In week 2 of the 2012 NFL season the Cleveland Browns go on the road to face division rival Cincinnati. The Bengals beat Cleveland twice last year and both games were games in which Cleveland had leads late only to have rookie WR A.J. Green make big plays and Cincinnati wins.

This year both teams are entering week 2 after losing on the opening weekend of the NFL season, so both teams will be eager to gain their first victories of the year. For Cleveland they are coming off of a week 1 performance that was about extremes. The defense played about as well as a defense can play against the explosive offense of the Philadelphia Eagles. They held big plays in check, created turnovers, and even found a way to score a TD.

Their offense was horrible. They couldn't run the ball effectively and their rookie QB threw 4 interceptions and completed only 34% of his passes. The Browns offense played young players at key positions and, at least in week 1, they paid for it in a big way.

The Bengal ran into a buzz saw in week 1 as they faced a near flawless Baltimore Ravens team on MNF. The Ravens have been a good team over the last few years but Monday they played well in all 3 phases of football and dominated their division counterpart.

The Bengals didn't play as poorly as the score indicated. Baltimore was just really special in that Monday night game and the Bengals will be looking to bounce back at home against the Browns, so let's get inside the game and try and predict what we will see on Sunday.

Week 2

When/Where: Sunday 1:00pm Cincinnati, Ohio Paul Brown Stadium

Opponent: Cincinnati Bengals **Current Spread:** Browns +7

Bengals Offense

The Cincinnati Bengals are a team offensively that relies on its powerful offensive line and its second year QB. Under offensive coordinator Jay Gruden the Bengals usually use a 3 WR set but they will mix in a more traditional look while using a two back set and playing power football.

In the running game Cincinnati likes using their big offensive line in power blocking schemes and when they use a FB in the backfield they have a really physical one in Chris Pressley. Their starting running back BenJarvis Green-Ellis (The Law firm) is in his first year with the team after cutting his teeth in the NFL with the New England Patriots.

Green-Ellis is a tough, strong, and physical inside runner that specializes in scoring TDs in the red zone. He has a natural ability at the goal line to find creases and punch the ball into the end zone. Green-Ellis is much more comfortable inside the hashes so expect most of his runs to be of the inside variety. Even though the Bengals played the tough Ravens defense last week he still managed to average 5.1 yards a carry on his way to a 91 yard 1 TD performance so he is a player to keep your eye on Sunday.

When the Bengals put the ball in the air you can expect them to try and get the ball to 2nd year WR A.J. Green. QB Andy Dalton and WR A.J. Green exploded on the NFL scene last year as rookies and they continued the chemistry this year in week one. Dalton is a QB who excels at the short and intermediate passing game and Green is a gifted WR with a huge catch radius.

The Bengals also have a big (6-5) TE with soft hands in Jermaine Gresham who has had good games in the past against the Browns. Gresham will work the middle of the field as well as the flat area and he is always a huge weapon in the red zone.

The other starting WR is 2nd year player Armon Binns and he is a big strong WR who poses a threat on the perimeter of the defense. The Bengals leading WR in week 1 was the quick and speedy slot WR Andrew Hawkins. Hawkins is a short WR with tremendous short area quickness and lightning quick cuts combined with the speed to take it to the house from anywhere on the field. Other than A.J. Green, Hawkins is the player who should scare opposing defenses the most because of his big play potential so be alert whenever he touches the ball.

When it comes to Cincinnati's game plan against Cleveland I would expect a heavy dose of the running game and plenty of downfield passing to WR A.J. Green because Cleveland's top CB will be starting a 4 game suspension this week. I think the Bengals will focus on testing Cleveland's third CB in the passing game and they will try to exploit their TEs size advantage over the Cleveland safeties.

Cincinnati Defense

The Bengals defense was a top ten defense last season but they had a rough time in week 1 against the explosive offense of Baltimore. They also are facing a huge setback this week after starting LB Thomas Howard tore his ACL in practice earlier in the week. On film Howard shows up as a disruptive force and he is coming off of a game in which he had a sack, TFL, a pass defensed, as well as a QB hit. He will be extremely missed the rest of the season.

The Bengals use a 4-3 base defense and the strong suit of the defense is probably their CB and DL group. The Bengals have a physical and athletic front four and they boast 6 first round picks at the CB position.

Defensive coordinator Mike Zimmer usually fields a fast physical defense and he will bring pressure front various angles. Zimmer isn't overly aggressive but he doesn't hesitate to bring pressure and he will probably be even more aggressive with an improved secondary and facing a rookie QB should also be a factor in his aggressiveness.

When it comes to the defensive front the one player who is a huge problem to offenses around the league and especially in the AFC North is Geno Atkins. Atkins has the type of skill set that eats up guards because he is extremely strong but he is also as quick in short areas as a DE is. He is going to be a huge problem for either of the Cleveland's guards and you should expect to see Cleveland center Alex Mack double to his side most of the day. Atkins is coming off an opening week where he had 2 sacks and he will look to keep his success going in week 2.

The LBer group is young and aggressive to the ball. MLB Rey Maualuga is a fast, physical player who really packs a punch when he hits you. He can be overly aggressive at times but every year he has been in the league he has improved that aspect of his game.

OLB Manny Lawson is a really athletic LB with experience as a pass rushing OLB in a 3-4 defense so he is really good getting to the QB on blitzes. We will have to wait and see how the Bengals handle not having Thomas Howard at the other OLB position but my instincts tell me they will try and get rookie LB Vontaze Burfict in the lineup somehow.

Burfict is a LB who underachieved his senior year in college and had a horrible pre draft experience but he has a ton of talent. Since his humbling draft experience where he failed to get picked he has lost 15lbs and played his way onto the Bengals team as an undrafted free agent. When it comes to talent Burfict is at the front of the line but in terms of maturity he often struggles. He may not get the nod right away but my guess is that if he continues to work hard and keep his nose clean he will be starting by the end of the season.

Like I said earlier, the DB group is led by a group of talented CBs and within that group they are led by Cleveland killer Leon Hall. Hall always plays the Browns well and I expect him to continue with the young WR core Cleveland has.

The safety group boasts big hitter but sometimes struggler in coverage Taylor Mays and the ball hawking Reggie Nelson. That group is coming off of a week where they struggled against the Ravens so it will be interesting to see how they bounce back after getting beat deep more than once.

When it comes to the defensive game plan the Bengals will bring against Cleveland you can expect to see the same recipe the Eagles used against Cleveland in week 1. They will press the running game with 8 men in the box on early downs and blitz rookie QB Brandon Weeden on passing situations.

Until Cleveland can find a way to win the man to man battles outside teams will continue to make the young WRs prove they can beat press man coverage. You can Cincinnati to try and control Cleveland's running game and force the rookie QB and young WRs to beat them.

Cleveland Game Plan

When you are putting a game plan together to beat the division rival Bengals on the road, the plan will probably have some key points that need be accomplished in order to increase the odds of winning. A few key points on my list would look something like this.

- ·Stop big plays to A.J. Green
- ·Protect the football on offense
- ·Average 4 yards a carry
- ·Get pressure on the QB
- ·Hold them to less than 3 yards a carry

From an offensive standpoint for Cleveland to win on the road they will need to run the ball effectively and limit the turnovers. I think you can expect Cleveland to put pressure on the Bengals new starting LB in both the running and passing game and I would also expect them to target Taylor Mays in coverage.

I said it last week about the Eagles and this week is no different. The weak part of their pass defense is in the middle of the field and Cleveland needs to attack it. Not just the underneath throws, they need to attack the deep middle third of the field. The seams in cover 2 are an area I would expect the Browns to test, and the underneath zones of Maualuga and new starter Rey Vincent should also be places the Browns go with the ball.

Nate Clements is a CB on the outside that Cleveland should test deep because he has a history of letting WRs get by him at times. I would probably use Josh Gordon over the top instead of Travis Benjamin because he is much taller and stronger but either way if Trent Richardson is able to effectively run the ball I would expect the Browns to use play action passes and test Clements and SS Taylor Mays on the deep ball more than once before this game is over.

In the running game, the Ravens had a ton of success on running plays directly over the center from some spread formations so I would expect to see some of that on Sunday and I am sure Cleveland will test the anchor of DE Michael Johnson on a few outside runs.

Defensively I expect the Browns to rely heavily on getting pressure with 4 and dropping 7 into coverage. Last year Jabaal Sheard owned RT Andre Smith so look for that matchup to be a factor in this game. I also think rookie DT Billy Winn can beat LG Clint Boiling so that is another matchup I would keep my eye on.

In the preseason Cincinnati lost their starting center and they Cleveland draft pick and ex-Brown Jeff Faine as a replacement. Faine is a light center so I also expect Cleveland to test him with some inside slants from DT Ahtyba Rubin as well as a few inside pressures from MLB D'Qwell Jackson.

This could also be another game you won't hear Cleveland FS Eric Hagg's name called a bunch because he will spend most of the day playing over the top of A.J. Green in an attempt to limit his big plays. Hagg will have a chance to make some plays on the ball in the passing game so if he is having a good day and Cleveland is getting pressure on Bengals QB Andy Dalton Hagg could end up with big play or two but don't expect his name called a lot when it comes to tackles.

Another aspect of this game that should be a major factor is special teams. Cleveland special teams ace Josh Cribbs has always played the Bengals well so look for him to have a big day in the return game. If Cleveland is able to play with a short field or maybe even get some points in the return game it will go a long way in getting a victory on the road.

Analysis

Trying to predict an outcome in this game is truly making me feel like I have multiple personalities. I have more than enough confidence that Cleveland's defense will play good enough to compete and win this game but based on what I saw from this offense last week I am not sure how we will score points.

I think rookie RB Trent Richardson calms down which will allow him to actually see the holes and in turn he should have a good day but I am not sure it will be enough.

Taking all those thoughts into consideration I was so impressed with the play of the defense in week one I am going against my gut here and picking the Browns to win this game by a field goal.

I think the TEs and running game will put us in the situation to score points and I am a believer in this defense…….. plus I am expecting a big game by Josh Cribbs and the special teams.

In my head that all adds up to a win and even though my gut is going against me and rookie QB Brandon Weeden was horrible in week 1, the Bengals are a beatable team that Cleveland had on the ropes twice last year and came up short. The law of averages strikes in this game and Cleveland gets its first win of the season and Pat Shurmur gets his first win in the division.

Fellow Browns fans I hope my mind is right and not my gut, but regardless enjoy your football Sunday and……..Go Browns!