

THE LOOK MAN REPORT 2009

Week Minus One – The Heat of September

“We call our group The FFCA -- The Fired Football Coaches of America. There are 12 or 15 coaches every Wednesday. We look at tape on Wednesdays and Thursdays and we go from 6 in the morning to 1:30 or so before picking the kids up at school. “ – former Tampa coach Jon Gruden on his MNF preparation

The NFL season is upon us, with all of its itinerant fan zeal. NFL voice over maven John Facenda opined that, “Hopes that are high in the heat of September can wither and die in the cold of December.”

Part of the chill could come from the NFL front office, which is about to kill the proverbial golden goose. Labor unrest and an iron-fisted commissioner could make this AFL anniversary the last good season of many to come. The NFL has prospered in recent years, and the last five Super Bowl games rank amongst the best ever. Two plays in last year’s Titanic struggle, the Harrison 100 yard pick six, and the Santonio Holmes game winning TD, make the top five ever.

Still, the league has lost some of its luster, and the Look Man is worried. As far as 2009, here are some of the things the Look Man thinks he thinks.

Are You Ready for Some Chucky?

The addition of former Tampa coach Jon (Chucky) Gruden on MNF allows Jaws to talk X’s and O’s again. Though the Look Man liked Kornheiser, he never really meshed with the team. Tony’s expertise was playing the straight man, and the booth already had that in the Polish Rifle.

Chucky should be good in this role, though his preseason has been filled with superlatives. Let’s hope he doesn’t turn into Dan Dierdorf, who never saw a frontrunner he couldn’t overhype. Dierdorf went from a promising career to a caricature of John Madden.

Gruden still meets with Bruce Allen [former GM of the Bucs], Tim Marcum [former coach of the AFL Storm], [Former Bucs coach] Rick Venturi, Jim Haslett, high school coaches and some guys from USF on a weekly basis to stay current. While Chucky doesn’t have his own wing at NFL Films like Jaws, he is a student of the game and it comes through in the booth.

Brown Out

The Browns have become an even bigger embarrassment with a never ending QB competition. New head coach Eric Mangina faces charges that he is a bigger hermaphrodite than South African runner Caster Semenya. The Look Man knows that championship assistant coaches are assistants for a reason: they’re not alpha dogs.

Mangina has brought discipline to a Browns squad that had none under Romeo (Ralph Cramden) Crennel. In effect, Cleveland traded one bus driver for another. Mangina further complicates matters by doing a poor man’s Bellicheat impression of closed mouth press conferences. When you deconstruct his commentary, it reads like a bad SNL skit with Chevy Chase mimicking Jane Curtin.

The biggest disappointment is that Mangina selected Brady Quinn (Medicine Woman) as his starter. Derek (Neo) Anderson will be holding a clipboard just one year removed from a Pro Bowl season, while Jane Seymour dinks and dunks the Browns into a sub-500 season. The product will be a dink and dunk offense supported by a bend-but-don’t-break defense. Nice.

Quinn has never won anything collegiately or in the pros. Usually, you see flashes of brilliance in any winning player. With Medicine Woman, you see a guy who's scared to get hit, and can't go deep. The Look Man finds himself actually wishing to see a guy get injured for the first time since LT fractured Joe Theismann's wheel.

The worst part is that Browns Fan actually wants Jane Seymour over Neo. To paraphrase George Bernard Shaw, "the NFL is the vehicle that allows teams to play the QBs they deserve."

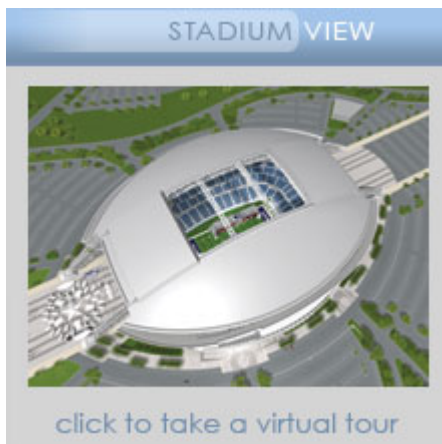


Eric Mangina in green pants...

Pyramid Buildings

Jynts, Jets and Pokes Fan is in trouble with new stadium deals that cost billions. These facilities are driving the average fan out, while increasing the likelihood of blackouts. Simple math states that larger buildings are less likely to sell out, especially with inferior product.

While the Dallas stadium is a magnificent architectural achievement, the sheer size means that fans are simply watching the game on television while at the facility. The viewing screen needs to be raised before a re-do forces a tired visiting team to cover punts in succession. It's only a matter of time before Dallas scores a punt return TD while facing a tired special team. And that is a home field advantage that hurts the integrity of the game.



The Taj Mah-Jones

The moves by the Lions and Jets to install rookie QBs have more to do with money than winning. Installing rookie QBs means excitement now, and perhaps injuries later. The NFL blackout policy states that home games cannot be televised unless sold out 72 hours before kickoff. The NFL has waived that rule for holiday weeks, but the net result is no football for home fans.

It's unclear what effect this rule will have, but Cleveland, Cincy, and Jacksonville are already in trouble. Even KC, which has sold out for years, may have trouble in 2009.

The Chows – No D?

New England has lost a lot more talent over the last two years than George Costanza has lost hair. More importantly, the core defensive players like Bruschi, Vrabel, Assante Samuel and Seymour will likely reflect a lack of discipline on the field. Rodney Harrison and Junior Seau were rented players, but still contributors. While rookie DTs Ron Brace and Myron Pryor show promise, the Chowds are simply preparing for an uncapped 2010 while hoping that their offense will win shootouts. Not a formula for an NFL championship.

The real impact of the defensive losses will show up in the secondary. Without the substantial pass rush, the Chowds DBs will be exposed. They recently signed former Browns CB Leigh Bodden, who will start on Sunday. Suffice it to say that they will be in more shootouts than Wyatt Earp and Doc Holiday ("I'll be your huckleberry.")

Caponomics

The uncapped 2010 season is already making a mockery of the NFL. The selection of DeMaurice Smith to succeed the late Upshaw occurred too late to allow meaningful dialogue with Goodell, and the owners are bracing for a battle. The players and fans are the ones who will suffer during this upcoming period of unpleasantness. The league has already taken away most home field advantage by playing music and canned chants instead of allowing the fans to orchestrate the cheering. Most blue collar fans have been priced out of the stadia, and the NFL marketing machine has allowed NFL Sunday Ticket to compete with attending live games.

Between the economic conditions and the lack of positive PR for the league, look for at least two seasons of instability beginning with the 2009 season. An uncapped 2010 will put the Lombardi up for sale, followed by a lockout in 2011. The NFL might just become MLB or even the NHL before it's over.

Hard Knocks – Bengals Style

The Bengals appearance on HBO's annual football special made for great TV, including a renaissance for Ocho Cinco. Chad came across as a great player, albeit not a smart one.

NFL Films also exposed the fact that Marvin Lewis can't cuss a lick, even when he tried after a disheartening loss to the Lambs. Still, this show had comedic value, even if it portends a losing season, as it did for its previous contributors. BTW, Mike Zimmer can cuss, and his language could fry eggs.

The laughs continued, with convicted DUler and current O-Coordinator Bob Bratkowski having an "It's 5 o'clock somewhere!" poster on his wall. QB (Johnny) Carson Palmer joked that his new center Kyle Cook needed to work on his hygiene, saying that his hand smelled like a toilet after taking practice snaps. Hi-yoooooooooo!

Bengals Andre (Ki-Jana) Smith signed a contract before the final preseason game, only to break a bone in his foot in his first few practices. Ki-Jana II has a contract clause that reduces his game check to half if his weight exceeds 350 pounds. He tipped the scales at 364 on Day One, meaning that he will need to lose 15 pounds before Sunday. And that won't be easy with a broken wheel.

Viva Viagra

Danny Woodhead from Chadron State in Nebraska surprisingly went unclaimed after being cut by the Jets. Woodhead ran for over 170 yards in the final preseason game, and he looked like a running back version of Wayne Chrebet. The kid's got some wiggle and should be a

contributor somewhere soon. Woodhead has signed a contract with an ED firm, after setting the NCAA record for rushing yards in a season

THE LOOK AHEAD

Denver at Cincy (-4):

The Nati wants to start fast in 2009, something they capitalized upon in their one playoff season over the last nineteen years. (Johnny) Carson Palmer's elbow is healthy, and Cedric (The Butler) Benson will be the starting RB. Their defense ranked just below the top ten in 2008, and Marvin Lewis is battling for his career.

Denver is in upheaval after trading swapping QBs with the Bears in the offseason. Jay Cutler(y) is the biggest thing to hit Chicago since the railroad. Kyle Orton even went as far as to shave his beard and quit the Foo Fighters in order to focus on his career.

The biggest thrill of this game might be that Gus Johnson is doing the call. Gus has called nearly as many upsets as Thom Brennaman, though he hasn't spent nearly as much time with Tim Tebow.

Look for the underrated Enver defense to reclaim its "D" with a healthy Champ Bailey. While the Look Man believes the Bengals will win, he thinks it may be on the toe of a Chad Ochocinco FG. Denver covers.

Dallas at Tampa Bay (+6):

Dallas has looked crisp on offense in the preseason after jettisoning their nemesis Terrell Owens. O-Coordinator Jason Garrett is feeling the heat and needs a solid year to keep his job and his street cred. Unfortunately, the Tampa Two has LB Barrett Ruud and a defense that is hungry. New head coach Raheem Morris wants to do well, and his middle name is defense. No word on whether new D-Coordinator Nas will employ the Dr. Dre defense over the previous Full Monte (Kiffin) D. Kiffin has joined son Lane in the college ranks at Tennessee.

QB Tony Romo (the Place for Ribs) waived celebrity girlfriend Jessica Simpson in the offseason as part of the Air McNair Crazy Girlfriend Reverse Stimulus Program. Unfortunately, Romo's O-line is still questionable and his receiving corps has no replacement for TO. The Ribs King will now give head coach Captain Kangaroo gray hair in the tough NFC Beast.

Expensive Corn Kings will cover with new QB Byron Leftwich going deep early and often. Dallas is 7-1 in openers, but their fast starts haven't overcome their late season tank jobs. And they don't even have DT Tank Johnson to blame anymore.

San Francisco at Arizona (-6):

Arizona is the Look Man's pick for team that fails to make the postseason after representing the conference the previous year. Not only did they get some home cooking to beat the Iggles in the playoffs, but they have internal issues with WR Anquan Boldin and lost uber back Edgerrin James. Tack on losing WR Larry Fitzgerald to the madden Curse, and it looks like a long year for the Deadbirds.

The Niners still haven't signed Crabtree, but head coach Mike Singletary is putting his stamp on the team. Look for them to cover and win against Phoenix in a mild early season upset.

Minnesota at Cleveland (+3.5):

The Pope is back, starting his hermit-like existence on the road in C-Town. Mangina has not announced his starting QB, fooling no one. The Williams Wall D will be intact, having survived NFL lawsuits to date.

Look for the Swedes to smoke the Browns. They get off to a fast start, forcing Quinn to go deep with the worst arm since Quincy Carter in Dallas. Browns lose, and the fans still believe that Quinn is the One. Meanwhile, Derek (Neo) Anderson is waiting to load the Jump Program in the Matrix. Swedes, baby, Swedes as the Look Man is ready to jump off of his garage in protest.

Philadelphia at Carolina (+2.5):

Donovan McNabb and the Iggles blitzing D lost an icon in D-Coordinator Jimmy Johnson. JJ died of skin cancer, and the Birds look to make him the focal point of their 2009 campaign.

Everyone hates on the Black Cats, saying that Jake (The Man) Delhomme has lost it. What they lost was their respect for head coach John Fox. Julius (Dr. J) Peppers still hasn't received a new contract, but the offense picked up a few key free agents.

The Iggles welcome the return of uber-back Brian Westbrook. Look for the City of Brotherly Love to open Andy (The Walrus II) Reid's drive to the Lombardi in Week One. Iggles.

Buffalo at New England (-10.5) Monday Night Football:

Buffalo shocked the world by firing O-Coordinator Turk Schonert last week. Terrell Owens has already weighed in on the vanilla offense, which was among the lowest scoring in the league in 2008.

Schonert is a former Bengals QB whose innovations are reminiscent of Sam Wyche. His high wire act failed to score with conservative Ivy League head man Dick Jauron (means "coward" in Latin). The Bisons defense has been decent, but their offense lacks punch.

With everyone poised to see Tom Brady win Comeback Player of the Year, the Look Man looks for the Chowds to struggle early. Brady will be worried about that knee for at least the first few weeks, and their running game will need to carry the load. Chowds win, but Crapchester covers on the Big Stage.

EPILOGUE

Week One is a time of hope (unless you're a Browns Fan). The loss of Troy Polamalu to a knee has already fulfilled part one of the madden curse. Arizona WR Larry (F.Scott) Fitzgerald is now sleeping with a rabbit's foot under his pillow. Injuries are part of the game, and the Look Man believes that they will figure prominently in NFL 2009. Brady Quinn had better double up on his dose of Myoplex EAS. After he's injured for the year in Week One, he may utter, "Now I'm done."

Here's hoping your September heat continues into winter.

Peace,

The Look Man