

Bengals vs. Browns- Game 1 Preview

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Saturday, September 10 2011 11:00 PM - Last Updated Saturday, September 10 2011 6:42 PM



Week 1

When/ Where: Sunday 1:00 pm Cleveland Browns Stadium Cleveland, Ohio

Opponent: Cincinnati Bengals **Current Spread:** Cleveland -6.5

The season is upon us and it is time to start previewing games that actually count. Game one is always tough because you really don't know what teams like to do yet and you really haven't even seen what they *can* do because most teams are so base-orientated during the preseason. This season's opening contest against the division rival Cincinnati Bengals at Cleveland Browns Stadium is even tougher to predict because both teams are running different offensive systems and the Browns are running a new defensive system. As if that's not enough, the Browns also have a new Head Coach, while the Bengals have a QB who has never taken a snap in the NFL.

Let's look at what we should expect from this week's game:

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Cincinnati Offense- I expect the Bengals to try and protect their young QB and lean on the running game. I don't expect power formations but I expect the Bengals to attempt plenty of running plays from a 3 WR formation so the defense is spread and forcing a LB for CB switch.

I also expect rookie A.J. Green and TE Jermaine Gresham to be the focal points in the passing game. Gresham has a nice size advantage on our starting safeties and I anticipate the Bengals to try and attack this point. Jordan Shipley could also be a factor out of the slot.

Jay Gruden, the offensive coordinator for the Bengals, is doing the job for the first time in the NFL after coming from the arena league so there may be some growing pains associated with this debut. Maybe inexperience leads to things like some delay of games or wasting of timeouts. You might want to be on the lookout for some of that.

Cincinnati Defense- Having Mike Zimmer as defensive coordinator, the Bengals boast a seasoned veteran coach who has a history of coaching with an aggressive style. Expect the Bengals to apply plenty of pressure packages against the Browns to test how the Browns have digested their new offensive system.

Stopping Peyton Hillis will no doubt be priority number one for the Bengals. Colt McCoy is only going into his 9th start so the Bengals will probably take the approach of wanting Colt and our relatively unproven WRs to be the ones that beat them, and not the Madden cover boy.

I expect to see plenty of safety play near the line of scrimmage and blitzing from OLB Manny Lawson, who was originally drafted as a pass rush specialist for the 3-4 scheme in San Francisco.

Browns Offense- As long as the weather is good I expect coach Shurmur to let Colt come out guns blazing. I think the Browns will start the game passing to get McCoy in a rhythm and keep his confidence high.

The starting safeties for the Bengals are both below six feet tall so Ben Watson and Evan Moore should be able to win those matchups and the TEs will no doubt be featured. The last

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time the two teams played Watson led the team in receptions with 7 for 92 yards.

Hillis will more than likely play on all three downs and I expect him to get 20 combined touches. He may get even more if the Browns can maintain a lead in the second half. Also, if the Bengals decide to blitz often look for Hillis to rack up some dump off receptions in the passing game.

I expect Greg Little and Josh Cribbs to be featured with Brian Robiske getting the secondary looks. Massaquoi is back practicing in full so it will be interesting to see how much he plays after missing the entire preseason.

Browns Defense- Whoooo let the dawgs out? Yes, I expect the Browns defense to be aggressive. The safety will be down in the box trying to stop Cedric Benson from getting the ground game going because that will make Bengals one dimensional.

If they do stop the run I expect the Browns to confuse and pressure the rookie QB. It is not often you get to play a rookie in his first regular season start and I expect the veteran coaching staff to try and exploit Andy Dalton's inexperience.

The personnel in sub-defenses is not yet known to us but expect healthy doses of Marcus Benard in the backfield on passing downs and expect D'Qwell Jackson to be active and a tackling machine.

I think Jackson and TJ Ward should will be the team leaders in tackles when this game is over.

Matchups to Watch

Although the season is fresh I have my eye on quite a few matchups that could be key in the outcome of Sunday's game

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OG Jason Pinkston vs DTs Domata Peko & Geno Atkins- I know I have been pretty critical of Jason Pinkston on his play during the preseason, but the rookie's technique and power really looked bad at times. It will be a great test of how far he has come because Peko has a really high motor and Atkins is really strong and active. If Pinkston can keep these guys off of McCoy in the passing game it will go a long way in showing the growth Pinkston will need in order to exhibit to have a good rookie season.

LT Joe Thomas vs DE Michael Johnson- When I watched the Bengals preseason games Johnson really jumped off of the tape. He was by far the most disruptive force on the defense. He has always had the physical gifts but up to now has just never put it all together as a young player. It is now his 3rd year in the league and he has looked like a dominant force during preseason against some good left tackles.

Joe Thomas is the best in the league by most people's rankings but he looked human for the first time in his career when I watched the 2010 season a second time. Thomas got paid this offseason and is the type of person who will do his best to prove his worth so I am interested to see this matchup.

LDE Jayme Mitchell vs RT Andre Smith- Smith was a top ten draft pick who has underachieved by great proportions so far in his NFL career. He has been injured, overweight, and his work ethic has been questioned thus far so it will be interesting to see if he starts putting the critics at bay.

Jayme Mitchell is a player trying to find his way as a starter in this league and was bragged about for his pass rush skills by Browns management. I have yet to see what all the buzz was about thus far. Maybe going against Smith is just what his confidence needs.

DT Phil Taylor vs OG Clint Boling- Taylor should be both licking his chops and thanking the football gods for this matchup. Bobbie Williams a 12 year veteran, and one of the most physical guards in the league, was suspended by the league for the first 4 games of the season. Taylor's day would have been a whole lot different if he had to go against Williams all afternoon. Having a fellow rookie to go against gives Taylor an excellent chance to start off his rookie year looking like a dominant force. Let's see if he takes advantage of the situation.

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CB Demetri Patterson vs WR Jordan Shipley- Jordan Shipley proved his rookie year that he can wreak havoc from the slot. It will be critical that Patterson, the 3rd

CB, can blanket Shipley so the rookie QB can't hit those short passes over the middle that keep drives alive and defenses on the field. Shipley might have extra incentive to play well against the Browns since T.J. Ward laid him out with a concussion last year.

RB Peyton Hillis and LB D'Qwell Jackson vs RB Cedric Benson and Rey Mauluga- These RB vs LB matchups will be key on both sides. If one team becomes one dimensional I expect the team that suffers that fate to be at a real disadvantage because of the youth at QB.

Prediction

I expect the Browns to come out of the gates on offense fast and up-tempo. I think the key to the game will be the Browns getting points early and tightening up the collar of the rookie QB for the Bengals. If the Browns can play with the lead it will allow for them to be more aggressive on defense and put Dalton to the test.

If the Bengals are able to run the ball effectively and Benson gets anywhere close to the 150 yards he had the last time he faced the Browns, the Bengals will keep themselves in the contest and anything can happen.

I do expect the Browns to be effective scoring points early against the Bengals and therefore think they will play the game with the upper hand.

QBs usually go a long way in determining the outcome in an NFL game and I think the Browns have the better QB in this contest so I expect the Browns to win.

Browns 31 Bengals 17

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Enjoy the game. Go Browns!

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