

Browns vs. Colts: Game 2 Preview

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Sunday, September 18 2011 11:00 AM - Last Updated Sunday, September 18 2011 11:11 AM



When/Where: Sunday 1:00pm, Lucas Oil Field, Indianapolis, Indiana

Opponent: Indianapolis Colts **Current Spread:** Browns -2

Week 1 didn't produce favorable results for either club. The Indianapolis Colts got beat into the ground by the Houston Texans (34-7) and the Cleveland Browns got beat 27-17 by the Cincinnati Bengals. This week's matchup will be critical for both teams to get on track if they want to have a productive season. Last year 8 teams were 0-2 after week 2. Of those 8 teams none of them finished above the 7-9 St. Louis Rams and the 8 teams ended the year with a combined 42-86 record. Neither club wants to be a part of stats like they so anticipate a dog fight at Lucas Oil Field on Sunday.

Let's look deeper into the matchup and check out what we should expect:

Colts' Season Snapshot

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One of the biggest stories early in the 2011 season was the Indianapolis Colts losing their franchise QB Peyton Manning to neck surgery. Most predicted it would have a tremendous effect on their season and it certainly did week 1.

Losing a player like Manning affects both sides of the ball for the Colts because their defense was designed specifically to compliment the fast break style of offense that Manning and the Colts use.

The season is only one week old so who knows how the Colts will end up, but starting the season on the road against a Wade Phillips attacking 3-4 proved too much for newly signed QB Kerry Collins in the week 1 game against the Houston Texans. Collins fumbled twice early in the game, both of which led to TDs, and the Colts couldn't stop the snowball effect in the first half as the Texans got out to a 34-0 lead.

In addition to the miscues from the Colts on offense they also gave up a special teams TD as Jacoby Jones took a punt to the end zone in the 2nd quarter. The game had a much different tone in the second half as the Colts shut the Texans out and scored 7 points themselves winning the half 7-0.

Some would say the Texans just packed it in and played backups but I watched the game on my computer with NFL Game Rewind and that was not the case at all. The Texans tried to score and were either stopped all together or turned the ball over and the Colts offense looked good moving the ball pretty well throughout the second half.

Kerry Collins and the Colts looked like two different players and two different teams during the second half and if they continue to play the way they did in the second half their season won't be the washout that some think it will be this year.

Expectations on Gameday

Colts Offense-The Colts use a base 3WR set on offense. They don't even list a FB on the roster although Chris Gronkowski has been a listed FB on other rosters he has been on in the

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NFL.

Running Game-This is the best run blocking OL the Colts have had in a while and I expect them to use the stretch run play they are notorious for against the Browns based on the success that the Bengals had with it in week 1 against Cleveland. Expect the Colts to use two RBs throughout the game. In week 1 Joseph Addai and rookie Delone Carter got equal carries and expect the same to happen in week 2.

One of the running schemes the Colts have used and will continue to use is running out of the double TE formation after calling a "check with me" call in the huddle. I expect Collins to start using this and if so he will dictate which side the run will go to once he gets to the line of scrimmage based on the alignment of the defense. These are the types of calls made at the line of scrimmage that have made Peyton Manning famous. I think Kerry Collins being a veteran QB can continue this concept and make running calls at the line of scrimmage, so look for it on Sunday.

Passing Game- In case you haven't picked it up by now, the Colts signed 17 year veteran Kerry Collins to be their starting QB once they knew Peyton Manning needed surgery. Collins may be old (38) but he can still sling the football. Based on the throws he made in the second half of the season opener he still has a very strong arm and can still hit all the throwing windows required to be a good QB in the league.

In game one Collins spent a lot of time trying to get the ball to pro bowl WR Reggie Wayne (11 targets) and until he gets more comfortable with the secondary routes I expect him to do the same in week 2. Reggie Wayne is a top 5 WR in the league so I would expect him and the Colts to try and duplicate or better the 7 catch 106 yard 1TD performance he had in week one. The other pass catcher to keep your eye is pro bowl TE Dallas Clark who caught 4 of the 5 balls thrown his direction in week1. That was Clark's first game back after missing most of last year with an injury.

I also expect the Colts to try and work the secondary (Pierre Garcon/Austin Collie) WRs this week since the Browns are likely to have Joe Haden on Reggie Wayne as much as possible. Collie's route running and Garcon's run after the catch ability make these guys dangerous targets so the Browns shouldn't focus all their energy on Wayne.

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The last thing I want to point out is the Colts screen game. The Colts are one of the teams in the league that run the screen play for all three levels of skill players on offense (WR, RB, TE). In week 1 the Colts ran two screens to Dallas Clark and one to Reggie Wayne. Look for the Colts to run a few screens in Week 2 and not necessarily just the conventional RB screen.

Colts Defense-The Colts run a classic version of the cover 2 shell (otherwise known as the Tampa 2 defense). This style of defense is a 4-3 base defense that boasts undersized, quick DL personnel and LBs who can run well in order drop properly into their zone coverage, a staple of the Tampa 2.

In general this type of defense is an aggressive run and hit defense that doesn't blitz much. They rely on their front 4 to get penetration and provide the pass rush without blitzing their LBs, preferring to drop the LBs into zone coverage. This idea of rushing 4 and dropping 7 into coverage is a style of defense that makes tighter windows and provides the opposing QB with more defenders to throw around.

Personnel wise the Colts boast two of the best DEs in the game in Robert Mathis and Dwight Freeney. Mathis got a sack and tackle for loss in week one but the all pro Freeney didn't even register a tackle, so expect him to be in full beast mode at home on the fast turf of Lucas Oil Field.

The Colts have made a conscious effort in recent years to bulk up some at the DT position (Fili Moala is 303lbs and Antonio Johnson tips the scales at 310lbs)... but if they are up on a team and are in full attack mode they insert the 265lb Eric Foster into the lineup to get more pass rush from the middle.

The cover 2 zone puts pressure on the secondary players in run support because the CBs will have contain on the outside and the safeties will be expected to fill fast up the middle due to the DL getting up field with penetration. When looking at the stat sheet from last week you can see what I mean because 3 of the 4 starting DBs were tied for second on the team in tackles.

I expect the Colts to continue to rely on their front 4 to get pressure utilizing the cover 2 defense that they have been known for.

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Browns Season Snapshot

The initial contest of the Pat Shurmur Cleveland Browns ended with a disappointing loss to the Cincinnati Bengals after having the lead going into the 4th quarter. The offense struggled in the second half mustering only 112 yards and 3 points and the defense eventually gave up a big play in the form of a go ahead TD pass to rookie A.J. Green.

The go ahead TD was even more heartbreaking because it was a quick huddle play by the Bengals and the Browns didn't get lined up fast enough. That allowed Green, the rookie WR, to be all alone on the outside for an easy score.

The 2011 season didn't get off to the kind of start a young coach and team would want so let's see how they respond in week 2.

Expectations on Gameday

Browns Defense- Overall the Browns defense didn't get off to a bad start in week 1. They got burned by some costly penalties and one giant mental error so the problems for the defense to fix seem pretty straight forward.

Right off the bat I expect the Browns to challenge the age of Kerry Collins by checking his mobility. Collins has never been a mobile QB and at age 38 and after coming out of retirement to play, the Browns want to see if his body is feeling O.K.

I expect them to send some pressure (more than likely right up the middle) early to create some movement and get some hits in on him. They will know fairly quickly if he is feeling and moving fine or if he is stiff and bothered.

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I also expect the defense to give the veteran QB a few different coverage looks early in order to see if he has all the checks in order. Kerry Collins has only been running this offense a few weeks and may not be in tune with all the hots and checks for various coverage he could face. Testing the QB and WR being on the same page seems like a solid plan.

The Browns got 4 sacks in week one. Two of those sacks came from starting MLB D'Qwell Jackson and another from CB Joe Haden. The last was a combination of backup DE Marcus Benard and backup DT Brian Schaefering each getting half a sack. I expect both of these players to earn more reps and spell the starting DL a little more in game 2.

Also, if the Colts start having success passing the football against our nickel defense and seem to be taking advantage of a LB matchup... look for backup LB Kaluka Maiava to play as he is a really good LB in coverage, and from what I have seen, he is the second best LB on the team behind D'Qwell Jackson.

One other thing I would look for is the possibility of shadowing Reggie Wayne with Joe Haden when the Browns are in man coverage. Typically Joe will stay on the left side but if the Colts scheme Wayne away from Haden's side and Wayne is having a ton of success on Sheldon Brown, look for the Browns to counter with Haden shadowing Wayne.

Browns Offense- If you have Peyton Hillis on your fantasy team, make sure you start him this week. This Colts defense is built for speed not power so they have a history of letting big physical backs pile up yards on them. For example in two meetings last year Arian Foster racked up a combined 333 yards and 4TDs.

Running Game-I expect the Browns to pound Hillis from the 3WR set and, unless they're busy chasing down a big Colts' lead, I expect them to keep going to him throughout the game. This is the type of defense that a power runner can feel like super hero and Hillis was under used in week 1.

Another reason I suspect they will utilize a 3WR set is to get the Colts to bring in their nickel CB Justin Tryon in exchange for one of the Colts LBs. Tryon is only 5-9 and 183lbs so anytime you can exchange a LB for a guy that size you increase the odds of a RB like Hillis to have success.

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I expect the Browns to use a healthy dose of power plays mixed with some zone stretch plays to change it up. The Browns also have some younger, more athletic interior O-linemen so I wouldn't rule out some trap plays trying to take advantage of the Colts' DL instincts to get up field.

One last note on the running game is to pundits who say the Browns won't stay committed to the run game because of Pat Shurmur and his west coast offense: reconsider. Because Shurmur showed in St. Louis that if the situation dictated, and the results were there...he will run and run often.

For example in the Rams vs Chargers game of the 2010 season, Steven Jackson ran the ball 29 times...same number against the Broncos...and in the Redskins vs Rams game the Rams RBs combined for 36 rushing attempts. Again, listen up: If it gives coach Shurmur the best chance to gain yards and win a game....he will run the ball.

Passing Game- When looking at the Browns plan in the passing game I revert to some of the things I saw the Texans do against the Colts in week 1. For example, the Texans first three passes were bootlegs and play action passes.

Taking advantage of the fast pursuing defense of the Colts will be a part of the game plan for sure so look for the Browns to use these same type of plays early in the contest. That will also play into the strength's of Brown's QB Colt McCoy who has proven that he is a very good passer on the move and outside of the pocket.

Screen passes, which the Browns didn't use in week one, should get dusted and taken off the shelf for the same reasons bootlegs will be used so I would look for both bootlegs and screens this week.

As usual I expect the Browns TEs to be a big part of the passing game. The cover 2 defense of the Colts should allow the TEs to challenge the seams. This will allow the TEs to be more of a factor from the conventional TE alignments as opposed to needing to create TE opportunities flexing them out.

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I don't expect the Browns to stop flexing Evan Moore altogether. However, I do think both he and Ben Watson will be factors from the conventional alignment positions in this game.

I would also anticipate some fade patterns to test the safeties once the running game gets going. In a cover 2 if the safeties start getting nosy and peeking in the backfield to support the run, well, it can allow for some fade patterns to turn into big plays and the Browns have shown the ability to complete passes using this pattern during the preseason.

This is the type of game where the accuracy of Colt McCoy can be a huge asset because with more defenders out in pass coverage it will really help if you can put the ball exactly where you want it.

The zone coverage and extra obstacles could also be a turnover machine if Colt and the WRs do not show great timing. With the smaller windows created by this defense, the passing game needs to have great timing to hit the windows at the correct times because if they are off it can lead to balls being thrown in closed windows which will more than likely result in turnovers.

The Colts have been running this same defense for years so they are very well in sync with their movement and should provide a really good measuring stick of where the Browns passing game is at.

Also keep in mind that the noise level in a dome will no doubt create the need for the Browns to use silent counts. Silent counts mean that the O-lineman and the D-lineman are almost on a level playing field when getting off the line of scrimmage. This will only help great pass rushers like Freeney and Mathis so keep an eye on the "get off" of the Colts DL in reference to the Browns OL. This will go a long way in the success or failure of the Cleveland passing game.

Player Matchups and Game Notes

Key Injuries-Colts will be without two LBs MLB Gary Brackett LB Ernie Simms are out.

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Browns look to be out RT Tony Pashos and backup LB Titus Brown.

RT Artis Hicks/RT Oniel Cousins vs Robert Mathis-The Colts Robert Mathis is an outstanding pass rusher with a high motor. Starting RT Tony Pashos is out again in week 2 so Hicks and Cousins will continue to share time in his absence. Mathis will put both tackles to the test but should provide a bigger test for Cousins who is a bit bigger and slower than Hicks. If Mathis dominates these guys the Browns could lose big because Mathis has a history of creating turnovers through sack fumbles which could lead directly to points by the Colts. If the Browns are going to win this game, they must win this matchup.

Dallas Clark vs Incoming rushers- When I watched the film from week 1, twice I saw Texans OLB Mario Williams blow past Dallas Clark for sacks on Kerry Collins. If the Browns pass rushers are put in one-on-one situations against Dallas Clark they must win these battles. Clark is a wonderful receiving TE but blocking isn't his forte and you have to take advantage of that.

Dallas Clark vs T.J. Ward- Although blocking isn't Clark's best quality he may very well be the best route running TE in the league. Clark is a precise route runner with enough speed and run after catch ability to create big plays in the passing game. T.J. Ward allowed Jermaine Gresham to catch 6 of 8 balls that were thrown to him in week 1 so Ward needs to stick closer to Clark or he will have a huge day.

Peyton Hillis vs Pat Angerer- With starting MLB Gary Brackett out this week, starting LOLB Pat Angerer will slide over to the middle. Angerer had 13 tackles in week 1 so he is a very active LB but will face a big bruising back in Hillis who will be determined to prove he is worthy of the contract extension he is currently seeking.

Hillis is in line for a contract extension but his 57 yard performance of week 1 isn't the type of production that warrants big money so I expect Hillis to be salivating and motivated against a defense that is typically undersized up front. Angerer will have to make a lot of plays in the run game if the Colts want to contain the bruising Hillis.

Anthony Costanzo vs Jabaal Sheard- Anytime Sheard gets to face a fellow rookie this year I

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would expect him to try and make some plays. The first year player from Boston College, Costanzo was pretty good last week against another rookie J.J. Watt last week.

I expect Sheard to try and use some speed and speed-to-power moves against Costanzo to try and generate pass rush. In the run game Costanzo may have an advantage, he is known for being a mauler, and Sheard can have trouble at times anchoring against the run so look for the Colts to attack the left side when running the ball.

Prediction

Starting a new job with the type of loss new Head Coach Pat Shurmur did only added salt to the wound of his team's offensive performance in Week 1. Coach Shurmur is also the offensive coordinator and play caller so he has more stock invested in the offense than most head coaches and therefore can also have a greater role in the fixing of week one's problems.

I do think the Browns fix some of the kinks in the offense and passing game in particular but I don't think Colt McCoy's experience in the dome of Lucas Oil Field will be the same one he had in the Superdome against the Saints in 2010.

I think the emotion of the Colts players and fans to prove they can win without Peyton Manning at the helm will be too much for the young Browns team to handle and I think they struggle to block LDE Robert Mathis.

I think Kerry Collins will look more like he did in the second half of the Week 1 game and hit some big passes in front of a fired up home crowd. After Sunday the young Browns will go 0 for 2 to start the 2011 season and will have to look to right the ship in week 3 at home.

As always enjoy the game and... Go Browns!

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