

THE LOOK MAN REPORT 2018
Week 17 – How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb

“Stability should not be confused with satisfaction. I will not overlook how poorly we accounted for ourselves following a 3-1 start.” – Sacksonville owner Shad Khan (Noonien Singh) after a Week 17 loss. Khan retained coach Doug Marrone, EVP Tom Coughlin and GM Dave Caldwell, but relocated their offices to Ceti Alpha Six, a remote office building on the outskirts of town.

PROLOGUE

In 1964, director Stanley Kubrick created an incredible movie about an insane general who nearly starts a nuclear World War III holocaust while politicians flail about. The movie features Academy Award winner George C. Scott, Peter Sellers and the inimitable Slim Pickens. It is a cautionary tome about the dangers of absolute power, and what happens in a system without appropriate checks and balances. If you haven't seen this black and white classic, do yourself a favor and stream it.

There are parallels between that movie and the NFL. Checks and balances should be established to ensure that the NFL can get out of its own way. The resolution of replay from New York NFL offices is one issue, limiting Zebra independence is another. The officiating in 2018 reached its nadir, with more than a few games violating the eye test. Bottom line: let the games decide themselves, and the fans win.

Roger (Rabbit) Goodell has been missing in action, avoiding the camera like Jimmy Carter during the Iran hostage crisis. And that was clearly intentional for the lowly regarded commissioner, who gets booed each time he appears. Now that Goodell has the ultimate control, he has merely to sit back and watch his evil plan come to fruition. Rabbit can ensure which owners win championships, which cities get teams, and now, which casinos become the “official casino of the NFL.” We need to stop this before it ends in the total annihilation of professional football.

Without further conspiracy theories, the Week that Was:

LAGNIAPPE

Buying a Ring – Part I

NFL GMs received a pass on the most recent White Monday, in which six head coaches were sacked. The league is looking at a 25% turnover in head coaches, and that doesn't bode well for continuity.

Eight head coaches and innumerable assistants are out of work while general managers retain their jobs. Steve Keim is less than a year removed from a felony DUI, Mike Maccagnan in New York stinks, and Jason Licht in Tampa have all made questionable deals for franchises which should and could be better.

Hornheads GM Rick Spielman attempted to purchase a ring by dumping playoff QB Case Keenum for Kirk (KC and the Sunshine Band) Cousins, giving Cousins \$84 million guaranteed. They end up missing the playoffs with way too much talent to do so. And Spielman keeps his job?

Donkeys GM John (the Mascot) Elway drafted Paxton Lynch, a QB who is now out of the NFL, and is on his fourth head coach in six seasons. The only good moves by Elway were the free agent acquisition of Peyton Manning and drafting pass rushers like Von Miller and Bradley Chubb who fell into his lap. Look for coaches to avoid Denver, a team whose owner is dying and whose GM is a first-rate a-hole.

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Elway at a recent press conference

In Cleveland, former GM Sashi Brown accrued high draft picks only to be terminated. Current Browns GM John Dorsey parlayed those inherited picks into a playoff ready squad. Dorsey is now interviewing head coaching candidates in a weird management structure in which both he and the head coach report directly to owner Jimmy (Con Man) Haslam.

The current NFL trend features bad owners aligning themselves with marginal GMs. Coaches like Arizona's Steve Wilks are deemed dispensable after one year, even when they begin the year bereft of talent and front office leadership. And owners are tossing out the babies instead of the bathwater.

These (and other) GMs deserved a pink slip, but didn't get them based upon their relationships with greedy owners who want guys who think and look just like them. Instead of a consortium with diverse ideas and talent, the NFL has become a homogeneous group of navel gazing rich guys. They want to buy a ring instead of getting one the old-fashioned way - - - earning it.

Buying a Ring – Part II

NFLN's Mike Mayock was hired as the GM of the Oakland Raiders this week. Mayock, whose draft analysis and Xs and Os are first rate, will now serve as the sacrificial lamb for Jon (Chucky) Gruden. Chucky joked in the press conference that if good players were drafted by the draft-rich Raiders, he would take the credit; if they failed, it would be Mayock. There's truth in every joke.

Many GM candidates declined to interview with the Raiders, likely due to Gruden's presence. He not only sent stars Amari Cooper and Khalil Mack packing, he failed to build consensus. Gruden won in Tampa with Tony (Skeletor) Dungy's players and has never posted a championship season. Gruden and his \$100 million guaranteed contract may not even make it to Vegas if this team struggles again in 2019.

Going, going, gone?

The 2018 season may have seen the end of a lot of guys who have been very good for a very long time. The list is a virtual who's-who of NFL talent, stretching from the specialty positions to the trenches and beyond. It will be a sad day when these guys finally call it quits. Or, in the words of the Father of Professional Football, Paul Brown, "Son, it's time to move on to your life's work."

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| Name | Position | Team |
|--------------------------|-----------------|------------------|
| Andrew Whitworth | LT | Rams |
| Adam Vinatieri | K | Ponies |
| Julius Peppers | DE | Black Cats |
| Josh McCown | QB | Jets |
| Eli Manning | QB | Jynts |
| Marshawn Lynch | RB | Raiders |
| Frank (Al) Gore | RB | Marine Mammals |
| Larry Fitzgerald | WR | Deadbirds |
| Phil Dawson | K | Deadbirds |
| Sea-Bass Janikowski | K | Seahawks |
| Antonio Gates | TE | Bolts |
| Vernon Davis | TE | Genocide Victims |
| | | |
| Shane Lechler | P | FA |
| Sean Lee | LB | Pokes |
| Andrew Sendejo | SS | Hornheads |
| Michael Johnson | DE | Bengals |
| Chase Daniel | QB | Bears |
| Adam (Packman) Jones | CB | Donkeys |
| Terrell (T-Sizzle) Suggs | DE | Dumpster Ducks |
| Jonathan Joseph | CB | Slim Shadies |

The current crop of rookies is incredible, with superior talent coming out of the 2018 draft class. Guys like Mayfield, Darnold, Lamar Jackson, Darius Leonard, Eddie Jackson, the Chubb cousins and others will step into these roles.

Browns Town?

The head coaching search starts in earnest after the Browns went 5-3 under interim HC Gregg Williams. They did it by leveraging OC Freddie Kitchens and (Cake) Baker Mayfield, but the defense is the real story.

The Browns need to look seriously at a defensive head coach who will put the ‘dog’ back in Dawg Pound. A blue-collar town needs a like-minded defense, especially in the AFC Asgard division with Baltimore and Blitzburgh.

Here’s hoping the talk of Chokelahoma’s Lincoln Riley and Chowds OC Josh McDaniel’s is just that. These guys are frauds who would capitulate to the knuckleheaded C-Town fan base. Former head coach Jerry (the Man in Black) Glanville once opined that when you listen to the fans, you will soon be sitting right next to them. The game is to win, and the NFL stands for “Not for Long” if you fail.

The Tennessee Flaming Thumbtacks had six primetime games in the last eleven weeks of the 2018 season. They are now fishing in the Tennessee River instead of the postseason tournament. The Browns are sure to be network darlings in 2019, courtesy of (Cake) Baker Mayfield, who set the NFL Rookie record for TD passes on Sunday. Before Browns Fan goes celebrating, he should look at this year’s TV darlings.

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The Look Man saw five wins on the Browns schedule, and the team surpassed that total, finishing 7-8-1. They were flat out robbed in at least two more games and could easily be part of the postseason mix if not for the zebras. Still, if the new coaching staff doesn't focus on running the football, the Browns will be fishing in January 2020 instead of learning how to win in the tournament.

THE LOOKAHEAD

Wild Card weekend is one of the Look Man's favorites in all of sports. It features the combination of the best underdog matchups with supposed home field advantage, and therefore, the best opportunity for upsets.

Saturday NFL football hearkens back to the Look Man's childhood memories of *This Week in the NFL* and the best soundtrack evah. It's the number one reason why the NCAA does not want to expand the playoffs to eight teams; no way the college game can compete with the National...Football...League.

Without further table-setting, the Lookahead for Wild Card Weekend:

Saturday:

Ponies at Slim Shadies (-1.5/48.5)

Boomer Esiason's old college roommate, Frank (The Fourth) Reich, has been the Coach of the Year, parlaying a 1-5 start into a real run at the Lombardi. He has done it with (Captain) Andrew Luck, the Comeback Player of the Year with 39 TD passes, and some excellent drafting. The Ponies picked up LB Darius Leonard, RG Quentin Nelson, and returned FS Malik Hooker from injury.

Their reward is facing one of the toughest defenses in the AFC. Houston features the Triplets on D: Jadaveon Clowney, JJ Watt and Whitney Mercilus, the most aptly named linebacker in the NFL. These guys are no joke, and Luck, who has been sacked only 18 times this year, will have his head on a swivel.

On the other side of the ball, Houston QB Deshaun Watson was sacked a league-high 62 times and still managed a nearly 70% completion rate and a QB rating above 100. Watson was a Comeback Player of the Year candidate as well, returning from an ACL after a lightning rise in 2017. Houston has a balanced offense and rugged defense, and this will be a tough out for any team in the AFC except New England, which owns Houston.

Indy and Houston split the season series, and this one promises to be good. Watson has thrown only two picks in the last ten games, and he is defying logic despite holding the ball and taking too many sacks. Ponies TE Eric Ebron finished second in the NFL behind Antonio Brown with 13 receiving TDs, and he is a weapon, especially teamed with WR TY Hilton, love child of the hotel magnate Conrad and half-brother of celebrity twit Paris Hilton.

The Look Man has an expression: in a tight matchup, take the best QB. Well, both of these guys are good, but Luck has been to the playoffs, his defense is underrated, and his coach won a ring in 2017. Reich, who holds both the NCAA and NFL records for largest comeback wins by a QB, will lead this team, and their playoff beards on to the next round. Adam (the Winemaker) Vinatieri hits a long one to seal the win. Ponies.

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"...and the kids have been so good this year, too...guess I'll have to kick another game winner."

Seahawks at Pokes (-2/43)

What a great matchup. We have the best running team in the NFL against Zeke Elliott and Doomsday Lite.

Seattle won the regular season meeting, but so what? The Pokes are a different team with Amari Cooper, despite the drops in Week 16. Dak Prescott Campbell-souped his way to a win good in the finale in the Meadowlands, tossing a dime to (Gnat King) Cole Beasley as time ran down.

Prescott has defied the odds in 2018, and he did it on Sunday without his partner in crime Zeke Elliott, and with a Raiders version of Amari Cooper, who dropped balls all day in a hard-hitting affair. Dak's dime to Beasley was followed by a do-or-die two-point conversion to rookie WR Michael Gallup (Poll) for the win. The Look Man clearly undervalued Dak in 2018.



The Look Man has been hard on Dak in 2018, but his taste in companions is not in question

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In Seattle, (Dange)Russ Wilson has been outstanding, leading with actions not words. The Hawks are the best rushing team by a large margin, and the recent returns of (Angry) Doug Baldwin and LB KJ Wright have turned them into a wrecking ball. They have some tight wins and their mettle is battle tested.

Doomsday Lite plays outrageously at the Jerrah Dome, and it will be a loud playoff atmosphere. The Hawks RG JR Sweezy and LT Germaine Ifedi are nicked up and they have a tall task facing excellent LBs Jaylon Smith and Leighton Van der Esch. Perhaps more telling, the Pokes D-Coordinator, Kris Richard, is a Seattle castoff who knows their personnel and has an axe to grind with Pete Carroll.

The difference: Dak was sacked 56 times in 2018, second only to Watson. (Dange)Russ and the Legion of Boom Lite will sweep in 2018, setting up a bad meeting between Jason Garrett and the Jones Gang. Hawks.

Sunday:

Bolts at Dumpster Ducks (-2.5/41.5)

Another game, another rematch. Baltimore got into the postseason by beating the Bolts on the road in Week 16. The Ducks received more than a little help from the Zebras in that win, a physical matchup between an injury-depleted Bolts team and a playoff hungry Baltimore squad. The Dumpster Ducks win in Week 17 over Cleveland was also zebra-aided with a goal line fumble overturned by a quick whistle.

The Bolts are a 7-1 road team this season; in point of fact, even their home games are road games. No other AFC team has more than five road wins. The Bolts will make rookie QB Lamar Jackson beat them with his arm, while Baltimore attempts to blitz Philip Rivers back into the stone age of football.

Everyone is touting the B-more turnaround, and John (Not Jim) Harbaugh deserves COTY consideration. The Look Man just doesn't see a rookie QB with a pedestrian arm beating a road-tested veteran squad in his first postseason game.

Baltimore, like the Pokes, can only win one way: smothering defense and just enough offense to milk the clock. Head Coach Anthony Lynn and the Bolts defense are not chopped liver, and they win by scoring early and forcing B-More to throw. Bolts.

Iggles at Bears (-6/41)

Da Bears are more than Khalil (Return of the) Mack, with DT Akiem Hicks, DE Leonard (Pretty Boy) Floyd, and Pro Bowlers CB Kyle Fuller and FS Eddie Jackson. The formula for the Monsters of the Furniture Mart is simple: pressure the passer and allow the Pro Bowl secondary to eat. Return of the Mack gets all the ink, but these guys are serious on D.

Fuller and Jackson are not yet household names, but Fuller tied for the NFL lead with seven picks, and Jackson has three scores in 2018. Bears Fan likes to pooh-pooh Fuller's contributions, but the Cheeseheads offered him nearly \$13 million to change colors. Chicago matched and is laughing all the way to the postseason while Green Bay is ice fishing in Lake Michigan.

On offense, da Bears have QB Mitchell (the Big) Trubisky, former Iggles TE Trey Burton and RB Tarik Cohen. Cohen is the best of the bunch and his brothers Joel and Ethan directed such film classics as

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Fargo, The Big Lebowski, and O Brother, Where Art Thou? Tarik is no director, but he can cut like a director editing film. This kid is spectacular.

The matchups are an intriguing contrast in styles. D-Coordinator Vic Fangio's defense employs a zone-based blitz scheme, and the Iggles offense is built around beating zone. Philly floods the zone on one side, bringing former Bear Alshon Jeffrey or TE Zach Ertz underneath. If Nick Foles can buy time, they could beat coverage, especially if Eddie Jackson is not fully recovered from that ankle.

On offense, Matt Nagy is a mad scientist with a crazy misdirection concept which uses speed to force the defense into fast, inaccurate reads. Nagy is a certified alchemist from the Andy Reid coaching tree. The result is like a Three Card Monte card game on speed; you follow the fakes and factor back Tarik Cohen or TE Trey Burton wind up with the rock. Once the ball is in their hands, the big play is nearly a guarantee. All of this misdirection masks the fact that QB Mitch (The Big) Trubisky is only mediocre.

Here's the problem: the Bears have not played in a meaningful playoff game in this decade and the Iggles are defending champs. Both Nagy and Iggles chief Doug Pedersen are fruit from the same coaching tree, and they worked together for years in Philly and KC.

Take the better QB, as St. Nick and the Iggles raise the ante on a balmy 30F evening in Chicago. Iggles.



The real MVP of da Bears. Oh, and also, some dude named "Mitch"

EPILOGUE

Super Bowl LII was the apex of offense, with records in yardage, scoring and viewership. The NFL is attempting to recapture that lightning in a bottle, manipulating the seedings and officiating to ensure that the matchups align with market share. Perhaps more importantly, offenses are employing inferior college tactics to obtain early leads; the problem is that these same offenses have no real way to let the air out of the football late. In the NFL, you pass to score; and run to win.

There's an old expression: defense wins championships. The Look Man happens to believe in that theory, and defenses have caught up in 2018. The proliferation of college offense has made a statement, and the NFL defensive brain trust has answered back.

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The Look Man is very excited about the postseason. Defense has always won championships and Super Bowl LII was no exception – Philly got one stop late in the game, and that sealed the win.

This year's tournament features two teams with incredible defenses in Chicago and Baltimore. Another few – New Orleans, the Pokes, Rams, Houston, and Bolts - have superior defenses. And then there's the Chowds, whose defense relies mainly on their teammates in black and white striped jerseys.

The Look Man likes this year's contestants: Baltimore and Indy are dangerous teams no one wants to face (especially New England); Chicago and Houston have physical defenses that can ruin your whole week; and KC, the Rams and New Orleans can drop an embarrassing fifty burger on you. All in all, we have a group that is pretty much guaranteed to please everyone. And that ain't easy.

The Look Man no longer fears the bomb; defenses have figured out the key to stopping college plays and formations. This postseason becomes a referendum on coaching and strategy, not sleight of hand.

Irrespective of the outcome, the postseason field looks outstanding. We are guaranteed to see good games with slobberknocking action, high flying offense and strategic clock management. And when it comes to predicting the outcomes, nobody knows nothing.

Let the games begin!

Peace,

The Look Man