

## **The Look Man Report 2006** **Week XVI: Another Christmas Story**

*"I am the most loyal player money can buy." - Don Sutton, Pitcher for the Los Angeles Dodgers, Houston Astros, Milwaukee Brewers, Oakland Athletics and California Angels*

### **OPENING**

The Look Man is very fond of Christmas specials of both the animated and live action variety. Not only do they typically capture a snapshot of pop culture, they signify that the college bowl and NFL playoff season is upon us.

Week 16 of the NFL season is best epitomized by one of these tomes: *A Christmas Story (1983)* is a classic tale of 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 contrasts the Christian roots and secular rituals of the holiday.

The original film was featured in LMR 2004, Week 16, so fittingly, this week will be known as *Another Christmas Story*. This story was about teams searching for the true meaning of a playoff spot during Gut Check Week. Instead of Peter Billingsley, the lead protagonist was one Tony Romo, with (Johnny) Carson Palmer as his little brother. Our protagonist faced learning the true value of a Christmas spent on the road. Ironically, it played a lot more like a Rod Serling episode than a children's story. But after all, the NFL is Big Boy School. Toughs like Scut Farkus need not apply.

The NFL back stories included several teams that were able to keep their dwindling playoff hopes alive courtesy of big-time wins in Week 16. When it came time to check their guts, teams like Philly and Baltimore came through with flying colors. Perhaps it helps that their team mascots have an avian motif. Tennessee, St. Louise, San Diego and Chicago have no relationship to birds, but they also put their money where their mouths were, collecting wins that protected their playoff potential.

All in all, it was a fitting week in a season that has many plot twists. Just when you think you know what is going on in the National...Football...League you don't. And you never will.

Without additional Mora-isms, the Week in Review:

### **WEEK IN REVIEW**

#### **Philly (23) at Dallas (7):**

The Iggles invaded Big D on Christmas Night looking to keep their playoff hopes flapping. Backup QB Jeff (Jerry) Garcia was on a roll with his Iggles band Mother McRee's Uptown Jug Champions. Dallas simply wanted to maintain the mini-roll they started in the ATL the week previous. Something had to give, and it was the Pokes who blinked first.

The game programs had to be reprinted at the last minute to indicate that Bill Parcells would be playing the role of Darren McGavin, while Tony Romo would play Ralphie Parker. Even as the programs were being revised, onlookers got a version of *Sex In The City Dallas Style*, starring American Idol songstress Carrie Underwood as Carrie Bradshaw, and Romo as Big. Romo and Carrie were seen hugging and canoodling

before kickoff. It's always a sign of total concentration when the leader of the offense is snuggling with his girlfriend. As the Look Man says, "Celebrity girlfriend equals bad play."

As our story began, Bill Parcells was dressed up in a Santa suit with Tony Romo sitting on his lap. "Whaddya want for Xmas, Kid? How about an Official Red Ryder Carbine-Action Two-Hundred-Shot Range Model Air Rifle?" Romo couldn't come up with a reply, but as he was shoved to the side to make way for Terrell Owens, he jammed his feet into the Texas Stadium carpet and shouted, "No! No! I want an all-expense paid trip to Hawaii with a start in the Pro Bowl!" Tuna replied, "You'll blow the NFC East Division Championship, kid." Parcells then unleashed a stream of obscenities that still hang over Lake Ray Hubbard.

Surely enough, The Place for Ribs looked horrid in the biggest game of his career. He threw an awful INT to Iggles safety Brian (the Hawk) Dawkins and said afterwards, "Oh no! I threw a pick! I would've been better off if I had simply shot my eye out!" He then faked an injury, and went crying to the sidelines and QB coach Chris Palmer.

Actually, all of the Pokes were forced to blink in order to avoid shooting their own eyes out. Terrell Owens dropped key balls one after another. Anthony Henry and Roy Williams got toasted in coverage. RB Marion (Predator) Barber got stuffed repeatedly in goal line situations. All in all, the Iggles played like neighbor dogs who tore through the 'Boys screen door and ripped their holiday meal to shreds.

Garcia, Hawk Dawkins and DE Trent (King) Cole led the carnage, ripping into the tender holiday meat in Big D. They pressured Romo, pounded the run game, and threw precision passes to carve the Pokes like a holiday bird. "Some folks would say we're cannibals for eating T-Bird," said Garcia. "I like to think we're simply raptors."

Afterwards, the heavenly aroma of the playoffs still hung in Texas Stadium. But it was gone, all gone! No division crown! No division sandwiches! No division salad! No division gravy! Division Hash! Division a la King! Or gallons of division soup! Gone, ALL GONE!



*Romo's MVP Award*

The Pokes ended up going to an Asian restaurant in Grapevine to eat Vietnamese turkey with the head on while the servers sang, "Deck the hars with bars of horry; fa ra ra ra ra, ra ra ra ra." Terrell Owens put on his Grinch outfit for the celebration after

wearing it to the postgame presser. "Again, I wasn't involved early. Everyone knows I like to get involved early and often," said the Grinch. "When they did go to me, it was too late. My special Grinch catching powder had worn off. I couldn't catch a cold naked in Alaska by then."

Later that night, Romo lay in bed. Next to him in the darkness lay his oiled, pig skinned Roger (Rabbit) Goodell signed NFL beauty. His Pro Bowl selection was the greatest Christmas gift he had ever received, or would ever receive. Gradually, he drifted off to sleep while dreaming of pringing receivers on fly patterns and getting off spectacular shovel passes in Hawaii.

*Expensive Corn Kings (22) at Browns (7):*

The Browns continue to spiral downward in 2006. The worse part of it is that Boomer Esiason's preseason prediction is coming true: the Browns are headed for the Brady Quinn Sweepstakes by being one of the worst teams in the league. It's always tough hearing anything Esiason prediction come true. After all, the guy has only one more playoff TD than the Look Man.

On Christmas Eve the Browns' only points were scored on by a man named Holly. Reserve CB Daven (Boughs o') Holly picked up a Tim (Wicker) Rattay fumble and raced 40 yards to the end zone early in the 4th quarter. He then decked the halls with a celebration dance that could get him an invitation to *Dancing With the Stars 2007*. "That was for the fans," Holly said. "I wanted to give them something to talk about. The stadium could've been empty today. The scoreboard certainly was for three quarters. I had to do something. Hey, what happened to my man Mistletoe?"

The Browns remaining game is against the Houston Slim Shadies at Reliant Stadium. The Slim Shadies have been resurgent of late, having beaten the Ponies and are beginning to look like a real NFL team. Let's just hope the Browns don't pick David Carr out of the trash heap that Houston throws him into after the season. Carr is due a big bonus, but he has been sporadic after enduring more sacks than a hooker at a Super Bowl.

*Bengals (23) at Donkeys (24):*

The Bengals went out to Mile High looking for a decisive win after a terrific letdown last Monday Night at the RCA Dome. Instead, they were forced to listen to the Elvis version of *Blue Christmas* over and over as the Orange and Blue Crush put the hurt on.

The Bengals (Johnny) Carson Palmer made the critical error of bringing Kool-Aid to a gin party and the Donkeys poured it all over his head in the form of picks and turnovers. The bad game plan was amplified when Mr. Tonight Show was high all night, including a red zone pick that set the tone early. Chad (Ocho Cinco) Johnson coughed up the rock trying to get extra yardage. Even Rudi (Ray Moore) Johnson donated one to the Donkeys during a critical fourth quarter drive.

As predicted, a good deal of the real pain came from the zebras. Walt Coleman (Lantern) and his crew had their beacons turned up full so that they didn't have to cancel Christmas. Unfortunately, the lights were only on the Bengals, who got jobbed from the opening snap at Investigation Field.

After blowing two early opportunities to get a double digit lead, Mike (The Rat) Shanahan called a trick play. The double pass featured octogenarian WR Rod Smith, who lateraled to Jay (The Knife) Cutler. The Knife dissected the Bengals secondary with a bomb to wideout Brandon Marshall, who executed a toe-tap catch for first and goal.

After further review, the catch included a juggle after the toe-tap, but Coleman lantern chose not to see that in his review. Marvin Lewis was incredulous that the challenge was rejected, but as the Look Man says, "They don't call it Investigation Field for nothing." Even the Chowds get robbed in Denver [see also 2006 AFC Divisional Playoff].

The Bengals defense rose to the occasion, and the offense scored what should have been the game tying TD to set up overtime. That's when long-snapper Brad St. Louise blew the PAT snap, causing the 24-23 loss. "We were all ready to snap the ball when some dogs came running by me," said Arch snapper. "They seemed to be sniffing around for turkey or something. Sons of bitches! Bumpuses!"

The loss was a heartbreaker and the Donkeys won a game they had no business taking. The Rat even threw the ball in desperation several times down the stretch, because other than a penalty assisted 99 yard drive, Denver had zilch. Of course, their rookie QB is from Santa Clause, IN, and the game was on Christmas Eve.

Still, one has to wonder why the Bengals failed to take advantage of safety John Lynch (Mob). Lynch Mob is tough on the run, and made a number of hard tackles on Rudi. Had the Bengals gone deep early on, Lynch would have been forced to play deep middle and Rudi might still be running. Marvin Lewis' game planning is getting more and more prosaic and it now seems that barring a miracle, the talented Ugly & Black will miss the playoffs.

## **LAGNIAPPE**

### Jagt Up

The emotional hits just keep on coming for the Pokes, who: (1) have had trouble managing troubled WR Terrell Owens, (2) cut PK Mike Vanderyank after spending \$2.5M to sign him in the offseason, (3) lost DE Greg Ellis to an Achilles, and (4) benched Drew Bledsoe after finding out he was color blind. The cutting of Dr. Yankenstein was seen as a disciplinary move to get other players to fall into step. It seemed to work, as the team went into a late season winning streak thereafter.

Owner Jerry (The King of Pop) Jones can't lay the blame on Tuna, but the Boys are struggling down the stretch. It turns out that the hoopla surrounding America's (Old) Team was premature. Tuna himself told us not to break out the anointing oil for Romo, and the kid is struggling like any rookie in Year One. His QB rating has dropped since being exposed by Boy Scouts head coach Sean Payton('s Place) as the Southwest version of Jake the Fake. That is to say, a roll out passer who is less than accurate in the pocket.

BTW, Romo has slipped from 1st to 7th in QB rating with a 93.4. Romo is now behind both Donovan McNabb and Jeff Garcia in that category, but garnered a Pro Bowl spot for half a season's effort. Meanwhile the Pokes Doomsday Lite defensive numbers over the last twelve quarters: Eleven TD passes, 93 points, 862 passing yards allowed. Hmmm....

### Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Crennel?

The 22-7 thumping by the visiting Corn Kings was the latest in a series of bad losses by coach Romeo Crennel. Crennel's AFC Asgard record is 1-11 since he was hired, and that dawg won't hunt. The Browns Braintrust is going to evaluate his performance after the season but the smart money says he will be sacked.

While the Look Man is not in favor of musical coaches, no coach can survive a lack of competition within his own division. Baltimore and Blitzburgh have played musical QBs during this period, while Cincy has drafted and developed a first round superstar.

The Browns look to pick fourth in the 2007 draft, but The Look Man hopes they eschew Brady (Zoolander Jr.) Quinn of Notre Dame, and Troy Smith of the Buckeyes. Neither is tall enough to see over the O-line and become the type of leader Cleveland needs. The Browns also need to secure a veteran QB to train the rookies. With Jeff Garcia and Trent Dilfer off the market, look for the Browns to acquire a grizzled veteran like Damon Huard of KC. That ought to lead to a Super Bowl berth in about 7 more years.

### NFL Monopoly?

The NFL granted ESPN a \$550 million contract for Monday Night Football, but gave NBC flexible scheduling for its Sunday counterpart. As a result, MNF has stinkers down the stretch while SNF can select competitive games.

The ruling came due to the logistics of moving games from Sunday to Monday, but the net result is that NBC got a bargain. Unfortunately, fans may be too burned out after watching 10 hours of pre-game and doubleheader action to enjoy the late nighters. The Look Man himself has slept through some late games.

Still, this week's SNF game features the Cheeseheads vs. the Monsters of the Furniture Mart. Sure, it may be the last time we see Brett (The Pope) Favre suit up in green and gold, but the Stillers at Bengals is likely to be a better contest. It just reinforces that NBC has done less with more in 2006. Their studio group lacks cohesion, and they turn the show into a mocking, fake laughfest instead of putting the games in the forefront. ESPN's PrimeTime still has no peer, and it badly needs a replacement on some network.

### **ZEBRA OF THE WEEK**

Walt Coleman Lantern and his crew get the award hands down for Cincy at Denver. Not only was the early Brandon Jacobs catch bogus, there was a pass interference call on LB Landon Johnson after Madiou Williams clearly tipped the ball first. Even novice NFL fans know that tipped balls negate PI calls.

The Black & White Lantern also had bogus defensive holding on the Bengals for automatic first downs that preserved Denver drives and mystery clock stoppages outside the magical 5:00 mark of the fourth quarter.

Walt Coleman, you are the Look Man **Zebra of the Week!**

### **THE LOOK AHEAD:**

The Stillers come into Cincy in what should be a blood feud. It was almost exactly one year ago to the day when Kimo von Wilkes Booth took out Mr. Tonight Show's ACL in

the playoffs. Now neither team has solid postseason aspirations, but the Bengals need to implement the Under Armor creed: "We must protect this House!"

Games with real playoff implications include the NFLN Saturday Niter Jyntz at DC and the Grayders at the Jets. These two games will likely determine the last two playoff spots in each conference. Secondly, the Pokes-Detroit, Stillers-Bengals and Cheeseheads at Bears games will depend upon what happens earlier. Don't expect to see a puff of smoke coming out of the chimney in Chicago, however.

*Stillers at Bungals (-6.0):*

Odds makers have installed the underachieving Nati as a TD favorite, but they may have underestimated the effect of Iron Chin Cowher's retirement. Iron Chin will have the troops ready to pimp the Nati in their own crib on Sunday. In fact, the ultimate Cowher moment would be if the Jets lose and the Bengals lose while actually playing for a playoff spot. The Bengals learn scoreboard watching is never a good thing, and they go down like gratis hops at Pall Bearer Stadium.

*Browns at Slim Shadies (-5.0):*

Houston is actually favored in this one because of the injury to Browns QB Derek (Bigfoot) Anderson. The Look Man wonders if the bookies have ever seen Houston QB David (U Can Drive My) Carr?

The Slim Shadies have done it with defense and running the football, but look for that to cease on Sunday. Crennel's last hurrah won't be at the Alamadome, but the Browns cover and win anyway. Happy trails, Romeo.

*Detroit at Dallas (-12.5):*

The Pokes are giving a baker's dozen to the Cadillacs, but don't believe the hype. The Look Man expects Pickna and Company to attempt to prove they are for real with a final win. They have the big wide receivers, decent TE and adequate running game that would keep the game competitive. Also, Tuna won't want his Boys too high in the saddle considering the long trail ride ahead. Detroit covers.

*Dirty Birds at Iggles (-8.0):*

The Iggles blasted Dallas last week, but that could impact this game. The Dirty Birds are not playing particularly well, but Michael Vick is the X-factor. The Iggles have already clinched a wild card, so this game is only meaningful in terms of momentum.

Neither coach is a Hall of Fame candidate, but Andy ( the Walrus II) Reid gets a slight advantage. He will use his big, physical O-line to wear down the ATL front seven. Safety Brian (The Hawk) Dawkins will enforce the no-fly zone in the middle of the field, but the Iggles come up short [actually, the Look Man believes the Iggles will win and continue as the hottest team in the NFC, but he picked Dallas to win the NFC Least, so...].

This scenario would put three teams from the NFC Least Division in the playoffs. It has been a long time since that happened, and for good reason. The NFC is woeful, and there are a number of AFC teams that could dominate even the best team in the National Conference.

*New England at Tennessee (-3.0):*

The Chowds played a tough, physical game against the Jags last week, and won narrowly, 24-21. This week they take on the hottest team in the AFC, the Tennessee Flaming Thumbtacks.

The Tacks have superstar on the come Vince Young, whose speed creates a mismatch for most defenses. The Chowds lack of team speed will create problems which Vince will exploit. Look for the Chowds offense to be dominated by cover corner Pac Man Jones as Zoolander throws picks early and often. Tacks win, foreshadowing an early playoff exit for New England.

In a perfect world, Young's seventh consecutive win would garner the Tacks a wild card playoff berth, Coach of the Year honors for Fisher, and a Rookie of the Year award for Young. This is a team no one wants to play, and the NFL doesn't need them blowing up the AFC playoff mix, so no dice.

## **EPILOGUE**

The playoff mix will include two New York teams plus the Usual Suspects. Perhaps the real value of another Christmas Story is waiting a while for the Pro Bowl selections. TE's Kellen Winslow II and Jason Witten got overlooked, and Romo made it based upon just a few games. Perennial bowlers got the nods despite their 2006 performance, which ain't right.

There is an incredible battle for the Rookie of the Year award. Flaming Thumbtack QB Vince Young has six wins as a starter. Arizona's Matt Leinart threw for 405 in the Baggie Dome in his third career start. Tampa QB Bruce (the New Polish Rifle) Gradkowski may have knocked the Bengals out of the playoffs with one of his two game-winning scoring drives.

On the other side of the rock, Cleveland DE Kamerion Wimbley leads all rookies with ten sacks and three fumble recoveries. Denver's Elvis Dumervill is close behind with eight sacks, three fumble recoveries and one dominating game over the Bengals. Chicago's Devin Hester has six TDs as a PR/KR, and the season is not even over.

These are just a few of the rookies this season who have put their collective stamp on the NFL. They may not make folks forget the Class of '83, but they were born that year.

Peace,

The Look Man

PS. - The Look Man is rolling elevens in 2007. Are you listening Drew Bledsoe? Happy New Year!

**NFL Point Spreads For Week 17 - Week Seventeen NFL  
Football Spread - NFL Games 12/31, 2006**

<b>Date &amp; Time</b>	<b>Favorite</b>	<b>Spread</b>	<b>Underdog</b>
12/31 4:15 ET	At Baltimore	-9	Buffalo
12/31 8:15 ET	At Chicago	-3	Green Bay
12/31 1:00 ET	At Cincinnati	-6	Pittsburgh
12/31 1:00 ET	At Dallas	-12.5	Detroit
12/31 1:00 ET	At Houston	-5	Cleveland
12/31 4:15 ET	At Indianapolis	-9	Miami
12/31 1:00 ET	At Kansas City	-2.5	Jacksonville
12/31 1:00 ET	St. Louis	-2	At Minnesota
12/31 1:00 ET	Carolina	-3	At New Orleans
12/31 1:00 ET	At NY Jets	-12	Oakland
12/31 4:15 ET	At Philadelphia	-8	Atlanta
12/31 1:00 ET	At Tampa Bay	-3	Seattle
12/31 1:00 ET	At Tennessee	-3	New England
12/31 4:15 ET	At Denver	-10.5	San Francisco
12/31 4:15 ET	At San Diego	-14	Arizona