

Browns vs. 49ers: Game 7 Preview

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Sunday, October 30 2011 9:28 AM - Last Updated Sunday, October 30 2011 11:36 AM



Week 8 Game 7

When/Where: Sunday 4:15pm San Francisco CA, Candlestick Park

Opponent: San Francisco 49ers

Current Spread: Browns +8.5

In week 8 of the 2011 NFL season the Cleveland Browns travel to San Francisco to face the 49ers at Candlestick Park. This matchup will feature two teams that have first year head coaches, Pat Shurmur for Cleveland and Jim Harbaugh for San Francisco.

Even though these two coaches have been facing an uphill battle in their first seasons after losing their offseason to a lockout, they are fairing pretty well in their inaugural seasons. The Browns are 3-3 and 49ers are leading their division by piling up a 5-1 record.

Both coaches have offensive backgrounds and use offenses that are based on west coast offensive principles but their defenses are very different as the 49ers run a 3-4 base defense and the Browns run a 4-3 base defense.

This game on Sunday will feature these two rookie head coaches and two QBs trying to earn

Browns vs. 49ers: Game 7 Preview

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Sunday, October 30 2011 9:28 AM - Last Updated Sunday, October 30 2011 11:36 AM

some respect in the league. I expect this game to be a lot more entertaining than most are predicting and I anticipate both head coaches will have their teams ready to play.

Let's take a closer look at some of the players and concepts you will see on Sunday.

San Francisco Season Snapshot

The 49ers are coming into week 8 after resting on a bye in week 7. Their season so far is a story about a team who underachieved in most people's eyes last year coming back to overachieve this year.

In 4 of their 5 wins this year San Francisco has beaten some pretty talented teams. They have wins against the Eagles, Cowboys, Buccaneers, and the new darlings of the league Detroit Lions. Their wins are against strong teams so it shows that they are not beating up on the sisters of the poor they are playing good football and competing with some of the best rosters in the league.

First year head coach Jim Harbaugh has his team playing fundamentally sound football and winning the battles in the trenches. The reason the 49ers have had success this year is because they are getting great play from the offensive and defensive fronts and 7th year QB Alex Smith is making plays and not turning the ball over.

Here are some specifics to look for on game day.

Expectations on Game Day

Offense- Offensively the new age 49ers under Harbaugh look a lot like the Bill Walsh run 49ers of yesteryear. The reason has to do with the formations that they use which are some that you just don't see many (if any) teams use in the NFL these days.

Browns vs. 49ers: Game 7 Preview

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Sunday, October 30 2011 9:28 AM - Last Updated Sunday, October 30 2011 11:36 AM

For example, they use RBs lined up in a half back alignment side by side instead of the conventional I or offset I. They will offset them most of the time but they are still side by side. You also see San Francisco use a wishbone formation with two TEs as the wings instead of using extra RBs.

They really don't have a base formation as much as they have base personnel. The majority of their snaps are taken with 2 WRs, 2 TEs, and 1 RB. They will line them up various ways but this is the personnel grouping they use the most.

For Browns fans the offenses of Cleveland and San Francisco will look very similar. They use many of the same formations and plays.

You will see San Francisco use a lot of "heavy" formations where they have extra big guys in the lineup sometimes those are extra TEs and sometimes they are extra offensive linemen. They even use a short yardage personnel group that features a defensive lineman (Isaac Sopoaga) at FB. They don't just use that package on the goal line either. I saw them use the formation in the middle of the field in the 2nd quarter so expect it anytime they are in short yardage situations.

The 49ers are one of the more physical west coast offensive teams in the league. They really like using their big, athletic offensive line to punish defenses in the running game. San Francisco is ranked as the 6th best rushing offense in the league and starting RB Frank Gore is the 8th best rusher in the league.

When it comes to the running game against the Browns, expect the 49ers to extend the line of scrimmage with TEs and attack the edges of the defense while mixing in a few "wham" plays with a motion TE trap blocking the DT. They like using this play a lot and Frank Gore has great timing with the motion blocker which has allowed him to pop this run for big plays all year.

In the Passing game expect QB Alex Smith to play-action pass to the TEs a ton. The 49ers have two "mismatch" TEs with Vernon Davis and Delaney Walker. Both guys run really well and put pressure on the LBs and safeties in coverage.

Browns vs. 49ers: Game 7 Preview

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Sunday, October 30 2011 9:28 AM - Last Updated Sunday, October 30 2011 11:36 AM

TE Vernon Davis leads the team in both catches and yardage and is tied with fellow TE Walker for the team lead in TD receptions with three. Expect them both to get plenty of throws in the game.

Michael Crabtree is the leading WR and receives most of the looks down field. The other WRs are Ohio State graduate and Cleveland native, Ted Ginn Jr and public enemy number one amongst Browns fans, ex- Brown Braylon Edwards. Edwards is trying to heal from surgery so if he plays it will be his first game since week 2.

As a general philosophy expect San Francisco to run the ball as much as possible using multiple formations and feature the TEs in the passing game. They run a lot of screens and short passes looking for yardage after the catch and they also take the occasional shot down field with speed merchant WR Ginn.

Defense- San Francisco has the best defense the Browns will have faced so far in the 2011 season. They are big and physical and led by All-World LB Patrick Willis. They use a base 3-4 front and feature an attack style mentality. Browns fans are used to the Crennel/Mangini version of the 3-4 that is more of a two gap read and re-act system. The 49ers use some of those principles but they choose to get up field much more than the style that the Browns used to run.

Inside LBs Willis and Navaaro Bowman are a two man wrecking crew in the running game, they have combined for over 100 tackles through the first 7 games. They are total package LBs boasting size, speed, and toughness and will be difficult to keep blocked.

As a team the 49ers are ranked as the 2nd best run defense in the NFL giving up a measly 74 yards a game. So don't expect the Browns to make a living running the ball against them as a matter of fact, they have not given up a rushing TD at all this year.

Against the pass the 49ers rely on a talented rookie OLB (Aldon Smith) and a grizzled old vet DE (Justin Smith) to apply most of the pressure as they have combined for 10 sacks through the first 7 games. They also have 3 sacks each for DE Ray McDonald and OLB Ahmad Brooks.

Browns vs. 49ers: Game 7 Preview

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Sunday, October 30 2011 9:28 AM - Last Updated Sunday, October 30 2011 11:36 AM

Since San Francisco is so good against the run teams have passed the ball a lot against them so they give up about 260 ypg passing but they have not been abused as you can tell by the fact that they have only given up 9 passing TDs in 243 attempts.

Expect to see the 49ers be physical and fast on defense Sunday while applying pressure on the QB from the inside and outside. Don't expect too much schemed pressure from DB blitzes but expect them to have multiple OLBs rushing at the same time trying to rattle Cleveland QB Colt McCoy. The Browns and McCoy have had problems early on dealing with pressure so expect the 49ers to very aggressive rushing the passer and expect their inside LBs to make a lot of the tackles in the run game.

Browns Season Snapshot

The Cleveland Browns are coming off of a hard fought 6-3 home win against the Seattle Seahawks. The Browns are even for the year at 3-3 and seem to be getting better on defense with every game. The offense has had trouble with slow starts and inconsistent play but they have done a good job of protecting the football.

Cleveland is a young team that starts 9 first or second year players so some of their issues have been experience related and some have been caused by learning a new scheme. This is the first year under head coach Pat Shurmur and that combined with Cleveland's youth movement the team has made some critical mistakes at unfortunate times.

In general the team is performing above expectations on defense and below expectations on offense, but they seem to be getting better as the season progresses and that is about as much as you can ask for from a young team in the NFL.

Expectations on Game Day

Defense- The Cleveland Browns use a base 4-3 front on defense and typically rely on

Browns vs. 49ers: Game 7 Preview

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Sunday, October 30 2011 9:28 AM - Last Updated Sunday, October 30 2011 11:36 AM

fundamentals and sound play to get the job done. The defensive line is comprised of two rookie starters (DE Jabbaal Sheard/ DT Phil Taylor) and two more players(DT Ahtyba Rubin/ DE Jayme Mithcell) starting at their positions for the first time in the NFL.

On first and second downs the Browns tend to rely on their starting DL to get pressure on the QB and the group has combined for 10 their 17 sacks on the year. They will bring LBs and DBs from time to time which is evident by the fact that the LBs and DBs have combined for 7 sacks on the year.

The passing defense of Cleveland is the best in the NFL through the first 7 weeks of the season giving up only 171.5 yards a game. They are led by 2nd year CB Joe Haden who is one of the best young CBs in the league and 2nd year safety T.J. Ward who is known for his aggressive and physical run support. Knowing where these two players are at is critical for any team expecting to have success in the passing game, so expect the 49ers to key on these players.

The Browns are getting better against the run every week and have climbed their way up to the 20th spot in the rankings. ILB D'Qwell Jackson is the team's leading tackler with 55 and he makes plays sideline to sideline using his speed and instincts. The Browns are hard to run on up the middle so most teams attempt to attack the edges which allows safety T.J. Ward to do what he does best and make tackles in the running game. Ward is the second leading tackler on the team so expect him to be active against the run on Sunday.

In general the Browns will play gap-tight defense and rely on the front four to get pressure. If the 49ers get into 3rd and long the Browns will mix in some DB pressure packages as well as some LB blitzes. Expect Cleveland to play fundamentally sound in the passing game and force Alex Smith to beat them.

They will probably bring their safeties close to the line of scrimmage and force the San Francisco QB to beat them in the passing game where they think Joe Haden and the rest of the DBs have an advantage.

Offense- The offense of the Browns features second year QB Colt McCoy taking the snaps and making the throws. So far this year the offense has struggled to consistently move the ball and

Browns vs. 49ers: Game 7 Preview

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Sunday, October 30 2011 9:28 AM - Last Updated Sunday, October 30 2011 11:36 AM

put up points. Colt McCoy who was known as one of the more accurate college QBs has struggled in his sophomore season to throw accurate balls and find a groove.

The running game that was supposed to feature 2010 breakout player Peyton Hillis has had to rely on second year player Montario Hardesty in recent weeks because Hillis has been struck with injuries. Hardesty and the running game finally got going last week against the Seahawks as they piled up 144 yards against a team that was only giving up 97-ypg beforehand.

Expect the Browns to try and continue the momentum running the ball this week but don't expect Hardesty to match his 33 carry game of week 7 against the 49ers and their 2nd ranked rushing defense.

The Browns used some fast paced 3 and 4 WR sets in the preseason and I suspect this may be the game they try and display some of that. If they do try and speed up the tempo a bit expect rookie WR Greg Little to be a big factor. He is the Browns leading WR and the player they drafted to make big plays.

The big plays have been hard to come by for the Browns and don't expect many on Sunday against a good 49ers defense. The Browns will need to have sustained drives and show some consistency if they are going to put up more than the 6 points that they scored in week 7.

In general expect the Browns to treat the 49ers like they would Pittsburgh and spread them out. They will run the ball and throw it from more open sets so they can create lanes. Screens to the WRs and hitting the RBs out of the back field should be common sites in this game. If they choose to throw the ball deeper I expect it to come in the form of TEs down the seam.

Key Matchups

Browns vs. 49ers: Game 7 Preview

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Sunday, October 30 2011 9:28 AM - Last Updated Sunday, October 30 2011 11:36 AM

****Browns Coverage Teams vs. KR/PR Ted Ginn Jr.-** Ginn is one the better returners in the league and the Browns have struggled covering kicks this year. They gave up a TD to Raiders KR Jacoby Ford and Seahawks PR Leon Washington had a TD called back on a phantom block in the back last week so the Browns need to pay extra attention to Ginn, who returned a kickoff and a punt for TDs in week 1.

****RG Shawn Lauvao vs. DE Justin Smith-** Smith has a non-stop motor combined with a full bag of pass rush moves. Lauvao has struggled of late in pass protection and the Browns need Smith to stay blocked if McCoy is going to have time to throw and a pocket to step up into.

****ILB D'Qwell Jackson vs. RB Frank Gore-** The Browns will need to stop the running attack of the 49ers and force Alex Smith to beat them if they want to win the game. Jackson is having a good year and he will need to continue the high level of play this week if Cleveland is going to have success on defense.

****CB Sheldon Brown vs. WR Ted Ginn Jr.-** The veteran Sheldon Brown does a good job of getting his hands on WRs and redirecting them but if Ginn slips by him Brown can't catch back up. I expect the 49ers to try a play action deep ball to Ginn and Brown needs to keep the WR in front of him or the Browns will give up a big play.

****TE Evan Moore vs. SS Donte Whitner-** The 6-6 Moore is a mismatch for the 5-9 Whitner in the passing game. I expect the Browns to try and exploit this matchup in some double TE sets.

****Browns Pass Rush vs 49ers Offensive Line-** San Francisco's offensive line is great in the run game but average in pass protection. The Browns front 4 need to beat the offensive line of the 49ers and apply pressure on their QB trying to force some bad throws. Jabaal Sheard in particular can have a big day against 49ers RT Anthony Davis if he is quick off the ball.

****SS T.J. Ward/FS Mike Adams vs. TE Vernon Davis/Delaney Walker-** San Francisco's TEs are both game changers, the Browns need to control these two players if they have any chance of beating the 49ers on Sunday.

Browns vs. 49ers: Game 7 Preview

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Sunday, October 30 2011 9:28 AM - Last Updated Sunday, October 30 2011 11:36 AM

Prediction

As a fan, I could probably come up with a few different scenarios where the Browns come out winners on Sunday, but the realist in me just can't pull the trigger on a win prediction.

I don't see the Browns flying across country and walking into stadium that happens to house the best team we have faced so far and leaving with a "W". I think the Browns will play better than most people think and if they play good special teams I even see them covering the spread, but there is no way I can co-sign on a victory.

The formula for a win would include a defensive score, a few turnovers combined with an offensive performance that featured on target throws and plenty of yards after the catch so if the Browns are looking for the equation to victory I can offer that up.... but don't expect miracles.

I would be happy coming out of this game with the confidence that the offense is turning the corner and Colt McCoy is starting to figure it out. This is the week we need to see some progress because next week we have to face the Houston Texans in their building, and if we can't have some offensive success that running game of the Texans will eat us for lunch and the score will look like the one from week 7 where they pounded the Titans 41-7.

Enjoy the game Browns fans, and I am hoping just like you that we are all smiling at about 7:30 tonight...Go Browns!

[FOLLOW ME ON TWITTER](#)