

The Look Man Report 2006

Week IX: The Great Escape

"I don't think there's anybody in this organization not focused on the 49ers... I mean Chargers." – Chowds head coach Bill (Dr. Evil) Belichick

OPENING

As the Look Man was cruising cable this week, he stumbled upon a movie that is mandatory viewing any time it is on. Although any Steve McQueen movie probably falls within this category, The Great Escape from 1963 is a John Sturges film about a group of allied POWs who are moved to an 'escape proof' camp in WWII. Their leader formulates a plan to take out 250 veterans in a daring escape. The film features an all-star cast including McQueen, Jim Garner, Charles Bronson, and James Coburn as key players in the plot. It is only fitting that the LMR feature the celebration of veterans in November because "...you play with the football team you have, not the one you would like to have."

The movie plays like an NFL contest, with the first half fleshing out the characters in a comedic turn designed to set up part two. The second half escalates into the high adventure associated with the prisoners risking life and limb as they try to get out of Nazi-occupied territory.

Week Nine in the NFL was a lot like the movie. Cincinnati, Cleveland, and the Pittsburgh Steelers had error-plagued first halves before settling down to attempt victory against dramatic odds. They joined the Atlanta Falcons in falling to defeat while attempting to tunnel under the fence. As a result, they could end up with Virgil Hilts, bouncing and catching footballs off the walls of the postseason cooler.

Dallas, Minnesota, and New England flipped the script, saving their comedy for the second halves. Turnovers and misplays caused these teams to go down just when victory seemed within their grasp. These teams developed engine trouble, crashed and burned like a trainer plane in sight of the Alps.

The NFL season is now at its official midpoint, and the Pittsburgh Steelers and Cleveland Browns are already firmly encamped in Stalag 17. Minnesota and Cincinnati are struggling on barbed wire fences, while Chicago and New England are hoping to right their motorcycles for the stretch run. Only the Indianapolis Colts is cruising after playing and winning games against opponents tougher than Stalin's minions on the Eastern Front.

Without further WWII movie metaphors, the Week in Review:

WEEK IN REVIEW:

Cincy @ Baltimore -3

Smoothie nearly called this one perfectly, after the Ugly & Black went down big on early turnovers. The Nati bounced back to make it a contest, but failed to hang on to key opportunities. They dropped at least two picks that might have made this one a ball game. The final 26-20 win by Baltimore puts them 2 games up in the AFC Asgard Division. Cincy drops to 4-4, halfway to the Look Man's 8-8 prediction.

The Bengals coaching staff has now implemented a new phrase to remind defensive players about the proper way to handle an interception. They call the reminder "Pluck it and tuck it" and it was so named by Jets head coach Eric Mangina.

Indy @ New England -3

Conventional wisdom said Peyton couldn't win the big one. Look Man wisdom said the Chowds were overrated. Look Man wisdom prevailed as Tom (Zoolander) Brady put up four turnovers and the Ponies won big over their AFC rivals.

The game puts Indy in the driver seat for home field in the AFC. It also reminded folks that Manning is having a quietly spectacular season. Without factor back Edgerrin James, and with a defense that gets few sacks and turnovers, he has led the Ponies to an 8-0 record against solid competition.

The Chowds haven't played nearly the level of competition, and they looked like it. Safety Rodney Harrison suffered his annual bone break, and the Chowds have to go back to the pot to simmer. So much for "crowning their asses" after the Vikes' win.

Denver @ Pittsburgh -2.5

Smoothie forecasted, "...This game is where Pitt bounces back and posts a quality win..." It was a sentiment felt by many pundits, but the Stillers looked horrible in this loss. Anytime you make Jake (the Fake) Plummer look like a real NFL QB, you know there are issues.

On the offensive side of the ball, the Stillers continue to try to do too much. Big Ben is still forcing the rock, and now Hines (57) Ward is gripping after coughing up a sure TD at the goal line. The Stillers are pressing, and at 2-6, their season is officially over.

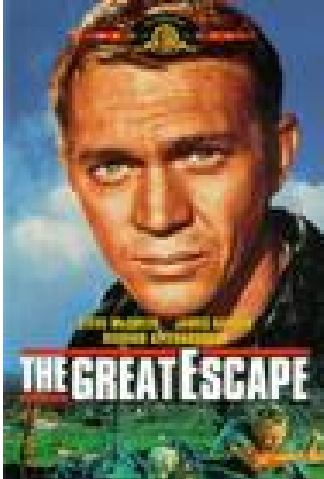
Dallas +3 @ Washington

Dallas passed up chances to knock the Genocide Victims out, and as a result, Washington came back and stunned them in regulation. This is the third time that Joe Gibbs has pulled one out against Bill Parcells, and it is starting to become routine. In the words of Pokes owner Jerry (The King of Pop) Jones, "When you've got that much going for you, and you screw it up like that, it's how you end up 4-4." Jones didn't even bother to tack on his patented "hee-hee!" afterwards, so you know he was despondent.

The game included a missed field goal by Mike Vanderyank and a dropped TD bomb by a wide open Terrell Owens. TO tacked on a key unsportsmanlike penalty after a TD that set Washington up with a short field.

Owens' excessive celebration foul came in the third quarter when he pretended to take a nap, using the rock as a pillow. He barked at Parcells afterwards, but seemed contrite after the loss. "I owe this one to the team," Owens said. "I let the team down. Honestly, I think it was a lack of concentration. If I had been concentrating, that would have been another simulated nap in the end zone."

TO leads the team in targeted AND dropped balls. His act is getting pretty old in Big D, which is facing an uphill playoff battle after losing another close one. The Pokes picked up Owens after missing the playoffs in 2005 due to these same narrow defeats.



Washington coach Joe Gibbs

LAGNIAPPE

Bus You Up?

Just before the late game on Sunday, NBC's Jerome (the Bus) Bettis and Sterling Sharpe were queried regarding issues in Cincy and Chicago. When Bob Costas asked Bettis whether Chad Johnson was correct in his criticism that he wasn't getting the ball enough, Bettis concurred with the Dentist. Sharpe issued a loud and quick rebuttal, saying Chad simply isn't working hard enough to get open.

Costas followed up with Bus regarding whether Rex Grossman should be benched for his recent turnovers. When Bettis answered in the affirmative, Sharpe countered by asking how Bettis could support not benching Big Ben while benching Grossman. Bettis barked angrily, "I'll bench you" before Costas turned into Mills Lane.

Bettis and Sharpe are not alone among commentators that dislike each other. Most folks will remember Boomer Esiason and Dan Marino's on-air tiffs, and Kornheiser and Theismann don't seem too cozy either. The Look Man wonders just how long it will be before a fistfight breaks out in the studio?

Marvin-nati?

Marvin Lewis has received local and national criticism after the Bengals recent losses. Baltimore LB Bart Scott even went so far as to call Chad Johnson "Ocho Stinko" after the lost knocked the Nati to two full games out of first.

The Vaunted Bengals Offense now faces a real challenge on Sunday. If the 4-4 Bengals lose another game at home to the Merroidman-less Bolts, the natives might get restless. Will the Bengals break out the ugly orange jerseys for this affair? Will the VBO bust out with a big game? Will Congressman Steve "Chabby" Chabot show up at Pall Bearer Stadium again with his same bad comb-over? These and other answers in the next LMR...



Bengals misspelled "Stinko" for the Dentist

ZEBRA OF THE WEEK

This contest got some love in Week Nine as the Zebras allowed WR TJ Houshmazooli to get mauled late in the Bengals-Dumpster Ducks game. The Bengals WR followed the no-call by slamming his helmet and being escorted off the field by coach Lewis. Zebra Gerry Austin (City Limits) saw the play differently, and the Bengals lost another close one due to their cousins in stripes.

Zebra Ron (A Lyin' in) Winters threw his stripes into the ring for his fourth and inches call in the Indy at New England game. Winters rushed in to call a first down on the failed Tom (Zoolander) Brady sneak, moving the chains before the play could be challenged. When the booth issued their call for a review inside of 2 minutes, Winters refused to reverse the call despite incredible video evidence to the contrary.

This call followed a defensive holding call on the Chowds that should have been pass interference. The PI call would have put the Ponies at first and goal from the one. Instead, the holding call provided only five yards and it was the only red zone stop by the Chowds all night.

The granddaddy of all calls was the phantom fifteen yard facemask at FedEx. After Washington blocked a game winning FG try by Dallas, safety Sean Taylor picked up the ball and took off for the goal line. He was grabbed on the mask by LB Kyle Kosier, who let go almost immediately. The incidental face mask call would not have put the Genocide Vix in FG range, so Terry (Bottlegate) McAulay issued the personal foul variety.

DC kicks the game winner on an untimed down, resulting in the worst loss since Joe Pisarczik's Miracle at the Meadowlands. The bogus facemask foul on Big D re-emphasizes the ridiculous home cooking at FedEx Field, where the odds for fairness are worse than at a Native American casino.

Bottlegate McAulay, you are the Look Man's **Zebra of the Week**.

THE LOOK AHEAD:

The Look Man went 3 of 7 in Week Nine, but hung his hat on the Slasher Pick of the Marine Mammals over Bears. Perhaps it was the proverbial trap game for the Monsters of the Furniture Mart, but it could be that any good defensive coach can figure out T-Rex Grossman gets nervous whenever facing extinction.

T-Rex has only started 16 games in his career, so it is too early to tell whether he is a typical Chicago QB draft bust. The upcoming three game road stretch will likely determine his fate in 2006 and beyond. Brian (Beer Batter) Griese is on a 12-step program just in case they need him. The Bears have removed all dogs from the Lake Forest complex just to ensure he doesn't tear up a knee in the interim.

Week Ten has some excellent matchups as the playoff hunt intensifies:

Bears at Jynts (-1.5):

A little of the luster is off of this game after the Marine Mammals knocked of the Bears last week and the Jynts suffered more injuries to key players. Mike Strahan and Amani Toomer are out for this good, old fashioned slobberknocker.

The MOTFM counter with their own injury to overrated LB Brian Urlacher, who suffered a turf toe last week. Urlacher says he will play, but Tiki (the) Barber (of the Ville) is sharpening his blades after seeing Ronnie Brown run for a buck sixty last week. Backup RB Brandon Jacobs is a former Illinois kid who would also like to have a big day for his homies.

The Look Man sees this one going to the Jynts in a playoff preview. Despite the press on the Bears defense, the Jynts are capable of putting up points in bunches. The Bears have injuries to WR Bernard Berrian, and they really miss S Mike Brown. G-Men win, as the Bears come back to the pack in the NFC Norse.

San Diego (-1.5) at Cincy:

This game would seem to be the AFC game of the week, as the Nati hopes to change its recent misfortune against a bona fide playoff contender. They may even break out the ugly orange tops to change their karma. Unfortunately, Marvin (Jerry) Lewis has a bunch of malcontents after hearing his favorite cheer in Bal'mer last week. The locals are forsaking their "In Marvin We Trust" mantra, and the tar is boiling in the Queen City.

The X-Factor is the bruising battle last week against the Browns. The Barking Dawg D shut down the Bolts in the first half, then allowed the New LT to bust them out in the second half. The Bengals give up rushing yards by the bushel, so Marty-ball is the order of the day. Of course, the other facet of Marty-ball is ridiculously conservative play-calling that generally turns a laugher into a slugfest.

Despite getting some ugly make-up calls to atone for the robbery in Baltimore, the Bengals get busted out by the Bolts at Pall Bearer, setting the tone for the second half of the season. Bolts win.

Indy (-12.5) at Buffalo:

This one looks too easy, but the Ponies will not cover after back-to-back tough games. Buffalo always plays the Ponies tough, and the Bisons will cover easily despite missing RB Willis Magahee to broken ribs. They counter with bruiser back Anthony (A-Train)

Thomas, who will pound the Ponies. This could even be a trap game for Indy, who faces Dallas in Week 11. No NFL team has ever gone 9-0 in consecutive years.

New Orleans at Blitzburgh (-4):

There's trouble at the confluence of the Still city, and this week could make it even worse. Bill (Iron Chin) Cowher has lost the team, and it looks as if 2006 will be his last eating Primanti Brothers.

The Look Man likes the Boy Scouts to continue their winning trend, largely due to their big WR matchups against the Stillers. Iron Chin benched starting CB Ike (and Tina) Taylor for giving up big plays, but look for just that as New Orleans rolls them at Ketchup Field. Icons, baby, Icons.

Philly (-7) at Washington:

Philly sat out last week but looks to regain its swagger in the NFC Least against the schizoid Genocide Victims. McNabb(sty) and Company should handle DC this week, but it's hard to minimize the effects of the Zebras at FedEx. Iggles win to tighten up the NFC Least Division battle.

Green Bay at Minnesota (-5.5):

Brett (The Pope) Favre has struggled in domes historically, and the Swedes offense got shut down last week. The Look Man wonders if Brad Childress' criticism of Brad Johnson's turnovers caused Brad II to be too careful with the rock last week in Frisco. Things aren't good if Bad Brad begins looking over his shoulder, and the Swedes need this game in order to prove their playoff worthiness.

The pick: Swedes bounce back with a strong offensive effort to balance their defensive show in last week's game. Look for a shootout in this one, with Minnesota winning by a FG.

New England (-10.5) at Aeronauticals:

Sea Reh believes that the Chowds never follow up a clunker with another bad game. The Look Man believes that the Chowds are not as good as their record. He likes the Aeronauticals to serve notice that they are a contender by banging with the Chowds in the Big Apple this weekend.

New York head coach Eric Mangina (means "simulated female sex organs on a man") has developed friction with Dr. Evil following his departure from the Chowds' coaching staff. Mangina still knows his former team, and the lack of respect indicated by the double digit spread will be an added incentive. The Aeronauticals brew up a Tea Party of their own, covering the spread as the Chowds look ahead to the Chicago game.

Dallas (-7) at 'Zona:

Dallas lost yet another ridiculous heartbreaker, and the big question is whether they can bounce back this week vs. the Cardinals. Zona always plays the Pokes tough, and if they can't rid themselves of the narcoleptic nabob of negativity himself, Dallas may be on the verge of implosion.

On the other side, the Deadbirds may be on the verge of resurrecting their season after an official vote of confidence for head coach Denny Green.

Look for the 'birds to use their big WRs to burn the Pokes as Larry Fitzgerald (Kennedy) returns from a bad hammy. It's Mike Vanderyank versus Neil Crackers as Zona covers in this Southwest FG festival. Green comes up with another patented meltdown if his team doesn't cover, so get your popcorn ready just in case. Rookie QB Matt Leinart has been seen hanging with noted songstress Mariah Carey, who models 'Zona's new uniform, below:



Junk in Leinart's trunk if he wins?

Carolina (-9) at Tampa Bay (MNF):

Carolina is coming off a bye week, and the Corn Kings got blasted last week by the Boy Scouts. More importantly, Bruce (The New Polish Rifle) Gradkowski has looked uncertain in recent weeks. He may be the victim of too much new offense as Jon (Chucky) Gruden overloads the playbook.

The Look Man picked the Black Cats to win the NFC Souse, so he will go with the inconsistent Cats to cover and win at the Big Sombrero. BTW, this is the second in a series of MNF games that won't be competitive. Despite posting big bucks for the franchise, ESPN got a lot of stinker games in the second half of the season. They cannot participate in flex scheduling, so we the fans are left to witness crap like the Shehawks-Grayders.

EPILOGUE

At the true midway point of the season, and many teams need to figure out whether the password is Courage, or if they are doomed to serve out the rest of the war with Colonel Klink and Sergeant Schultz.

Cincinnati, the Jets, Carolina, Dallas, St. Louise, Philly, Minnesota all stand at .500 and need to get on a run if they are going to sniff the playoffs. KC, J-Ville, Seattle and Atlanta are one game over .500, and need to get their forged papers authenticated by the NFL Gestapo in order to make it to Playoff Land.

New England, Denver, San Diego, the Jynts, New Orleans, and Baltimore can all see the Alps, but will need to gain altitude. Only Chicago and Indy have made it to their contacts in the French Resistance and are guaranteed to celebrate on VE Day in January.

Finally, there is one team each year that rises like a Phoenix from the ashes, making a second half run that gives legitimacy to their hopes for next season. The Detroit Cadillacs and Cleveland Browns are in position in 2006, having faced the toughest part of their schedule in the first half. Only one will rise, and the other will fall like bread made from old, dead yeast. Given Detroit QB Jon Pickna's and Charlie Frye's culinary battle for turnovers, it's anyone's guess which team will rise.

In short, Week Ten promises to be an epic stratification week. The Look Man will be attending the Bengals-Bolts matchup to get a first-hand assessment of the AFC West situation. He doesn't anticipate there will be playoff tickets on sale for the Ugly & Black anytime soon, but the road to the playoffs could be decided by the Bolts, who play Denver twice, KC and Seattle down the stretch. Indy has games against Dallas, Philly, J-Ville, and the Nati, so the road to Miami in February most certainly takes a detour through the Midwest.

Peace,

The Look Man