

Preview: Browns @ Buccaneers

Written by {ga=hermanfontenot}
Saturday, September 11 2010 10:47 PM -



Cleveland Browns @ Tampa Bay Buccaneers

Time: 1:00 pm, Sunday, September 12, 2010

Location: Raymond James Stadium, Tampa, FL

Network, Announcers- CBS: Spero Dedes and Rich Gannon

Line: Buccaneers by three

Team W/L Records: Both teams are 0-0

Coaches: Eric Mangini is 28-36 overall, 5-11 going into his second season with the Browns; Raheem Morris is 3-13 going into his second season with the Buccaneers

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Last Season for the Browns: Got off to a 1-11 start, the worst twelve-game record in franchise history, before turning it around with a season-ending four-game winning streak, longest since the Return.

Last Season for the Buccaneers: Lost their first seven games and finished 3-13, the franchise's worst record since 1991. Two of Tampa Bay's three wins were over playoff teams, including a road upset of soon-to-be World Champion New Orleans.

□

All-Time Series: Browns lead, 5-2.

Last Meeting- [December 24, 2006](#) : In a Christmas Eve meeting between teams that finished with a combined record of 8-24, the Buccaneers held the Browns to 187 total yards and forced four turnovers in an easy 22-7 victory. Cleveland's only score came on a fumble return by Daven Holly. Tampa Bay rolled to 355 total yards, 212 on the arm of Tim Rattay. It was the first-ever win in Cleveland for the Buccaneers, who had lost their previous two games at the Lakefront.

Out, Doubtful or Questionable for Tampa Bay: □ No players listed as out, doubtful or questionable.

Out, Doubtful or Questionable for Cleveland: S Nick Sorenson (head) and LB D'Qwell Jackson (chest) are out; G Shawn Lauvao (ankle) is doubtful; LB Marcus Benard (shoulder), DT Shaun Rogers (ankle) and G Floyd Womack (knee) are questionable.

What to watch for the Browns: The Buccaneers were dead last in the NFL against the run in 2009, yielding a whopping 158 yards per game. Only twice did they hold the opposition to less than a hundred yards on the ground. It's going to be hot in Tampa on Sunday, with an anticipated game-time temperature of 94 degrees.

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Factor in the weakness of Tampa Bay's ground defense with the weather and it means one very obvious thing: the Browns are going to want to run the football. They're going to want to run it a lot and they're going to want to run it effectively. For the first time in a long time this early in the season Cleveland is playing an opponent that is flat-out inferior. In this situation you just hit them with your strength. The Browns were eighth in the NFL in rushing offense last season, they've added Peyton Hillis to provide battering-ram effects and they don't want to put the game in the hands of Jake Delhomme (23 interceptions in his last twelve starts) in a position where he has to win the game with his arm. The Browns will pretty much want to play the game the way they played it late last season- only a little less primeval.

Essentially Cleveland wants to do to the Buccaneers what the Buccaneers did to them the last time these teams met in Raymond James Stadium. On a hot October afternoon in 2002, Tampa Bay [battered the Browns](#) for 186 yards rushing in a 17-3 victory that wasn't nearly as close as the final score might indicate. Mike Alstott powered for 126 of those yards, including 83 in the fourth quarter. The Browns just happen to have their own would-be Alstott in Peyton Hillis. If he's running the ball a lot in the last fifteen minutes, expect the Browns to be 1-0 for the first time since 2004.

What to watch for the Buccaneers: A good way to keep from getting trampled in the fourth quarter is to go ahead early. That means Josh Freeman will have to take advantage of a Cleveland defence that looked slow and shaky at times during the preseason. Tampa Bay went as their rookie quarterback went last season: in their victories over Green Bay and Seattle Freeman threw five touchdown passes against two interceptions. In the eight games the Bucs lost with Freeman starting, his TD-to-INT ratio was a woeful 4-to-14.

(Freeman's third win, in New Orleans, was freakish. The Saints led 17-3 in the fourth period but fumbled in Tampa territory, gave up a 77-yard punt return for a touchdown and missed a 37-yard field goal that would have won it at the gun. Play the fourth quarter of that game a hundred times and New Orleans wins 99 of them. Indeed, the 2009 Bucs are the worst team, record-wise, to ever beat a Super Bowl Champion on the road.)

Anyway, it's simple: Josh Freeman will have to throw more often to men in white jerseys than men in brown jerseys for Tampa Bay to win. He'll also have to take advantage of his mobility, especially on third downs. Freeman averaged 5.4 yards per carry last season and can take some pressure off of himself by tucking it under and outrunning Cleveland's lead-footed linebackers to the sticks. The Buccaneers can't win if he doesn't pay well; unlike Delhomme he can't get away with just managing the game.

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Next Week for Both Teams: Cleveland hosts Kansas City; Tampa Bay visits Carolina.

Trivia: One of the losses in Tampa Bay's 0-14 campaign of 1976 came against the Browns. Cleveland handed the Bucs loss number eleven of that tragicomic season by 24-7 in front of just under 37,000 spectators at the Big Sombrero. Tampa Bay never beat the "old" Browns, going 0-5 against the pre-1999 team.