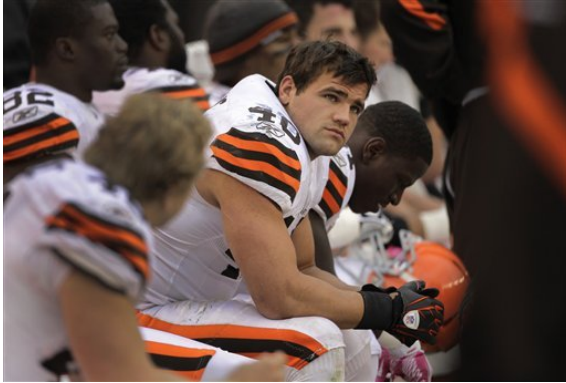


Kibble & Bits: Week 4 Review

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Wednesday, October 05 2011 11:00 PM - Last Updated Thursday, October 06 2011 5:56 PM



First let me start this week's article by saying it is good to be back after taking a week off to climb some life hurdles.....believe me, I would have much rather been writing instead of doing what I was doing, but I am back on the keyboard so let's talk some football.

As for this past Sunday's Browns game against the Titans, It was the first contest the Browns truly let a snowball form, roll down the hill and turn into an avalanche.... and they ended up getting buried.

A few articles ago I talked about time of possession and how the odds of winning increased when you win that stat. Well, Sunday is the perfect example why it increases the odds but provides no guarantees.

The Browns won the stat sheet in most categories,including time of possession, but in football mistakes can easily trump stats, and was the case on Sunday. The Browns made 2 of the 3 most critical mistakes you can make in a game that can swing momentum and skew the stats.

Those two things were allowing a big play from the opposing team's offense leading to a quick score (80 yard TD catch), and the second was letting the opposing defense score points (97 yard int return for TD). In case you were wondering, the third critical mistake would have been a special teams TD, which the Browns did avoid Sunday.

These types of big plays totally defeat the purpose of winning time of possession because the purpose of winning the stat is the idea that the other team is not putting up points when you have the ball. That is why the statistic is usually a good measuring stick on who won the game.

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If the other team is scoring on one play or 4 plays and 78 yards while taking only 1:01 off of the clock then the stat is null and void. If the opposing team is also scoring points when you possess the ball, time of possession really becomes null and void. The Browns had the ball for 36:53 compared to 23:07 for the Titans and got beat easily, 31-13, showing that time of possession (while important) is no 'win-or-lose meter'.

When it is all said and done, you can win the stat sheet but still come out of a contest with the hollow feeling of a loss just like the Browns did on Sunday.

With week 5 bringing the Browns a bye and providing some extra time for other articles, this Kibble and Bits will predominately focus on what I saw on tape after re-watching Sunday's game against the Titans. We'll also go with some division notes and week 5 games of interest thrown in.

So, let's get to it.

Reasons Why the Browns Lost

If you want to point to one area why the Browns came up short it would have to be big plays. Big plays have cost the Browns both of their losses this year. Sunday the Titans only completed 10 passes and had 112 yards rushing, yet they beat the Browns by 18 points. That was all made possible by the quick-strike and allowing yards to be gained in chunks.

In the second quarter the Browns gave up 14 points and 158 yards on drives that combined for a total of 5 plays and only used 1 minute and 19 seconds. That was the swing in the game and changed the style of offense the Browns could play. Prior to those drives the game was 7-6 and shaping up to be a game that was going to be won or lost in the trenches. After the two quick Titans scores the Browns offense turned away from the running game and had to put up a record 61 passes while playing chase.

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Let's try and break down the offense and defense individually and see where they failed:

Defense- I understand the defense's part in the loss on Sunday was magnified because of inconsistent offense but there is no excuse for the type of mental breakdowns that allowed the big plays of the Titans to happen.

The overall performance of the defense was not too much different than their performances in the first 3 games as far as yardage goes, but the story isn't always in the numbers.

For the first time this year the Browns faced a savvy, veteran QB and it showed. Even though Matt Hasselback only completed 10 passes he hit the correct guys at the right time and he exploited matchups like Scott Fujita covering Jared Cook on a crossing route when Fujita was in man coverage. It started out as a good play and would have gained a nice chunk of yardage but the play took a turn for the worse when Usama Young made one of the worst tackle attempts I have ever seen by a player not named Deion, and the net result was an 80 yard TD play for the Titans. These types of big plays change the direction of games and simply can't happen.

Another area in which the defense failed was pressure and impact plays. They only managed 1 QB hit all game and got no sacks. If it wasn't for the 5 passes defended the Titans could have run up an even bigger score in the game and the Browns defeat would have been worse.

The Browns inside players (DTs) made no impact plays and combined for only 4 assists on tackles and zero tackles for loss. The Browns even sent some pressure with LBs coming on blitzes and the Titans picked it up every time.

The lack of impact plays from the DTs and the ineffective LB blitzes show off how good the Titans offensive line is and why their former OL coach, and current head coach, Mike Munchak got a shot at being a main man in the NFL.

If you want to break down the Browns defensive performance even more I think one area in particular should shoulder much of the blame for the outcome on Sunday and that area was safety play.

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The Usama Young tackle attempt on the 80-yard play was totally unacceptable and the space cadet play of T.J. Ward on Craig Stevens 12-yard TD play was a crucial mistake.

Ward has shown over his first season and ¼ that he is often times too worried about making a huge play in the red-zone instead of staying true to his responsibilities and it cost the Browns 7 points on Sunday.

In both losses the defense has had big breakdowns mentally and they need to do a better job of staying focused throughout the entire game.

Offense- The offense once again showed their youth. The offense Sunday suffered from not scoring TDs in their first two point scoring drives which aided in their playing the game from behind.

The game would have been an entirely different contest had they been able to put the ball into the end zone instead of having to settle for FGs. The offense's lack of consistency has been a common theme throughout the first 4 games and it was no different on Sunday.

Anytime you have a young offense you run the risk of mistakes happening, and unfortunately for the Browns they are taking turns making mistakes. Almost everyone on offense is participating in the mistake party and it often times leads to drive killing results.

For example, on one play Colt McCoy may miss a wide open throw, the next series Shawn Lauvao misses his only block of the game on a third down passing play. The next drive Alex Smith drops a ball that hits him in the numbers, on the next series Joe Thomas gets a false start and on the next series Hardesty misses the designed hole (or drops a pass).

The Browns offense took turns making mistakes on Sunday and they left the field too quickly on many drives because of it.

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The running game with Peyton Hillis was off to its best start of the season as Hillis had 46 yards on 10 carries and his long run was only ten yards. That means he was getting positive yards on a regular basis. The Browns were not able to keep going to the run because they were playing catch up for most of the game and essentially kept themselves from making the RB a difference-maker in the outcome of the game.

In the passing game, McCoy once again showed some good things but also looked lost at times while struggling to find or trust his WRs. He often times zoomed right in on the TE only to have the pass broken up by good coverage from the Titans. I think he predetermined going to the TE on too many plays and on other plays he put the ball on the wrong side of the TE which led to drive killing incompletions.

Playing from behind forced 61 pass attempts on Sunday and it also pushed McCoy to force throws. One force in particular resulted in a 97 yard pick 6 for the Titans and put the finishing touches on the Browns defeat.

The timing and rhythm of the passing game is really poor right now and finding it will be a key to success going forward. One of the things I think can help coming out of the bye week will be a concerted effort to keep the same WRs in the game throughout a game to allow Colt McCoy to gain the type of trust that will allow him to anticipate throws. That will also give the WRs an opportunity to make some yards after the catch.

The Browns have some players that can move the ball after the catch but late throws not only cripple that ability but also allow the DB to recover and get in the way of some completions.

With No OTAs and lacking hundreds of summer snaps to get a feel for each other, maybe a 61 attempt game can go a long way towards gaining some much needed chemistry in the passing game....we will see after the bye week.

Game and Player Notes

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RBs- Look, I am a bit tired of the notion that Hardesty needs to play and get touches. The fact of the matter is that the 250lb RB that put up 11TDs and 1100 yards needs to play the overwhelming majority of snaps and we don't "need" to get Hardesty involved in the game.

I am not buying for one minute that RBs need babied when it comes to touches during the first 4 weeks of the season and I am definitely not buying that Hardesty (who essentially is a rookie) needs to get into the game, especially when he is coming off of a knee blowout and clearly doesn't have the explosiveness he had in college.

Let the guy get a few token snaps, but stop with the 50/50 mentality.

Rhythm is not relegated to the passing game and the Browns have zero rhythm in the running game as a whole, so I think they should stick with one guy for as much time as possible.

If Hillis gets dinged up or needs a blow then you let Hardesty get some snaps, but a 250lb RB like Hillis is most effective against a defense after he steadily pounds them all day.

If any of you watched the Monday night game this week you saw exactly what I mean as Tampa battered the Colts with LeGarrette Blount over the course of the game. Just because you think you have two good backs doesn't mean you have to give them equal snaps. So let's stop that thinking and allow the line, Hillis, and the scheme to form a solid relationship before it is too late.

One last RB note that is a constant sight when re-watching the games and focusing on just the running game....the RBs are missing holes. I do respect the cutback, but too many times Hillis and Hardesty abort the intended hole for a crease they see on the way and they pass up good yardage.

I think a little patience and discipline would go a long way at opening the cutback in the future. Stop free lancing and slow up, show some patience and please, allow the linemen to actually engage defenders before try to go flying by them.

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WRs- Brian Robiske is getting a ton of flack about getting open and it really shouldn't be the case. If you actually watch the game and focus on the WRs and routes you will see that Robiske is getting enough separation to make catches so the problem is not just his.

On some plays he is the 3rd option so the play either never gets to him or it is late when it does. On other plays the timing and rhythm isn't there so he gets separation and the ball doesn't come. There have been a few plays where he gets separation, the ball is thrown, but it isn't in the correct spot so no catch is made. Robiske is a good, not great, WR but he can and does get open.

Two plays come to mind that illustrate the difference between him making plays or an incomplection happening. The first is the great catch he made down the left side of the field over Nnamdi Asomugha in the Eagles preseason game. That play was a great route and a great throw.

The same exact play happened in the Miami game on the right sideline and Robiske ran a great route, had separation and the ball was throw short inside instead of over the shoulder outside and Robiske had to come back and play DB while trying to make the catch and the pass was incomplete.

Robiske will never be a great quick-twitch or big play WR in this league but he can be an effective player. Unfortunately, if Colt McCoy doesn't grow at a faster rate and he continues the need to see a ton of space between defenders and WRs in order to throw the ball, Robiske may end up on the sidelines because he will never be one of the guys who creates a ton of space against man coverage on a regular basis.

Greg Little is the player that probably benefited the most from the 61 pass attempts this past Sunday. After not playing for almost two years it would have been crazy to think Little could start and play an entire game in the NFL at the WR position right out of the gate, so his work load has been steadily increased over the course of the season.

I think he needed an exhausting game like that to get his wind and legs in good enough shape to start playing an entire game like a true #1 WR in the NFL needs to do.

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You saw him getting a bit winded, losing his concentration, and even dropping a ball late in the Titans game and I think that experience will help him in the future to understand the level of conditioning needed to play WR for 60 minutes in the NFL.

I think he should be starting and staying on the field throughout the game but ,because of his long layoff, he did need the progressive approach Coach Shurmur took with him during the first couple of games and I expect his workload to increase as the season goes on.

T.J. Ward- Ward frustrates me with his lack of discipline. It is an all too familiar theme in the red zone of him losing focus and letting his responsibility score a TD. I was critical in the preseason of Joe Haden losing his focus and trying to make every play a game-changing play, and he has done a GREAT job of settling down and doing his job really well instead of swinging for the fences every at bat...and that is exactly what T.J. Ward needs to start doing.

Sometimes the biggest play is just doing your job and Ward's wandering eye into the backfield needs to stop. He is a safety and therefore pass will always be his first responsibility and he needs to remember that especially in the red zone.

Big Plays- One of the biggest plays the Titans made on Sunday didn't go for a TD but set one up that was a back breaker. The play was right before halftime when Nate Washington scorched the Browns with a 57 yard run and catch with 37 seconds left in the half. The play led to a TD and changed what was a 14-6 game into a 21-6 game, which is a huge difference. The big 80-yard play gave them the lead but this 57 yard play started to seal the coffin.

Dick Jauron- I didn't get to write about the Dolphins game in week 3 so I couldn't make this point then, but coach Jauron is doing a fabulous job of both creating game plans and calling games. In the Miami game I saw him go outside of expectations in his game plan.

In the first two games everything the Browns did was pretty basic and vanilla but they were executing at a pretty high rate. In game 3 against the Dolphins I saw some zone blitzes where he dropped DEs into coverage, I saw some overload blitzes, he brought multiple DB pressures, and even blitzed both safeties at the same time on at least one occasion.

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He went back to his comfort zone a bit when facing the Titans and the veteran Hasslebeck, but I can understand that he figured the veteran would burn him.... And it turns out he did anyways.

I have been really impressed with the defense after starting the season with a 'we are doomed' mentality on that side of the ball.

McCoy- Browns fans are seeing first hand why QBs like Colt McCoy, who are somewhat limited physically, don't usually get an opportunity to develop in the NFL. The amount of obstacles a shorter QB with an average arm faces and needs to conquer in order to compete in this league makes it a tougher for teams to stick with them through the growing pains.

When you look at a guy like Cam Newton and the success he has had early in his rookie year (when most thought he would struggle passing in the NFL), and you compare him to a QB like Colt McCoy, you begin to understand how physical ability can give you an edge in development.

With Colt not being 6-6 or possessing a rocket arm he needs more game reps in order to figure out how to do things like create throwing lanes and anticipate routes. He needs those reps more than a player like Cam Newton who can see over the top easier and has the type of arm strength to both throw off his back foot and wait a little longer to release the ball but who still maintains the ability to get the ball into the window before it closes.

Newton is still making mistakes, which is natural, but some of his physical traits allow him a greater margin of error than a player like Colt... who has the potential to be a very good player but needs time so he can figure out how to accomplish things while overcoming some variables that he can't change.

I am not saying Newton will be a better QB over the long haul than McCoy but it is easy to see that some of Newton's built in advantages are making the game look a lot easier for him than they do for a QB like Colt.

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There is a reason why big, strong, and strong armed QBs are coveted in the league. With all that being said, watching the games as many times as I have has allowed me to see some of the growth that has occurred from the first week to the fourth. One of those areas of growth has definitely been pocket comfort and effectiveness.

In the first two weeks it was a bit frustrating watching Colt bail at minimal or phantom pressure. He has really done a good job of moving forward through the pocket and finding throwing lanes as opposed to bailing (usually to the right) out of the pocket to clear himself for the throw.

His footwork is better and he seems to be better at keeping his feet moving while he is going through his progressions so when he releases he is throwing with good form. He doesn't have the strongest arm so using proper technique on his throws is critical for sustained success.

He needs to do a better job of pressing the ball downfield so the defense has to defend short, intermediate, and deep balls but hopefully as the season goes on and the game starts to slow down you will see him attack defenses.

Keep in mind that without an offseason to get comfortable with the offense, McCoy is trying to understand both the coverage he is seeing and the routes his guys are running. Don't underestimate being comfortable with your offense as it allows you to go up to the line of scrimmage and focus on the defense, then make adjustments accordingly.

Without the full understanding of your own offense you go up to the line trying to envision what route everyone is running and then try to figure out what look the defense is showing, all the while making checks and adjustments. McCoy's head is spinning right now and the game is still moving at warp speed.

McCoye has been put at a clear disadvantage but at the end of the day, and by the end of the season, nobody will be talking about the lockout and we all expect to see him play better.....the positive sign is that so far he is getting better even though some areas may be growing faster than others.

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You know, from time to time you hear a player like Drew Brees being used as the type of player Colt can become, but some people don't realize how long it took Brees to truly figure enough out to perform well enough that he was thought of as a "franchise QB". He had 27 starts under his belt before the Chargers acquired Philip Rivers in the 2004 draft. Brees didn't even become a 60% passer until the year Rivers was drafted and before that season he had 28TDs to 31ints.

Brees needed almost 3 years of starts to figure it out and put it all together. I am not saying McCoy deserves that long but the reality is that we will need much longer than the 12 starts (including 4 this year in a system he has been running for all of 2 months) before we either crown him or fire him.

Division Peek

The AFC North is playing some lights out defense as a group. The division boasts the top 3 defenses in the league in total yards allowed and all 4 teams are in the top 9. This division has been tough for years but looks to be even tougher this year.

The Ravens lead the division with a 3-1 record followed by the other 3 teams who are all tied at 2-2.

Cincinnati Bengals-The Bengals lead the league in total defense with a young, aggressive group and a respected veteran coordinator. The team is on a high after executing a come from behind win against the Buffalo Bills who were undefeated at the time. Rookie Andy Dalton is doing well enough to keep them in games and rookie WR A.J. Green is living up to expectations having 3 consecutive games of 100 yards or more receiving. The Bengals look to get back to over .500 as they travel this week to Jacksonville to face the 1-3 Jaguars.

Pittsburgh Steelers-The Steelers are in a bit of turmoil at this point in the season. Although they have the #2 defense in yards allowed, they only have 7 sacks over the first 4 games and James Harrison, who has 2 of the 7, is out after having surgery on a broken bone in his face.

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They plan on moving MLB Lawrence Timmons to OLB to take Harrison's place so it will be interesting to see if Timmons can get pressure on the QB.

The biggest Steelers news could be the fact that Ben Roethlisberger is in a walking boot after suffering a foot sprain. If he can't play and be effective moving around and extending plays the offense may be in trouble because they are struggling in the running game.

The Steelers host the Titans this week and the Titans have already beaten Baltimore and the Ravens thrashed the Steelers in week 1. It will be interesting to see how the Steelers respond after losing this past week to the Texans.

Baltimore Ravens-The Ravens are coming off of another impressive win against a good team in the N.Y. Jets. The defense is playing lights out and they are also second in the league in points allowed giving up only 14.2 points a game. The defense has only allowed 4 TD and they have gotten them all back by scoring 4 TD themselves, which is impressive.

Joe Flacco continues to be up and down so defense is still the backbone of the Ravens. Defensive coordinator Chuck Pagano has the Ravens back to the aggressive ball hawking group that strikes fear in every offense in the league.

This week the Ravens will enjoy some rest and relaxation along with the Browns because they too are on a bye.

Around the League

Even though the Browns have a bye this week, I will still be glued to the TV. I have the NFL ticket for the first time and there are some games that interest me a lot.

Tennessee at Pittsburgh- This game interests me because I want to see how the Steelers respond to the turmoil and the Titans have proven to be a tough out early in the 2011 season. If

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the Steelers blink the Titans will make them 2-3 and heading the wrong direction.

Philadelphia at Buffalo- These two teams came into the season with polar opposite expectations. The Bills have turned into the little engine that could but are coming off of a last second loss to the Bengals giving them their first defeat of the year.

The Eagles are 1-3 and the arrow is pointing down. If the Eagles don't get this win they will have a tough road in order to get into the playoffs, especially because they play in the NFC East which is always a tough division.

N.Y. Jets at New England- Rex Ryan and the Jets are 2-2 and coming off of a butt kicking by the Baltimore Ravens so I expect him to have his team focused. Ryan usually makes headlines with his smack talk so I am waiting for him to give Hoodie and Tom Brady some bulletin board material.

The Patriots are probably chomping at the bit to face the team that put them out of the playoffs last year and Tom Brady loves beating the Jets. I expect Brady to be prepared for the exotic blitzes that the Jets used to send him home last year, so I anticipate him to put up some points in front of his home crowd.

Green Bay at Atlanta- This is also playoff rematch and this Sunday night game should bring the fire out of both teams. Atlanta made a draft day trade with our beloved Browns giving up a boat load of picks so they could draft WR Julio Jones and become more explosive in the passing game.

Personally I think the 48-21 loss the Falcons suffered in the divisional round of the 2010 playoffs is the reason the Falcons made the trade in the first place. After making the trade and preparing for a Super Bowl run they are only 2-2 so far this season and not playing like many predicted they would.

The Packers have yet to face defeat and come down from their Super Bowl high. The Falcons will be pumped to get the opportunity to beat the World Champs and give them their first loss of

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the season....should be a good game.

Personally I want the Falcons to lose the game and, furthermore, I would like them to lose every game. Part of that draft day trade included the Falcons first round pick in the 2012 draft. The Browns will get the pick no matter where the Falcons finish, so of course we as Browns fans should wish for them to lose as much as possible.

Enjoy the games this weekendIf not, go out with the family so you can give them one last Sunday before the 12 week stretch to finish the season

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