

Utterly Predictable

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Saturday, October 24 2009 7:00 PM -

It would be nice if the Cleveland Browns weren't so predictable. But in the most predictable fashion possible they were manhandled by the Green Bay Packers 31-3. The loss could be attributed to any number of maladies that struck the team this week but it was mostly attributable to a strong Packers team featuring a brilliant Aaron Rodgers. The Browns are now 1-6 and showing no progress since they lost in the first week to the Packers' division rival, Minnesota. Gary talks about it in his latest game piece.



It would be nice to believe that the drama-queen of a football team that calls itself the Cleveland Browns would have the attendant unpredictability accorded that status. It doesn't. In its utterly predictable fashion, they were drilled Sunday by the Green Bay Packers, 31-3.

In one sense, this loss could be attributed to any number of issues that plagued the team *this* week; swine flu, car wrecks, no tight ends, bad clams perhaps. In another sense, it's always something.

The outcome was basically known before kickoff but confirmed on the Browns' first drive. It featured everything that plagues them as a franchise.

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Green Bay, fearing the only player in a Browns uniform they needed to fear, kicked away from Josh Cribbs and had the ball hit the pylon. It was ruled out of bounds and the Browns started their drive at their own 40-yard line.

They ended it at their own 42 after having taken a step backward first due to an offensive pass interference call on Mohammad Massaquoi on a ball that he couldn't have caught no matter how hard he pushed off Green Bay defensive back Al Harris.

Despite setting that tone, there was a moment, however brief, where the team actually showed a whiff of life and actually got on the scoreboard first. After squandering good field position on their first drive, the Browns' offense found some rhythm on its second drive or for most of the drive anyway.

Taking over on downs after the defense stopped Aaron Rodgers and the Packers on 4th

and 1 from the Cleveland 34-yard line, the Browns methodically marched down the field as if they'd done it a hundred times this season.

But what they've really done a hundred times this season is squander opportunities and this one was no different.

The rhythm established was summarily broken and for the rest of the game after Jamal Lewis got the ball down to the 2-yard line on second down. Anderson was forced to call time out for some such reason and on consecutive plays thereafter fumbled and nearly threw an interception. Billy Cundiff, subbing once again for Phil Dawson, converted the chip shot field goal, after hitting the left upright, and the Browns had a 3-0 lead just seconds into the second quarter.

The doink sound the ball made after hitting the upright aptly captured

the collective thoughts of thousands.

The Browns' minor uprising apparently was enough to shake the sleep out of the eyes of the Packers. On the ensuing drive, Rodgers put together a 6-play, 71-yard touchdown drive that featured a 45-yard touchdown pass to tight end Spencer Havner, helping the Packers grab a 7-3 lead.

Steelers' game.

It was shades of the

Havner

was an outlet for Rodgers on 3

rd

and 1 who then rumbled nearly untouched the entire way to the end zone.

Predictably, the Browns responded with a 3-and-out. But the Packers had 12 men on the field and with that penalty the Browns got another chance.

Unbowed, they went 3-and-out again.

The Packers then made it 14-3 when Rodgers hit Donald Driver on what was supposed to be a quick strike but turned even more quickly into a 71-yard touchdown. Defensive back Brodney Pool had a chance at Driver but couldn't make the tackle.

It probably

wouldn't have mattered anyway.

Then it got ugly. On the Browns' next drive, Anderson spent most of it alternately scrambling for his life and throwing wildly off the mark. The Browns got a gift first down, however, on an illegal contact penalty and Anderson used the extra downs to get his weekly interception out of the way early, this one to Charles Woodson, who took it to the Cleveland 13-yard line.

The Browns' defense looked to have held the Packers to a field goal but on 3rd and goal from the 2-yard line, Brandon McDonald interfered in the end zone with Driver, giving the Packers 4 more chances to score. They needed 3 but got what they needed when Ryan Grant pushed it in from the 1-yard line.

It helped push the score to 21-3 with just under two minutes in the half.

The Browns then made a predictably half-hearted effort at a two-minute drive, half-hearted because they threw short and in the middle of the field mostly. After Anderson was sacked with two seconds remaining and the ball sitting their own 48-yard line, the Browns inexplicably called time out.

It was explained 30 seconds later when offensive

coordinator Brian Daboll gave Anderson a final opportunity to throw another interception.

Anderson's heave to the end zone was knocked away harmlessly instead.

The rest of the game had the look and intensity of a mid-summer scrimmage, with the Packers testing various aspects of their offense and the Browns willingly complying.

The Packers worked on the run in their first drive but it ended with a missed 55-yard field goal by Mason Crosby.

The Browns took over at their own 45-yard line but on 3rd

and 2, Anderson hit Cribbs on a short pass, Cribbs fumbled and it was picked up by linebacker Brandon Chillar at the Green Bay 49 yard line.

Head coach Eric Mangini challenged the call and, predictably, he was wrong.

When the Packers took over again, they worked some more on their running game. It should bode well for the rest of the season.

Grant ran four of the next 5 plays and ran well.

That drive, too, though ended just short of the end zone and Crosby hit the short field goal that gave the Packers a 24-3 lead.

The Browns, meanwhile, looked to be working on, well, it was hard to say what they were working on. There were a few perfunctory runs by Lewis into a stacked line of scrimmage, an occasional fumbled snap and a variety of passes that didn't appear to have intended targets.

And the drive would have ended predictably and quickly but the Packers did their level best to keep the drive alive by continually committing penalties, including holding and a late hit after Jerome Harrison had stepped out of bounds after a swing pass and then was inadvertently hit by safety Atari Bigby.

All that nonsense allowed the Browns to get the ball deep into Green Bay territory. Then Anderson hit recently-signed tight end Michael Gaines inside the 5-yard line and he took it to the 1. Lewis then lost 2 yards, Anderson overthrew Massaquoi in the corner of the end zone, Lewis got his two yards back and then Anderson missed badly to Massaquoi in the end zone on 4th down, leaving the ball at the Packers 1-yard line.

On the plus side, Mangini didn't attempt the field goal.

The Packers got out of that jail as if they were in Mayberry. Anderson hit Driver on first down for 18 yards. He then hit Havner for another 14 yards.

Two plays later, Rodgers scrambled 19 yards on 3rd and 6.

Grant then went off tackle right for 37 yards, getting the ball to the Cleveland 5-yard line.

Rodgers finished off the drive with a 5-yard touchdown pass to James Jones and the Packers had a 31-3 lead.

With the Browns deeply entrenched once again in garbage time, it's hard to know exactly what Mangini was thinking, except that he wasn't thinking Brady Quinn. Anderson was awful in every way a quarterback can be awful and offered absolutely no resume for why he should see another snap.

In fairness, he did have the one good drive late in the first quarter, but as long as we're being fair let's not let that help that drive come unhinged.

Meanwhile, Quinn sat idly on the bench wondering why someone who was 12-26 for 99 yards and 1 interception to that point and a quarterback rating around 40 was playing ahead of him. Maybe this really is a money thing.

But there was Anderson anyway, throwing his next pass at the feet of Lawrence Vickers and another out of the reach of Massaquoi. When it was all over, Anderson didn't complete another pass and finished the day 12-29.

Rodgers, on the other hand, was brilliant. He threw only 20 times but completed 15 and had 3 touchdowns and 246 yards.

He finished with a quarterback rating over 150.

The Packers also rolled up 202 yards on the ground. In all, they had 460 net yards while the Browns had a meager 139.

The Browns are now 1-6 and probably petitioning the league office as to why they have to wait still another week until they get a bye. So are their fans.

As for Sunday's outcome It's not so much that it was a set back because this team, despite its win in Buffalo, has shown absolutely no progress since the first game

when they were similarly blasted by the Packers' divisional rival, the Minnesota Vikings. But just as this loss and everything about it was predictable, so too will be the inevitable silver lining that Mangini will find somewhere, especially when it comes to Anderson. There was that one drive. And just as predictably, the fans will mutter, "huh?"