

The Look Man Report 2009 **Week Seventeen: Ain't Gonna Be No Rematch!**

"We're dangerous. You have to be able to run the football this time of year, and you have to be able to play defense, and we can do that better than any team in the league. That gives us a chance in every game, no matter who we play." - Jets coach Rex Ryan after the 37-0 shutout of the Bengals that propelled the Jets into the playoffs.

At the end of the first Rocky movie, Apollo Creed intones, "Ain't gonna be no rematch," after taking a beating from the Rocky Balboa. The implication is that he gave Italian Stallion a chance to beat him, and that he won't be fooled again and lose his title.

In Week Seventeen, coaches gave their teams mixed messages based upon their potential for improving playoff seeding. The results were predictable, with Dallas, the Jets and Green Bay all blowing out teams that they would likely face again in the postseason.

The problem with football players is that they aren't typically the sharpest knives in the drawer. If you tell them to go full speed and knock someone's head off, they can comply in spades. If you tell them that there are 12 possible playoff permutations based upon whether a complicated win-lose matrix with five different teams, and their eyes glaze over. The losing coaches in Week Seventeen followed the latter formula.

A lot is made regarding momentum in the playoffs, but the Look Man believes it is at once simpler and more complex. Running the football down the throat of an opponent in Week Seventeen is positive, not for the momentum, but simply because a team can force its will upon their opponent. That kind of dominance carries over.

What doesn't carry over is the finesse game, especially when a coach like Andy (The Walrus II) Reid pulls back the reins a little in anticipation of a win. The Look Man didn't have major heartburn with the Iggles' blowout loss to the Pokes, for the following reasons:

1. The loss of center Jamaal (JJ) Jackson hurt the Iggles badly yesterday. Not only had their O-line played well together, JJ makes the line calls that keep McNabb clean. *In short, the TE is a QBs best friend but the Center is his security blanket.*
2. WRs Jeremy Maclin and DeSean Jackson dropped catchable balls, and TE Brent Celek had double digit grabs.
3. Andy (The Walrus II) Reid was playing it close to the vest offensively. Reid wanted to keep some plays in the bag for next week in the event a rematch materialized, especially in the second half, when the game was a rout.

As for the other blowouts, well, those were just bad football in the final week of the season. The worst might have been the G-Men, who are on a campaign to get their head coach fired just two years removed from a Lombardi. Weird how Minnesota blew their doors off, regaining their mojo just in time for the postseason.

LAGNIAPPE

MTV Cribs

Browns KR Josh Cribbs was offered only 1.4 million reasons to return in 2010. While Cribbs is legitimately still under contract, he has outperformed it in every way. Cribbs put the entire team on his shoulders down the stretch, playing QB in the Wildcat, returning two kickoff returns for TDs in one half, and provided over 60% of the offense. His reward: a slap in the face by Cleveland management. Perhaps it's only an opening number in the negotiations, but it is still insulting.

Cribbs decided not to force the Browns' hands as Braylon Edwards and Kellen Winslow Jr. did. He outplayed his contract in pursuit of fair compensation. He is now the undisputed best special teams player in the NFL, and a serious offensive weapon to boot. As the Look Man has been saying all season, "Pay the Man!"

The Andy Reid Syndrome II

If you want a good read on clock-management, check out *Football Clock Management* by John T. Reed. Reed is a PhD researcher who has turned NFL clock management into a science project. He speculates that allowing an opponent to score is one of the smartest, gutsiest moves in coaching.

The most infamous example occurred when then-Green Bay Packers coach Mike (the Walrus) Holmgren allowed Denver (no D) to score with 1:45 remaining in the Super Bowl. While the Walrus was roundly criticized, it was actually the right call because it put the ball back into the hands of gunslinger Brett Favre. Favre wasn't the Pope back then, but a true gunslinger that could put up points like no one else in the two minute offense.

Reed points out that the Walrus faced a similar situation versus Indy earlier in the '97 season. Instead of allowing the Colts to score, his defense stoned the rush but was unable to stop the clock. Indy knelt three times and calmly kicked the game winning FG. By not allowing the score, Holmgren guaranteed his offense would never see the ball again.

Pro teams get 35 seconds between each play, meaning that for every snap taken without a timeout, the clock will run 35 seconds. Since you have four downs to achieve a first down, 140 seconds is a magic number. If your team has no timeouts remaining and the other team has it with 140 or less seconds, you need to think about allowing a score.

Reed's rule also stipulates when you're down by eight or could be by allowing a touchdown, and your opponent can end the game but won't kneel, let it score. The Look Man would also consider defensive strength, ability to create turnovers, and other factors, but timeouts and clock management are huge.

Every team should have a clock management specialist right next to the coach. Instead of blowing timeouts to avoid delay of game penalties, keep them in your hip pocket. By managing timeouts, not only can you stop the clock, you sustain your ability to challenge a play right up to the 2:00 warning. You can't challenge without a timeout, and you can't guarantee your offense enough time to counter with a score.

The Eighth Man

Browns President Mike Holmgren was introduced to the Cleveland media this week, and retained Eric Mangina as head coach. The Look Man is not unhappy because the Browns finished with a four consecutive wins. The players were playing for the Walrus, not for Mangina, but the point is that Mangina took a rag-tag, talent-light group to four straight wins. The Browns executive management has now added the Walrus, with a GM to be named soon. With eleven draft picks in 2010, the future looks bright.



"I could still be back on the sidelines in 2011!"

THE LOOK AHEAD

Jets at Bengals (-2.5)

The Jets dismantled the Bengals last week in the finale of the Meadowlands. The game was over at halftime in the House of Hoffa, and it actually included several plays where the Jets O-line decimated Bengal defenders. On one particular play, the right guard pulled and knocked Rivers over backwards, with pieces of his helmet flying off in the process. Brutal.

This kind of physical pounding is more than just one team sitting starters. If rookie Jets QB Mark Sanchez can make enough plays to counter the zebras, the Jets will win in back-to-back games. Sanchez would also join Eli Manning and Joe Flacco as rookies who ate hot dogs on the sideline, er, won playoff starts.

Enquirer sportswriter Paul Daugherty did a nice piece on Johnny Carson Palmer for SI this week. Doc wonders why one of the most talented QBs in the league is being paid \$100 million to hand off. Cedric (The Butler) Benson is the big star of the Bengals, and backup RB Brian Leonard is probably the MVP. All Mr. Tonight Show does is hand off. Since Chris Henry went down, Palmer has been mediocre at best.

NFL Films did an incredible 50th anniversary special on the AFL which is being rebroadcast on the NFLN this month. It features current Jets coach Rex Ryan and his memories of the Jets. Ironically, the Bengals joined the AFC in 1968 only after a merger was a fait-acomplis. Apparently Paul Brown had less stomach for risk than his other AFL colleagues.

The Look Man will be attending this one in single digit wind-chill, hoping for a run dominated game that will mean a quick contest. On this 50th anniversary season, the Jets punch the Bengals in the mouth on Saturday, en route to the Drum for the AFC Divisional Playoffs. J-E-T-S, Jets! Jets! Jets!

Iggles at Pokes (-3.5)

This game always brings to mind the anniversary of the Bounty Bowl, where Iggles head coach Buddy Ryan paid bounties for Iggles defenders to take out key Dallas players, including the kicker. The game was contentious, leading to the hilarious Jimmah Johnson quote, "I tried to talk to Buddy, but he tuck his big bee-hind off the field!"

Buddy Ryan is best remembered for his Chicago Bears 46 defense and the 18-1 championship season under Ditka. Buddy started his pro career with the Jets and Weeb Ewbanks during the Joe Namath SB guarantee season. Romo has been white hot, and the Iggles lack of linebacking speed plays into his hands. If they double WR Miles (Steve) Austin, then TE Jason Witten goes crazy and vice versa. Speed RB Felix (The Cat) Jones rolls his eyes when he thinks of the edge room, but he can't really pick up the blitz. RT Marc Columbo may return for this game, but Doug Free has been playing well in his place.

The key has been Doomsday Lite, which was taken over by Wade (Captain Kangaroo) Phillips late in the year. Like Phillips, Doomsday is trying to earn their name back, and they have been doing fantastic. Two divisional opponents were shut out in the December playoff run, and Dallas knocked New Orleans from the ranks of the undefeated.

The Look Man still likes the Iggles' chances on Saturday. With all due respect to Doomsday Redux and Wade, Donovan McNabb is the most underrated winning QB in the history of the NFL. His numbers aren't flashy, but all he does it put up double digit win seasons with the least talent of any marquee QB in the business.

In the one season that McNabb had an All Pro wideout, he played in the Super Bowl. Nuff said. Iggles.

Baltimore at New England (-3.5)

Joe Flacco is said to have suffered the Sophomore Jinx, but in truth, he has better numbers than in 2008. That is odd, because Baltimore seems to be a worse team this season. They have a fantastic running game, but the passing game will go only as far as Derek Mason can take it.

New England lost slot receiver Wes Welker to a non-contact injury last week in Houston, and it is a major concern. The Chowds running game is suspect, and their defense has been mediocre. Tom (Zoolander) Brady has a broken ring finger, and perhaps three ribs to go with it, depending upon whom you believe (Belichick disavowed last week's insider report by Charlie Casserly of CBS Sports).

The Look Man thinks this game will be one of the better games. The Chowds have a little edge in the secondary, and sometimes, matchups are everything. Chowds cover and win against a Ravens team that shouldn't have made the playoffs.



"Casserly says you've got a great set of lungs, but what does he know?"

Breen Gay at Arizona (+1)

Believe it or not, the defending NFC champs are GETTING a point at home against a wild card. The Cheeseheads dismantled the Deadbirds in Week Seventeen, and the odds makers forecast another win.

The key seems to be injuries to WR Anquan Boldin and CB Dominique Cromartie, but WR Larry Fitzgerald hasn't been the same since getting his knee pinned on MNF weeks ago.

The Cheesehead defense has used an All Pro season by CB Charles Woodson to leverage a solid defense featuring rookie LB Clay Matthews Jr. Matthews was in the running for defensive Rookie of the Year with ex-teammate Brian Cushing. Matthews brings an intensity to a group of very talented linebackers in Green Bay.

The Look Man predicted that the Deadbirds would wilt and miss the playoffs. The next best thing would be to lose to the Pack two weeks in a row. Done and done, as the Pack covers and wins.

EPILOGUE

The AFC playoff picture was settled in the final week, but what a mess. The games were blowouts, and the Commish is looking for a way to fix it. The truth is that there is no easy fix; the league needs to do a better job of scheduling or re-seed the playoffs.

The storylines will revolve around QBs, but the Look Man likes the back-story: the Packers, Ravens and Jets are all strong running teams that can make noise in the postseason. Running the ball and stopping the run was the mantra of the 80's. The Look Man thinks it returns in the Y2Kteens.

One other item of note. The Look Man calls it the Eleven Point Rule. If a team is playing in a nationally televised game and goes up by eleven, it cannot by league rule run the ball three times consecutively. If a team violates this rule, there will be a bogus holding call. Even dive plays are subject to the world's fastest holding calls in this situation.

The Jets should pay particular attention to this rule. The NFL wants the Bengals to succeed, and they will be getting love from the Zebras anyway. Sanchez must throw just to keep the zebras honest.

Peace,

The Look Man