

The Look Man Report 2004

Week 16: A Christmas Story

Week 16 of the NFL season just happened to fall on Christmas weekend. In point of fact, the NFL had games on Christmas Eve, Christmas Day and the day after Christmas, which shall heretofore be named Mithras Day. Though we celebrate Christ's birthday in December, it is more likely that the holiday coincides with the winter solstice pagan celebration of the Persian god Mithras.

It is not uncommon for conquering nations to adopt the holy days of the conquered. In fact, many of our so-called Christian holidays are merely the absorption of pagan holy days. The spring solstice matches up with Easter, the winter solstice Christmas, and Halloween matches up with a Wicca celebration of the autumnal equinox. Of course, we also celebrate the Fourth of July to loosely mimic French Bastille Day, which was the least we could do after stealing their colors, philosophy and the fried potatoes.

The weekend also included 2 important anniversaries. The first was the 20th anniversary of Dan Marino's 48 TD pass season. The second, and perhaps more important, is the 20th anniversary of the movie classic, *A Christmas Story*.

For the uninitiated, *A Christmas Story* is a classic tale of one midwestern boy's holiday memory. Peter Billingsley stars as a Hoosier kid whose attempts to obtain a Red Ryder Carbine-Action 200 Range Air Rifle from Santa are thwarted at every turn. The film captures the feel of a family celebrating a holiday whose Christian roots are in conflict with the secular rituals.

The week included many good games, but the 2 most prominent were the Bolts at Colts and the Flintstones at Stillers. These two matchups featured four of the best teams in the dominant AFC and constituted some possible playoff matchups. Without further delay, Week Seize en Croute.

Gouda Group @ Swedes:

The Gouda Group traveled to the Twin Cities to take on the Swedes in a crucial NFC Norse matchup. Hornheads QB Daunte Culpepper lit the Pack up with TD passes on three consecutive throws: a 12-yarder to wide receiver Randy (Mouth) Moss, a 68-yarder to WR Nate Burleson (Ives), and a 38-yard screen to RB Michael (Harve) Bennett.

Not to be outdone by a mere Protestant, Brett (The Pope) Favre issued one of his patented divine comebacks, going 80 yards in 13 plays for the tie with just over 3 minutes left. The Limburger Cheese D then figured out how to tackle, forcing a Vikes punt with the help of the officials, who threw in a cheap holding call. The Pope was then able to go to work on the game-winning prayer, a FG for the 34-31 win.

The Pack won the NFC Norse on the FG, and now will have at least 1 home game. Of course, as poorly as they have been playing at home of late, it may not matter.

Flintstones @ Stillers:

The Stillers hosted Baltimore in a potential AFC North slugfest. The Stillers then provided all of the slugging, when Jerome (The Bus) Bettis ran around, over and through the Flintstone defense. The Flintstones seemed like they were putting coins in the Bus' back, because they went for rides every time they tried to tackle him. Oy and double oy.

Stillers WR Plexiglass Burress came off the canvas to catch a play action TD from (Big) Ben Roethlisberger early. The 'stones were keying on Hines (57) Ward, so Big Ben simply put it in the hands of Antwan Randle El (Sid), who made a sweet one-handed grab for a first down as well as a nice 3rd down conversion near the goal line.

Baltimore was dominated 20-7 in this one, and the only ugly scene was the cheapshot hit on Big Ben by LB Terrell Suggs. Big Ben had clearly thrown the TD to Jerame Tuman when Suggs pounded him into Heinz Field, resulting in a rib injury. Suggs can expect a little something extra from the league office this week in the form of a fine. Big Ben's jersey is the number one seller in the league this season, and losing him for the playoffs would be a marketing disaster.

One item worth noting was the lack of pressure by the Stillers blitz. Although D-Co Dick LeBeau(nhead) likes hurries as much as sacks, he didn't get any of the latter on Kyle Boller. It was the third straight week without a sack versus Boller Hat, Eli Manning and Chad Pennington. None of these guys are known for foot speed, so if the Tissue Paper Curtain goes against a mobile guy, look out.

Bolts @ Colts:

Peyton (Billingsley) Manning celebrated his holiday weekend by breaking Marino's passing TD record. The more important stat might have been the W over a potential playoff opponent in San Diego.

The Colts and Bolts matchup was epic in many ways, not the least of which was the game tying "ghost to the post" TD pass to Brandon Stokely (Carmichael) in regulation. After calling a different play in the huddle, Manning casually told Stokely to "run the post" as he walked to the line. To sell the route, Manning issued the hand signal for the corner route by punching his fist into his open palm. The Bolts' defense recognized this hand signal from the previous week, where Manning used it against Baltimore. The nickel back instinctively responded to Stokely's corner move, and the safety slipped at the second move to the post. The pass left Manning's hands right as Stokely made the first move. It hit the slot receiver in mid stride as he crossed the goal line with Manning's record-breaking 49th TD pass of the season.

A lot is made of Manning's record-breaking performance, but there were some other keys to this game. First, the Bolts defense is for real, and it boasts 2 of the toughest LBs no one knows about in the AFC. Steve Foley (Catheter) is an ex-Bengal, who didn't have what it took to stick around under previous Bengal regimes. All he did was sack Peyton Billingsley 3 times in this game, including what should have been the game breaker. Foley Catheter sacked Manning on 3rd and long, a factor in the usually accurate Colts kicker Mike Vanderjagt missing a 48 yarder.

After a 3 and out by the Lucky Charms D, and down 31-23, Manning overruled head coach Tony (Hume Cronyn) Dungy's punt decision on 4th and 4. Hume Cronyn sent in the punt team, but Peyton Billingsley waved them off frantically despite Hume yelling, "You'll shoot your eye out kid!!" Manning then calmly hit WR (Millionaire Playboy) Reggie

(Bruce) Wayne for the first down on one of those “check with me” pass plays. Batman ran a timing pattern and Peyton put it on his back hip so fast that the CB never had a chance for the pick. It was like shooting ducks in a pond with a Red Ryder BB gun.

The other LB is former Baby Back Donnie (Brasco) Edwards. Brasco picked Peyton’s pocket in a first and goal situation early, setting the tone for the game. Edwards is fast, tough and cagey. Between he and Foley, you have 2 of the best in the AFC, despite the hype given Ray (Ray) Lewis in B-More.

Lastly, backup RB Dominic Rhodes (Scholar) had a pedantic scurry to the Hizzie on a kick return that pulled Indy back into this one. Rhodes Scholar’s score breathed life into a moribund Colts team, and both the offense and defense responded in kind. Rhodes earned a game ball for his trouble, and was quoted as saying, “That kick return was sine qua non for this victory. Invictus, veritas!” Translation: we kicked dey ass. Manning on the other hand didn’t get a game ball, but he did win a handsome leg lamp with fishnet stockings, which he gave to his father Archie. Bolts TE Antonio (Bill) Gates and LaDanian (The New LT) Tomlinson received nice door prizes for their record performances as well.

The play of this wonderful San Diego defense was undermined by none other than Marty Schottenheimer (means “too much prevent D” in German), who allowed his conservative play calling to ruin the day. As usual, Marty played it too close to the vest against a wide-open offense. When you play not to lose, you usually do, and Marty gagged on another one on Sunday. The Colts stole the 3rd seed in the playoffs, and now look to face Denver instead of the Bisons or Baltimore. Either team is capable of sending Marty back to Stuttgart for the winter.

Carolina @ Tampa Bay:

The Black Cats are still the team no one wants to face as Jake (The Man) Delhomme threw 4 TDs against the Expensive Corn Kings. The Man is especially in tune with WR Muhsin Muhammed, who had a great grab in this one.

The Look Man loves a QB who congratulates his WRs on TD catches – a Jake Delhomme specialty. Oh, and Cats DT Kindal (Craving) Moorehead had an INT for a TD to lock up the game. When one beat writer asked, “Who is Craving Moorehead?” “Apparently, you are”, replied assistant coach Sean Connery.

Lagniappe:

Yippee Yi Yo Chai Yay:

Pokes SS Darren (Woody) Woodson called it a career this week. Woody represented the last Starhead from the Superbowl Era, and his retirement due to a bad back is symbolic of the overhaul in Big D. When asked about his career, Woody responded, “I did what I had to do. The Ballerina wanted me home more with the kids so what the hey? I have a sponsorship deal with Levitra and Cialis to sell some of their wood drugs, so I should be fine financially. To Infinity and beyond!”

When we see the retirements of Vinny Testaverde, Bryant Young of the Niners, Jerome (The Bus) Bettis and Brett (The Pope) Favre, the NFL will be devoid of any player that can say he played for a true dynasty.

More Than a Grocery Bagger:

Don't look now, but going back to 2003 playoffs, Manning has thrown 58 TDs in a span of 18 games. Not surprisingly, the Horsies went 14-4 over that span, but 2 of those losses were to the Chowds. Manning's performances against 2 class defenses in San Diego and Baltimore have been impressive, so if someone knocks off New England or Blitzburgh, he...could...go...all...the...way!

Put Me in Coach:

The Look Man is ticked that the NFL is allowing teams to sit their starters down the stretch. When the Iggles laid down for Mike Martz and the Lambs on MNF, who didn't even have a QB who can throw the deep ball, what message does that send? The outcome of that game directly affects the playoffs, since the Jets play at St. Louis next week, and the Vikes, Bisons and Carolina playoff futures hang in the balance.

The Look Man would like to see Commissioner Tags send out a mandate for playing time, making violators suffer the ignominy of the loss of draft picks. On the other hand, Ignorance is its own punishment; when Indy rested its starters in the last week of the regular season in 1999, it got blasted 41-6 by the Bisons and went on to lose in Week 1 of the postseason.

Manning the Gun:

A lot of folks can't remember Marino's record-breaking season in 1984, but the Look Man does. Marino was drafted in late by the Miami Marine Mammals in 1983, The Year of the QB. He had the misfortune of being drafted in the same year as number one pick overall, John Elway, but also Jim Kelly, and Ken O'Brien of the Jets.

Despite the legendary nature of the QBs taken in this draft, it also included Hall of Fame talents such as CB Darrell Green, OT Bruce Matthews, and RB Eric Dickerson. The talent pool in 83 was so deep, that it included Bears DE Richard Dent and Fish WR Mark Clayton in the eighth round, a round that no longer even exists. NT Tim Krumrie, Donkeys LB Karl Mecklenburg and Vikes Pro Bowl wide receiver Anthony Carter were all drafted after the 10th round.

The Look Man quotes this to show how much talent the league had in 1984. All of these guys were well on their way to stardom, and against these defenders, Marino lit up a league that still allowed bumping of receivers all the way downfield. His 48 TD, 5,000 passing yard performance catapulted him to his only shot at the Lombardi, where he lost to a lowly QB named Joe Montana.

The Patient Football Conference:

One theory about AFC dominance over the NFC links coaching tenure to wins. Blitzburgh fans were calling for Bill (Iron Chin) Cowher's head a year ago at 6-10, and now the Stillers are the cream of the NFL. Jeff Fisher, Brian Billick, Bill Belichick, Dick Vermeil and Mike Shanahan have all been around longer than most of the NFC coaches and the records speak for themselves. The AFC owns the NFC in interconference play this season.

That's the Way of the Chowd:

Can the Chowds actually win a Superbowl with a corner named after Earth Wind & Fire? What's next, a WR named after an MTV VJ? How in the hell can New England win with 89 linebackers and defensive backs named Moe? Just ask the Jets. Also, you ever wonder if Belichick hired Weis and Crennel just so that he could be the only normal

looking guy? Those sweatshirt outfits on the sidelines are some kind of retro look. You just know Dr. Evil has stock in Old Navy hoodies.

Battle of the Interims:

Sunday Night's Browns-Marine Mammals included starters despite the bush league play. Browns QB (Little) Luke McCown had one decent throw, while Mammals QB AJ Touchy Feeley looked horrible. The 10-7 game was nearly unwatchable. Little Luke was later quoted as saying, "Peyton Manning can throw 50 TDs, but I can eat 50 eggs." Coach Terri (Hatcher) Robiskie countered, "What we have here is a failure to communicate." Or a failure to score, says the Look Man.

This game had two notable items: (1) the Fish had a 12-play, 6:51 drive that ended in a punt, and (2) there were 3 fumbles and 2 turnovers on THE SAME PLAY in the second quarter. The play resulted in a 26-yard gain for C-Town. BTW, that sucking sound was the sound of ESPN SNF ratings going down the toilet after this one.

Oscar Goldman Signs With ATL:

Michael (Jack B Nimble) Vick signed a 10 yr/\$100M deal last week, of which \$37M is guaranteed. The guaranteed money includes football and non-football injuries, and is said to be key in assuring that Jack B Nimble maintains his devil-may-care style on the field, as opposed to turning into Aaron Brooks in New Orleans. Brooks quit running and started throwing passes to lineman in his own backfield right after signing his new deal. As a result, the talented Religious Icons are on the bubble instead of charging into the playoffs as a wild card. The Dirty Birds wanted to insure that Jack B didn't take the same play-it-safe attitude once his new deal kicked in.

Playoff Pick-ture:

With the Gouda Group clinching the NFC North and the No. 3 seed, the Vikes may be on the outside looking in, unless they win at FedEx on Sunday. Owner Red McCombs exercised his option on head coach Mike (Fried) Tice, but the loss to Green Bay reminded us of the Vikes' Week 17 collapse at Phoenix in 2003.

The Bisons have slim hopes for a nice playoff story. The Look Man believes that the league doesn't want these guys in the playoffs, and will likely allow the Donkeys and Jets to take the last playoff spots. In its last six outings, Buffalo has scored 228 points -- more than Indianapolis scored in its last six outings, and just 15 points fewer than the Bills scored in all of 2003.

Still, who wouldn't want to see the Human Statue that is Drew Bledsoe and the Bisons' aggressive defense featuring Takeo (means "pizza" in Mandarin) Spikes in the postseason? They're the team no one wants to face, and their run-stuffing D could present problems for the Stillers, Donkeys and Chargers.

Celebrity Obituary of the Week:

The Look Man was tempted to recognize noted author and activist Susan Sontag, who died this week at the age of 71. Sontag's intuitive understanding of art and pop culture was best highlighted by her "so bad it's good" affinity for everything from "Swan Lake" to feather boas. But the very heart of the LMR is sports, not intellectualism and this mandates that the Look Man address one of the NFL legend Reggie White.

Reggie White died of a massive coronary on a full moon Sunday. White, a former Packer, Panther and Iggles, was born December 19, 1961 in Chattanooga, TN. The former Volunteer was drafted as the first pick overall by the Philadelphia Iggles.

At 6-5, and just over 300 pounds, his 4.55 speed and incredible strength allowed him to redefine the DE position. He perfected a move called the "under schlumpy", where he clubbed opposing linemen with a rip move, sending 300 pounders flying, and clearing his path to the QB sack.

After he was unable to persuade the Iggles to meet his salary and championship ring demands, White went free agent in 1993. He signed a theretofore unheard of 4-year, \$17 million deal with the Gouda Group. Though the Genocide Victims, Jets, Niners, Pokes and Browns were all chasing Reggie, he selected Green Bay based on a divine conversation. "God told me to go to Green Bay. Apparently, there are a lot of sinners there, including Brett Favre. God said if I can convert Brett, he might be Pope some day, said White.

Further, White made Green Bay popular with a generation of African American players, allowing them to sign big-name FA's that eventually led them to the Super Bowl. White turned Green Bay back into 'Tittletown' in his 4th season on the Frozen Tundra.

One great Reggie White story comes courtesy of Niners Pro Bowl OT Harris (Clara) Barton: White begins shouting spiritual dogma at Barton before every snap. He tells Barton that the Lord Jesus is his savior, and that by the end of the game, Barton will have no choice but to accept the Lord as his savior. White was dominating the Nurse on nearly every snap and finally, Barton goes for the punch line. While White is shouting about the Lord, Barton smiles and says, "Reggie, I'm Jewish." White simply laughed the big laugh and continued to punish Barton.

White was also famous for his impressions of Muhammad Ali, Fred Flintstone, and Rodney Dangerfield. He led his teammates through humor, eschewing profanity, and seeking converts. He also raised hundreds of thousands of dollars for inner-city youth programs and churches. Although Brett Favre got the credit, make no mistake: this was Reggie's team.

The Gouda Group is seeking an unlikely exemption for the mandatory 5-year wait for admission to the Pro Football Hall of Fame. They also lowered their US flags to half-staff in honor of White. Though there is no doubt he will appear one day in Canton, Ohio, White will have to wait. Fortunately, he didn't make us wait to see perhaps the greatest defensive lineman in the history of the game.

Zebra of the Week:

Replay It Again, Sam:

The Bears-Lions game ended in controversy when Bears WR Bernard Berrian got both his feet down and still didn't get the points. The Zebra must've been smoking a jizzo here, because not only did Terry McAulay deny the TD, he also refused to overturn it on review.

Bruce Banner - NFL Official:

In the ugly Browns @ Miami game, RB Lee Suggs fell to the ground and the ball popped out. The Zebras convened, and Ed (The Hulk) Hochuli determined it was a

fumble. Not one zebra called it a fumble on the field, so the call was made in their huddle with no one actually having seen the fumble. Nonetheless, the Browns lost the challenge. The correct call would be to signal dead ball, no fumble. If the review showed that it was a fumble, then it could be overturned. Instead Hulk Hochuli blew another one.

The Look Ahead:

Religious Icons @ Black Cats:

The Black Cats have owned the Saints since former New Orleans backup Jake Delhomme signed as a free agent in 2003. The Icons have quietly gotten hot of late, and they have the longest win streak in the NFC at 3 straight. This one could be a war, but the Look Man likes the Black Cats to make it to the playoffs on the strength of their defense.

Browns @ Slim Shadies:

Despite the lack of playoff ramifications, look for the Browns to score early and often - - - at the gentlemen's clubs in Houston. Get real, folks. Houston is coming off an important win on the road at J-Ville, and this game ends their season on a high note. Cleveland's season wouldn't end on a high note if Philip Bailey was calling the signals at QB.

Denver @ Indy:

No word yet on whether the Horsies will rest their starters, but Denver needs this one a lot more than the Lucky Charms. Jake the Fake will try to light up the scoreboard to avenge the ass kicking the Donkeys took at the hands of the Colts in the 2003 playoffs. Unfortunately, what he'll win is a chance to face Buffalo or New York, two wild card hopefuls that would pound him back into the plumbing business.

Blitzburgh @ Buffalo:

The Stillers will rest Big Ben, the Bus and any other starters that are dinged up. The Bisons will be fired up at Orchard Park, and the Stillers have nothing to play for unless you count Bill (Iron) Chin Cowher going against his former mentee Mike (Fulla) Mularkey. Look for trick plays aplenty as the Fulla goes toe to toe with the slowest talking D-Co in the NFL in Dick LeBeau(nhead). Again, this could set up a rematch in the playoffs, so don't discount the fireworks that are sure to occur here.

KC @ Saint Don:

The Bolts have little to play for against one of the hottest teams in the AFC. After facing the other white hot offense in the conference, it will be interesting to see if Marty's Boys have anything left. It's Crying Man vs. Crying Man when Schottenheimer and Vermeil go at it. Maybe they should rename this the Kleenex Bowl in honor of the coaches.

Bungals @ Iggles:

Not sure why this game is even worth mentioning except that the Bungals have a shot at 8-8 respectability at the Linc. Look Man co-worker Chuck (kd) Lang believes that Iggles backup Jeff (Shake N) Blake will be looking for revenge over the Ugly & Black for trading him and his high priced salary. CBS is investigating the possibility of wide-angle lenses to keep Blake's sky balls on screen. CBS made no mention of catering services, since Jon (Easy Bake Oven) Kitna will be providing turnovers free of charge.

Minnesota @ DC:

The Vikes need a win against the always-tough Genocide Victims D. The weather may be a factor since the Vikes haven't won outdoors since the Eisenhower Administration. The Look Man could see the Vikes taking one on the chin here, allowing some unlikely playoff scenarios to occur.

Jets @ Lambs:

It will be a battle of the bad AC joints when Chad Pennington (and Pound Foolish) takes on Marc (The Scarecrow) Bulger in St. Louise. The Lambs need a win to get in and the Jets simply need a win. No word yet on who will tick off the press more following the game, Chad or Mike (The Cockatoo) Martz. The Look Man is betting that the Jets D will shear the Lambs, knocking them out of the playoff hunt. Herm (Blake) Edwards can then begin filming the sequel to *10*, starring Pound Foolish with a braided blond wig as Bo Derek.

Also in the news this week, The Cockatoo claims that OT Kyle (Helen) Turley threatened to kill him when Martz questioned his rehab from back surgery. Turley replied, "I can throw your head farther than I threw my helmet when I was with New Orleans, biyatch. Get outta my face!" The Cockatoo reported the incident to the NFL, who is mandating that Turley face additional testing for steroids. "We think Kyle may be suffering from 'Roid Rage", said Mike Pereira. When asked if steroids were really the root, or if the irritating head coach might share the blame, Pereira backpedaled, saying, "No, we mean hemorrhoid rage. The man has a bad case of the piles." No comment from George Brett on the subject.

ATL @ Seattle:

Despite claims that Michael Vick and the rest of the Dirty Bird starters will suit up for this one, it should be interesting. Former Niners coaches Jim Mora and Mike (The Walrus) Holmgren face off in a possible playoff preview. The Dirty Bird D looked pedestrian the last two weeks, but the Seahags haven't lit it up with either Trent Dilfer (means "marital aid" in Swedish) or Matt (Hair Club for Men) Hasselback. The Hags will not rush for 140 yards on this defense, so it will come down to Quarterback by Committee versus the \$100 Million Dollar Man.

Epilogue:

Buffalo probably won't make it to the Tournament, but the Black Cats will, which doesn't bode well for the Iggles. Carolina kicked their butts all over Lincoln Financial in last year's playoffs, so don't be surprised if the Cats pluck the TO-free Iggles again this season.

Over in the AFC, the absence of the Bisons could hurt the conference overall. The Look Man expects a few surprises down the stretch, including a possible fall from grace by the Stillers and Chowds. He likes the dark horse that is Indy, but the Bolts' D also makes them a distinct contender. Having Marty at the helm won't help if they face a wet paper bag, but they match up extremely well on paper with the Chowds, Colts and Stillers.

The new year arrives this week and we should all remember the folks affected by the tsunami in our prayers.

Happy New Year!

Out.

The Look Man