

Buh Bye Week

Written by {ga=gdbenz}

Monday, November 01 2010 6:00 PM - Last Updated Monday, November 01 2010 2:01 PM



Maybe the Cleveland Browns serving a 4-year league imposed bye prepared me for it, but honestly I look forward to the team's bye week each year. Timed right, it not only gives me the opportunity to finish up the outdoor chores I tend to ignore in those agonizingly painful days between the end of golf season and the onset of snow, but it gives me the opportunity to watch football through a much different prism.

Unencumbered by another Browns' game to break down and analyze for the moment (which, believe me, is not nearly as fun as simply watching it with your buddies while being over served Bud Light), I get to instead focus on what the rest of the NFL is up to.

The good news, indeed the great news, is that the Browns are hardly the most troubled franchise in the NFL at the moment. In fact, it's not even close. As bad as things have been in Cleveland, at least we haven't been burdened lately with overwhelming expectations. The last time that happened was in the pre-Twitter days of 2007, nearly a lifetime ago, and we saw the Browns handle it like a cheap lawn chair from Sam's Club handles your overweight brother-in-law at his kid's soccer game.

On full display Sunday was the Dallas Cowboys who are essentially reliving the Browns' 2007 season except for a few small details. The expectations for the Browns were the playoffs, modest but exciting in context. For the Cowboys it's the Super Bowl or bust. The Browns play in

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a nice stadium but the Cowboys don't just play in a stadium, they play in a Parthenon, a monument to excess that, I think, cost somebody somewhere about \$6 billion. The Browns had a diffident owner who hid from the media like Howard Hughes in the final throes of dementia. The Cowboys have one of the most visible owners in the history of the NFL. He hides from the media like a Kardashian hides from the media.

But with 7 games under their belt the Cowboys are 1-6 and looking every bit as disinterested, unorganized and out of sorts as any Browns' team in the last 10 years, including that woeful 2007 bunch. Head coach Wade Phillips has assumed the role of Romeo Crennel, the nice guy who expects grown men to act like professionals and give their best effort because that's what their paid to do.

It didn't work out well for Crennel then because he gave the inmates the keys to the compound. And when given the chance the inmates will absolutely take over the compound. They'll imprison the guards, change the locks on the door and put nothing but desserts on the lunch menu. The Cowboys, like the Browns in 2007, are in full revolt at the moment and all Phillips can do is stand by, grimace occasionally and hope that his favorite Pandora station starts playing through the headset he wears on the sideline instead of the incessant noise from an assistant who knows he'll too be out of work soon.

Although quarterback Tony Romo is injured and gone for the next several weeks, it's hardly an excuse for the kind of mail-it-in performance they had against Jacksonville on Sunday or even against the New York Giants a week before when Romo was playing. First of all, Romo may very well be one of the most overrated quarterbacks I've seen in the last 10 years. He has skills, but not Peyton Manning skills. Romo's accomplishments pale in comparison to the attendant hype. He's an above-average quarterback with the bad luck to be on a team where above-average is never going to be good enough.

The other thing is that the Cowboys defense is pitiful. Given how the Browns' defense has played all season, even with Sheldon Brown and Eric Wright spending a good portion of the first 7 games watching receivers fly past them like a stranded driver watches semis whiz by on the Shoreway, the Cowboys might very well be at least 4-3 and in the playoff hunt if they had that Browns' defensive unit. The Cowboys can't stop the run or the pass, just like the Browns in 2007.

This will not end well for Phillips just like it didn't end well for Crennel. The difference is that

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Phillips will not survive the season. Crennel survived mainly because it took owner Randy Lerner that long to realize that yes, he was witnessing a car wreck as it was happening. Let's just say that Jerry Jones is a little more self-aware.

I also had the chance to watch another overrated team, the New York Jets, put on an absolutely horrendous performance against the Green Bay Packers. I'm still not quite sure what kind of team the Packers have but I am pretty sure that the Jets will once again disappoint the fans of New York. To that I say welcome to the club. Browns fans have been charter members of it for the last 10 years.

The reason the Jets ultimately will disappoint is that they have a head coach who can be as reckless as he can be inspiring, kind of like the Browns' defensive coordinator. No small coincidence then that the two are twin brothers, is it?

Rex Ryan literally cost the Jets a victory because of hubris couched in mismanagement. It's the fatal flaw of the Ryan brand. They trust their instincts too often when they should trust their research.

On 4th and 18 early in the game, Ryan let punter Steve Weatherford try a fake punt. I understand the surprise factor, although fake punts are all the rage this season, but Reggie Hodges running 60 + yards last week for the Browns on a fake punt is a once in a lifetime sort of thing. Weatherford had as much chance of getting the first down as Bill Belichick has being inducted into the Browns' Ring of Honor. (Note: Weatherford was originally ruled to have gotten the first down but on replay the call was reversed. He missed by at least two yards.) It gave the Packers the ball deep in Jets territory, which they converted into a 20-yard field goal. The Jets didn't know it at the time, though they should have, that it would be all the points the Packers would need.

But that little sneak attack that blew up in their face was a minor blip compared to the strangeness of the play calling and decision making in the last 6 minutes and 36 seconds of the game that beat them over the head. With the Jets deep in their own territory and trailing 6-0, they were able to get one first down before Ryan and offensive coordinator Brian Schottenheimer went into brain freeze mode.

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After a Mark Sanchez swing pass fell incomplete, Ryan and Schottenheimer eschewed any desire to move the ball methodically, instead putting Sanchez in a situation where he couldn't succeed. Two deep passes were incomplete (it wasn't even close) and the Jets were forced to punt.

With 4:12 remaining and the Packers with the ball, Ryan decided to use all 3 of his remaining time outs. It worked, except when it didn't. All it did was really accelerate the inevitable outcome.

The Packers were forced to punt and the Jets took over with 3:50 remaining, instead of the two or so minutes they might have had had they preserved at least 1 time out. An off tackle run by LaDarian Tomlinson, which kept the clock moving, was followed by another deep pass that fell incomplete. Sanchez was then sacked on third down as he held the ball too long while looking for an open receiver on another inexplicable deep route. The clock kept moving. Forced to go for it on fourth down and in their own territory, Sanchez again looked deep again and in the direction of Braylon Edwards. That pass, predictably, fell incomplete. Not once did Ryan, Schottenheimer or Sanchez seem to even consider the possibility that getting a few first downs and putting the Packers on their heels might be a good idea. The Packers then moved in for another field goal effectively ending the game.

It was the kind of play calling that Browns' fans may be used to but the real comfort is that this kind of stuff doesn't just happen in Cleveland except, of course, when Rob Ryan is calling blitzes and leaving Eric Wright to fend for himself.

Bye week football is not to be ignored but to be relished for what it is. A confirmation that things aren't as bad as it seems in Cleveland even while it serves to show how far this team still has to go.