

Kibble & Bits: Week Two Review

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Wednesday, September 21 2011 12:00 PM - Last Updated Wednesday, September 21 2011 2:40 PM



One of the good things about writing a game preview and making a prediction is, as a fan, I can pick the Browns to lose but I get to end up being ecstatic about being wrong when they win, just like I was this week.

As in a loss, there is no singular reason why the Browns won on Sunday so we will get into some of what I saw when I re-watched the game. And as usual, it won't be all about the good things because there were plenty of areas the Browns can improve in. We will also get into some scheme/concepts talk and take a look around the division and league.

Away we go.

Reasons the Browns Won

As far as the overall team play, the Browns definitely came out against the Colts with a bit more energy and a lot more focus. With a team that has a young players playing impact roles,

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combined with a first time head coach, early on in the season will be a series of peaks and valleys as players and coaches each figure out solutions to problems they're seeing for the first time. The Browns did a better job of adjusting on the fly Sunday and that allowed them to control the depths of those valleys which is key in winning most games in the NFL.

The quality of play was much improved in week 2 as the Browns cut down on the mental mistakes and penalties that infested the first game. The Browns also won all of the key matchups I had in my preview, as well as others that I didn't mention, which was a great aid in the getting them the victory.

Film Study

Offense- Offensively the keys to the Browns success came from their ability to score TDs and not settle for FGs, limiting their turnovers, running more quick passes and screens, and, most importantly, not shooting themselves in the foot with a bunch of costly penalties.

The offense as a whole was managed much better in Coach Shurmur and Colt McCoy's second game together. I really loved the implementation of quick passes and an infusion of screen plays because they allow the young QB to see some balls being completed and that always helps soothe the mind of a QB and lifts his confidence level.

In the running game some would say "the Browns ran the ball much better in week two than in week one"....but the numbers say 'not really'. The Browns ran the ball at a 3.2 yard average in week1 and a 3.1 yard average in week2. They had 83 net rushing yards against the Bengals and 106 net rushing yards against the Colts so as you can see the raw rushing totals are not dramatically different on paper.

It was more than raw rushing totals that made the running game effective on Sunday. The fact that the Browns were able to score TDs and the Colts settled for FGs too many times allowed the Browns to have a lead and therefore get in a few more rushing attempts (33 over 26). That led to more rushing first downs (8 over 5) and changed the time of possession (hereafter ToP) in the Browns favor.

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Those extra rushing attempts really allowed the Browns to swing their ToP from 29:37 in game 1 to 34:34 in game 2. This is only 5 minutes on the surface but there are only 60 minutes in a game so if you increase your ToP by five you are decreasing the opponents' by 5 minutes and it becomes a ten minute swing in possessing the ball (34:34 to 24:26).

I understand time of possession isn't a tell all or a win-guaranteeing stat, but it does substantially increase the odds of the game ending in a favorable outcome so I tend to keep my eye on it.

With a RB like Peyton Hillis it's more about attempts and the wear and tear caused to a defense than anything else and I expect better rushing averages will come as the running game gets a bit more in sync. The fact that Browns stuck with the running game is a good sign in and of itself.

The effective running game was also aided by the short passing game. Although on paper the yards are passing yards, a pass at the line of scrimmage that the WRs catches and runs 4-7 yards really serves the same purpose as an outside rushing play so in my opinion some of the passing yards can be put in the rushing column which would re-inflate those numbers a bit.

Besides from doubling as running plays those short passes and screen passes can really change the stat sheet for a QB. Colt McCoy went from an offense in week 1 that featured no conventional or quick screens to one that did in week 2. His numbers in the completion percentage column went from less than 50% in game 1 to over 68% in game two.

The last stat I wanted to point out as a big difference in game 1 vs game 2 is third down efficiency. The Browns raised their third down conversions from 4 of 15 against the Bengals to 8 of 16 against the Colts. I think this was a direct result of having to go shorter distances on third downs and actually being able to run for some of those, instead of facing definite passing situations.

As most have said already, the Browns were more efficient on offense and didn't put the defense in bad spots against the Colts which definitely contributed to the win.

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Defense- Defensively I have been a bit anxious to see them do something aggressive or innovative and they have not... but I have learned that there is something to be said about solid and consistent and the Browns have been just that over the first two weeks.

With every snap they are becoming more comfortable with their run fits and they are tough to score on when the field shrinks in the red zone. In my opinion, one of the biggest reasons behind the Browns ability to get that road win was the defense holding the Colts to FGs on the Colts first three scores.

That would have been a whole different affair had the score been 14-0 after the first quarter and then 21-7 in the second quarter. The Colts actually had more a better yards per carry average (4.2) than the Browns and more total rushing yards at 109. If they would have played with the lead instead of playing from behind in the second half, the time of possession could have been much different which would have bettered the Colts' odds of coming out on top.

As a group the defense is not running any complicated or confusing fronts, they are just doing a nice job of winning the line of scrimmage battle and making solid tackles in the run game. And for the first time this season they were getting some pressure and moving the pocket with a four man rush.

The pass rush was clearly boosted by Jabaal Sheard moving to the left side and Jayme Mitchell to the right. Mitchell has actually been doing a good job of setting an edge in the run game but he wasn't beating any right tackles in the pass rush category and Sheard was struggling a bit with his transition to the right side of the defense and he wasn't generating any pass rush either.

That all changed when he moved to the left side because Sheard showed he can win some one-on-ones versus right tackles. The overall effect of an outside pass rush will be tremendous for this defense because of the outstanding play the Browns are getting from the DTs. The QB of the opposing teams will have a real hard time stepping up because Phil Taylor and Ahtyba Rubin are doing a great job of pushing the front of the pocket up towards the QB and essentially smothering them.

Even when you don't get a hit or sack, smothering a QB creates an uncomfortable feeling which can go a long way in the QB being inaccurate. If you add this to the really good coverage the

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secondary has provided in the first two games you start to get a defense that is finding a way to get off the field on 3rd downs, which has been a big problem with Cleveland defenses in recent years.

The defense did its part in forcing FGs early in the game even though they were giving up yards. That allowed the Browns offense time to gain a rhythm, which they did in the second quarter when they scored two TDs to take the lead.

Game/Player Notes

*Coaching- It was a great sight to see the swap of DEs. Not just the fact that I think the Browns will get better protection from Sheard, for me it is more so the message it sent. The coaches we have had in the past have been so bull headed and close minded that a move like that probably would have never occurred.

It is refreshing to see a simplistic approach of "hey this may work better, let's try it" when it comes to the coaching staff making changes....and if it came from a player suggestion it's an even greater message that is being sent.

*Switching DEs- The switching of DEs side to side will have a compounded effect in my opinion. I think that in general Jayme Mitchell has done a good job against the run but had very little pass rush affect and Jabaal Sheard has been average in both. Sheard will feel more natural and have much better success in the pass rush on the left side. I also think the Browns want to invite teams to run to their right (defense's left) because of the success Phil Taylor has had. It will also allow Ahtyba Rubin to face more one-on-ones and he has done a good job of winning those battles so far this year.

With Sheard creating more havoc in the backfield and generating more pass rush it will allow Mitchell and his other D-line mates to get some funnel sacks which should help everyone out in the long run. The move could also lead to Marcus Benard getting some rotational work as a rush end on the right side spelling Mitchell on passing downs.

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*Marcus Benard- I watched the game 3 or 4 times and I couldn't find Benard at all. I don't think he got any reps in the game. Either he is hurt or coaches dropped the ball on getting him time.

*Phil Taylor- One thing Phil Taylor is doing differently now than he was in the preseason is attacking the line of scrimmage. The O-line of opposing teams cannot move him at all when he is moving forward and attacking the offense. He is doing a wonderful job a reestablishing the line of scrimmage and the thing that sets him apart from average DTs is his ability to shed once he makes his read. When he finds the ball and decides to go after it, he just tosses the offensive lineman to the side and gets after it. It is awesome to see.

*Ahtyba Rubin- Rubin has made tremendous strides in his pass rush efficiency. He has done a great job of cutting down extra steps and wasted movements when rushing the passer. He is showing much better in the 4-3 than I thought and seems to be getting more comfortable attacking instead of holding position with every snap he takes.

*LBs-D'Qwell Jackson is a natural and instinctive player. I know I sound like a broken record but he shows that every week when I re-watch the defense so I will just keep saying it. Scott Fujita had a much better game in week 2. He showed in the running game and was effective getting his hands on Dallas Clark in the passing game so Clark wasn't always getting clean releases off of the line of scrimmage.

I really hope when Titus Brown gets healthy the Browns consider playing him some at MLB and letting Jackson move to the weak side as the run and hit guy. I think our LB play would sky rocket as a group if it happened but it probably won't without injury.

*Colt McCoy- Colt McCoy was better in week two. I won't harp on the all the little things, for the most part he did a good job of managing the offense. I only saw one time where he left the pocket without being forced which is an improvement.

The team needs to continue featuring the shorter passing game and let him work his way down the field as he gains comfort in the offense and chemistry with his WRs.

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*Offensive coaching- Much better job in getting the ball to Josh Cribbs and Greg Little. If the Browns continue featuring Cribbs in the quick screen game it will bring up defenses and will eventually make it easier to beat them down field.

You could tell they changed some read progression and made Little the first read on more plays which is great. The fact that McCoy is not yet an "expert" in Shurmur's offense will cause Colt to think a bit more on who is doing what instead of focusing 100% on coverage and this will keep him from getting through the entire progressions from time to time. By making Little the first read you can ensure more targets which is a good thing in my book.

*Defensive coaching- I have been a bit critical of Dick Jauron defenses but in reality you don't need to be all that creative and innovative if you win the line of scrimmage battles and are capable of generating pass rush with your front 4. If the Browns can continue to do that the defense will be solid without a bunch of gimmicks or crazy blitz packages. Good defense is all I care about so if they continue to play good defense while being vanilla then so be it.

*Josh Cribbs- When Josh Cribbs is healthy and making plays, he is the best disease a team can have. Guys like him have a way of making everyone else try a little harder and those players are invaluable to a team.

*Usama Young- Young is a much more explosive player than Mike Adams. He should soon be getting the lion's share of reps.

*Jason Pinkston- When it comes to the rookie class and evaluating the players who start, I think Pinkston's journey is by far the journey with the biggest swings. There are some plays where he handles business and blocks well and then there are others where he whiffs. The good plays he makes give me confidence that he can be a good player in the league, so once he builds his strength and becomes consistent in his technique I expect him to be a good player.

Watching the game I saw him steam roll a player on one play and then get tossed like a rag doll on another. The best part about his play to me was the fact that the bad play happened early and the better ones were later. He is figuring out the effort needed on every snap in this league so the fact that I see progress is good.

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*Interesting nugget- The Browns have scored all but one of their TDs (4 of 5) in the second quarter so far this season. Only the Hillis TD late in the 4th quarter this past week is the exception.

*Running game- The offense left a ton of yards on the field on Sunday. The RBs and linemen are slightly out of sync and you can tell that when watching the game and focusing on the line. It is also going to take some time for the FB to sync with Hillis.

Marecic is a good blocker but he is not a natural RB so he needs really defined assignments. With Vickers at FB you were getting a guy who also spent a lot of time in college being the guy running the ball so he is really good at “feeling” and anticipating holes and a lot of times Hillis would trust in him to pick the right hole and explode off his cut. That relationship isn’t there yet so things are a bit choppy in the running game right now. Also, Hillis has been peeling opposite of the FB at times and it has yet to pay off with big runs like it did last year which is also causing the numbers to be lower.

Another issue with the timing I see is the use of pulling guards on the power plays. When the Browns run those power plays left and right, they have been using a pulling guard. Hillis and the guard have yet to sync on those plays. Even on the 24 yard TD at the end of the game Sunday, Hillis and the pulling Shawn Lauvao got tangled up in the backfield before Hillis broke out and ran to the endzone.

The running game is slightly off and out of sync, but when they start clicking you will see a huge day from the RBs because they have been leaving a ton of yards on the field the first two weeks.

Scheme

I wanted to take a minute and talk about a term you hear thrown around a lot and some may wonder what exactly they are referring to. That term I am referring to is the “zone blocking” scheme. We have faced teams in back to back weeks that have used a version of “zone” run blocking so I thought we would try and explain a bit on the surface level what the term is

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referring to for those who don't know.

There are many different ways you can handle blocking assignments on running plays and a lot of people think immediately to the Denver Broncos and their ex-coach Mike Shanahan when they hear the term zone blocking. The fact is many teams use and have used the scheme in recent years but the Broncos during the Shanahan gained a ton of notoriety because they used that scheme and took it to another level with the backside cut blocks they used. During Shanahan's stint at coach it seemed like they could plug anybody in the backfield and gain 1,000 yards so the term and his team kind of became intertwined.

The big difference between the zone blocking and man/assignment blocking on running plays really has to do with how they create the running lanes or holes. In a power man scheme like you will see the Dolphins run on Sunday you see the O-lineman use the approach most of us are used to. In the conventional straight forward man scheme, the offensive lineman fire off up field reaching their assignment and driving their man back trying to get vertical movement on the player that they are blocking. At a minimum they are trying to position themselves between their assignment and whatever hole the running play is designed to attack, but ideally they also want to create push that will also drive their man both backward and away from the designed running lane.

Envision a power I formation with the play designed to attack the 4 hole which is between the right guard and right tackle. The lineman to the left of the hole including the right guard would fire off the ball engaging their man pushing forward and to the left sidelines while the right tackle and TE (if one is to that side) fire off and engage their assignment trying to drive their players back and towards the right sideline.

All of those linemen are trying to position themselves so they keep themselves between the player they are blocking and the hole they want to create.

The FB would run through the 4 hole and attack a LB who should be flowing into that hole if he is reading his keys which is usually the RB's or the guard's movement. Ideally everyone is engaged as the RB enters the hole and passes the defenders who are unable to tackle because they are engaged with a blocker.

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Now, to attack that same **right side** of the line of scrimmage *with a zone running play*, instead of your linemen firing off of the ball trying to create depth, they would all start moving in concert to their right as they engage defenders near them, driving all those defenders in the direction they are going to run the ball. They are basically moving at an angle toward the sidelines while engaged with their defenders. The RBs job is to move right with the linemen, follow the group, and watch for a crease to form between his linemen at some point. When he sees that crease he plants and explodes through the crease getting vertical.

You can either create running lanes by your linemen engaging and moving the defenders down field to the play side, or you can get the defense to attack the play side too fast. That's when a good running back plants his foot and cuts all the way back, traveling against the flow of traffic. That is called a cutback run.

Denver got famous for the zone scheme because they would actually get everything flowing to one side while targeting a defensive lineman on the backside of the play and actually perform a cut block (take his legs out) on him which would create a gigantic void in the defense and create a huge lane to "cutback" into. A lot of times they didn't limit themselves to cutting only on the backside. They would and could do the same block on the side they were flowing to. This would also create the void and provide a running lane.

The zone blocking scheme is good for any type of RB because the bigger backs get yards in 4-7 yard chunks due to their ability to "run down hill" and build up steam. The quicker guys can easily cut on a dime, shooting through creases and finding cutback lanes at will if it is blocked properly.

There are variations and you can break it down getting into more specifics, I just wanted to try and create a visual for some of the people who have heard the term but have no clue what to look for.

The Dolphins will run an old school power front that will try to drive our DL into the end zone so don't expect the Dolphins to have their O-line moving horizontal too much at all. They are a big physical group that wants to lean on you.

Division Play

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All four teams in the division are 1-1 so far on this young 2011 season. The Bengals have scored more points (49) than anyone else in the division and unfortunately the Browns have allowed the most points in the division at 46.

The two best teams in the division (Steelers/Ravens) have blowouts in their wins and losses so it has been an interesting couple weeks so far in the AFC North.

Cleveland and Cincinnati play at home this week against the Dolphins and the 49ers while the Steelers and the Ravens are on the road against the Colts and Rams. I am intrigued by the Rams and Steelers match up this week because, based on what I saw Monday night, the Rams defense can give fits with all of those blitz packages and disguised coverages, and Sam Bradford is a really good young QB. The Rams shot themselves in the foot on the road Monday night but they actually showed signs of being a decent team.

Around the League

*Cam Newton once again went bonkers. I watched that game and he has the perfect game for a Rob Chudzinski downfield passing game. On one play he showed off his arm strength and chucked it 55 yards downfield while off balance, and on another play he dropped it over the defenders shoulder with perfect touch. He can really sling it and mighty mouse Steve Smith is the perfect 'go after everything' WR you need with a guy launching the ball all over the place like Newton is. Carolina plays Jacksonville this week and the Jaguars should give Newton his first NFL victory because Jacksonville is a mess at the QB position.

*The Lions vs Chiefs game from week two was a tale of teams headed in opposite directions. The Lions so far are playing like the young darlings of the league that many predicted in preseason and the Chiefs look nothing like the defending AFC West champions of 2010. The Chiefs have gotten beat 89-10 in the first two weeks of the season...Wow!

*Chan Gailey has the Buffalo Bills playing like the Chiefs were last year. They are under the radar while playing hard and finding ways to win. Ryan Fitzpatrick, the 7 year veteran from Harvard, is playing like he has figured it all out. With the Patriots coming to town this week the

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Bills can either put the league on official notice or let everyone know that they are still the Bills we have come to know in recent years.

*The injury to Mike Vick on Sunday night was unfortunate. For a QB who makes as many plays outside of the pocket and takes the punishment that he does, it is ironic that he gets put out of the game on an accidental blow from his own teammate while in the pocket.

*Tony Romo had every right not to come back into that game Sunday after breaking a rib and puncturing a lung. Not only did he come back, he led his team to an overtime comeback win. Last week in my article I talked about his propensity to mess things up but this week I am doing nothing but giving him his respect for his incredible pain tolerance. He is one tough hombre.

That's all for now. Look for my week 3 game preview later this week, until then....Go Browns!

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