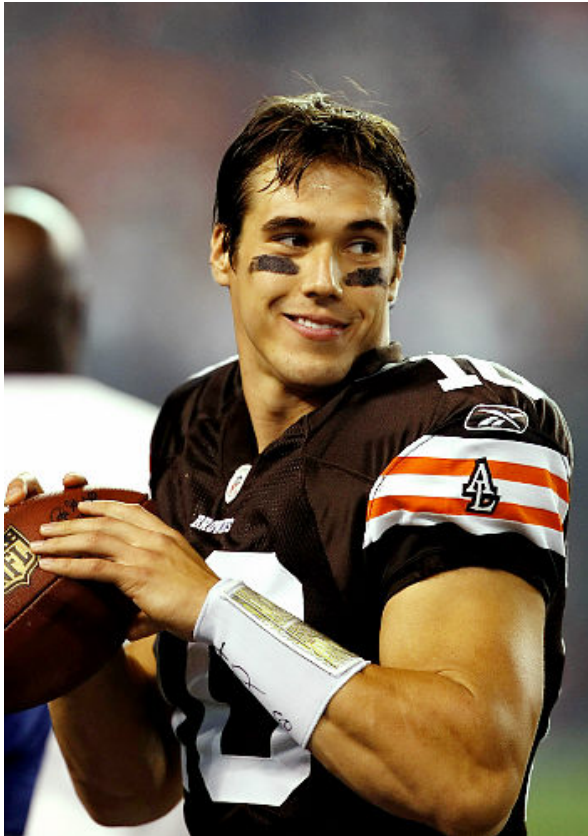


Ten Points: Browns/Broncos

Written by {ga=mrburns}

Thursday, September 24 2009 7:00 PM -

This game felt eerily reminiscent of the opener. We saw this movie last week; the defense hangs tough for two or three quarters, but eventually atrophies due to a total lack of support from the offense. The difference this time around was that the Broncos were a team that many thought the Browns would beat, or at least give a competitive game. As he does each week, Nick Allburn checks in with his Ten Points from last week's Browns/Broncos game.



1. Same old song and dance.

This game felt eerily reminiscent of the opener. We saw this movie last week; the defense hangs tough for two or three quarters, but eventually atrophies due to a total lack of support from the offense.

The difference this time around was that the Broncos were a team that many - myself included - thought the Browns would beat, or at least give a competitive game. Kyle Orton and friends had other ideas. In fact, the Browns were lucky that they only lost by 21, as Denver kicker Matt Prater missed a pair of field goals.

This has not been a fun team to watch. I've come away from both of these games

feeling like Rocky Balboa after the first Clubber Lang fight. A friend of mine asked me if I thought the Browns were the worst team in the league right now, and I had to think hard. We could beat Detroit, right? Maybe St. Louis or Kansas City? The fact that we can't answer that question with any certainty is pretty disheartening.

2. Patience, grasshoppers.

For the second week in a row, fan morale is pretty low, and that shouldn't come as a shock. The nature of these second half blowouts tends to leave a bitter aftertaste. But to see so many fans writing off Brady Quinn and/or Eric Mangini is a surprise, and it's also borderline laughable.

I'll rarely criticize fellow Browns fans because as we all know, there aren't any bandwagoners among us at present. (I think the bandwagon was sold for scrap around the third week of the '08 season.) But there are three things that we all need to accept.

First, Brady Quinn needs to play all 16 games. Finding a competent quarterback is probably the toughest thing to do in the NFL, and if you want to argue that Derek Anderson is a better player than Brady Quinn right now, I can respect the argument even if I disagree. But Quinn was arguably the best quarterback in college football less than three years ago, and was viewed by most as the best quarterback prospect in the 2007 draft. This guy needs to get his shot, especially in what's going to be, sadly, a largely meaningless season. We need to see if Quinn's worth keeping, or if it's time to go back to drawing board at the quarterback position.

Second, this is a lousy football team that isn't going to win very many games. Before the season, I thought this team was more talented than the 4-12 they posted last season, and you could have talked me into them winning as few as five games and as many as nine.

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At least for the time being, it looks like I overestimated their abilities. This could be a tough season, but we have to ride it out and look for some purpose. We need to evaluate Brady Quinn, see Eric Mangini instill some discipline into this organization, and hopefully let some of the younger players experience their growing pains. This won't be fun on a week-to-week basis, but it's the hand we've been dealt.

Third, we all need to accept that we won't be able to pass full judgment on Eric Mangini for at least one, and probably two or three more seasons. Mangini needs time to bring in the players that fit his system, and also to tinker with his coaching staff. It can't be ignored that Mangini is currently hamstrung not only by a roster that isn't particularly talented, but by some ridiculous contracts handed out by Phil Savage that will continue to muck up the Browns' salary cap situation for the next couple of years.

3. About those pants...

I'm by no means a purveyor of cool, but those brown pants look atrocious. Those need to head for the backs of the players' lockers and stay there. It's absurd that we have to suffer through watching games with those brown pants, while the snazzy orange pants stay retired. Is there anyone who actually doesn't like the orange pants? Just say 'no' and we'll move on.

4. Grading Brady.

It was another rough outing for our apparently not-so-fearless leader. Eighteen completions on 31 attempts for 161 yards, a pick, and a lousy rating of 58.7. *Ouch.*

Quinn also lost a fumble (that actually wasn't his fault, and we'll get into that later), and was sacked four times by Elvis Dumervil, as the Broncos really teed off with their pass rush in the second half.

The main thing that has bothered me about Quinn so far has been his tentativeness to throw downfield. Is it a hangover from the quarterback competition that has left him afraid he'll be hooked if he makes a mistake? That seems unlikely, as Quinn threw downfield more during the pre-season.

What we need to know is if guys aren't getting open downfield, or if Quinn is simply gunshy. It's tough to tell from watching the game on television, but as with most questions of this nature, it's probably some combination of the two. At any rate, Quinn needs to take some shots or he may lose his job by being too cautious.

The pass protection went to hell in the second half, but Quinn had time in the first half, as the Browns didn't release the tight end very much to bolster the blocking. Unfortunately, Quinn was just hanging onto the ball too long.

The lack of depth at receiver was evident once again, as the second leading receiver was running back Jerome Harrison. Josh Cribbs was third with 5 catches for just 22 yards.

On the bright side (there's a bright side?), Quinn is finally hooking up with Braylon Edwards, who had 6 catches for 92 yards. Quinn's mobility has also kept him from several sacks that Derek Anderson simply wouldn't have escaped.

Brady certainly has his work cut out for him with a very tough Ravens defense this week, so don't expect a huge rebound. If Quinn can just look decisive, stretch the field a little more, and minimize his mistakes, I'll live with it against the vaunted Baltimore D.

5. Mack attack!

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Brady Quinn has had a tough start to his season, and Alex Mack hasn't helped him out much. Mack was overwhelmed several times in the Vikings game, and although his pass protection seemed better this week, he still hasn't figured out the Rubik's Cube that is the shotgun snap.

I mentioned Brady Quinn's fumble earlier, and it was completely Mack's fault. Mack had another lousy shotgun snap that didn't reach Quinn, so apparently that's still a problem for the rookie. I really don't see how. It's one thing if you're asking the guy to fill in at long snapper, but a college center should be able to consistently execute a shotgun snap.

The inside running hasn't been great either, and at least some of the blame has to fall on Mack's shoulders. Hopefully the first round pick is just experiencing a learning curve, and wasn't simply an overrated prospect.

6. Take Cribbs to the grave.

The Josh Cribbs as a receiver experiment needs to end. Josh Cribbs is a good football player, but he's simply not an NFL wide receiver.

Against Denver, Cribbs ran a couple of third down patterns short of the stick, one of which could have easily been a first down had Cribbs run his pattern one yard longer. Cribbs' hands are good, but they aren't great, and he doesn't have the ability to stretch the field that you need out of a starting receiver.

Don't believe me? During the young season, Cribbs has 7 catches for 32 yards. Less than five yards per catch doesn't cut it at any receiver spot, let alone as a starter.

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To make matters worse, he's taking playing time away from rookies Mohammed Massaquoi and Brian Robiskie. Robiskie didn't even dress last week!

Regardless of whether or not they're ready, Robiskie or Massaquoi (probably Massaquoi) needs to start opposite Braylon Edwards. Neither rookie is polished yet, but at least they know how to play receiver better than Cribbs, and they should be more capable of running deep patterns to at least pose a threat to the defense. Maybe they can force the defense to balance its coverage instead of sagging over towards Braylon Edwards.

Josh Cribbs is a terrific special teams player. Cribbs is one of the games elite return men, he's terrific in punt and kickoff coverage, and he's probably good for a few trick plays each game, but a starting receiver he is not.

If the Browns are set on keeping Cribbs in the offensive game plan, I'd suggest some wide receiver or even running back screens, and having him throw the ball from the quarterback position. If Cribbs is on offense, the goal should be to get him the ball in space to let him create extra yardage. Trying to turn Cribbs into a starting wideout is the football equivalent of sticking a square peg in a round hole.

7. Excommunicate Saint Clair.

John St. Clair has been an unmitigated disaster for the Browns at right tackle. St. Clair was signed to replace Kevin Shaffer, but he's been doing a great impression of both Shaffer and a turnstile during the first two weeks. Elvis Dumervil played Chris Brown to St. Clair's Rihanna in the second half of last Sunday's game.

St. Clair will likely improve as the season wears on, because let's face it, he can't get much worse. But for being one of Mangini's biggest signings in the off-season, he's not reflecting well on his boss. I wondered during the draft, and I still wonder if taking a tackle (I'm talking about you, Eben Britton and Phil

Loadholt) with one of the second round picks might have been the right move.

8. It's easy: stay away from Eazy-E.

Eric Wright has matured into a very solid starting cornerback. Brandon McDonald? Not so much. If I were running an opposing offense, I'd go after McDonald early and often.

It's easy to see why Football Outsiders ranked the Browns as the worst team at covering number two receivers, because watching B-Mac chase after these guys is like watching Ronald McDonald try to run down the Hamburglar. McDonald is best suited to a nickel role, and the Browns need to add a new starter to complement Eric Wright in the off-season.

9. Keep Lewis outside.

It might be somewhat counterintuitive, but Jamal Lewis just might be the Browns' least effective inside runner. Lewis has looked tentative running between the tackles, and he's getting ankle-tackled much more easily than I ever remember. Odd as it sounds, Jerome Harrison or James Davis (when healthy) are better options inside because they hit the seam harder.

Lewis can still be an important part of the team, but I'd like to see him get the ball more on pitch and stretch plays to the outside when he can build up a head of steam. If that actually happens, I'll be completely shocked.

10. Up next: at Baltimore Ravens, 1:05

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The Browns opened as 13-point dogs (and rising) and are a layup pick for suicide pools everywhere. I'm nothing if not an optimist, but I think we see things get ugly this week. Well, they're ugly already, so I guess we'll just see more of the same.

The Ravens match up well with the Browns. They boast a more balanced offense now that Joe Flacco is in his second year, and they still have a solid running attack. Their defense is as blitz-happy as ever, and should be able to take away many of the short and intermediate patterns that Brady Quinn likes.

And the Browns running on the Ravens? That's about as likely as Will Ferrell running a marathon. Wait, that actually happened? At any rate, the point is that the Browns won't be able to run consistently.

The Browns have been blown out the first two weeks by a couple of teams that I don't think are of Baltimore's caliber, and one of those games was at home. Things won't be pretty this week in Maryland.

Prediction: Ravens 33, Browns 13