

Kibble & Bits- Getting Closer to Real Deal

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Wednesday, August 24 2011 11:00 PM - Last Updated Thursday, August 25 2011 7:34 AM



Game two of the 2011 Preseason schedule is in the books and game three is fast approaching. This week we'll talk about both games as well as get into some scheme and division talk. Let's jump right in.

Game 2 Detroit Lions

Things I Liked

Offense- Offensively the preseason has given me confidence that I can actually watch the passing game and not predict the outcome of the play as soon as I see it is a pass. The way Pat Shurmur mixes formations and combinations of players within the formations is very exciting and adds a level of unpredictability we didn't have last year.

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The Browns passing game is clearly not just a TE and RB show. Thus far, Coach Shurmur has shown exactly why he was considered one of the best young offensive minds in the game when the Browns plucked him from St. Louis.

Colt McCoy took another step in preseason game 2 and that step was showing the ability to function and produce under duress. It seemed like the Lions were in the backfield all night due to either an aggressive penetrating mentality from their front 4 or creative blitz packages that seemed to come all game long.

Colt's ability to hang in, find the open guy, and deliver is much needed when facing the likes of Pittsburgh and Baltimore twice a year. He has shown a great understanding and comfort level in what Pat Shurmur is trying to do on offense, but more importantly he has shown the ability to execute it while under pressure.

Defense-Defensively I liked few things. One was the D-line started to show movement. I saw some stunts run during the night and it gave us an opportunity to see what type of movement skills Phil Taylor has.

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Another thing to note was the effectiveness of Taylor and Ahtyba Rubin to hold position in the middle of the line. It really takes a double team to move these guys off of a spot. The last thing that caught my eye, especially watching the game a second time, was the play of D'Qwell Jackson and Kaiuka Maiava at LB.

The one thing that keeps Jackson from being a Patrick Willis type of player is his lack of size. His instincts and speed will keep him in the top of the league in tackles whenever he is on the field. He just doesn't have the pop that the bigger guys have and also can get engulfed by the O-line at times.

Maiava has similar LB instincts. He can feel and sniff out plays before they happen and both of these guys are well above average cover LBs.

Things I Didn't Like

Offense-Offensively the Browns are struggling in the run game. The Detroit Lions gave the

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Browns fits when the O-line was trying to block man on man. I think one reason is the fact that the Browns are not a penetrating team on defense so they have not practiced against that style much.

The best running plays all night came when the O-line was on the move. One noticeable example occurred during a sweep play and the other time was while the Browns line executed a trap play. Our O-line moves well and I expect Coach Shurmur to continue to take advantage of that fact.

The O-line does however need to raise their overall game a great deal when it comes to getting a push in heads-up, man-on-man situations. If Peyton Hillis is getting all of his yardage on effort plays, he will not last the whole season and that would be a huge blow to the success of the team.

Defense-I think any time you start a rookie undrafted free agent, a career special teams player, an 8 year career backup, and 3 of 4 first time starters on your D-line your defense is probably in real trouble. And that's what the Browns did against Detroit Friday due to injuries and an abundance of caution to not sustain any more.

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The lack of depth on the defense is being tested because of all the injuries to starters and the test is not going to well. Impact safety play has been nowhere to be found with T.J Ward out of the lineup.....there is zero inside pass rush and in the Detroit game other than one strip and fumble the DEs made no impact plays.

I will wait to order my case of Pepto until I actually see the full defense run together for 60 minutes but some of the matchups I expected to see the Browns win (especially up front) have not gone their way so I am on high alert to say the least.

Game/Player Notes

-The first game note that I underlined over and over has to do with the DL stunts. Several times I saw the Browns run a DT twist where the DTs move laterally crossing each other to attack the other's original gap responsibilities. They basically are trying to confuse the guards and center to create a situation where one of them is unblocked because one of the guards misplays the situation.

The big DTs of the Browns are not quick enough to actually make this a worthwhile stunt

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without following one of the tackles with a LB or DB. Maybe when the Browns start using special personnel for the sub defense one of those tackles will be quick enough for this to pay off but until then, stop with the Rubin and Taylor twist because it only creates running lanes and doesn't give any pass rush results.

-It's hard to understand why Phil Taylor keeps lining up a yard (slight exaggeration but way too far) off of the ball. I really don't understand how making the engagement point on our side of the line of scrimmage is a good thing. He did it regularly in the Detroit game....if he does it again against the Eagles the coaches must be O.k. with it but I don't understand it.

-Joe Haden is one of my favorite Browns players but I am not feeling his preseason at all. He looks like he is on a sugar high while playing because he is all over the place while in coverage. He is either getting too worried about making big plays or he is just too uptight because it seems like he is always trying to "catch up" to the WR after he is beaten. He is in for a rude awakening if he thinks he is so good he can cheat all the time.

Hey Joe, stay consistently in the WRs hip pocket, force a perfect throw, then capitalize on the bad throws. Stop trying to make every play a big play. No matter how good you are, in the NFL you can't play CB trying to pick 6 on every play.

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-Evan Moore is a QBs dream.....enough said. Just watch the games and you can't miss it.

-Running plays off tackle are killing us on defense. I can't wait for T.J. Ward to come back and help with that and I hope Jayme Mitchell is working out the kinks of being a first time starter because he is BAD against the run....I know, that statement is already getting old.

Game 3: Philadelphia Eagles

Some of the things I am looking for in the 3rd preseason game are conditioning levels, the state of the running game, sub defense personnel, and WR play.

The Eagles are a loaded team. The talent level is up there with the best in the league and they are coming off of a 1st string to 1st string beat down by the Steelers. This matchup will test every facet of our team.

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I am anxious to see how slow Mike Vick makes our defense look and how well Joe Haden does keeping DeSean Jackson out of the end zone. I am also interested in seeing how many off tackle holes the RB Shady McCoy finds for the Eagles.

I would also like to see the Browns start using alternative personnel on the DL for the nickel package. I think they need to start to develop timing with each other both in the blitz package and performing the line stunts. I understand they could hold out until the Bengals game in order to maintain whatever competitive advantage they can gain but I would rather not be working out problems on the fly during the first game of the regular season.

For the offense I want to see if the revamped passing game orchestrated by Pat Shurmur can continue to get WRs open against the best CB trio in the game.

Our TEs should have the upper hand against the safeties but finding space on the outside may be hard to come by without either great plays made by the athletic Gregg Little or exceptional coaching and play calling from Shurmur.

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Big Ben did what he does and made really good plays outside of the pocket to extend plays. He bought precious time and waited for his guys to get open against the Eagles really good secondary and Colt may have to make a few of those type of plays himself in order for the Browns to have success.

If the passing game of the Browns has close to the success it has had in the first two games, it will be a great source of optimism for the upcoming season.

I'd also like to see Peyton Hillis take advantage of the young LB core of the Eagles both in the running game and the passing game. This will also be our first look at the health of Montario Hardesty. If Hardesty looks good it can give us hope that we can give Hillis the type of rest that will help him last an entire season.

Matchups

Jason Pinkston vs. Antonio Dixon and Cullen Jenkins- This is a huge opportunity for the rookie to show he can play in this league. He will be going against veterans who are both stout and can get up field and create havoc while pass rushing.

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Jabaal Sheard vs. Jason Peters- Peters is one of the more physical LTs in the game. I am interested to see how the rookie Sheard holds position in the running game. I am also interested to see if he can beat the heavy footed Peters and apply some pressure to the QB.

Vick vs. Jackson- There is no better test of your speed and athleticism then to face Mike Vick. D'Qwell Jackson looks fast and fresh so far this preseason but Vick will put more pressure on his speed than any other QB in the league. I wonder how Jackson will perform as a spy in the base defense and if he has the ability to slow down the playmaking Vick.

Phil Taylor vs. Danny Watkins- This rookie vs. rookie matchup will give Taylor an opportunity to battle someone equally inexperienced in the league. I wonder if this is the game Taylor can make some 'wow' plays in the backfield.

Haden vs. Jackson- DeSean Jackson is the most explosive WR in the NFL. He boasts double digit TD plays of over 50 yards in his career and should provide a good test for Joe Haden's ability to keep the top notch playmaking WRs in front of him. He was chasing Nate Burrell way too much last week and if he does that to Jackson he will be on the bad side of some ESPN highlights.

Scheme Talk

It was pretty clear watching the Lions game how much a 4-3 can vary team to team. I always get frustrated when people say this defense is better than that defense because it is a 3-4 or 4-3. The reality is that both defenses can be good or bad, either one can be aggressive or more passive and it is really all about the personality of a defense more than the type of defense.

Rob Ryan is a coordinator that I can use to best explain this. Ryan has been a defensive coordinator in both schemes and maintained the same aggressive and creative philosophy while coaching both types of defenses.

Last year was not a true reflection of Ryan's style. For the most part it was a reflection of the head coach. In the games (Saints, Patriots) where you saw more exotic and aggressive looks it was more of a reflection of the kind of defense Ryan wanted to run and, in my opinion, Mangini was only on board with it for those two teams in particular because there was such a big difference in the talent levels of the teams that Mangini felt it was the best, and maybe only, chance to win.

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The Browns are a bit of a mystery right now when you are trying to figure out what their defensive personality is going to be. I think they are using the element of surprise to their advantage in order to start the season with a little mystique.

That's because they have been real vanilla in the preseason games so far and I expect they will keep in that way until they play in the regular season. The reason I wanted to point this out was if you watched the game against the Lions you saw a tale of two extremes in philosophy when it came to styles of defense.

The Lions were in attack mode all the time. Their D-line penetrated up field with the intentions of dictating to and disrupting the offense. They also brought blitzes of all kind from both levels of the back 7.

The Browns were much more conservative in their approach. If you paid attention to the defensive tackles in particular, you'd have seen the DTs engage, but not with the intent to penetrate as much as with the intent to control. They would engage and try to hold position creating a logjam which gives the LB a chance to shoot a hole and make tackles.

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I hope the early style of defense is not an indicator of what the defense will be like during the regular season because if so, well, the switch from a 3-4 to a 4-3 will be irrelevant. This 'play stout and run through us' mentality is the exact same mentality that Romeo Crennel and Mangini had except they ran a 3-4 base defense.

I want Browns to dictate and create havoc as opposed to being physical and absorb. Although that is the type of defense I would like to have, if the Browns maintain the same level of aggression as the defenses Dick Jauron has coached in the past we will NEED Colt McCoy and the offense to carry us because our talent level on defense is not good enough to have the 'you can't beat us straight up' mentality. They can be beaten straight up.

In my opinion teams with better talent can afford to focus on being fundamentally sound while waiting for you to make a mistake or just fail to execute. The teams that attack can actually find players with a specific skill and then put that skill to use. I hope that Jauron is a good enough coordinator to scheme defenses that will allow the players we have to excel instead of being a coordinator who tries to do what he is familiar with no matter who the personnel is.

With no offseason to learn his players, it is critical the Browns find out who can do what on defense and then put those players in situations in which they are working with their strengths. If they do.... it will be a much better season than one in which you have a coordinator set in his ways putting unrealistic expectations on unproven players.

Division Peek

Winning the division is the goal of every team in the NFL so you have to stay in tune with what is going on in your division. I went back and watched the first half of our division rivals for week 2 of the preseason and here are a couple thoughts that stuck in my head for each team:

Ravens- The Ravens defense is starting to get very, very scary again. The past few years the Ravens have played good but not great defense. This year, they have the potential to be great again.

The big difference is up front and in the secondary. The front 3 of Ngata, Cody, and Redding seemed impossible for the Chiefs to move. The Chiefs, who were the best rushing team in the league last year, had a miserable time running on the Ravens. With those three up front, Ray Lewis (who didn't even suit up) should be making play after play and holding teams running totals way down.

The secondary, which has been a weak point for the Ravens, has turned into one of the deepest spots on the team. If it wasn't for a few great catches by Dwayne Bowe on the rookie Jimmy Williams, the Chiefs wouldn't have moved the ball at all early in that game.

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Ray Rice looked great running the ball and Joe Flacco and his new weapon Lee Evans were clicking early and often. This could be the year the Ravens finally get a home playoff game.

Bengals- The Bengals the 2011 season will be a roller coaster ride. I really do like the young players they have on defense and Andy Dalton looks like he has some good ability. The running game with Cedric Benson will be ahead of the passing game because the passing game features a bunch of players with responsibilities that they have never had at the NFL level. Rookie A.J. Green had very inconsistent play in the rain and dropped some balls that he should have caught. Dalton is a rookie and often times looked the part while the other WR, Jerome Simpson, is a first time starter in the league.

On defense the CB play was O.K. but the safety play was not and they got torched by Dustin Keller in the game. I love Rey Mauluga at MLB and the addition of Thomas Howard and Manny Lawson should help the team speed on defense.

Based on the early look, the Browns have a good shot at finishing above the Bengals in the standings.

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Steelers- The Steelers looked in mid-season form against the Eagles. Big Ben was in the best shape I ever seen him in and was making plays all over the place. The young WRs have second year confidence and Antonio Brown in particular looks poised for a breakout year.

The running game looked good as Rashard Mendenhall looks to be in superb shape and he also looks quicker through the hole than he did last year.

The Steelers defense looked like its usual suffocating self. The Super Bowl loss could have actually motivated the Steelers....Now isn't that scary?

Enjoy the game Thursday....with the caliber of team we are facing it should be an entertaining game no matter what.

Let's just hope it is entertaining because the Browns are performing well and not because we are watching a Mike Vick show like last year on Monday Night Football where he went Superman on the Redskins..... Go Browns!

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