

Browns/Steelers Recap: List Of Demands Edition

Written by {ga=davekolonich}
Sunday, October 18 2009 7:00 PM -

While the Browns certainly fought hard for most of the afternoon, and had some chances - the end result of yesterday's game again came down to the disparity of talent between these two storied rivals. Or, in other words - the Steelers once again showed why they are a better football team than the Browns. Cry if you want, but the facts are the facts. And since traditional overreactions are so 2006, let's at least try to focus on some more tangible areas found yesterday afternoon. And since the Steelers will basically serve as the measuring stick for Browns' progress in the years to come, let's take a look at some of the areas that need the most attention. It wouldn't truly be a Browns-Steelers game unless lamentations of the highest degree are employed. While there remains some optimism regarding Eric Mangini's relaunch of the Browns franchise - I think - the familiar causes of concern that have shaped our franchise over the past decade again resurfaced during today's fifth defeat of the season.

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Bring Me The Head of Brandon McDonald...and Zone Coverage

I had to keep reminding myself throughout this game that Romeo Crennel is no longer the Browns head coach. I'm pretty sure I didn't see him remaining stationary on the sidelines, yet the Browns defense employed the kind of self-destructive zone scheme that permeated the Crennel era's 0-8 mark against Pittsburgh.

While certainly the Browns weren't able to generate enough of a pass rush to challenge the Steeler offense - which led to the overly generous zone drops that helped Ben Roethlisberger reach over 400 yards of passing offense - it is still beyond frustrating to watch just how helpless the Browns defense can be.

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Outside of some scattered first half moments, the Browns did not put much heat on Roethlisberger, which allowed him the time to comfortably make his reads - two or three times through. Witness the Steelers' first half touchdown catch by Heath Miller, as Roethlisberger had what seemed like three minutes to scan the field before finding his tight end in the endzone. And when the Browns are reduced to assigning lead footed David Bowens to cover a pass-catching tight end; not having a pass rush tends to hurt.

Within the agony of deep secondary drops, the Browns managed to avoid making open field tackles for most of the afternoon. Leading the way in this carnival of errors was Brandon McDonald, who I could have sworn was benched a few weeks ago. Blame it on a hurt shoulder, or blame it on his Dominican

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shortstop-sized frame, but McDonald is the Browns biggest liability in downfield tackling - be it through the air, or on the ground.

[As I've stated before](#), the Browns defense will not reach a consistent level until their pass rushing improves, but a similar argument can be made regarding the secondary. Until the Browns can add a top-flight cornerback and some disruptive linebackers, we will continue to get carved up by the likes of pass happy teams, such as the Steelers.

Bring in a Tight End

I fully realize that adding a quality tight end is probably not at the top of the Browns makeover shopping list, and that the team's current depth at the position has been hit hard by injuries, but consider the following:

Would you rather have a remotely adequate tight end blocking James Harrison or LaMarr Woodley....or Jerome Harrison?

The funny thing about the Steelers - in case you haven't been watching football for the past 15 years, is that they like to blitz. Also, the Steelers are perhaps the league's most creative team in terms of blitzing, sending any variety of defenders out of multiple looks. And while the Browns offensive line has shown some improvement this year, they desperately need to add a quality tight end or two in the coming seasons.

And no, I'm not referring to Kellen Winslow.

What the Browns need at tight end are some blockers, who are also athletic enough to catch the occasional pass. You know, someone like Robert Royal - only not Robert Royal, if you know what I mean. Perhaps a younger version of Steve Heiden would fit the bill - or the team could finally test the limits of science and clone their own version of Heath Miller.

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Again, the Browns are riddled with injuries at tight end at the moment, and for as

much as I enjoy the play of Hank Fraley - I'm a bit concerned when our ex-center declares himself eligible for the 48th straight play.

For a franchise that continually points to the team's storied tradition of football greatness, somewhere in Baltimore, the ghost of Ozzie Newsome must be rattling his chains in fury.

Bring on the Future

So what can we learn from Eric Mangini's first tangle with the Steelers?

First, in the most optimistic manner I can summon, it looks like there is a possibility that this version of the Browns may stand the best chance of eventually matching up with the Steelers in terms of physicality and desire. While a sloppy 27-14 loss is nothing to savor, there were some glimmers of hope to be found - as the Browns played a physically sound game of football - sans tackling - while getting finessed to death by the pass-happy, post-modern version of the Steelers.

At least in terms of the defense matching up with the Steeler offense, the Browns showed that they can more than compete against a subpar offensive line and average running game. On the other side of the ball, I'm hoping that a vision of the future was shown as Alex Mack and Joe Thomas swept left, blocking downfield on one of the Browns' few productive first half runs.

However, while the Steelers have lost their soul offensively, their defense is the sort that can completely dominate a game at times. For the Browns to eventually match up against the Steeler D, the overall offensive production, particularly in the passing game, has to improve. And before everything again falls on Derek Anderson, at least consider that the Browns have to do a better job of pass blocking and catching passes.

For a few short moments in the second half, another vision of the future was glimpsed as Mohammed Massaquoi made some plays that led to the team's only offensive touchdown. And in Massaquoi's defense, I still cannot fathom the pressure he must be facing as entering just his third NFL start, he is the main focus of the opposing defense. Although I may again be accused of ["grasping"](#),
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Massaquoi could develop into something special, if only the Browns can develop some talent around him.

And in stating the preceding, I was thinking more Brian Robiskie than Chanci Stuckey.

Bring on the Rationalizations

Of course the cynic in me, and in most of Browns Nation, can conclude the following items after watching today's game.

1. The Browns are now 1-5.
2. The Steelers are on a 12-0 run against us.
3. To legitimately challenge the Steelers, volumes of work must be done.

However, to end on a slightly more optimistic tone, at least consider the following:

1. The play of Alex Mack, Mohammed Massaquoi and to a lesser degree, appearances by Brian Robiskie and Kaluka Maivia could signal that the Browns have finally found a few capable players for the future.
2. Despite the absences of D'Qwell Jackson, Kamerion Wimbley, every tight end on the roster and the continued presence of Brandon McDonald, the Browns held on and occasionally challenged the Steelers throughout the afternoon.
3. Josh Cribbs is still on the roster.

For now.