



Preseason Week 3 – Cleveland at Detroit

There are two ways to view the Defensive "performance" so far this Preseason:

1. The Defense has been playing vanilla. Scheme and game planning will improve the overall product. So will getting Shaun Rogers and D'Qwell Jackson back. Detroit's Offense will surprise people this year with all their weapons, Sam Bradford and the STL O looked great against the Pats, and Green Bay probably has the most potent passing attack in the league. Several of the DB's are very young and will improve with experience. A lot of the points were surrendered by backups and third stringers.

2. The Defense sucks ass.

The truth is probably somewhere in between, in that vast gray area where pretty much all answers lie. Part of me realizes this is the Preseason and feels that the Defense will have time to gel and will look stronger. Another part of me is horrified by the lack of depth (especially in the Front 7) and the fact that they are routinely manhandled and out of position, demonstrated by the poor Run D and the complete inability to defend anything in the middle of the field.

Yes, I believe that the Browns will be able to manufacture a pass rush... eventually. If they have to blitz 10 to get pressure, that's what they'll do. But, no, I'm not sure they'll be able to defend the Run. And I'm certainly not sure that they'll be able to stop Backs and Tight Ends from having a Stat Feast over the middle in between the zone they have to run because they (still)

have glaring weaknesses in man-to-man coverage.

Not to mention everyone falling all over themselves if someone cuts back.

It is way too early to press the panic button. The season is long, and it's very difficult to say where it will go. But is there real cause for concern?

The look on Mangini's face on the sidelines should answer that.

(Hell yes).

Game Recap

Delhomme again looked good, leading the team to a 3-0 lead. Then Matthew Stafford came on the field, tearing through the Browns D like he was a 4 year old on Christmas morning and they were a shiny present (perhaps a box of plastic dinosaurs). It looked like very little could be done to stop the Juggernaut Lion attack, when Brian Schaefering closed on Kevin Smith from behind and knocked the ball free, allowing Eric Wright to scoop it up and daintily prance his way for a 44 yard fumble recovery TD. *Browns 10, Lions 7.*

The Defense actually stiffened (that's what she said) and Jake drove Cleveland down for another TD, capped by a 5 yard pass to Lawrence Vickers. And when the Browns held Detroit yet again, they looked poised to rip the game wide open. *Browns 17, Lions 7.*

But then Jerome Harrison fumbled (again) and it was brought back for 6. *Browns 17, Lions 14.*

No matter. Nothing that a 78 yard TD drive can't cure, thanks to more intelligent and accurate passing by Jake and some hard running by Cleveland's next Superhero, Peyton Hillis-Man. Not only did they score, but they effectively ran out the 1st Half as well. All in all, it was quite successful, especially Offensively. *Browns 24, Lions 14.*

When the teams came out of the locker rooms, the D had drifted back to sleep, and it was Christmas morning all over again for Stafford. *Browns 24, Lions 21.*

Seneca Wallace came in and once again played well, leading the team to a FG. After the D held, he again looked like he was going to march the Browns to points-sweet-points, but Evan Moore fumbled after the catch at the Lion 41 right at the start of the 4th Q. *Browns 27, Lions 21.*

The rest of the 4th starred Colt McCoy (although better) flailing about and the Browns backups doing little to nothing on Defense of notice. It was like watching backyard football the way the Lions O went up and down the field on Cleveland's D. Their performance was one of putrocity and vomitousness.

Final: Lions 35, Browns 27.

Conclusion

Well, if I must be "fair and balanced" (as if such a thing exists, since we are all ruled by our experiences and preconceptions), I must say that the Browns did not play all that badly. If we look at the stats of the game when the starters and the main backups cleared out by the end of the 3rd Quarter with Cleveland up 27-21:

Time of Possession: Cleveland – 27:17, Detroit – 17:43

Total Yards: Cleveland – 325, Detroit - 233

First Downs: Cleveland - 22, Detroit – 13

We must remember that the Browns are still a major work in progress. To expect them to dominate everyone is just silliness. Detroit was bad last year, yes, but that team has a lot of talent, especially on Offense (Stafford is going to be very good in this league, Best too if he stays healthy, and Calvin Johnson is already there). I guarantee the Lions don't finish last this year in the NFC North. That spot is reserved for the Chicago Bears.

I have to say that being where the Browns were through 3 quarters would've been just dandy with me had this been the Regular Season, no matter who they were playing.

Gameballs

Joe Thomas – Doesn't get enough love. There was one play in particular where it looked like Vanden Bosch had him beat and was going to nail Delhomme from behind. Joe recovered in the blink of an eye and shoved him down.

Josh Cribbs – For years, I've disbelieved the theory that Cribbs could become a viable Receiver. Even though he still doesn't "look" fluid at the position... this could be the year he proves me wrong.

Hillis Man – That Quinn trade to Denver looks horribly lopsided, and that doesn't even count the

draft pick.

Jake Delhomme – So far, has a 105 QB rating. Derek Anderson couldn't get that if you multiplied his rating times 3.

Honorable Mention

Brian Schaefering – Forced a fumble, caused a Holding penalty, and was generally a presence all night. That's how you make the team.

Brian Robiskie – Nice way to respond to a poor performance. Several nice catches.

Nick Sorensen – For being OK.

Wall of Shame

Abe Elam – What purpose does he serve? Looks like it'll be another draft class until that position is shored up.

Casey Bender – Likely cut by the time you read this.

Sheldon Brown – Got beat on a TD, did not tackle well. Please let this be an anomaly.

Backup Linebackers – Eric Barton misses tackles, can't cover Backs and Tight Ends, lets the play come to him. David Veikune better have a great game next week, because he always seems to be standing around outside of where the play took place. David Bowens (whom I loved last year) looks heavy and out of shape. Let's hope at least he can play his way back into relevance.

Snap Exchanges – Several botched again this week between Delhomme and Mack. Caused a turnover last week, easily could've done the same in this one.

The Defense – But you already know that.

Colt McCoy finally got the team a couple first downs that didn't involve him scrambling. He looked better - which is faint praise indeed.

If arm strength is something you can work on and improve at this point, then he needs to do it. He checks down so often that I think I'm watching Brady Quinn all over again.

And that Hail Mary at the end? How do you throw that out of bounds? Did I mention Brady Quinn?

I was glad to see that that throw didn't get glossed over. First, Brian Daboll reamed him. Then Mangini took his turn. It was fun to watch Colt try to explain himself (we obviously couldn't hear what was said, but body language spoke volumes). What could his defense have been? Wind took it? Trying to keep his QB rating strong? Someone shot it with a crossbow on the way to the End Zone?

I have not and will not give up on this guy after a couple Preseason games in his rookie year. But let's hope a quantum leap of execution takes place over the next 12 months.

I've heard a lot of people complain that Seneca Wallace came in for 2 downs on the first drive as a change of pace. The reason that you hear the complaints is that it didn't work on that occasion. If Wallace threw a TD pass (which was entirely possible) then it would have been a stroke of genius.

The thing is that Wallace brings a dimension that Delhomme doesn't have. In the 3rd Q, Wallace was pressured, rolled left, and used his speed to turn a certain loss into a 15 yard gain. That ability, that mobility, is exactly why they need to throw him in there every once and a while.

And they need to stay with it. They can't listen to the detractors. If you bring in Wallace for a couple plays and the drive stalls, then you don't go away from it. This situation is highly unconventional. They need to keep at it if they want to reap the possible rewards.

It may have been part of the "vanilla" D, but they seem to be dropping the DB's way too deep in their zone coverage. Anything from 7 to 15 yards down the field is so wide open that Derek Anderson could hit them.

There will be growing pains with these young DB's - oh, lordy yes - but that won't work for a nanosecond come the Real Games.

I feel badly for Chris Jennings. He tries hard, he helped us last season, and he made some nice moves on Saturday. But he has absolutely no chance of beating out James Davis. It's sad when one position is so deep that a worthy player will get cut when a Mike Adams is going to stay.

If Carlton Mitchell is in the game with the Ones, look for the WR sweep.

Dennis Northcutt is still alive?

My favorite Bernie-ism from the game: Calling Scott Fujita "Fu-heeta".

Bernie, his name is Japanese, not Hispanic. He is not a tasty Mexican dish.

