

The Future of the Browns and the Tao of Super Bowl XLV

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Sunday, January 30 2011 2:00 AM - Last Updated Sunday, January 30 2011 8:12 AM



The Browns Reincarnated have played Pittsburgh 25 times, winning only 4. Yes, that's four. A winning percentage of .1600%, just slightly better than the Washington Generals had against the Globetrotters. But there is hope, because next Sunday we'll be able to watch the team we aspire to be on offense against the defense of the team we need to beat consistently if the Browns are ever going to crawl out from under the shadow of the Steelers. A lone game, especially one in which our team is not on the field, will not tell us anything definitive about the post Daboll era. But hopefully the game provides a glimmer (or is it gleam?) of optimism; something to hold onto between February and September.

I rarely, if ever, get fired up for the AFL- NFL World Championship Game, as it was once named over 44 years ago. The primary reason, of course, is that the Browns are never playing and usually I couldn't care less about the teams that are. Super Bowl Sunday is the greatest excuse in the world to have a party, during which it seems more people pay attention to the commercials than the actual game. This year is different. This year we get to see the offensive blueprint on how to move the ball and score against Dick LeBeau's defense, ranked number 1 overall in both yardage and scoring.

The Browns, if they are ever to return to the playoffs, must be able to win AFC North games, especially against the Steelers and Ravens, whose defenses have much in common. Athletic, fast and physical, both have given the Browns fits over the past 12 years, and neither team seems poised to fall off anytime soon. The Browns must find a way to consistently win games against them; perhaps the Packers can give us a sneak preview next week.

It is impossible, of course, to extrapolate the offense orchestrated by the hottest quarterback in recent memory to whatever the Browns will run next fall. Nevertheless I am very interested to see how well the Aaron Rodgers led WCO can attack the Steelers D. Pittsburgh dropped only 4 games this year, losing to the Ravens, Saints, Patriots, and Jets. While Roethlisberger missed the Ravens game Polamalu was out against the Jets, the winning formula was essentially the same. Throw it to win it. All opposing QBs had good games, with Flacco, Brees, and Brady all

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throwing for at least 250; the latter two were above 300 yards passing for the game. Teams that beat the Steelers also ran the ball, and despite not having much success they kept at it, at least 21 carries per game to keep the Steelers D honest and the clock moving. Sounds like a nice fit for the WCO, doesn't it?

Now, this is not to imply that the McCoy (or whomever) WCO is going to look exactly the same as what Rodgers and the Packers can run. Not that the system is vastly different, but certainly the talent is. Still, I am going to assume the essential elements of both systems will be the same, and even if we don't have a Greg Jennings we should be able to use the basic philosophy of the WCO in a similar style to Green Bay.

Unfortunately, we won't gain any insights on how the Dick Jauron 4-3 might match up against the Steelers O, as the Dom Caper hybrid 3-4 is nothing like what we'll see in Cleveland. Here's the kicker, though – against the Pittsburgh and Baltimore I really like the Jauron 4-3 and what it brings – a focus on stopping the run first and foremost. His defense will never be confused with an aggressive, attacking scheme; this 4-3 is more read and react. Pressure comes from the 4 down lineman with an occasional blitz, with typically a 2 deep zone behind. But I like the idea of forcing the Steelers to throw, as long as you confine Roethlisberger to the pocket and limit his ability to make plays when the protection breaks down. I would expect the Packers to bring varied looks and more pressure off the edge with Woodson than you will see next year from Jauron.

While I have great expectations that the Packers can move the ball and score against the Steelers, I'm not so sure that Pittsburgh isn't able to run the ball effectively against Green Bay – just enough to open up some opportunities down the field for Roethlisberger. No predictions yet, but my feeling is this one is close and lower scoring than many assume.

So, for the first time in awhile, I'll actually be watching more than just the commercials. Your 2011 Cleveland Browns, at least on offense, dream of growing up to be like the 2010 Green Bay Packers. Maybe we can get a preview of better things to come when we watch next week's game.