

What to Expect from the Browns Offense

Written by {ga=jta1975}

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Yeah...I just watched the Rams entire season in review. So what? Don't judge me. Pat Shurmur's offense was my focus. I wanted to try and gain a feel for our new Head Coach before I actually get to see what the 2011 Cleveland Browns will look like.

There were a couple of things that I noticed right from the start, but I want to start by talking about something that I think will be the key to Shurmur's success as a head coach. Like many coaches Pat Shurmur will live and die on his ability to mentor and develop a QB.

The great offensive coordinators who have gone on to be successful head coaches all seem to have one common trait and that trait is the ability to find and develop a QB who embodies their offensive philosophy. Shurmur and many WCO guys in the league and out have been good at developing QBs: Mike Holmgren, Andy Reid, Mike Shanahan, Jon Gruden and Mike McCarthy, right on down the line back to Bill Walsh.

Shurmur started to put his pelts on the wall as a respected QB coach while with the Eagles and continued his success in development last year by helping Sam Bradford have one of the more successful rookie campaigns that the league has seen in a while.

Developing a QB is the one job no coach has been able to do since the Browns return to football but in Shurmur I think the Browns have finally found the candidate to do so.

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After witnessing a solid debut for Sam Bradford, in what most would call an offense void of playmakers, I am comfortable that Pat Shurmur can develop us a QB. I am not saying Colt McCoy is surely the answer but I believe if Colt has it in him and we've signs), then Pat is the guy who can get it out of him.

Now here are the rest of the opinions and analysis I have from watching the Rams 2010 season.

QB Play

After watching the rookie effort from Sam Bradford I can't help but to think that he is well on his way to being one of the top QBs in the entire league. The guy is smart, accurate as they get and he has a much better arm than I ever thought. Watching him progress over his rookie year was a great experience and the Rams are in very good hands.

He did of course make plenty of rookie mistakes, but the overall theme of his play during his rookie season was as positive as I have seen from a QB in a while.

Another reason Bradford rates so high in my book is the quality of the players he was working with and the type of offense he plays in. The majority of rookies who flourish at the QB position either have weapons that inflate their numbers and help cover up his errors or they have great defenses that allow them to make mistakes without paying dearly for it.

Bradford had neither and finished 3rd in the league in pass attempts and 12th in yards passing. In my opinion the kid played really well in his inaugural season and I think it was due to both his ability and the mentoring of Pat Shurmur.

Since the Browns only have one of those guys let's talk about Shurmur the QB groomer.

The first thing that comes to mind is the extreme difference an offense has when it has one

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direction and is led by the same QB all season long. The continuity that the Rams offense showed had a lot to do with the same QB taking the all the snaps but it also was due in large part to the great game flow created by outstanding play calling from Shurmur.

Watching the games, the common theme from broadcasters was one that praised the play. I recall at least 5 times off of the top of my head that I remember announcers going on to commend Shurmur's ability to call a game and create an offensive flow.

If my memory serves me correctly that is at least 5 times more than I can remember the same being said about Brian Daboll or Eric Mangini.

Production

When I took a look at the stats what really shined through was the ability Shurmur possessed to control a game while having minimal weapons.

The Rams were 7th in the league in offensive plays run but only 26th in the league in yards gained, which shows the lack of big play makers on the team. Another stat that backs up the lack of explosion the Rams were dealing with was the fact that they only had one play that went over 49 yards (catch from Steven Jackson). That's actually shocking.

Bradford still finished with the 12th most passing yards in the league yet no WR on his team had more than 689 yards. That indicates it wasn't a stellar group of playmakers the Rams employed in that offense. That's also backed up by Bradford's meager 18td passes.

To take it a step further, no player even had more than 3 receiving TDs which is shocking for an offense that puts the ball in the WRs and TEs as much as this one did.

Bradford pulled his end of the line which was apparent by the rookie finishing 7th in the league in completions. He showed off both his accuracy and Pat Shurmur's ability to get guys open by

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using formational mismatches and throwing the ball underneath which is a huge indicator of what the WCO can do to control a game with passes.

Although Bradford had the 3rd most attempts of any QB in the league, Shurmur still found ways to keep feeding Steven Jackson the ball, evident by Jackson's 330 carries. That's a lot of throwing with a rookie QB while still feeding the beast the football in the running. Tons of plays, tons of production and with a young QB and few stars.

Starting to ring a bell?

Running Game

The first thing that popped in my mind when focusing on the Rams running game was the fact they used multiple "heavy" formations kind of like the Packers do. The unique thing about some of those formations was the fact that they probably used 3 TEs (using one as an H-back) as much as they used a FB.

When I saw how little they actually used a FB it made me even more upset about the possibility of losing Lawrence Vickers..... Although it made me upset, I guess it also made it start to sink in as a reality. As little as the FB was used last year for the Rams (5 catches/6 rushes), I don't know how the Browns could justify giving Vickers the type of money he deserves and keeping the rookie Owen Marecic.

The next two things I noticed was how similar the 2010 Rams and Browns blocking schemes were and the similar types of runs that they used. This made it really easy to compare how the 2011 Browns running game would look because I think it will be just about the same in terms of schemes, but the formations will be different.

The actually RBs themselves also make it easier when trying to project what the ground game will be for the upcoming season. Steven Jackson and Peyton Hillis may be more similar than any other two starting backs in the league. They compare favorably in every aspect of the game. They are around the same size, play with the same punishing disposition, both have

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more power than speed but both also possess enough speed to get to the corners, and the biggest thing they have in common is the fact that they both catch the ball very well for a RB with their size.

Both guys played on third downs and are factors in the screen and swing pass game.

Pat Shurmur's ability to both get Jackson his touches and still pass the ball as much as he did should ease the minds of all of the fans who think a WCO means the Browns will get away from the running game.

The formations we run out of will probably look a lot different but the blocking scheme and results should be very similar to what we saw last year.

Passing Game

The passing game is where Browns fans can expect to see a dramatic change both in formations and intentions.

The WCO offensive principles were on full display when watching the Rams season in review. The biggest example and easiest way to explain have to do with the "base" formation of the offense.

The Pat Shurmur version of the WCO highlights a 3 WR/no FB set as the predominant formation.

The reason behind the formation is to ***force the defense to choose a personnel package and then have the offense take advantage of that package by using pass/run checks and automatic hot reads***

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To break that down but keep it simple the defense must choose to stay in their “base” defense or use a “nickel” defense.

When using a base defense against this formation the defense is putting pressure on their own pass defense because with only 2 CBs and 2 safeties it forces the LBs to be key factors in the passing game. That creates a mismatch that is favorable to the offense.

If the defense decides to take a LB out and go to a nickel defense, the offense will now try and play to its size advantage and run the football.

In watching the Rams Steven Jackson bully his way through defenders I quickly learned this is where Peyton Hillis can really be a difference maker. Having a back that breaks tackles with so much ease due to his rough and rugged running style will really be to the Browns advantage against teams that switch to nickel.

The passing game will also utilize far more short passes. In Shurmur’s offense he often uses quick hitch passes the same way a team would use an outside run. The offense has automatic checks that get the ball in a WRs hands immediately when teams use “off” coverage.

Those numbers will get put in the passing statistics but actually serve the same function as a 5 yard run.

The one passing formation I saw used quite often and really excites me is the trips (or bunch) formation. This formation is used to quickly get the ball in the hands of players who can run after the catch and also allows them to have blockers in front of them.

With the skill set brought to the team via the drafting of Gregg Little combined with the skills we already know that Josh Cribbs has, the Browns can use the formation to beat secondaries up physically and also create big play opportunities.

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This formation also highlights the one type of WR I am not sure the Browns yet have and that is a smaller, shifty type of WR to run the choice/decision routes (short outs and ins). Having a WR who is quick and gets in and out of breaks fast enough to create separation will be something I expect the team to address because right now that player is probably not here in Cleveland.

The current roster just does not have a player who can bring these things to the table like Danny Amendola did for the Rams. I saw many times on 3rd and short where Amendola would run a simple out pattern and still be open because he did it so quickly and crisply. When you have very accurate QBs like Bradford and McCoy, these types of WRs can be invaluable in keeping the chains moving.

Another aspect of running a WCO that was apparent on film was what I call the pressure point of the passing game. This offense changes the pressure point from putting heavy pressure on the WRs to beat their man to get open and firmly puts the pressure on the QB.

This offense can really give fits to QBs who don't process fast and who have a hard time of getting the ball out of their hands quickly. The scheme does a wonderful job of creating matchups that are favorable to the offense but because a lot of patterns tend to run horizontally and not vertically the windows are tighter.

The very accurate QBs will thrive but the guys with cannons lacking accuracy will create a ton of turnovers. The QBs who process slower and need really defined reads will also struggle but the guys with quick releases and the ability to anticipate will flourish.

One of the problems with the Browns 2010 passing game that I mentioned earlier was the young WRs being forced to constantly beat coverage instead of getting help through the scheme of the offense.

A Pat Shurmur offense does a good job of using formations to relieve some physical stress to WRs but it also adds some additional mental stress because WRs need to make good reads and be on the same page as the QB.

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Timing and rhythm were big themes as I watched the Rams offense and when they are in sync, and the QB is accurate the offense really seems unstoppable.

This offense also compels WRs to keep their heads in the game by getting touches. A WR tends to stay interested and into the game more if they catch a ball, no matter if it is a hitch pattern or a post. They need to get their hands on the ball to feel involved and this offense does a good job of doing that.

The difference between the teams that run a WCO offense well and the ones that don't is the QB and not the WRs. That is why you see functional offenses like the Eagles of the McNabb era and the Seahawks of the Hasselback era with the ability to have an efficient and effective passing game with no All-Pro WRs.

Having studs or explosive WRs can be the difference in scoring and producing big plays, but a WCO can still consistently move the ball down the field as long as the QB is accurate.

The Rams producing no passing plays over 49 yards (and that was to a RB) did not stop their ability to complete passes or hinder Bradford from having the 12th most passing yards in the league, it did however hinder their ability to score points.

The Browns with Josh Cribbs and Greg Little in particular have a much better chance to create more fire power than exhibited by the Rams of 2010.

In watching the Rams offense function it was also clear that TEs are a huge part of the offense. The Rams used the TEs both by getting them down the seams and on crossing patterns where the TE drags across the field.

Shurmur will also have a much better TE group than he had in St. Louis when it comes to pass catching and I am quite sure he will take advantage of the fact. Ben Watson should really flourish because of his ability to get into the seams and Evan Moore will be a big mismatch on the backside in double TE sets.

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The tremendous athletic ability of the group should also help the Browns excel in the red-zone and scoring TDs in general.

Final Thoughts

After watching the Rams ability to execute with a Rookie QB and marginal weapons I really have a new level of respect for Pat Shurmur's ability as a football coach. The offense was smooth, balanced, and well-paced.

Shurmur showed he can control a game with his short passing and still run the ball effectively when needed and I think his ability to get the QB and WRs in the flow of the game early and pounding the ball with a big running back late really highlighted what the WCO is all about.

Coaching sometimes gets overlooked when players become professionals but in watching the Rams offense flow with the quality of talent (or lack thereof in many cases) they were working with clearly showed me the difference it can and did make.

After watching the Rams 2010 offensive season I am really excited about seeing the WCO in Cleveland. I love the way Shurmur was able to find a way to move the ball using both young and inexperienced players. The fact that he did it all with a Rookie QB is even more impressive and after seeing the coach's offense in action I am absolutely on board with him calling his own plays. In fact, I think it would be a huge mistake if he didn't.

I am not sure how Pat Shurmur will ultimately handle all the duties and responsibilities of being a head coach in the NFL. But after watching the film I have the utmost confidence that the Browns have at least found themselves a hell of an offensive coach.

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