

The Look Man Report 2007

Week Eighteen: Wet and Wild Cards

"If only Tony had called me and said, 'Terry, Jessica [Simpson] and I are going to go to Mexico,' I would've told him: 'You crazy? Don't do that! The paparazzi is going to find you, man. You're a star. She's a star. It's just going to happen,' " - Hall of Fame QB Terry Bradshaw on the Dallas QB's trip to Cabo last week.

PROLOGUE

The weather was a factor in Wild Card Week Eighteen, as it rained at Blitzburgh, Sheattle, and San Diego. The slow turf at San Diego hurt LaDanian Tomlinson, and may have been responsible for the injury to TE Antonio (Bill) Gates. As a result, the games at Blitzburgh and San Diego ended up as close outcomes, while the better weather and turf in Sheattle and Tampa resulted in blowouts.

The Wild Card week has always been a favorite of the Look Man, and last week was no different. With the possible exception of the first two days of the NCAA Road to the Final Four basketball tourney, there is no more action packed period in sports. Teams that have to win or go home are stacked head up, with non-stop action for 6-8 hours. It's fan-tastic.

The outcomes of the games were predictable, with the J-Squareds, Bolts, Jynts and Shehawks advancing. Of course, J-Ville failed to cover the two point spread due to a bizarre decision-making by the Stillers Omar Epps, who chose to go for the two point conversion twice in the final stanza. The Look Man has never been a proponent of using the Vermeil Chart unless it is late in the game, typically on the last two possessions. It signals that the coach has more faith in the defense than the offense. More importantly, it essentially leads to a demoralizing finish for an offense that has just scored a TD. The kick is nearly never missed, while the two point try is only a 50-50 proposition.

The Divisional Playoff matchups are now set, with the bye teams facing live action. Dallas, Green Bay, Indy and New England awaken from power naps to take on the battle tested Jynts, Shehawks, Bolts and J-Squareds. Only time will tell whether they can go from zero to sixty and if the additional physical pounding wears down the challengers. Either way, this weekend's games promise to be tough, physical battles. In the words of the Highlander, "There can be only One!"

Without further ado, Week Eighteen in a nutshell.

WEEK IN REVIEW

- The Bolts are one Marlon (Fifth Dimension) McCree fumble away from a potential world championship. McCree fumbled a Brady pick that would've sealed a win last year, costing the Bolts the game and Marty his job. San Diego matches up extremely well with Indy, and if the San Diego safety had simply fallen down with the Brady INT, things would be different. For one, the Chowds may not have gone out and gotten every good free agent available. Marty Schottenheimer would still be in SoCal, as well as assistants Chudzinski, Phillips and Cameron. Miami wouldn't be 1-15, Dallas wouldn't have Capt. Kangaroo, and the Browns' offense wouldn't have turned around in 2007. Interesting how everything changes on a simple play. Ditto for the Tuck Rule that propelled New England to the brink of its fourth championship in six years. It's the Look Man's version of the Butterfly Principle.
- The QB formerly known as "Ben" pulled a Kordell Steward playoff hat trick last week, with three picks and a fumble. Despite a valiant second half comeback largely aided by the zebras, the Stillers were unable to pull a rabbit out of a hat, losing twice to the same team for the first time ever at Ketchup Field.

- "I have no qualms, no concerns about Tony's social life or his relationships," said Pokes owner Jerry (The King of Pop) Jones. "I have had a lot of concerns during my 19 years as owner about a lot of players. I am not a novice in this area. But there is not one concern about how he relaxes or what he does with his time." Jessica Simpson is reportedly not planning to attend Sunday's playoff game in Texas, due to a prior commitment with Britney Spears and Paris Hilton.
- When asked for additional comment Terry Bradshaw said, "For an athlete, there's no time off ... until it's over. You don't take a mental break ... No way that I would ever, ever do what Tony did. Of course, I have been divorced three times, and Howie Long did have sex with one of my wives."
- The beat went on, with newly divorced Jynts DE Michael Strahan saying, "You guys love to say, 'Oh, he is coming off the beach and he is dating Jessica Simpson.' Please! Heck, if Jessica Simpson wanted to date me, I may give her a shot." Strahan was in a very messy offseason divorce proceeding in which his ex-wife claimed he was gay.



JessiTony and TE Jason Witten (with beverage) in Cabo

- The Browns extended OC Rob (The Cannibal) Chudzinski for two years following speculation he was a candidate for the Baltimore head coach vacancy. They also fired DC Todd Grantham, who parlayed a bunch of bums into a 16th rated defense in 2005. Grantham, fresh off a two year extension in 2006, couldn't repeat in 2007, and the Browns defensive ranking plummeted. GM Phil Savage said this week the Browns intend to pursue David Copperfield as defensive coordinator if they can't get good players in the draft.
- The Browns are also negotiating a 3-year extension for Romeo (Ralph Cramden) Crennel, despite the protestations of the Look Man. The Bus Driver is attempting to parlay his 10-6 record into a vote of confidence, despite the fact that he was forced to fire his former OC.
- One has only to look at Billick in B-More or Cameron in Miami to see that a coordinator is elevated to head coach for his side of the ball. Marvin Lewis is on the hot seat as well for failing to meet management expectations for improvement on his side of the rock. Failure is not an option and resistance is futile.

- The Cannibal is more responsible for the Browns improvement than Cramden, but even he could've been replaced with Cam (Candid) Cameron, who created the offense while in San Diego. If the Browns keep making knee jerk moves like this, the only thing it ensures is struggles for the next few seasons. While the Browns' moves seemingly represent continuity, they have underachieved under Cramden, with essentially similar personnel.
- The Browns need to restock the aging D-line, add some LBs, another pass rushing DE, and a running back. The Browns' 19-14 loss to the Bengals knocked them out of the postseason, and that loss had nothing to do with Grantham. Moreover, losses to beatable teams like Oakland, Phoenix and Blitzburgh cost them a shot at hosting a playoff game in 2007. Postseason experience is invaluable, as demonstrated by the fact that Green Bay and Tennessee are the only 2007 teams who failed to appear in 2006.
- Despite the fact that Gates left after a routine hit, it is more likely that the hit from behind by LB Keith Bullock was the proximate cause. Bullock nipped Gates on the heel on a previous play, and jammed his foot into the sideline turf unexpectedly. Gates' operating system won't be the same for the balance of the season, even if they get by Indy this week.
- Jynt's OC Kevin Gilbride was masterful in the last two weeks of the season, going conservative and allowing Eli to work his magic. The strong running game winded the Corn Kings D, and Eli avoided the crucial turnover. Combined with a stultifying defense led by Mike Strahan, the G-Men overcame the loss of center Shaun (Chief) O'Hara, to grab a W at the Big Sombrero. Luckily, it was the only good weather venue of the weekend, or Eli could've imploded.
- Derek (Neo) Anderson was announced as the starting QB for 2008, leaving the Browns' Brady Quinn (Medicine Woman) looking for a new show. The Browns are sitting in the catbird sit, with Jane Seymour eating up a manageable \$8 million in the cap over the next few seasons. After seeing 63 different starters in 2007, it's good business sense to have a quality backup.
- While no one yet knows whether Quinn can pitch anything other than Myoplex and Subway sandwiches, this plan is a good one. It locks Neo in as a starter, but guarantees he won't go throwing four picks in a game anytime soon. If he does, the Browns simply dial up Quinn to play Agent Smith, destroying any glitches in the Matrix. They also need to re-sign RB Jamal Lewis as Morpheus, while drafting additional D-line, LB and RB help.

ZEBRA OF THE WEEK

The Wild Card week wasn't exactly exemplary, with the worst game being the Flaming Thumbtacks at Bolts. Zebra Ed (the Hulk) Hochuli and crew wanted to avoid a replay of an ugly game earlier in the season in which Shawne Merroidman got kneecapped, and fights ensued. Unfortunately, all the Hulk did was make an ugly game uglier with ridiculous penalties.

The Jags at Stillers was also bad, including an awful offensive holding call that negated a Stillers two point conversion. Talk was rampant regarding an offensive holding on NT Casey Hampton on QB David Garrard's 32 yard scamper on 4th and 2, but the Look Man thought it was incidental. Still, the failure to call facemask or offensive PI on the Hines (57) Ward in the endzone set up a TD that never should have happened.

The New OB?

Flambeau field is the new Orange Bowl, often getting the worst calls to favor the home team. It used to be that Washington, Denver and Miami got the most home cooking, but now the title goes to Breen Gay. In Washington vs. GB earlier this season, DB Sean Taylor caught INT number 278

on Favre, but the GVs lost anyway on some bad calls. Look for more bad calls this weekend as the Walrus has an aneurysm at his old stomping grounds

THE LOOK AHEAD:

Quick picks for the Divisional Playoffs in Week 19:

Seattle at Breen Gay (-7.5):

The Shehawks at Cheeseheads is the re-enactment of Matt (Hair Club for Men) Hasselbeck's infamous, "We'll take the ball and we're gonna score" blast. This time around, HCFM is facing a more complete Breen Gay team than the one that burned him for a pick six to seal the OT win.

Green Bay's defense is tremendously underrated. They can shut down the run with MLB Nick Barnett, and their LBs and secondary are also good pass defenders in space. Seattle cannot run the ball effectively, and HCFM doesn't have enough to beat them with his arm alone. HCFM is also going to have two injured WRs in DJ Hackett (ankle) and Deion Branch (calf).

On the offensive side, the Pack running game is simply adequate. RB Ryan Clark has averaged only slightly fewer yards than the New LT down the stretch, but Coffetown also has a defense. The difference is that the Cheesehead receivers won't drop the ball like Washington, and their big play ability will unmask the Shehawks. Seattle lives by the turnover, and that makes for a potent match for The Pope, who holds the world record for picks.

The Look Man likes the Cheeseheads to win this one on the strength of its defense and an unhealthy dose of zebra love. Green Bay is the new Orange Bowl, where zebras often interpret the rules using their own misguided book. The Pack is back, knocking off the Shehawks, and giving us yet another view of the Mike Holmgren Face. Koo-koo-ka-choo!

J-Ville at New England (-13.5):

J-Ville got out to a big lead on the Stillers twice already this season, only to blow it and struggle to get the W. If they do the same thing in Beantown, they can start booking their fishing charters early, because the Chowds don't make mistakes at crunch time.

While much has been made of the Chowds superiority, most of it is smoke and mirrors. Their primary strength is that they don't commit penalties (or they are called), and they force the opposition to choke from the pressure. J-Ville coach Jack Del River is a prime candidate for a meltdown at crunch time, as he has barely enough brains to coach already. When faced with a certified tactician like Dr. Evil, he could be in for a battle of wits as an unarmed man.

No one is giving J-Ville a prayer in this one, as indicated by the spread. Of course, this spread is similar to the ones given three other solid running teams, the Jynts, Philly and B-More. These squads played ball control offense, backed up by zone defense, which gave the Chowds fits. The games ended up as three point wins for New England instead of the predicted double digit blowouts. Tack on the injuries to key offensive linemen Nick Kazcur and Stephen (King) Neal, and the Chowds could be in for a dogfight. J-Ville's D-line features run stuffer Grady Jackson and Big John Henderson, who should play despite a hammy suffered last weekend.

The Look Man likes the J-Squared defense to force New England to play ball control, but the J-Squareds are 25th in total number of big plays given up in 2007. The Chowds are the master of the big play, largely due to their ineffective running game. J-Ville is in the top five against the run, so look for New England to put it up early and often. Further, the Jags are one of the worst blitzing teams in the league. They disguise their blitzes like Groucho Marx disguised his face.

Without a strong edge rush, the Chowds can pick a zoning team apart. Brady will go to Wes (Lawrence) Welker, and when the Jags drop a safety to help, Moss will go deep. It worked against the Jynts to perfection, and it will work this week.

J-Ville covers, but loses a physical game, setting up Indy for a tenderized Chowds team at the Blade in the AFC Championship. 19-0, here we come.

San Diego at Indy (-9):

The Flaming Thumbtacks let the Bolts off the hook - - - again in the Wild Card playoff. San Diego QB Philip Rivers was able to acquit himself with some big plays, and the Bolts defense stiffened against a one-dimensional Tennessee offense. The problem is that Indy's offense is anything but one dimensional.

Peyton Manning threw six picks in the earlier meeting of these teams, and only a missed chip shot saved the Bolts. This time, Manning does better, and the defense doesn't have to deal with uber TE Antonio Gates. Gates is out with a toe, and the Indy defense regains DT Raheem Brock from injury.

Brock is an underrated player, and will put pressure on Rivers. He is tall, with great speed and leverage. Rivers already throws the weirdest ball anyway, and the Look Man is expecting Brock to deflect one or two this week. Even if he doesn't, Vincent Jackson and Chris (CC) Chambers aren't scaring the Indy D. Rivers never throws over the middle anyway, and that is the only real weakness of the Tampa Cover Two defense.

Ponies run roughshod on the Bolts, setting up a midfield fistfight between Tomlinson and Rivers. These two guys don't like each other, as indicated by Tomlinson sulking after Rivers threw to a covered Vincent Jackson instead of the New LT in a goal line situation last week. The announcers claimed it was simply frustration, but it was obvious that NLT was wide open while Jackson couldn't even beat one man to the endzone, let alone the two who were there.

Jynts at Pokes (-7.5):

While the media went crazy of Tonica JessiRomo's weekend in Cabo, they should have been focusing on head coach Wade Phillips' 0-3 postseason record. Despite going 13-3 this year, Capt Kangaroo will need all of his crew in order to beat the Jynts a third time this season.

The league is rife with examples of teams that went 2-1, with the one begin in the postseason. The Pokes face a New York squad whose only road loss is at Dallas in Week One. They play better away from the boos at the Meadowlands, and Dallas should be afraid, very afraid.

The Jynts D-line is the strength of the team, so they should be able to put pressure on the Pokes passing game. The Pokes return center Andre Gurode just in time, beefing up their huge O-line in time to play ball control. If Romo is forced to pass, he may have Terry (She) Glenn back to pair with Patrick (Crayola) Crayton. The Look Man would rest TO, who is still limping from a high ankle sprain. TO is a Jynt killer, but one bad move, and he will likely miss the rest of the postseason, including a return to the Bowl.

The Look Man likes to Pokes to win this one based upon Eli being Eli. Unlike the Citizen Watch commercial, Eli is very stoppable, usually due to throwing a pick at the worst possible time. The Doomsday Lite pass rush turns him into a Timex, as the Pokes get up early and pound the run.

The Pokes will put eight in the box to stop big back Brandon Jacobs, forcing Eli to cheesecake his way to a loss. Dallas, baby, Dallas, to set up a rematch with the Pope and the Fondue Crew from Wisconsin.



The Manning Bowl won't happen this year...

EPILOGUE

If the picks fall the right way, it will set up an epic rematch of the AFC Championship between Indy and the Chowds. The NFL has a vested interest in seeing its best drawing team, the Chowds, against the defending world champs. All of New England's games have generated tremendous viewership, and it is unlikely that this game will be an aberration. After all, in the words of Terry Bradshaw, Tom Brady gets all the supermodels but Peyton Manning gets all of the commercials.

Brett (The Pope) Favre intimated that he would like to return in 2008 for another season in Breen Gay, and this may be the kiss of death. The league and Madison Avenue love the Pope, and the Look Man wouldn't bet a pair of Wrangler Jeans that he won't be the Chosen One to attempt to dethrone the Chowds in Super Bowl XLVII.

Look for the league to do everything in its power to guarantee that the Cheeseheads appear in the postseason. That scenario would set up Favre riding off into the sunset like Elway. Unfortunately, if the threat of his departure removed, the storyline is not as compelling.

The league has become a caricature of itself. Whenever big money interests outweigh pure competition, the Fan loses in the process. The mythical national collegiate football championship is a prime example of greed superseding truth. Let's hope the NFL never bows to the same level of ugliness.

Peace,

The Look Man