Cleveland Browns @ Pittsburgh Steelers

Time: 1:00 pm, Sunday, October 17, 2010

Location: Heinz Field, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Network, Announcers- CBS: Kevin Harlan and Solomon Wilcots

Line: Steelers by thirteen-and-a-half

Team W/L Records: Cleveland is 1-4; Pittsburgh is 3-1

Coaches: Eric Mangini is 29-40 overall, 6-15 in his second season with the Browns; Mike Tomlin is 34-18 in his fourth season with the Steelers.

Last Week for the Browns: Lost two quarterbacks and the game, 20-10 to Atlanta. It was Cleveland's first loss to the Falcons at home since 1971.

Last Week for the Steelers: On the bye. Two weeks ago the Steelers were beaten at home by Baltimore, 17-14, giving up the game-winning touchdown with 32 seconds left.

All-Time Series: Pittsburgh leads, 58-56.

Last Meeting- December 10, 2009 : Josh Cribbs terrorized the Steelers on this bitterly cold Thursday night, which was normal. What was abnormal was that he terrorized them in a winning effort. Cribbs's 200 all-purpose yards and eight sacks of Ben Roethlisberger were the critical elements in Cleveland snapping a twelve-game losing streak against Pittsburgh and an eight-game losing streak overall, 13-6.

Out, Doubtful or Questionable for Pittsburgh: G Trai Essex (ankle) is doubtful.

Out, Doubtful or Questionable for Cleveland: QB Jake Delhomme (ankle), DE Robaire Smith (back), T John St. Clair (ankle) and QB Seneca Wallace (ankle) are doubtful; RB Peyton Hillis (thigh), TE Robert Royal (shoulder), G Floyd Womack (knee), DE Kenyon Coleman (knee) and S Nick Sorenson (calf) is questionable.

What to watch for the Browns: Cleveland was twenty-fifth in the NFL in total offense before losing their top two quarterbacks and being forced to turn to third-round rookie Colt McCoy, who has never fired an NFL shot in anger. Pittsburgh is fourth in total defence and first in scoring defence. The Steelers are a mediocre twentieth against the pass but that probably won't do the Browns a whole lot of good considering the quarterback situation. Peyton Hillis is banged-up and you can't run on Pittsburgh anyway, not when their defence is healthy- which it wasn't last December when Cleveland racked up 171 on the ground. The Steelers didn't have Aaron Smith or Troy Polamalu that night. They will on Sunday.

How in the hell are the Browns going to score points? Answer: they probably won't. Not unless Josh Cribbs breaks out of his kick-return doldrums and/or the defence forces table-setting turnovers from what may be a rusty Ben Roethlisberger. Don't expect to see a reprise of the winning formula from December, though. That Pittsburgh team was beat up and on the greased skid of a four-game losing streak. This Pittsburgh team is fresh, healthy and primed.

The shame of it is that Cleveland can at least compete with the Steelers at or near full strength. I don't find Pittsburgh's offense all that intimidating. It isn't like a few years ago when the Steelers could run the same trap play a hundred times in a row and just physically dominate Cleveland's defence. Obviously Pittsburgh's skill players and linebackers are superior, but the Browns don't match up badly right on the line of scrimmage. It's a shame this team is so beat up. And why is it so beat up? We're not six weeks into the season and the injury report looks like the casualty list at Ypres. Is it conditioning, the way it practices, dumb luck?

What to watch for the Steelers: Keep in mind, amid the minor hoopla of "Big Ben" making his first start of the season for the yellow-and-black:

Roethlisberger hasn't played an NFL game since the first weekend of January. He did play in the preseason, but, while I've never played a down of NFL football, I have to at least guess that the preseason and regular season are a bit different in terms of the level of intensity, and the hits are harder and more purposeful. He has practiced with the team since October 5th. So he should be relatively in tune with his receivers. But Roethlisberger doesn't have the quickest release at the best of times and it's reasonable to assume he'll take even more time making up his mind on Sunday.

So Cleveland's defence should have some opportunities here, both to get to Roethlisberger and to force him into poor decisions with the football. The Browns sacked him eight times in the last meeting back in December and no doubt Rob Ryan will be just as aggressive in going after the Steelers quarterback as he was that night. I think Pittsburgh will look to get Roethlisberger going early and then turn it over to the running game so the Browns will have their chances. They have to take advantage of them.

Next Week for Both Teams: Cleveland visits New Orleans; Pittsburgh visits Miami.

Trivia: The only coach in “new” Browns history to defeat Pittsburgh twice in a row is Chris Palmer, who guided Cleveland to upsets of the black-and-yellow in the second meeting of 1999 and the first meeting of 2000.