

## **THE LOOKMAN REPORT 2012**

### **Week Seventeen – The Wild Card Zone**

*"Brings new meaning to the term 'the whole nine yards.' " -- LA Times football writer Sam Farmer following Adrian Peterson finishing nine yards shy of breaking Eric Dickerson's single-season rushing record of 2,109 yards.*

The Sci-Fi Channel runs a New Year's Day Twilight Zone marathon featuring an odd little man in a dark suit. The odd little man was named Rod Serling, and made magic with his typewriter.

The 2012 NFL season came to a screeching conclusion for twenty teams in Week Seventeen. The rest of the teams are either waiting at home, or entering something the Look Man calls The Wild Card Zone. It's a zone that exists somewhere between the pit of Man's fears, and the summit of his athleticism. There is another dimension; not of sight or sound, but of mind. It is as vast as space, as timeless as Eternity. There's an old expression: if the shoe fits, wear it. But be careful; it might take you one step too close to...The Wild Card Zone.

In this case, the shoe was a glass slipper, one that was too tight for Tony Romo and the Pokes or Jay Cutler and da Bears. Those boys are sitting next to Burgess Meredith in a perfidy of their own making. For them, there's always next year. For their fans, it's like watching a horror film that they've lived many times prior.

Without further ado, the Week that Was:

#### **LAGNIAPPE**

##### *The Coaching Cliff?*

The Look Man could scarcely believe the toll on NFL head coaches following the 2012 season, with seven guys given a version of the home game. Andy (The Walrus II) Reid, Pat Shurmur and Norv Turner all earned their rewards, Chicago stunned the world by firing Lovie (Thurston Howell III) Smith with a .750 winning percentage. It simply reinforces that Jay Cutler is a coach killer. After starting out 7-1 on the strength of a defense that scored, Chicago tanked the second half and missed the playoffs.

Maybe it's just the Look Man, but when you trade all of your draft picks for a coach killing QB, it's no surprise that your O-line goes south. Da Bears lucked into Brandon Marshall at wideout, but still have no depth. It's like George Foreman late in his career; he could still fight, but he was too old and slow to throw combinations.

The coaching carousel began in earnest with a number of college guys getting love. The Browns are looking at Oregon coach (Chocolate) Chip Kelly, who is attempting to "pull a Pete Carroll" and leave before sanctions destroy his program.

That chuck and duck offense won't work in the NFL, and the Browns would do better by going after Stanford head man David Shaw. The Look Man believes they should go the way of the Stillers and get a young Mike Tomlin or other defensive specialist. With the sixth pick overall, they can get enough talent to compete in the AFC Asgard, where Blitzburgh and B-More are long in the tooth, and Cincy is a pretender.

The postseason is here, and the NFL doesn't really need the college game to promote itself. Better to spend that effort on the real games and not pursuing guys who have never worked a day in the National...Football...League.



*Would you trust this man?*

### Miles High

Peyton Manning and the Donkeys are looking at home field for the AFC playoffs. When you play at Investigation Field at Mile High, that means the zebras give you the benefit of most of the laundry.

But Manning has looked the part of the Comeback Player of the Year, making receivers Eric Decker and Demaryius Thomas look better than they really are. The road to the Lombardi in the AFC is a tough one indeed, and the Look Man believes the deck is stacked for Denver.

With the legalization of marijuana in Colorado, it should bring new meaning to the words "mile high stadium" in the Divisional Playoffs.

### Angels With Dirty Faces

Robert Griffin III crashed Mike Shanahan's news conference this week, slipping in the back door and taking an aisle seat for The Rat's presser. It didn't take long for the reporters to move from a bad Jimmy Cagney impression to the Real Deal, and Bob Griffin soon had a microphone in front of him.

Shanahan retorted, "You got me by surprise there. Who is this guy?" "What did you do for New Year's?" Griffin asked. "I tried to put a good game plan together. I wasn't sure how healthy you were, so it was hard without you calling me," answered Shanahan, still chortling away.

Shanahan is the worst kind of coach, a guy like Andy Reid who uses you up, and then blames his own failure on the damaged players. Reid made a career of this in Philly, dumping Donovan McNabb, Brian Westbrook and soon, Mike Vick.

Terrell Davis garnered Shanahan two rings in Denver, but can't sniff the Hall of Fame. Elway's yellow jacket and GM role was bought and paid for with Davis' knees. More recently, The Rat had RGIII getting blown up on pass plays just to prove Shanahan's offensive wizardry.

Washington is playing with house money after playing win-or-else games for nearly two months. The difference is the ligament sprain in Bob's right knee, which limits his explosiveness. He was able to beat the Pokes on one wheel, but now it's playoff level football. The stakes are higher and the hitting is fiercer.

Bob has been impressive with the knee, posting a solid passer rating. He now has to face a Seattle squad that has bad intentions and a worse temperament. Maybe the Rat will take a few snaps in his place this week?

## **THE LOOK AHEAD**

The Wild Card Week is here, and the matchups are scintillating. We have three rookie QBs in the tourney, and all are playing spectacularly. More importantly, the League is looking at some great new blood in the form of Seattle, Indy and Washington.

Without further ado, the Wild Card Lead Pipe Stone Cold locks:

### Cincinnati at Houston (-4.5)

The Baltimore Bengals game was a joke, with half of the former in street clothes, and the latter helmed by Bruce Gradkowski, who isn't even a household name in his own house. Andy (The Red Rifle) Dalton is getting good press, but this offense has gone south of late, being carried by the underrated defense led by D-Co Mike Zimmer.

The Bengals return to the scene of the crime 2011, where Houston beat their heads in with a rookie QB TJ Yates. The Look Man is curious why Houston is in the offensive doldrums of late, but it has to be injuries to the O-line.

The Bengals have a puncher's chance here, but only if the puncher is George Foreman. Houston has more depth, more skill players and better coaching. Plus, the Bengals always struggle against:

- 1) Big wideouts like Andre (the Giant) Johnson; they have no big time CBs, and lack speed at safety.
- 2) Good TEs like Owen Daniel and former players like WR Kevin Walter and CB Jonathan (Jon-Jo) Joseph.

Houston's secondary has been awful lately, but the Look Man believes Jon-Jo is getting healthy. The wild card, excuse the pun, is QB Matt Schaub, a guy who can blow a game with turnovers. Schaub is highly dependent on Arian Foster and the run game, ripping off big chunks of yardage behind play action.

ESPN's Ron (Jaws) Jaworski is all-in on Cincy, meaning the Look Man is all out. Jaws also predicted Seattle's Russell Wilson would be a bust. Houston covers and wins.

### Minnesota at Green Bay (-7.5)

The Hornheads looked outstanding in a must win over Green Bay last week, culminating in Adrian Peterson eclipsing the 2,000 yard mark. Even QB Christian Ponder emerged from the Celebrity Girlfriend/Wife slump, forcing Rich Eisen on NFLN to tweet, "Two words I didn't think I'd tweet today: Ponder ballin'."

The magnitude of Peterson's dominance is not understood by most fans. To rush for two large when you have a mediocre QB is like pulling Jessica Alba in a bar full of male models. Dude is unbelievable even against nine in the box. To the Look Man, there is no doubt about who the real MVP of the NFL should be.

Still, beating a division opponent twice in a season is exceeded only by winning at Flambeau, where the zebras take a different interpretation of the rulebook. Look for the Pack to get on a roll with the return of Charles Woodson in the secondary. Woodson is like an interception Jedi; he uses mind tricks to force QBs to give it up - - - just ask Jay Cutler.

Pack is back, rolling in this one. Green Bay.

### Seattle at DC (+3)

The Pokes provided the Genocide Victims with timely New Year's gift last week, and Washington is quietly the hottest team in the NFL. After starting 3-6 and having Mike (The Rat) Shanahan pronounce them dead on arrival, the GVs have swept the table.

They now face a big time, physical team in the form of the Seattle Seahawks. While the pundits point to Seattle's road woes, one has to look closely at what the Hawks did following a

physical win in Chicago. After that game, the Hawks stuck skyrocketed and the Bears were on path to fire one of the finest coaches in the NFL.

Washington wins by putting pressure on the defensive edge, as reflected by the way they dominated Dallas last week. DeMarcus Ware and Anthony Spencer got used like toilet tissue at FedEx Field by RGIII and RB Alfred Morris. Every time you looked around one of the Pokes was getting torched on the edge.

But Seattle is a different team. They have giant corners that go 6'3" and 225, augmented by rookie of the year candidate LB/DE Bruce Irvin. If you try that edge crap on them, you're going to end up concussed and violated.

The Look Man likes Seattle in a road win. If they can stand the pressure applied by the Zebras to make RGIII and the GVs America's New Team, they come away with a huge win, and an emotional advantage in the postseason.

They've already proven they can beat the Chowds, Niners and Cheeseheads. They match up well with Atlanta. Plus, Seattle has the coolest uniforms in the NFL...bar none. Watch out, there's a new sheriff in town and his name is Reggie Hammond, er, Russell Wilson.

Hawks cover and win against a beat up RGIII.



*Reggie Hammond, I presume?*

### Indy at Baltimore (-7)

The line is rising on this one following the news that Ray Lewis' admission that he really did stab those dudes in Atlanta. Well, the real news is that Ray-Ray is retiring, and despite the fact that he is one of the greatest linebackers in NFL history, it's high time.

Ray-Lew has been getting pushed all over the field for most of the last two seasons, and he is moving on before he has to get the special Brett Favre Jersey. You know, the one with the hole in the back so that the fork can stick out. The retirement announcement comes just in time to motivate a Dumpster Ducks squad that has underachieved again in 2012.

Ray never could keep his mouth closed, on or off the field, and he has already negotiated a sweet deal to appear on the Four Letter Network. It's ironic, as he is the only Super Bowl MVP in recent memory to not get the Disney deal.

Disney didn't allow Ray-Ray to speak those inimitable words after knocking off the Jynts. That honor went instead to Trent Dilfer, and signaled the end of his employment with the Ducks. "You're not going to DisneyWorld Trent, you're going to the Unemployment Line."

Ray-Lew went on to resurrect his image, and has become an icon. If you haven't seen the Madden NFL or Chunky Soup commercials with Ray, you're missing out. No one has rehabilitated his image this well since Richard Nixon.

The spread is pretty reflective of the emotional bounce from the announcement, especially given the lack of health on this defense. Ed Reed, Haloti Ngata and Ray-Ray are all banged up, and the rest of the linebacking and secondary is not much better. If not for the emotional return of Chuck (Strong) Pagano in Week Seventeen, the Look Man would not believe the number.

Ducks get the W this week, despite the zebras giving Andrew (They Call Me Mister) Luck(y) too much love. The Chuckstrong story is great theater, and the NFL needs all of the positive PR it can get these days. Ducks cover and win.



*"I'm not a crook!"*

## **EPILOGUE**

Wild Card Week is one of the best in the NFL season. Not only do we get a bonus Saturday doubleheader, the matchups are typically solid. Teams that got hot at the end are scratching and clawing to avoid going fishing.

Perhaps just as compelling is the knowledge that the NFL season is coming to a close. By the first weekend in February, we'll be champing at the bit for college basketball and spring training will be the talk of the town.

The NFL is the sports Goliath and seeing it rise and fall each year is like the Groundhog Day movie. No matter how what stratagem you may devise, the end of the season catches you flat-footed.

So we celebrate Wild Card week with the realization that the fun is nearly over. Like the Look Man says, "The party don't stop from Turkey Day to the Super Bowl, baby!"

Peace,

The Look Man