

Dawg's Eye View: Training Camp Part One

Written by {ga=jta1975}

Friday, July 27 2012 5:00 PM - Last Updated Sunday, July 29 2012 1:39 AM



As training camp starts I thought I should take a moment to talk about some of the things I will have my eye on as camp unfolds. Over the last three years GM Tom Heckert has dramatically changed the roster composition by engaging in a full blown youth movement, so in general the roster is filled with young, talented players and a few veterans sprinkled in to keep the ship on the right course.

In 2011 rookies made huge contributions to the team. If you count FB Owen Marecic, by the end of the year 6 of the 8 rookies from the 2011 class were starting and the other 2 DBs (Eric Hagg and Buster Skrine) were getting time in sub packages.

So far the 2012 class seems headed on a similar path as the first three picks (Richardson, Weeden, Schwart) appear on the path to starting. And with Phil Taylor mending from a torn pectoral muscle, DTs John Hughes (3rd round) and Billy Winn (6th round) are in the mix to start until Taylor is healed. Fourth round LB James Michael-Johnson could also get some early playing time because of the 3 game suspension to LB Scott Fujita, and WR Travis Benjamin and H-back Brad Smelley could also carve out a niche on offense and see some playing time early in the season.

It is pretty apparent that Cleveland is smack dab in the middle of a youth movement and training camp and preseason games serve as valuable tools in order to measure the progress and effectiveness of the young players.

For the veteran players training camp is no longer the hated monster it once was because the newly negotiated Collective Bargaining Agreement has virtually eliminated the dreaded two-a-days, and actually even allows for some scheduled days off during the weeks of camp.

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For fans looking to head out I would advise you to check the [schedule](#) and make arrangements to attend sooner rather than later because unlike years past, there aren't that many practices to attend.

At first I was going to write this article as a roster evaluation but on second thought I would rather wait until I have a chance to see some of these players in person at camp before I go giving my thoughts on them. Instead I will tell you what I will be looking for when I go to camp and how I will watch the different position groups. I think it is better to go through what I'll be looking for and what my expectations are and once I get to see some of the fringe players in person I will have a better opinion on them beating someone out for a roster spot.

Let's jump right into some of the things I will be looking for from the offense when I head to Berea for camp.

The first thing I will have my eye on when it comes to the offense is how new OC Brad Childress interacts with the unit in 7 on 7 drills and team sessions. Even though there is some question on who will actually be calling the plays on game day, Childress is now the one who is responsible for the offense as a whole and he has a reputation of being a very detail oriented guy. I want to see how much coaching he is really doing to the offense when they are together as a group.

I am wondering if he is the type of coach to blow the whistle when a WR takes 8 steps instead of 7 and has them do it all again, or does he base the success or failure of the play based on the outcome? These are the types of things that help you learn the coaching style of an individual and it also gives you an opportunity to see his effectiveness with the players. I will be taking mental notes of how many times it takes for them to get it right after he corrects them as one of the gauges on Childress as an effective teacher.

I will also pay plenty of attention to the various formations being used. When I watched the Minnesota offense operate with Childress as a head coach I saw an emphasis on execution rather than trickery when it came to beating a defense. I think with a younger group of skill players on offense the Browns will focus more on executing a few things really well as opposed to trying to do everything. I am interested if team sessions show that to be true.

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If you went to training camp last year I expect you to see everything on offense looking much crisper this year. After having a real offseason of workouts and training, combined with the fact that the terminology and concepts are the same as last year, I expect the offense to be light years ahead of where they were at last year at the start of camp, and if it isn't that should be an immediate red flag to all.

Here are some of the things I will be on the lookout for when I watch the specific position groups.

QBs- By far this is the position group fans are usually most tuned into during training camp and this year Cleveland has a rookie first round QB that throws rocket shots, so this area will probably be focused on even more than normal.

For me I will be looking at a few things. The first is the order that the QBs take reps and the second is the number of reps the QBs are getting with each group. Like most of you out there I am already convinced the Browns are starting rookie Brandon Weeden at QB, so I am more interested in how they are handling the backup situation.

Specifically with Weeden, two things I will have my eye on are the throws that involve trajectory and pace changes, as well as the players he feels most comfortable taking some chances with. The trajectory and pace issue will tell if he is more like the rocket launching QB that Cleveland sent to the Pro Bowl (who the league figured out only had a fastball) or a QB with a great fastball who can throw all his pitches for strikes. More than likely Weeden is "B" but I want to see for myself.

The comfort level thing is pretty self explanatory. If he has confidence to throw balls in tight spots to certain WRs it is because he trusts that WR will either catch it or make sure it isn't caught by anyone. Turnovers are not tolerated by any coaching staff so you won't see QBs just chucking it up there if they don't have faith in the WR.

RBs- All NFL RBs are great athletes and can 'wow' you if you watch their group during camp, but when you get to see one after the other you can begin to see which ones separate themselves from the group in various aspects.

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All eyes will be on the #3 overall pick Trent Richardson but I would also pay attention to how backups Brandon Jackson and Montario Hardesty look, because it is tough for any RB in the league to make it through the year totally healthy and we saw last year how depth at that position is a huge issue.

I will be watching very closely to pass protection drills and the RBs catching the ball out of the backfield. Those drills are done going full speed so it is pretty realistic of their ability, but you very rarely see RBs taken to the ground in practice so it is harder to gauge a RBs overall ability. You can, however, begin to see some of his vision and quickness so I will also be watching for that.

Players I will be watching the most will be Hardesty....Richardson....Adonis Thomas. Thomas is an undrafted free agent who is quick as a hiccup and provides a dimension unlike any other RB on the roster. I am curious to see if he can carve out a role on this team and I will have my eyes on him during camp.

WR- Since I already anticipate Weeden starting at QB I will probably be watching this group the most because, by most people's account, it is the weakest group on the offense. Specifically I will be watching for the new players at the position and trying to get a feel for them.

This is a group you can get a lot of information from by watching the drill work because it will be clear which ones are natural catchers and which ones are playing the position because of their athleticism. In the drills there is no worrying about assignments or trying to read defenses so you can tell a lot about the player's pure ability by watching drills for this group. Here are some of the specific things I will be watching for a few players.

Greg Little- From Little I will be looking for 3 things. The first is his route running because I want to see if losing the 12 pounds he lost helps him get in and out of his breaks more smoothly. The second thing I will be watching is how he looks catching the deeper routes because I want to know if he has relaxed as a WR, and one of the best ways you can tell that is how he plays the ball in the air on the deeper routes. The third thing I will be watching for is how many balls thrown to him end up on the turf. We all saw him struggle at times last year but I understand this is only his 3rd football season at the position so I want to see progress, not necessarily perfection. Oh I will also be looking to see if he is playing flanker or split end with

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the first team.

Josh Gordon- I will be looking to see two things from Gordon that will be a big indication of how much time he will get this year. I already know he has superior hands so I want to know if he can beat press coverage and how many gears he has. If he can't get off the line of scrimmage on a regular basis he won't play, and if he is going to create separation in this league he will need to play at different speeds.

Josh Cooper- I already know from studying Weeden that Cooper has a special chemistry with Weeden, and I want to see if Cooper has the smarts to read coverage and find the open spots while working from the slot in the NFL. He doesn't have top end speed but he is really quick and has hands of glue, so if he continues to have special chemistry in this offense with Weeden he has a chance to make the roster over a player like Jordan Norwood.

Travis Benjamin and Carlton Mitchell- I am on record of not being a big fan of Travis Benjamin so I am anxious to see if my caution about his ability to be an effective player in the NFL is right or wrong. I don't think his quickness or vision overcomes his size so I want to see him against NFL CBs. Mitchell is a player with great physical attributes but he has struggled to stay healthy and when healthy he has struggled to be consistent. With the drafting of Gordon his roster spot is in extreme jeopardy and I want to see how he responds.

OL- When it comes to the offensive line, unless you are a scout or ex-lineman, watching them do drills at training camp isn't much fun, but you can learn a boat load from watching the offensive lineman and defensive lineman do one on one drills and half line, full go rushing drills.

One thing I want to note about this unit is the philosophy of the offensive line coach of having players work at multiple positions. Don't read too much into seeing a guard play tackle or some different line combinations during camp.

Continuity and unity is a big aspect of the offensive line so it is pretty important to get time as a unit and therefore you can expect to see the same starting line, with the addition of rookie RT Mitchell Schwartz, running with the first team. Like I said in an earlier article, if any of the incumbent starters are going to be replaced my money is on RG Shawn Lauvao and, if so, it could lead to Jason Pinkston swapping sides, but at least early on expect to see Thomas,

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Pinkston, Mack, Lauvao, and Schwartz as the starting unit.

As a fan who loves to watch the big boys bang, your best bet for good action is to see some goal line drills, half line rushing drills, and one on one pass rush drills so that is what I'll be hoping for when I head down to camp.

TEs/FBs/H-Backs- For the TEs and FBs the aspect you can get a good picture of during training camp is their hands. For the FBs you can see who looks natural with the ball and which ones have soft hands. For the TEs you can watch for speed as well as their ability to make difficult catches.

Blocking is an aspect you can see during team drills so keep an eye out for plays breaking down because of missed blocks by TEs and H-backs. Here are some of the players at the position I will have a special eye for.

TE Jordan Cameron is a player I expect to blossom this year. He has elite athletic ability and the size to be an effective blocker for the position. I want to see if he separates himself in drills and I also want to see how much confidence the QBs have in him to catch the ball in tight spots.

FB/H-back Brad Smelley is a rookie I expect to earn immediate playing time. He has been a blocker for Trent Richardson for a few years now and he can block and catch really well. As a matter of fact, he has great hands and he should fit the H-back position in this offense perfectly. I think Smelley is more natural with the ball than 2011 draft pick Owen Marecic, so as roster spots get tight I think Smelley will end up having an edge over Marecic. I want to see how Smelley compares to Marecic in practice so I will be watching that group for sure.

Last year the offense was the downfall of the team so I think most fans will be spending plenty of time watching that unit and looking for improvement, and that is why I started with that side of the ball in part one of this article. In part two I will focus on some of the things I will be looking out for when I watch the defense at training camp. So until them.....Go Browns!