2009 7:00 PM -

teamer will transition to safety, a position never played, and impact as if he's Chuck Norris. I got the news here Josh, we love you mang, but when you show up as if you Kenny Easley, we'll talk \$crilla, awe-ite? It's not my cheddar, but it's my team as a fan, and managing cap space is clutch. Until then, you are a very good special teams' player. In other words, you are a dime a dozen. Want to sit out? Great. There are plenty of other starving hungry young players who will give all the blood, sweat, and tears you gave to make you a trivia question and a nice memory of a fan favorite from a local college. Now get your dreads on the practice turf young man, and get this weak contract drama out of here.