



Week 2 – Cleveland at Indianapolis

Does that win change anything?

For a lot of people, the answer is No. Beating a Peyton Manning-less Colts team is akin to Phil Taylor slapping David Spade around. Even the worst team should be able to fall out of bed drunk and pound the Colts, so there is nothing positive that can be taken from beating such a squad. If anything, the Browns should be ashamed for not smashing them as they're supposed to.

Somehow, somewhere, Browns Nation has become so ensnared in losing that they can only be happy in pain. The self-loathing is palpable.

Now, I'm as pessimistic as the next person. I'll believe it when I see it. My head tells me that this franchise is headed in the right direction, that the leadership structure is both accomplished and effective, that the talent level - whilst young and thin - is definitely growing.

But my soul just waits for the bottom to drop out, for this regime to fail like the last, for these players to fall apart (or leave) like their predecessors.

Life history teaches me that I should listen to my head. Sometimes that's not easy, but I will try.

The Browns are not a good team... right now. They might get better as the players get learn and get used to their new schemes, as the coaches get used to their new roles, as the young players start to develop.

They might not get there

this year.

Regardless,

most of us thought this was a 6 or 7 win team going in.

They're certainly on pace for that.

Why are so many so angry when the Browns are what we thought they'd be?

Additionally, the disregarding of the Colts as a minor league team is absurd. No, the Colts are not good.

It is clear

how important Manning is to that team, but we knew that a couple years ago when we had to watch Jim Sorgi flail around and lose his way to screwing the Browns out of a playoff spot.

But it's not like Reggie Wayne, Dallas Clark, Joe Addai, Dwight Freeney, Robert Mathis, Jeff Saturday, Antoine Bethea, etc. suddenly forgot how to play football.

And it's not like Kerry Collins is Jim Sorgi... hell, he's led his team to a Super Bowl, he's started 179 career games, 7 last year. His deep balls were right there (good coverage). His INT was because the Receiver fell down.

Collins and the Colts are going to win some games before this year's done.

They're hardly the Worst Team Ever.

In the end, it's a win. Doesn't matter who it comes against. Doesn't matter the circumstances. Doesn't matter if they win by 1 or 45, the win still counts.

And, at 1-1, the Browns are actually tied for the division lead (probably the latest in the season they've been tied for 1st since the 80's).

This is still a 6 or 7 win team. But we knew that. I just don't get the trend of hating everything about the team we supposedly love.

Stats

Time of Possession: CLE – 34:34, IND – 25:26

Total Yards: CLE – 303, IND - 285

Yards Passing: CLE - 197, IND – 176

Yards Rushing: IND – 109, CLE - 106

First Downs: IND - 19, CLE – 18

Turnovers Forced: CLE - 2, IND – 1

Sacks: CLE – 2, IND - 1

Final Score: Cleveland 27, Indy 19

These stats are completely misleading, since the Colts were able to pad their stats in the last 2:53 when the game was out of reach and the Browns went into Prevent and allowed Indy to march the field and score. So let's try this again from 2:53 left in the game, showing a much more accurate statistical picture of the contest.

Time of Possession: CLE – 34:12, IND – 22:55

Total Yards: CLE – 304, IND - 202

Yards Passing: CLE - 197, IND – 93

Yards Rushing: IND – 109, CLE - 107

First Downs: CLE – 18, IND - 14

Turnovers Forced: CLE - 2, IND – 1

Sacks: CLE – 2, IND - 1

Final Score: Cleveland 27, Indy 12

Plus 10 minutes in Time of Possession. Over 100 yards more Total Offense (and the Defense holding the Colts to approximately only 200 yards). Bas
ically winning every single statistical category convincingly (except Rushing, which was a draw).

Does this speak to the solidity of the Browns Defense, or is it just that the Kerry Collins-led Colts are that bad?

Probably a bit of both. There's no doubt that a Manning-less Indy team is just pitifully adrift (despite still having tons of team talent). But there's also no doubt that this Cleveland Defense has surprised and impressed me. I'd still they rather be more solid against the run, but they certainly aren't a wilting flower by any stretch.

Game Balls

Jabaal Sheard – The move from RDE to LDE paid off big time for Sheard, who suddenly looked quick and powerful coming from the left side. 4 tackles, 1 assist, 1 sack, 1 forced fumble, 1 fumble recovery doesn't really demonstrate how effective he was. He hit Collins as he threw, which should have led to a Phil Taylor pick. He burst through the middle to drive Joe Addai back on a carry, turning him outside where Joe Haden drove him out (and got credit for the tackle).

Clearly, Sheard is the more explosive of the 2 Defensive Ends (Jayme Mitchell being the other). They both like to play Left End. I say if Sheard prefers to play Left, then he plays Left - end of story. My apologies to Mr. Mitchell.

Josh Cribbs – It is now obvious that Cribbs was hampered all last season by injury, because he is back to his explosive self in an explosive way this year. Twice in 2 games his Kickoff returns have sparked a Browns rally, and twice in 2 games he was a teammate in the

way away from taking a Punt Return to the house (this week it was Joe Haden). Not to mention all the success he's having on those bubble screens, which apparently is Shurmur's way of getting him involved without asking him to be a full-blown WR.

One moment in the game I found quintessential Cribbs was when Shurmur challenged Sheard's backwards pass-thing near the end of the game right after Jabaal had stripped the ball from Collins and recovered it. Shurmur came out onto the field to explain to the Refs what he was challenging. Uninvited, Cribbs followed him out, standing behind him and "helping" to explain the challenge.

Ahtyba Rubin – Another solid game for a player who wisely received another solid extension. He provided a push all game, including an early sack.

Honorable Mention

Colt McCoy – About twice a game (usually in the 2nd Quarter), Colt makes a throw that has you saying "Damn! That was impressive!" I'm not worried about his arm, and I love his elusiveness and accuracy on the run (which is important on this team with the O Line playing like it is). But he does still hold the ball too long, and needs to take a few more shots down the field to loosen up the plethora of short stuff that the WCO brings.

Phil Taylor – He'll not be mistaken for an All Pro at this point, but he's definitely making his presence felt. His hit to stone Delone Carter for no gain on 3rd and 1 at the CLE 9 at the end of the 2nd Quarter was huge, holding Indy to just a FG and a 6-0 lead.

Joe Thomas – Was ready to ring him up for WoS when he let Freeney by him to blindside Colt and cause a fumble (although Colt definitely held the ball too long), but he pretty much shut down the Colts' perennial Pro Bowl pass rusher after that. Which is no easy task.

Owen Marecic – Not a strong runner, but had a nice blow-up block on Hillis' first TD run, had an impressive catch on a ball thrown behind him, and was central on several good ST blocks. Glad to see him contribute.

Brad Maynard – That's what a pro punter looks like.

TJ Ward – Two good pass break-ups in one on one situations, against Dallas Clark and Reggie Wayne, no less. The second - on Wayne - was loudly booed by the crowd as Pass Interference. Pass Interference? On Reggie, maybe. That was just solid D by TJ.

Mo Massaquoi – Still believe that Greg Little has plenty of potential, but - as of this minute - Mo is the only NFL-quality starting WR on the roster.

Wall of Shame

Oniel Cousins and Artis Hicks – Not as bad as last week, but there was still plenty of pressure coming from Colt's right side.

Montario Hardesty – Can't fumble there. CANNOT. The Browns got the ball back, fortunately, but that was a terrible mistake, one Montario did not have a chance to make up for.

Brian Robiskie – Read somewhere he was in the game for 25 or so snaps. Was he dressed in stripes and carrying a whistle?

Run Blocking – Until Peyton Hillis ripped off his late TD run (which had nothing to do with the blocking), he was averaging 2.65/carry (23 carries), and those were hard-fought. S
Several short yardage runs were stuffed by the not-known-for-run-stuffing Colts.
And even when the Browns really began racking up the Time of Possession advantage in the 2nd Half, they still weren't able to really wear down Indy's undersized D Line.
If they don't improve (and quickly), this does not bode well for the future.

The Linebackers – I think DQ is still solid, but I'm not sure either Fujita or Gocong made a play all day. Which is kind of sad when the D Line is playing as well as they did.

Slow Starts – Why does it take a Quarter and a Josh Cribbs return to wake this Offense up?

Dome Stadiums – Just so unnatural and sterile. Mr. Irsay, tear that roof down! (Like that's ever gonna happen).

Regarding the Play Calling

I don't want to give Paddy O'Shurmur too hard a time this week since he got an inordinate amount of grief last week (some deserved, some the panic of Browns Nation), but I do want to take umbrage with some of the play calling.

1. Too little Hardesty, wrong time. I kept wondering where Hardesty was the whole game, praying that the coaching staff hadn't fallen into the Mangini/Daboll trap of forgetting that playing backups was allowed. And when he finally takes the field, it's in a goal line situation, which he might be fine for if he's warmed up, but is probably a bad time to insert the guy for the first time. To
Shurmur's credit, he later admitted that he'd made a mistake getting Hardesty into the game so late.
Admitting such (along with moving Sheard to LDE) shows me that this Coach is more pliable than some of the previous regimes.

2. A little Smith? Yeah, this is nitpicking, but I do want to see a little Armond Smith, and not just on Special Teams. Just a carry or two to mix things up.

3. Not a big fan of that play-action misdirection screen (Colt fakes handoff to Hillis, fakes screen to the left, spins around and throws a screen out to the right back to Hillis). Maybe once a game, but they tried it 4 times by my count, and it was NEVER successful. That's a play to put away for a while, kinda like the ol' reverse on 4th and Goal.

4. Inside handoffs to Marecic. Those just need to go. No one is surprised. Marecic seems like he'll be fine as a WCO Fullback, but he's just not an effective runner yet.

5. Go deep. I can't say whether or not any deep passes were called and Colt just didn't throw them because they weren't there (entirely possible), but the running game/screen game simply is not going to open up for this team unless there is even a hint of downfield threat. I know, I know, the WR corps doesn't scare anyone speed-wise. But Evan Moore is effective deep with his size. Greg Little can be too. If those 2 don't come down with the ball, there's a good chance they'll pull an Interference call.

Regarding the Trends

First Quarter, start slow. Look out of sync Offensively, give up decent sized runs Defensively, get little pressure on the opposing QB, go down early.

Second Quarter, kickoff return gets good field position. Colt makes some impressive throws. Defense ramps it up. Browns take Halftime lead.

Third Quarter, Defense provides plenty of chances to put the game away, Offense refuses, won't finish off drives, maybe a turnover to give the opponent life.

Fourth Quarter, with little time left and supposedly in control of the contest, the score is still uncomfortably close. The Offense tries to run the ball to kill clock, but can't get it done. A mistake will sink them, a mistake that they've made 50% of the time so far.

It might've been 100% had Reggie Wayne not been so considerate as to fall on 3rd and 13 late in the game. It likely would've been a completion and a 1st Down rather than an Usama Young INT. The score was 14-12 Browns, and even a FG would give Indy the lead. Instead, the Browns kicked a FG off the turnover to go up 17-12, giving them the required breathing room to not choke.

That was the difference between Game 1 and Game 2.

That trend will not work against teams not named Cincinnati or Indianapolis.

Regarding the Wide Receivers

Sadly, I must proclaim that the Brian Robiskie Experiment will not work. On another team, as a #4 WR, he might be useful. He's just taking up space here.

Mo Mass is a decent WR, probably a #2. Greg Little... too early to say. He shows potential. But a true #1 might be a stretch.

Cribbs is not a WR. He's a playmaker, and therefore he gets playing time, but not a WR in the

true sense of the word.

Evan Moore? Nice possession WR. Not a TE.

Outside of Cribbs, there is something missing here - SPEED.

Thus, I wouldn't mind seeing a little more Jordan Norwood and Carlton Mitchell. Norwood showed his abilities in the Preseason, and Mitchell... well, I've been hearing the glowing reviews for this guy for too long to (seemingly) never see him play a damn game.

Regarding Whatever

***Spent all Sunday's game at the hospital with my wife, who was having trouble breathing. 7 pleasant hours in the Emergency Room for them to tell us she has pneumonia in both lungs. Time to stop smoking, girl.

I did get to watch the entire game, however, accompanied by the sarcastic commentary of nurses ("They're winning? Wonders never cease.") And the Browns are undefeated in games where I watch from the hospital.

So I guess I'll have to stab/burn/eviscerate myself every Sunday morning for the rest of the season.

***I love Peyton Hillis as much as you do, but he lacks elite RB cutting ability. Thus, my desire to see Montario Hardesty's carries go up to about 15 a game.

***As I mentioned above, Josh Cribbs was slowed down on his long punt return when he almost ran into Joe Haden, who was blocking for him. I must admit I'm a bit surprised to see one of the team's legit stars out there blocking for Special Teams.

Not saying I have a problem with it, just the pessimist in me would be irritated to lose a Haden during punt blocking, which is a task that I'm sure a James Dockery can do.

***From a Plain Dealer article [by Terry Pluto](#) :

"In the second quarter, the Browns had a fourth-and-inches on the Colts' 46. They ran a sneak to McCoy, who picked up the first down. I hate that play (it came out of an empty backfield) because of the injury risk to a small quarterback. I do like Shurmur being aggressive and going for it."

I apologize, Terry, but I must take issue with that opinion. Spreading the field and sneaking the QB almost always works in those short-yardage situations, and if the QB is so tender that he can't even perform a simple sneak without getting hurt, that's a team impediment.

You should give Colt credit for being more durable than he appears - I think we forget how much he ran the ball in college, and really only got hurt that once.

The reason we remember it so clearly is because it came in such a high-profile circumstance (the National Championship Game), thus giving many the false impression that McCoy is made of twigs and cobwebs.

***Joe Bauserman can't pass. Joe Bauserman can't run. Joe Bauserman can't even "manage" the game, since any time the ball leaves his hands there's a good chance it could be picked off.

Thus, there is absolutely no reason imaginable to have Joe Bauserman in the game. He's a 26 year old senior who's not going to "develop" at this point.

It's not like he's to blame - he's as good as he's ever going to be right now, thus there's no purpose to his playing time.

A Coach that continues to insist on using him would have highly questionable decision-making

abilities (and probably won't be around very long).

Next Up

Miami Dolphins (0-2).

The Fins are 0-2, but, to be fair, they hung with and lost to 2 teams that are vastly superior to either team the Browns have faced. One could venture to say that Miami would likely be 2-0 had they been fortunate enough to open with Cincy/Indy.

Thus, you could assume that the Dolphins are a better team than Cleveland, and you'd probably be right. But not by much. Not by enough to prevent the Browns from having a good solid shot at winning this one.

Chad Henne is joke. Brian Daboll is the guy telling it. But even these two miscreants can probably put up some numbers on the Browns fledgling D.

But the D isn't what I'm worried about. Miami has a better Defense than either the Bengals or Colts, and Cleveland's Offense has been pretty ugly. I can still foresee too much pressure causing a game-changing turnover or two. Which in a battle of NFL also-rans can make the difference.

Dolphins 20, Browns 13.