

Predicting the Unpredictable

Written by {ga=jonathanknight}

Friday, September 09 2011 6:00 PM - Last Updated Friday, September 09 2011 6:46 AM



Needless to say, it's prediction week 'round these parts. Everybody's offering their two cents about how they think the Browns will do in 2011, how many games they'll win, how much product Justin Bieber uses in his hair, and so forth.

While certainly fun, this can hardly be considered a productive use of our time.

No matter what happens over the next 17 weeks, things won't unfold exactly the way we think. Even if the Browns wind up with precisely the record we expect, the road they take to get there will be winding, unpredictable, and possibly utterly bizarre.

Take last year. No big surprise that the Browns finished 5-11, but who expected them to blow out New England and New Orleans? And then lose to Buffalo and Cincinnati?

Or that the "nobody" player we picked up when we pitched Brady Quinn to the curb would wind up being the face (and upper body) of the franchise? Or that our punter would have the longest run from scrimmage?

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Fortunately, for those of you who don't want to wait until January to see how this turns out, I've just come back from the future (which, for some reason, is accessible through the Giant Eagle dairy case) and can give you a week-by-week breakdown of what's going to happen to the Browns this season.

You thought last year was weird? You haven't seen anything yet...

Week 1: Browns 17, Bengals 10

The Browns pick up a rare opening-day win, less by playing better than the Bengals than by not dying in a massive bus accident on the way to the Stadium.

The Bengals' fate was sealed the previous week, when Cincinnati owner Mike Brown decided to have the team's lone scout re-shingle the roof on Brown's house rather than provide valuable game-planning information to the Bengals' coaching staff.

Cincy head coach Marvin Lewis was encouraged to purchase a copy of Madden 12 to get an idea of the Browns' offensive and defensive philosophies and personnel, but there was no guarantee he'd be reimbursed for the cost.

Week 2: Colts 27, Browns 13

On Mike Pagel Day at Lucas Oil Stadium, the mediocre former Colts' and Browns' quarterback has his jersey retired in an emotional pre-game ceremony, highlighted by praises and anecdotes from former teammates and coaches – like the time he overthrew his intended receiver on third down and that one game when he played almost as well as Gary Hogeboom.

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Then, as the banner emblazoned with Pagel's No. 18 is hoisted toward the rafters, someone in the Colts' PR department realizes that a current Colts' player already wears No. 18. And just had his neck replaced.

Deciding it would be in poor taste to make Peyton Manning switch jersey numbers before he regained the ability to swallow ramen noodles, Pagel's banner is quickly lowered and he's quietly led off stage and offered the consolation of watching Rob Ryan eat a McRib sandwich.

The Browns offer to atone for the Colts' faux pas by retiring the No. 10 Pagel wore in his five unremarkable years in Cleveland. But Pagel, recalling that Brady Quinn was the last Brown to wear the number, declines.

Emotionally drained from the pre-game drama, the Browns lose. But since Jim Tressel is on the Indianapolis payroll, the Colts are forced to forfeit the game the following week.

Week 3: Dolphins 10, Browns 6

Looking to stay in shape during the NBA lockout, LeBron James signs with the Dolphins in the week leading up to their trip to Cleveland, looking to show off the skills that earned him all-state honors as a wide receiver in high school. When LeBron catches his first pass on a screen in the first quarter, he stops and requests that a limousine escort him the remaining 45 yards to the end zone.

As the Florida National Guard is federalized to honor the request, Browns' linebacker Scott Fujita hits LeBron with the terrifying force of an 18-wheel Peterbilt on a NASCAR track. When he regains consciousness at Cleveland Clinic, LeBron immediately begins criticizing the Dolphins for not providing him with the talent he needs to lead the Dolphins to a Super Bowl.

Week 4: Titans 23, Browns 13

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In another losing effort, Browns' running back Montario Hardesty is enjoying the finest performance of his brief career when he's forced to leave the game midway through the second quarter after his left arm falls off.

That evening, he undergoes an operation to have it replaced and surgeons are stunned to discover that Hardesty's bones are made of Legos and his ligaments consist entirely of communion wafers.

Week 5: Bye Week 17, Browns 13

For the third straight year, the Browns come up short in their annual matchup with their longtime rival, now coached by Rich Rodriguez.

In other news, Browns' trainers are concerned when they discover Colt McCoy -considered too small by many scouts to be an effective NFL quarterback – is actually shrinking. Listed at 6-foot-1 in the media guide, McCoy now stands at 5-foot-7.

The first indication that something was wrong occurred the previous week when McCoy ran into former Cavaliers' coach Mike Fratello at the Chagrin Falls Drug Mart and had to look up in order to talk to him.

Week 6: Browns 23, Raiders 17

Browns fans who also root for Ohio State are torn. Not only do the Browns have to face Terrelle Pryor in his first NFL game, but also Jim Tressel, who's named Oakland's head coach by malcontent Raiders' owner Al Davis following Tressel's firing in Indianapolis after somehow costing the Colts three picks in next year's draft.

Tressel decides to start Pryor at quarterback, and he throws interceptions on his first three passes, resulting in an insurmountable Browns' lead further protected by Tressel's tendency to

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punt on second down, just in case. Bat-shit crazy Davis, blaming Tressel both for the loss and Davis' inability to experience human emotion, fires Tressel afterward, actually forgetting he'd hired him in the first place.

Week 7: Browns 19, Seahawks 17

Mixing longing stares at the Seattle sideline that he roamed like a paranoid walrus for 10 years between snarky comments about Pearl Jam and Starbucks, Mike Holmgren paces his private box at Cleveland Browns Stadium on a bright autumn afternoon trying to convince himself that he never wants to coach in the NFL again.

Down on the field, Colt McCoy, now the size of Tootie Ramsey on the *Facts of Life*, leads the Browns on an impressive drive in the final minutes and they win on a field goal by Phil Dawson in which the football bounces off both uprights, the crossbar, the back judge's solar plexus, and Captain America's bulletproof alloy shield before going through the uprights as time expires.

Week 8: 49ers 34, Browns 21

Frustrating the Browns the way he frustrated the Buckeyes while quarterbacking the Wolverines back in the halcyon days when Michigan had a both a football program and industry, new San Francisco head coach Jim Harbaugh directs the 49ers to an easy victory by the Bay.

The lone Browns' highlight comes midway through the third quarter, when Peyton Hillis catches the Zodiac killer.

Week 9: Texans 24, Browns 6

The Browns, still rattled by a controversial front-office move earlier in the week, look distracted and disjointed, allowing Houston to coast to triumph.

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Many players' heads are still spinning after disappointing wide receivers Mohammed Massaquoi and Brian Robiskie were released to make roster space for free agents Twinkie the Kid, Captain Cupcake, and Fruit Pie the Magician.

The "Hostess Three" promptly promise to win not two Super Bowls, not three, not four...

Week 10: Browns 27, Rams 20

After an exciting nip-and-tuck battle, the Browns score the winning touchdown midway through the fourth quarter when 3-foot-8 Colt McCoy fires a pass into the end zone that Twinkie the Kid reels in with his lasso.

Twinkie is named AFC Player of the Week, but is suspended for the remainder of the season after he's arrested for allegedly assaulting his longtime girlfriend, Little Debbie.

Week 11: Jaguars 14, Browns 10

The Browns drop a heartbreaker, primarily because they enter the game short-handed. Seven players are sidelined with blood infections received the previous week at Jim Tressel's new tattoo/piercing parlor in Youngstown.

Week 12: Bengals 27, Browns 12

Though the Bengals enter the game with a 1-9 record, they cruise to an easy victory over the Browns, who, realizing they're playing in Cincinnati, instantly become a train wreck, turning the ball over 14 times after taking the field not wearing pants.

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Marvin Lewis is forced to miss the game, however, as he serves a one-game suspension for stealing a copy of Madden 12 from a Finneytown-area GameStop prior to the teams' first meeting in September.

Week 13: Ravens 4, Browns 0

With Colt McCoy now being publicly mistaken for an Oompa Loompa, the Browns' offense can manage only five first downs against Baltimore's fierce defense, which scores the game's only points in the second quarter when Ray Lewis tackles Browns' running back Armond Smith in the end zone for a safety.

The officials, fearing the hyperkinetic Lewis may go berserk and come at them with a bloody shank at any moment, quickly award the Ravens another two points to calm him, then pepper him with tranquilizer darts and have him helicoptered back to the sideline.

Week 14: Steelers a whole lot, Browns not nearly enough

Since the game is on a Thursday night on the NFL Network (which only 19% of Browns fans have) and is broadcast opposite *A Charlie Brown Christmas*, nobody really knows what happened. But even without watching, we're pretty sure the Steelers kicked the bloody shit out of the Browns.

Week 15: Browns 20, Cardinals 10

Just like their three dozen fans, the Cardinals forget they have a game and don't show up until the middle of the third quarter. By then, facing no opposition other than the synthetic turf, the Browns had managed to take a 10-3 lead and hold on for the victory.

Week 16: Ravens 10, Browns 0

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With Colt McCoy now too short to face forward in his car seat and Seneca Wallace having accidentally been left in Houston in October, the Browns quickly sign Mike Pagel to start at quarterback on Christmas Eve in Baltimore. Having not played professional football in 20 years, Pagel is comically bad, yet still a noticeable improvement over Jake Delhomme.

After the game, the Ravens announce that in 2012 they will be leaving the AFC North Division for the SEC.

Week 17: Steelers 24, Browns 10

The Steelers' defense played well and made several....you know what, to hell with this. Same damn story since the Spanish-American War: Browns and Steelers play. Steelers win easily. Browns fans hate themselves. Drink. Watch re-runs of *How I Met Your Mother* until the sweet darkness of sleep overcomes them.

The only interesting thing to happen occurs during a pileup for a loose ball in the second quarter. Pittsburgh quarterback Ben Roethlisberger attempts to sexually assault the Browns' Phil Taylor, momentarily mistaking the 335-pound defensive lineman with a 21-year-old sorority girl who may or may not wish to have intercourse. When Taylor resists Roethlisberger's advances, he's penalized for roughing the passer.

If you're keeping score at home, that's three cartoon desserts, one shrinking quarterback, one Ben Roethlisberger rape joke, and a third straight 5-11 season for our orange-and-brown-clad warriors.

Like I said, maybe they'll wind up where you think, but almost certainly not how you think.

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