Week 7 Game 6

When/Where: Sunday 1:00pm Cleveland, Ohio Cleveland Browns Stadium

Opponent: Seattle Seahawks **Current Spread:** Browns -3

In week 7 of the 2011 NFL season, the 2-3 Cleveland Browns will play host to the 2-3 Seattle Seahawks. The Browns are coming home after suffering a week 6 road loss to the Oakland Raiders and the Seahawks are traveling east after a week 6 bye.

The back drop for this game may very well be about two young teams heading in different directions given the Browns have lost two in a row and 2 of their last 3 while Seattle is coming off of a win. The Seahawks have also won 2 of their last 3 with the loss being a 30 to 28 squeaker against Atlanta.

Injuries seem to be the focus as the game approaches with the Seahawk's starting QB Tarvaris Jackson being doubtful with a shoulder injury and the Browns maybe forced t play without 2010 breakout RB Peyton Hillis who is suffering from a strained hamstring.

Let's take a closer look at what we may see on Sunday from these two teams:

Seattle Season Snapshot

The Seattle Seahawks have had an up and down start to the 2011 season. They started the year with two losses, in which they played very bad and were beaten in all facets of the game, only to rebound and win the next 2 of 3.

The Seahawks are coming into the contest against the Browns after beating the NY Giants in New York during week 5 and getting some rest in week 6 while on their bye week. The Seahawks and head coach Pete Carroll are a young team trying to find their way, much like the Browns are, but have had more success in recent weeks than Cleveland has.

Both the offense and the defense of Seattle started slow during the early weeks of the season and both have come on as of late. The offense has really picked up the slack over their past two outings, scoring 28 and 36 points in those contests.

Off season acquisition QB Tarvaris Jackson seemed to be finding his way to success before he was injured in the 3rd quarter of their last contest, and after struggling early the defense has picked their game up and is currently ranked 8th against the run allowing under 98 yards per game.

Head coach Pete Carroll has the team playing confident, fast football and the group is riding high after earning their first road victory in New York.

Expectations on Game Day

Offense- The Seahawks and the Browns both run a version of the west coast offense. The Seahawks prefer spreading defenses out more while using a base 3 WR set and going without a FB. The Browns tend to use more FB and double TE sets in their version.

The Seahawks offense seems to have been tailor made for QB Tarvaris Jackson, but with Jackson hurt Seattle will turn to the inexperienced Charlie Whitehurst. The young Seattle QB will be making just his 3rd career start.

Under Tarvaris Jackson the Seahawks used an offense with similar principles as the popular shotgun, read option offenses that are trendy in the college game right now. Charlie Whitehurst has good mobility but I don't expect Seattle to feature those looks with him at QB.

In week 5 against the Giants, Jackson was in the shotgun for 90% of his snaps, but when he got hurt and Whitehurst entered the game they started from under center much more.

Whitehurst performed well against the Giants in his relief role going 11 of 19 for 149 yards and 1td. He didn't throw any picks and he did a good job of leading the team down the field, so he is a more than capable QB.

I expect the Seahawks to try and run the ball more than they have in previous weeks because of the switch at QB, but since they are coming off of a bye they have had plenty of time to figure out the passing plays that Whitehurst can excel at so expect to see a fairly normal game plan.

Seattle has also started to use a version of the no huddle, hurry up offense throughout the game so expect to see it on Sunday. The WRs are big on the outside (Sydnie Rice and Mike Williams) and quick and fast in the slot as they start an undrafted rookie free agent (Doug Baldwin) who, at the moment, also happens to be their leading WR in both receptions and yards. Just because the rookie plays the majority of snaps in the slot, don't think Baldwin doesn't get yards in chunks, because his 16.5 yards a catch average is proof that he does.

Under starter Tarvaris Jackson, the Seahawks have been considered a passing team and the stats back that up. Although they are only 15th in the league in passing attempts per game, they are dead last in rushing attempts per game. I expect more running on Sunday but they have weapons in the passing game that will help the young QB be productive when they choose to throw.

When the Seahawks do run the ball, Marshawn Lynch will be the RB carrying the load, and he has a solid yards per carry average of 4. Although he has a good average per carry, his total yards are down (239) due to limited (58) attempts, but his workload may increase this week when the Seahawks start an inexperienced QB.

Lynch is a jack of all trades type of RB; he has speed, runs with power, has good hands, and he blocks well in pass protection. He is such a good receiver, don't be surprised if you see him flexed out playing WR because Seattle uses formations where they ill flex Lynch out trying to create mismatches.

The backup RBs are the small but speedy Justin Forsett and return specialist Leon Washington who have a combined 72 yards rushing, so look for Lynch to continue to get most of the carries. Forsett does have 10 catches so you may see him enter the game on some passing plays to give Lynch a break.

In general look for the Seahawks to try forcing the pace with some no huddle while featuring the WRs in the passing game. With a young QB starting they will probably run the ball a few more times than they have early in the season but they will more than likely continue to throw the ball a lot.

If the Browns are forced to play the game without starting CB Joe Haden, who is attempting to heal from an MCL sprain, expect the Seahawks to attack rookie CB Buster Skrine who plays the outside CB in the Browns nickel package. The two outside WRs for the Seahawks are each 6-4 and Skrine is 5-9 so I expect the Seahawks to try and exploit the size difference with some high point outside throws.

Defense- Seattle runs a 4-3 defense that can sometimes look like a 5-2 when they slide the line away from the TE and bring the OLB up to the line of scrimmage on the TE side. When they use those odd fronts they also usually have one of their safeties come down and play more like a LB.

The Seahawks are 8th in the NFL in rushing yards allowed giving up 98.7 yards a game. The passing defense is a bit more generous giving up 268 ypg which ranks them 23
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in the league. When you're watching their games, the defense seems to get in the backfield quite a bit, providing constant pressure, but they don't get many sacks and only have 8 through the first 5 games.

Personnel wise Seattle has some of the bigger secondary players you will see and they combine that with a big starting D-line built to stop the run. Kam Chancellor is a big safety (6-3 232lbs) and he uses his size well While playing a physical style. He can also make plays in the passing game when given the opportunity, leading the team with 2ints on the year. The other safety, second year player Earl Thomas, is one of the fastest safeties in the league and makes plays all over the field. Bryant Browner, the starting right CB, is also a bigger more imposing secondary player (6-4 221lbs) and he plays the run well.

The Seahawks have one the best tackling secondaries in the league and when you look at the stat sheet, the numbers back up the statement. Between the three players I mentioned above, they have more combined tackles than the starting LBs do combined and Earl Thomas leads the entire team in tackles with 32.

Expect Seattle's defense to play big and physical at the point of attack while also being aggressive with blitzes on passing downs. They will come from every angle and, although they don't have big sack totals, they get good pressure. Based on the troubles the Browns had against the Raiders handling blitzes you can reasonably expect pressure all day and you can also count on their safeties providing good run support.

Browns Season Snapshot

The Cleveland Browns are coming off of a week 6 road loss to the Oakland Raiders and are 2-3 for the year. It has been the year of the big play (and lack thereof) for the Browns. In the three losses so far the Browns have been victimized by big plays. For example, in their last contest against the Raiders the Browns allowed a kickoff to be returned for a TD and they also allowed the punter to throw a 35 yard TD pass to a TE on a fake FG.

The Browns have struggled to find rhythm in the passing game and the running game has been irrelevant. Cleveland is playing adequately on defense but they have given up big plays at critical moments and those big plays have sealed their fate.

Sunday will mark the fourth home game in their first 6 games and they haven't fared too well going 1-2. Pat Shurmur will try to right the ship against the Seattle Seahawks as the Browns attempt to even both their home record at 2-2 and their overall record at 3-3.

Expectations on Game Day

Defense- The Browns will continue to deploy their base 4-3 defense this week. The Browns rely on sound fundamentals and beating one-on-on matchups instead of using exotic looks like some teams that use the 4-3. The Cleveland defense usually relies on their young front four to apply pressure and that has yielded mixed results so far. The Browns defense has 13 sacks on the year, which is a bit over 2.5 a contest and ranks them 13th in the league, but the Browns have lacked in getting consistent pressure.

In the running game the Browns have been beaten up on the stat sheet this year and are currently ranked 27th in the league while giving up 129.8 ypg.

The yardage stat is not good at all but that total is also a bit misleading. The Browns defense is actually 10th in the league when it comes to average yards per carry at 3.9, but because the offense has been so inconsistent and cannot score points early in the game, opponents are playing with the lead and attempting more runs throughout the game.

There are only two teams in the league with more rushing attempts against them so despite their top ten ranking in yards per carry, opponents have gained a higher rushing total from having more attempts. If the scenario of the early games was a bit different teams would not be able to run the ball as many times, so offensive issues have hurt the defense's rushing ranking.

The passing defense is getting a break because teams are running the ball more against Cleveland and their pass defense ranking is high because of it. The passing defense is ranked 4th in passing yards allowed and a big reason for that is because they rank 3rd in attempts against. Only two teams are getting passed on less than the Browns and I think the majority of that can be chalked up to the teams running the ball as they play with the lead.

The leader of the Browns defense is MLB D'Qwell Jackson who is making plays all over the field and leading the team with 49 tackles. The Browns start two rookies on the defensive line and two more players who are starting at their positions for the first time. The secondary is led by two second year players in CB Joe Haden (questionable for the game) and safety T.J. Ward. Ward has a reputation as a big hitter and most people consider Haden one of the best young CBs in the game.

I expect the Browns to continue the trend of relying on solid play and not exotic looks. You may see Cleveland bring bit more pressure on Sunday with an inexperienced QB getting the start, but don't expect too much more because with Joe Haden still not practicing (so he probably won't play) I think the Browns will limit the amount of time they leave young CB Buster Skrine without safety help.

Offense- The offense of the Browns has struggled with consistency and creating explosive plays. Second year QB Colt McCoy is second in the league in pass attempts per game but only 18th in passing yards per game. The running game has struggled, ranking 30th in the league while averaging 81.6 ypg, and they are second to last in yards per attempt.

The offense has also failed miserable to create big yardage plays with the running game producing only one play that has gained more than 20 yards and zero plays of 40 yards or more. The passing game isn't fairing much better with a league low 8 plays of more than 20 yards and 1 of over 40.

As far as a game plan, I expect the Browns to continue throwing the ball and relying on Colt McCoy's arm because the Seahawks defend the run well and Cleveland's starting RB Peyton Hillis is expected to be unavailable on Sunday for the game.

I would look for the Browns to feature the TEs and challenge the middle of the field in an attempt to exploit the Seahawks safeties who can be a bit over zealous supporting the run.

I also expect the Browns to try and beat the Seahawks LBs in pass coverage if they attempt to cover the RBs in man coverage. You could also see the Browns renew their interest in running

screen plays as an attempt to slow down Seattle's pass rush and blitz packages.

This could be the day Colt McCoy has a breakout game. Remember, even though the Seahawks beat the Giants in NY in week 5, Giants QB Eli Manning had his first ever 400 yard passing game. If the Browns pick up the pressure, expect to see the Browns to increase their count of plays exceeding 20 yard plays on Sunday.

Some smaller, quick WRs have had success against the Seahawks as have good receiving TEs, so look for the Browns TEs to have a big game because the Browns don't feature any smaller shifty WRs. You may also see Greg Little, who is a bigger WR, have success from the slot because he is strong like a TE and can make tough catches in traffic.

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Key Matchups

KR/PR Josh Cribbs vs. Seattle coverage teams- The Seahawks gave up two returns for TD in week one. Josh Cribbs was upset last week about his use and has been quiet by his standards so far this year in the return game so I expect Cribbs to crank it up this week. From previous experiences Cribbs plays his best when he is upset about something and I expect him to take his frustrations out on Seattle since they are giving up 32 yards a return for the year.

***Note- Steven Hauska the Seahawks kicker does have a strong leg and has only allowed 12 returns on the year, but when teams get a chance they have done well.

WR Greg Little vs CB Bryant Browner- Bryant Browner is a big, physical CB and Greg Little is a big, physical WR so I am highly anticipating this matchup. Little's strength will allow him to get off the line of scrimmage rather well against Browner, so you may see him haul in some of the deep balls you saw Colt McCoy throw him against the Raiders.

In the running game, it will be a challenge for Little and our WRs to keep Browner blocked because of his size and strength. Browner has 25 solo tackles which leads the team. If the Browns don't get him blocked he will wreak havoc on running plays.

QB Colt McCoy vs S Earl Thomas/Kam Chancellor- In order for Colt McCoy to get through these next steps in his development he needs to show the ability to manipulate the safeties. I am not just talking about in the passing game either. Seattle's safeties will take turns entering the box, acting as an 8th run defender. In order for the running game to get going Colt needs to do a better job of recognizing the placement of the safety and controlling the safeties positioning.

McCoy also will need to work the middle of the field in the passing game to take advantage of overly aggressive safety play. Look for Colt to use some seam throws in this game to keep the safeties honest.

LDE Jabaal Sheard vs RT James Carpenter- I have high expectations whenever rookie Jabaal Sheard gets to face another rookie. Carpenter is a rookie first round pick from Alabama and he had some struggles early in the Giants game. If the Browns are going to win the game on Sunday they will need to get pressure on young QB Charlie Whitehurst and this matchup should be the key.

MLB D'Qwelll Jackson vs. RB Marshawn Lynch- With starting QB Tarvaris Jackson missing the game and backup Charlie Whitehurst making only his 3rd career start on the road, I anticipate the Seahawks to run the ball more than they have so far this season.

Lynch is coming off of his best performance of the year after gaining 98 yards in only 12 carries against the Giants so he is coming into the contest on a high. Lynch showed last year in the playoffs that he can make plays in the running game and the Browns will have to control his production so they can try forcing the young QB to carry the load.

RT Tony Pashos vs. LDE Chris Clemmons- Pashos has played well and provided some stability at the RT position since his return from a foot injury. Pashos will have to continue his good play

against Seattle's leading sack man if Colt McCoy is going to have a good day.

Prediction

Both teams enter Sunday's game 2-3 with one team having the ability get even for the year and the other droppinge another game below .500. Naturally I want to pick the home team to win the contest and with Seattle starting their backup QB I don't think I would be going out on a limb by doing so, but the Browns have already lost two home games in three tries this year.

Last week I picked the Browns to win because I was convinced that Colt McCoy had grown to the point that he would be able to take the team down the field if they needed a score to win. Mcoy greatly disappointed me by failing to tie the game when he got the ball back with the game on the line and the ball at the 50 yard line with over a minute on the clock. I probably wouldn't be as turned off if he failed to get the ball in the end zone in the last seconds of the game but he couldn't even lead the team to one first down and that is just not acceptable.

I am picking the Seahawks to get the road win in Cleveland because they are playing good team football and they have won two of their last three while the Browns have lost two in a row.

The two victories Cleveland has earned so far this season have come against two teams that have yet to win a single game this year and therefore I am not convinced that this team can get it done against a team that is playing well. McCoy is struggling to make consistent throws and the running game has yet to show up which only adds to my doubts.

I expect the Seahawk to pressure McCoy and, based on the Raiders game, the offense isn't ready to make them pay. The Browns defense will probably play well enough to win but they have been giving up big plays at home so far and, until they stop giving up big plays, they will continue to shoot themselves in the foot and lose games.

If you are heading downtown on Sunday, have fun and enjoy the game....until next week…Go Browns!

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