

## One Step Up, Two Steps Back

Written by {ga=jb}

Friday, August 27 2010 11:49 AM -

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*"I'm sitting here in this bar tonight □  
but all I'm thinkin' is: □  
I'm the same old story."*

- Bruce Springsteen



So it is only a stupid fake game. Not much really matters as far as who won or lost. And it should be impossible to draw conclusions and only a flat out fool would extrapolate much into the regular season. Right? But seeing A.J. Feely drive down the field on your starting defense like as if he's Dan Marino against the 1990 New England Patriots is as [disturbing](#) as the cast from the [Biggest Loser](#) replacing the roster of the [Los Angeles Temptation](#).

I'm not planning on going into a full game summary because my boi [Hiko's produced that flick](#) already, and did a very nice job. No point in a mirror reprise. But when your [29th ranked pass defense](#) the year prior has yet another set back against a really inferior franchise, a broad brush [Alan Iverson dismissal](#) may not fully be in order.

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I'm not as disappointed by the offense as the defense. Sure, Delhomme and Mack's exchanges and Jerome Harrison's fumbles made me realize that I've seen better hands on most snakes. But there were at least some [weather related excuses](#). Once again, however, the pass defense was Big 12 worthy. Except instead of the opposition being a bona fide 4,000 yard pro bowl quarterback, it was a [chump](#) [career](#) who threw up a 62 quarterback rating the only season he ever started and went two seasons without so much as taking a snap. For context, keep in mind Brady Quinn had a 67 rating last year. Compounding matters was when they should have redeemed themselves and feasted, they made Sam Bradford look comfortable, poised, and confident in his second NFL game.

A pass defense is much like the rest of the issues we talk about with this league. It is at once incredibly sophisticated and yet also simple. Depending upon your outlook, you feel either relaxed or pensive based on Saturday. On one hand, you have a defensive backfield starting two raw rookies and one new free agent. Given the sophistication of NFL coverage schemes and how players need to get used to each other in zones, having breakdowns should be completely expected. The real surprise would be if they were flawless or even better more often than not. And starting the season against Josh Freeman and his bad thumb can't help but make you feel better. You just can't be the type of fan who lives so day-to-day that they believe the tripe about Colt McCoy being in roster trouble just because you read it on the interwebs. This team is a process. In the real NFL, new units don't gel immediately and rookies go through learning processes at defensive back. You have to live with it.

And then there is the front seven. We know that the defensive line is filled with mostly "just guys" that are placeholders and there to give as many quality reps as their age and limited talent will allow. Shaun Rogers is out and questionable for the early part of the season. The others are either long in tooth or very young with limited upside beyond being two gap pluggers. The Browns are in dire need of top shelf starting defensive ends, regardless of playing the 3 – 4, 4 – 3 or even the 6 – 1 of Greasy Neale. It is far more important in the draft next year that we get our Vince Wilfork or Richard Seymour than chase the latest "franchise" quarterback project or the elusive burner wide receiver. Truth be told, they could use about three new quality defensive ends to flank Rubin.

And that's where this thing gets pensive. The front seven talent just isn't there on paper to make

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a dent via pass rush; period. My calm, rational self says “Self, this is a Mangini defense. It operates on players who can absorb and execute his elaborate game plans in the front seven, and win via scheme. They are showing precisely none of that right now, because they are doing no game planning whatsoever. So sit down, chill out, pop a bottle the next two Saturdays and don’t worry until about late September.” My beaten down pessimistic self looks at the roster and says, “ [Who are these guys](#) ”? The defensive ends without Rogers are below average at best. The linebackers include Chris Gocong, a guy who lost his starting role last year and was deemed expendable, Matt Roth, who got off the Greyhound when the season was already over and instantly became our best pass rusher, and Scott Fujita, a good role player when surrounded by other impact players. There’s not a lick of intimidating playmaking athleticism in the bunch. Can scheme really overcome all? Because if not, this is going to be a long, long season of not being able to get off the field on third down and dying a death of a thousand cuts. Not a really fun way to spend the season.

On the positive ledger, notwithstanding the weather related errors, the offense looks like the improved execution wasn’t a mirage in game one. Things got a little choppy and mistake ridden, but we won’t play in a hurricane every Sunday. When and if we do, Peyton Hillis looks every bit the potential latter day [Walt Garrison](#) -comes-north folk hero as advertized. I thought for sure he was going to be our west coast offense fullback, so I owe Hiko a public apology for my pig-headed insistence he was merely that. Hillis and Lawrence Vickers gave us a glimpse of what a one-two battering ram punch they could be in bad weather or situationally in short yardage or at the end of games. Additionally, we saw the tight ends utilized in the passing game more than at any time since Kellen Winslow was dragging his knees around thee parts. For a practice game in a monsoon once they got past the football follies’ plays isn’t so bad, I suppose.

Saturday brings on our brother Super Bowl futility team for the annual [Great Lakes Classic](#) , a gift from Carman Policy that keeps on giving. It is hard to fully disassociate oneself from contrasting the Browns with the Lions. Both have been among the most downtrodden franchises of the last decade and both up until recently have drafted with as much success as Jennifer Anniston has with men. However, the Lions have been actively hitting on picks the last two years and look to be establishing a semblance of foundation, including the elusive franchise quarterback. It should be very interesting to see if we can take another step forward or if we will see a repeat of the porous pass defense that has plagued this team for two practice games and regular seasons

[since Butch Davis left](#)

. And then I will decide whether I will care yet.