

## Preview: Browns at Bears

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}  
Saturday, October 31 2009 7:00 PM -

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Josh Cribbs vs. Devin Hester. Yes Browns fans, this is what its come to. Using a battle of kick returners to manufacture enthusiasm for Sunday's game. Both these teams are struggling. The Bears got humiliated by the Bengals last week and have lost two straight. And the Browns? Their struggles have been well chronicled. They meet in the Windy City on Sunday, with the Bears as massive favorites. Jesse previews the game for us.



**Time:** 1:00 pm, Sunday, November 1, 2009

**Location:** Soldier Field, Chicago, Illinois

**Network, Announcers:** CBS- Kevin Harlan and Solomon Wilcotts

**Line:** Chicago by thirteen-and-a-half.

**Team W/L Records:** Cleveland is 1-6; Chicago is 3-3

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**Coaches:** Eric Mangini is 24-31 overall, 1-6 with the Browns; Lovie Smith is 48-38 in his sixth season with the Bears.

**Last Week for the Browns:** Hit rock-bottom- for the time being, at least- in a dreadful 31-3 home loss to the Packers. Aaron Rodgers, who went into the game as the most-sacked quarterback in the NFL, was barely touched as he picked apart Cleveland's slow, poor-tackling defense. The Browns were out-gained 460-139 and failed to score a touchdown for the fourth time in seven games as they lost their eighth straight at home.

**Last Week for the Bears:** Suffered their second consecutive loss, this one in humiliating fashion at Cincinnati, 45-10. Chicago's supposedly vaunted defense gave up 448 total yards, including 189 on the ground by ex-Bear first-round bust Cedric Benson. It was the worst loss for the Bears since the opening week of the 2003 season when they were buried by San Francisco, 49-7.

**All-Time Series:** Browns lead, 9-4.

**Last Meeting-** [October 9, 2005](#) : Trent Dilfer hit Antonio Bryant with 33-and-28-yard touchdown passes just 38 seconds apart, as the Browns came from behind to upset the playoff-bound Bears, 20-10. Trailing 10-6 early in the fourth quarter, Dilfer found Bryant in the back of the end zone to put Cleveland into the lead. Less than a minute later, following a fumble recovery by Chris Crocker, Dilfer went up top to Bryant again to salt the game away.

**Out or Questionable for Chicago:** LB Pisa Tinoisamoa (knee) is out; DT Matt Toeaina (calf) is doubtful.

**Out or Questionable for Cleveland:** CB Anthony Madison (non-injury related), DE Kenyon Coleman (groin), TE Greg Estandia (knee), G Rex Hadnot, TE (Steve Heiden) and TE Robert Royal (hamstring) are questionable. Tight ends are

frequent visitors to this section. Is Milt Morin available? Harry Holt?

***What to watch for the Bears:*** I shrewdly selected Matt Forte in the sixth round of the 2008 Stow-Kent Shopping Center League title and was rewarded for my aplomb when the rookie from Tulane helped carry me to a division title. Forte in effect *was* Chicago's offense last season: he accounted for 73 percent of the total carries, led the team in receiving by a sizeable margin and scored twelve touchdowns, seven more than Greg Olson's second-place total of five. In an age of running back-by-platoon, Forte was a true workhorse, a throwback to the Chuck Foremans and Lydell Mitchells of yesteryear.

Unfortunately for fantasy owners who were a year late on the bandwagon, Forte was doomed to hit a sophomore slump. He has struggled mightily in 2009, breaching 100 yards only once (against feeble Detroit), averaging a paltry 3.5 yards per carry and scoring just one touchdown. In the last two games, both Bear losses, Forte has 47 yards on 21 carries. More of a grinder than a homerun-hitter, Forte simply hasn't opportunity to get into rhythm: he's gotten fewer than twenty carries in four games this season, as opposed to five games all of last season. As could have been foreseen, his production has been hurt by the replacement of dump-off specialist Kyle Orton with Jay Cutler, who would rather throw an interception than check it down.

It is times like these in the life of a running back- and of a fantasy owner, for that matter- when one is happy to see those feeble men in the orange helmets wobble uncertainly into town. Cleveland is a perfect storm for running backs: their run defense ranks 31<sup>st</sup> in the NFL, and their offense and has already been gashed for season-best efforts from Forte's NFC North lodge-brothers Adrian Peterson (180 yards) and Ryan Grant (148 yards.) So to all you fantasy owners who blew a top-five pick on Matt Forte, congratulations: your day has arrived.

***What to watch for the Browns:*** For lovers of great play in the return game, it's a shame these two teams didn't meet up in 2007, when

Cleveland's Joshua Cribbs and Chicago's Devin Hester were the best return men in this and most other lifetimes. Hester tied an NFL record with four punt-return scores and tied his own NFL record with six non-offensive touchdowns; Cribbs led the league in all-purpose yardage, racked up the second-highest kickoff-return yardage total in NFL history, took a total of three kicks to the proverbial "house"; all while knocking heads as the gunner for Cleveland's coverage units.

Hester has since moved to a more conventional role in Chicago's offense. He caught 51 passes last season and with 28 through six games is well on his way to breaching that total this season. Meanwhile his return opportunities have slipped. He's still his team's primary punt-return specialist, but he only has one kick return. The Browns have dabbled with Cribbs offensively, but he's still hauling the water on returns and doing it rather well; he's second in the NFL in all-purpose yardage and has two return touchdowns which, by the way, account for a neat quarter of Cleveland's total.

So it's not the epic duel it would have been two years ago. Still, you'd have to think the Joshua Cribbs comes into this game with a little extra motivation. Every new ring reached on his ladder of stardom has been accompanied by the inevitable comparisons with Devin Hester. Now his opportunity to match brilliance with Hester's mystique, if not his actual presence, has arrived. I would not be surprised if Mr. Cribbs went house-bound at some point on Sunday. Then again, I never am.

***On this stupid ["protest"](#) Five things:***

- **Dawg Pound Mike** is an attention whore of the first and worst magnitude, and that goes for every one of the costumed self-promoters among this fan base. It isn't about you, kids. You don't represent us and you don't speak for us. Actually, if DPM announced that he was against radiation poisoning, I'd be on the first flight to Chernobyl.

- **Late walk-in?** That stadium is never more than half-filled at kickoff anyway. Thousands of refugees from the Muni Lot, protesting against sobriety, don't stagger into their seats until midway through the first quarter. What is DPM's next protest idea? Register your displeasure with the Browns by wearing orange?

- **I dislike this regime** as much as anyone, but there are players on this team that don't deserve this kind of thing. Guys like Josh Cribbs and Joe Thomas do it the right way week in and week out. So do other guys on this team who work hard, play with pain and give it everything they've got. Their efforts should be cheered, should be supported; should be appreciated.

- **Driving to Cleveland**, parking, spending all that money and sitting in the cold for three hours just to be ornery and miserable is

*asinine*

. Yeah, most of the time the Browns

*make*

us ornery and miserable, but to show up with the express purpose of being in that frame of mind? Feh, as my grandmother used to say. If you want to protest, stay home. If you're spending all that time and all that paper, you might as well support the team and make some positive vibes. Life is too short.

- **What the \*\*\*\*** is there to protest? That the team sucks? What, do we think the Browns want to suck? That this is a deliberate policy? That we can somehow shame them into being the Steelers or the Colts? Other than a way for that idiot Dawg Pound Mike to self-publicize, what's the point of all this?

***Good Past Win over the Bears-*** [November 30, 1969](#) : Cleveland was 7-2-1 and could clinch its third consecutive Century Division title with a win. Chicago was 1-9 and could only hurt its draft position with a win. That a team can have Gale Sayers and Dick Butkus and still be 1-9 is a little bizarre, but the Bears certainly didn't look like bottom-feeders on this cold day at Wrigley Field. With Sayers dancing through Cleveland's defense and Butkus personally shutting down its running attack, Chicago jumped out to a 21-7 first-half lead. The Browns rallied behind Bill Nelson, who hit Paul Warfield and Chip Glass with scoring tosses to tie the score, and rookie halfback Ron Johnson hit left end for the winning touchdown in the fourth period as Cleveland escaped with its division title, 28-24.

***Bad Past Loss to the Bears-*** [November 4, 2001](#) : I'm not quite sure how a team could lead 21-7, have its opponent backed up at own 20-yard line with less than two minutes left and manage to lose the game. But I know it can happen, because it did. The Browns seemed to have a huge road win and a 5-2 record clinched, cruising along by two touchdowns late in the fourth. But the '01 Bears- on their way to becoming the worst 13-3 team in NFL history- were kissed by Lady Destiny all season, and while Cleveland contemplated as many Browns wins in the first seven games of the 2001 season as they'd won in all of 1999-2000, that fickle trollop grabbed up the home team and gave them some serious tongue action:

- A quick Chicago drive topped by a Shane Matthews-to-Michael Booker touchdown to make it 21-14 with 28 seconds left.
- An onside kick that was awarded to Chicago- after a seemingly endless delay- *and* carried all the way to the Cleveland 47-yard line, within easy range of the Hail Mary.

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- Said Hail Mary, tipped up in the air by Percy Ellsworth and caught on a dive by Chicago back James Allen to tie the game.
- A Tim Couch pass deflected straight up in the air- in the opposite direction of where it was aimed- and intercepted by Mike Brown, who could have tripped and fallen forward into the end zone. He ran instead.

That 21-7 lead had become a 27-21 loss, and it took less than five minutes. So yeah, it can happen. I'm still a little dazed about it, actually.

***Next Week for Both Teams:*** Chicago hosts Arizona; the Browns are mercifully on the bye.

***Trivia:*** Three players in NFL history have scored six touchdowns in a game. One of them is Cleveland's Dub Jones, who scored six against the Bears in the first-ever meeting between the teams on November 25, 1951.