

The Evening After: Browns/Bengals Edition

Written by {ga=davekolonich}
Sunday, November 29 2009 7:00 PM -

Yesterday afternoon it appeared the Browns returned to more familiar footing, as the sputtering offense and winded defense of old reappeared during yet another disappointing loss to the playoff-bound Bengals. And much like a club-footed Sherpa sliding down the side of a mountain, it appears that things couldn't get much worse for the Browns. That is until you read reports that suggest Shaun Rogers is now finished for the season. So, with all this optimism safely tucked away in storage, let's take a look at yesterday's scorecard...while hoping that better days truly lie ahead.



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1. Here's the performance-based incentive question of the week: can Brady Quinn and the Browns offense retain - or in some cases, regain - the offensive momentum of a week ago?

It appears the Browns have found their own version of Ryan Fitzpatrick, in the suddenly versatile Brady Quinn. And while Quinn made two nice plays running and catching the ball; unfortunately, he didn't deliver through the air, as his accuracy was almost Derek Anderson-esque for most of the afternoon.

And perhaps I'm being a bit unfair to Fitzpatrick - considering he led his team to a victory yesterday - by actually throwing the ball.

Anyway, I am greatly saddened to see that Quinn's performance against the Lions may have been just that - a performance against the Lions.

Gone was the relaxed, confident Quinn of a week ago and in his place was the Quinn of old, who looked about as comfortable in the pocket as Randy Lerner in a room full of cameras and questions. Throughout most of the afternoon, Quinn's passes were badly off-target and he played the entire game with a frenzied pace unbecoming of a quality leader.

2. Considering that the first Bengals matchup featured a career game by Jerome Harrison, will we see the reclusive back featured again this afternoon?

Did you mean, "special teamer" Jerome Harrison? Then, yes - Harrison was prominently featured. And I am sure that after playing almost four years in the league, Harrison woke up this morning feeling excited and proud regarding his new role on the team.

3. How has Alex Mack progressed since the last Bengals game, or how about this - what type of second-level blocker is he - especially when facing a stiff challenge from Cincy's solid linebacking corps?

Perhaps I should have asked this question after seeing a much larger body of work. Considering the Browns barely held the ball for most of the afternoon, evaluating Mack was kind of difficult. However, contrary to early season reports, it appears that Mack has grown into his position. On the rare occasions when the Browns ran the ball, Mack did help to create some separation inside.

And in a season like this, it's something.

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4. Will Chanci Stuckey continue to emerge, or will Mangini continue to tinker with his starting wideouts?

While I'm not ready to declare Stuckey as the second coming, he has contributed to the Browns sputtering pass offense over the past few weeks. Yesterday, he managed four catches, which in terms of overall season progress, is indeed something. However, much like many assorted players on the current roster, Stuckey's future role on the team will likely come in the form of serving as a third-down or slot receiver.

However, Stuckey has helped to take some of the defensive pressure and focus off of rookie Mohammed Massaquoi. Hopefully, this trend continues over the last month or so of the season.

Because...

5. In a nod to #4, is Brian Robiskie still on the roster?

It is a most telling sign when a recent practice squad signee receives more playing time than the team's 2nd round draft pick. As for Robiskie's continued absence from the lineup - or roster - I am completely baffled. Is there something we're all missing here? Can Robiskie be this bad? Certainly, Mangini is not against playing rookies, as evidenced by Massaquoi's elevation to the starting lineup.

Considering the near devastated level of talent currently available, Robiskie's inability to get on the field either signals that Mangini missed badly last April or the rookie wideout is not as "polished" as most of thought some months ago.

Either way, with one win on the books and five games left to go, I can't imagine a logical scenario where Robiskie continues to sit out. What do we have to lose by playing him?

6. Can the Browns defense pressure a mostly immobile Carson Palmer?

The Browns' pass rush continues to improve under the watch of Rob Ryan. And considering the now lethal number of injuries the team has suffered on the defensive side, this is a rare sign of 2009 progress. Regardless of any upcoming front office changes - "alleged" changes as it were - it is worth noting that Ryan has done an admirable job working with some less than desirable parts.

As for yesterday's game, Kamerion Wimbley continued to show his progression -

or "re-progression" - if you will - by pressuring Palmer and newcomer Matt Roth also had some nice plays - more on him later. But perhaps the most overlooked performer of the game and season has to be veteran Robaire Smith, who is fast approaching the lonely enshrinement into contemporary Browns legends, which includes Ryan Tucker and Steve Heiden.

7. Does the slashing Bernard Scott offer more of a challenge than the banged-up Cedric Benson?

Between Scott and Larry Johnson, the Bengals proved yet again that the Browns run defense is among the worst units in the league. Despite all of the prior praise for Rob Ryan, the Browns simply do not feature the kind of athleticism in the front seven required of solid NFL defenses. And while players like Smith, Trusnik and David Bowens play hard, they are simply nothing more than gap-fillers at this time.

And perhaps the contrast in running styles between Scott and Johnson further highlighted this weakness. Scott got most of his yards all over the field, while Johnson ran up the middle so many times, you would have thought his off-field issues revolved around O.C.D.

8. Speaking of #7, this question is directed at the Bengal coaching staff: do you still think it was a good idea to run Benson 80 times against the Bears?

I guess the Bengal staff wised up and figured it would be best to split those 80 carries between two backs. In this case, there wasn't much the Browns defense could do. They were simply overpowered by a sneakily good Bengal line and the Browns offense also didn't help matters with another subpar performance.

9. How will Mangini shift his linebackers this week? Or, can we expect Jason Trusnik to again vainly attempt to cover a speedy back?

Luckily for Cleveland, the Bengals decided that they were going to win the game on the ground - which meant that the likes of Bowens and Trusnik didn't have to lumber after any speedy backs shooting out of the backfield.

Lucky us, indeed.

10. What adjustments did the coaching staff make in regards to the Browns' shaky deep secondary? Or, does the Ray Ventrone era begin today? How about a

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resumption of the Mike Furrey Gilded Age?

I will admit to being a critic of Mike Furrey, simply because of his scattered NFL experience and Mike Martz upbringing, but you have to give our former wideout some credit for probably emerging as the team's best nickel cover man. And with the injuries suffered by Brodney Pool and Mike Adams yesterday, look for Furrey to continue to provide a much-needed band-aid for the team's secondary.



11. Can the Browns, or more specifically, Eric Mangini - resume some

much-needed momentum heading into December?

So much for that. Mangini's Browns had a great opportunity to revive the team's fanbase headed into the final month of the season. A win over the Bengals could have propelled the team towards a greater sense of legitimacy - especially considering that three playoff contenders still remain on the schedule.

Instead, now Mangini may be facing his toughest challenge of his initial season, as the Browns will likely finish 2009 without the services of its best defensive player.

12. Who do the Rams play this week? Is Eric Berry coming out for the 2010 draft?

The battle rages on. Of course, the Bucs are also tied for the league's worst record, but they have played some good football in the past weeks. Really, it's a battle for the bottom between the Rams and Browns. Who you got?

The Pick - Part Three

While I have profusely referred to ["the process"](#) several times this season, I have to admit that in each case I was referring to our current roster of players. And in many ways, our team has hit bottom...several different times. However, now "the process" may have locked its sights on the man who is the most responsible for the demise of the current day Browns. And no, this time I'm not referring to Randy Lerner.

How Mangini responds to the current situation in Berea will be largely character-defining. If our current coach can continue to keep his beleaguered team motivated throughout the remainder of the season, then perhaps some well-deserved respect will be coming his way. These final five games of the season will largely be a test for Mangini, and not his players.

Perhaps "the process" has finally come full circle.

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And finally, on a related note, here's a comment an anonymous reader sent me after yesterday's game.

So, genius. Any more negative comments on Trusnik or the new guy, Roth? You panned them both in your wise ass column the other day. Gee, maybe you should reserve judgment until they actually play a little.

From Sunday's game:

Trusnik: 10 tackles

Roth: 7 tackles; 1 sack; 1 QB hit

That's what I like so much about y'all in this town's "media". You're all experts and are quick to shoot off your mouths, but then pretty slow to issue an "oops, maybe I spoke too soon" statement.

How about it, genius? Care to make another brilliant statement about Trusnik and/or Roth now?

First of all, thank you for the compliment. And although I think the term "genius" is a bit overused these days, I accept your characterization. Although, I believe the term "soothsayer" may be a bit more appropriate.

As for this reader's delirious acceptance of the Matt Roth era, I will contend that Roth could serve as a nice gap-filler/injury replacement for the remainder of the season. In some respects, he could become the defensive equivalent of Chanci Stuckey. That is, he is a nice player to have around - at least until better quality talent arrives via future drafts.

And while I don't want to crush the spirits of a Browns fan who remains optimistic after watching the tenth loss of the season, I have to suggest that perhaps tackling stats are a bit overrated. Considering that the Bengals ran the ball nearly thirty times yesterday, Trusnik's tackling stats are nothing but inflated.

Or, put it this way - if the Browns offense played any worse yesterday, then the Bengals probably would have run the ball some twenty more times. If that were the case, then Trusnik may have easily cleared 15-20 tackles, which if you follow this reader's logic, would immediately place him into Pro Bowl consideration.

But as it stands now, I can only categorize Trusnik as a quality special teams player who probably would not be starting on any other team. The point I was making in "criticizing" Roth and Trusnik is that under no circumstances should any Browns fan be excited over the future prospects of either player.

And for the 8,000th time, I feel an urge to utter the following: this is the slowest defense I ever seen in my life.

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Yet, I am hopeful that better days lie ahead.

So, I'm not sure if that qualifies as a "brilliant statement", but I hope it suffices for now.

If not, I can certainly dumb it down a little. Maybe I'll talk about the quarterbacks again.