

## Blitz-Happy: Browns/Lions Recap Edition

Written by {ga=davekolonich}  
Saturday, August 22 2009 7:00 PM -

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Much, much better on all fronts for the Browns in week two of the pre-season. Led by an aggressive defense that swarmed #1 overall pick Matthew Stafford, the Browns bested the Lions 27-10, giving some hope to the legions of Browns fans that were highly disappointed by last week's loss in Lambeau. Josh Cribbs was, well, Josh Cribbs. And Derek Anderson displayed some of the form that helped him catch the league by storm in the first half of the 2007 season. Dave Kolonich recaps the Browns Saturday night preseason win over the Lions. Since this is the home for antiquated pop culture references, one that was rattling around my brain during the Browns offensive "explosion" last night involved the likes of Bill Murray, a touch of old fashioned sexism and of course, a roughly detailed World War II era ground blitz. So, as the Browns offense showed its first signs of life in over ten months, I could only think of a vintage Murray SNL sketch where he highlighted his vision for America's military...an "all girl army."

*"If we win, that's great."*

*"And if we don't...big deal. You beat a bunch of girls."*

And of course, then there is the infamous Walker Brigade, which featured some precocious octogenarians.

Anyway, perhaps the best medicine for a struggling Browns team was by playing the historically inept, and eternally rebuilding Lions. After watching Cleveland get shredded by a much more capable Green Bay team, the collective spirits of Browns Nation had to be lifted by the prospects of incredibly raw rookie QB Matthew Stafford receiving most of the first half snaps.

While Stafford certainly has a big time arm and some surprising speed, it was obvious that mentally, the first overall pick in the draft is not ready to become a starting quarterback in the NFL. Credit a much more aggressive approach schemed by Rob Ryan for some of Stafford's struggles, as the defense blitzed several times, from a variety of spots on the field. Throw in the fact that the Lions were missing athletic freak Calvin Johnson on the outside, and the Browns defense was able to experience a cathartic bloodlust.



So, what are we to take from this game?

### **Defense**

Certainly, the overall effort was phenomenal, at least compared to last week's debacle. The Browns were much more aggressive on defense, took advantage of some turnovers and perhaps most importantly, tackled well throughout the game. Obviously, all of these symptoms that arose in last week's loss were addressed by the new coaching staff throughout the week. Perhaps the best example of the team's overall preparation came on Eric Wright's early interception on a bootleg pass...the same type of play that hurt the team in Green Bay.

The inside linebacker blitzes were effective throughout the first half, as Eric Barton helped to disrupt some plays, and the inclusion of some corner blitzes helped to shore up what is usually a weak front seven pass rush. As for the players who are being counted on to provide a more traditional consistent outside pass rush, the likes of Kamerion Wimbley and Alex Hall showed more improvement in the area of run defense. Hall especially was active during plays where a Lion back tried to cut to the outside.

### Offense

As I posed in yesterday's preview, there was a great possibility that the quarterback derby would become more muddled after the Lion game. Call me the [Nostradamus of Indecisiveness](#)

as Derek Anderson flashed the form that made him a Pro Bowler in 2007. Anderson showed a great deal of confidence on his throws, and the overall pace of the offense under his helm was impressive. But in typical Anderson fashion, a late first half overthrow led to a turnover.

And in staying true to Eric Mangini's promise to hold a &quot;fair&quot; quarterback competition, it appears that Brady Quinn played the role that DA previously held in Green Bay a week ago. While Quinn did not struggle mightily, the offense seemed to stall under his watch. However, in Quinn's defense, John St. Clair's penalties and weaker play calling seemed to hurt Brady's cause. A great example can be found in Quinn's first snap, as Mangini (or hopefully Brian Daboll) channeled his inner Belichick by calling a play action pass play on a 3rd and 1.

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So, in speaking to "truth in sports", the debate will surely continue for another week. In case you're scoring at home, it looks like after two preseason games, DA and Quinn are now tied at one.

Much like the defensive calls, the Browns offense finally featured some more downfield passing. The presence of a decent early running game allowed the team to mix up their play calling. Another great addition to the offense was the constant use of pre-snap shifting. Robert Royal in particular was often shuffled around, playing an almost H-Back type of role, which led to a terrific screen pass in the first half.

### Special Teams

Pay the Man! What more needs to be said? Also, the kick coverage teams played well.

### Odds and Ends

Call it Mid-Summer Passing Drill Fancy, but I guess I was a little off in my initial camp assessment of Brett Ratliff. While Ratliff has some good footwork and a decent arm, he just looks lost in the second halves of these first two games. But of course, when Ratliff enters the game, he is playing behind a rather poor backup line. However, the indecision the second year quarterback has shown is eerily, and indeed terrifyingly reminiscent of Charlie Frye.

I have to pause here for a second as visions of Maurice Carthon bang through my psyche...

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It is becoming clear that the mini-battle between rookie wideouts Mohammed Massaquoi and Brian Robiskie is not being won by the coach's son. Massaquoi received some early playing time and was impressive. While most of the offseason talk revolved around the &quot;polish&quot; Robiskie brought to the team, Massaquoi is emerging as the better of the two talents...at least in late August of their rookie seasons.

Although it is frustrating to not have Shaun Rogers in the starting lineup, it makes sense that Mangini is preserving him for the regular season. Watching the defense get gouged by Green Bay shows just how valuable Rogers is to this team. In Rogers' absence, Ahtyba Rubin is at least getting some more snaps. While Rubin is a decent player, any extended absence by Rogers will be a terrifying prospect.

Expect John St. Clair to be circling the Browns facility several times on Monday. An illegal motion penalty and a holding call hurt the offense while Brady Quinn was in during the second quarter. While St. Clair held up well in pass protection, he should probably expect to feel the wrath of Mangini very soon. As for the overall makeup of the line, you have to be a little concerned about the depth at the position. The falloff from the first team to second team is pretty dramatic.

Watching Ryan Tucker playing late in the fourth quarter can only mean that Mangini truly wants to see what the veteran lineman has left. Or, perhaps Tucker's recent practice absences have already reduced his role on the team, which is now comparable with players who don't have a chance to make the final roster. In either scenario, it's kind of sad to see an absolute NFL warrior most likely facing the end of his Browns career.

Look for the Legend of James Davis to grow. Davis' explosive third quarter run was impressive. There are a lot of things to like about Davis, but perhaps the most impressive is the rookie back's build and easy running style. Davis runs with a low center and shows some pretty good burst into the line. Although Davis' insertion into the starting lineup would rattle the chains of Ben Gay's ghost, it would be intriguing to see what he could do behind better blocking.

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### The Pick - Part 3

So, the optimist in me is relieved. Despite the quality of opponent that the Browns were facing, the overall level of play was inspiring. The Browns were intense, tackled well and generally showed a focus that was missing last week. The play calling was much more aggressive, which was probably the most exciting

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development in recent months. As for the overall coaching, I have a much better feeling after this game than last week. Besides the more aggressive schemes that were shown, it was obvious that the coaching staff identified and corrected some of the mistakes that plagued the team in Green Bay.

But then again, &quot;big deal....you beat a bunch of girls.&quot;