

THE LOOKMAN REPORT 2019

Week Eighteen – Walk the (Under)Dog

"My sister explained to my dad one time when she was explaining why she wanted to divorce. Dad loved her husband, and he said, 'What's gotten into you?' And she said, 'I don't hear bells. But the bottom line is, I heard bells.'" – Pokes Owner Jerrah Jones on his interview with former Packers head coach Mike McCarthy.

PROLOGUE

The Pokes, Panthers and Jyntz got their head coaches this week, and the Look Man is not hating. It only makes sense for the Browns to wait until the Divisional Playoff weekend is done in order to snatch a guy from that group. Niners D-Co Robert Saleh and Hornheads O-Co Mike Stefanski are in play in C-town, so we may hear bells soon.

Wild Card Weekend was wild as New Orleans got gut-punched yet again, New England got dominated, and both Brees and Brady looked old. The Texans and Vikes went to OT to garner wins, and the Iggles went down hard after yet another unfortunate injury to QB Carson Wentz.

It now comes down to nut-cutting time as we roll into the Divisional Playoff round. The tension ratchets up another notch on the inexorable road to the Lombardi.

LAGNIAPPE

Bad Moon Rising...

There will be a full moon for the Divisional Playoff weekend, a harbinger of good things for exciting sports outcomes. The Wolf Moon in January is named for hungry wolf packs howling outside Native American villages in the cold and deep snows of midwinter. The Native American villagers began calling January's full moon the Wolf Moon.

Like ravening wolves, the Vikings, Flaming Thumbtacks and Seahawks would really like to snatch up some tender home team meat this weekend. Howl, on three.

More on Winchester

Tampa Bay O-Coordinator Byron Leftwich is the primary person responsible for Jameis Winston's 5,103 yard/33 TD passing season. Leftwich took a pedestrian passer, taught him to read defenses, and turned him into a prolific passer. The only problem is that Winston keeps deferring to his arm talent when the reads say otherwise. The resultant picks are on him, not Leftwich.

Leftwich would make a fine head coach if the NFL were colorblind. Bruce (BA) Arians is doing a fine job filling out his staff with minority coaches, primarily on the offensive side, but he is the exception.

Former Arizona and Bengals QB (Johnny) Carson Palmer believes Winston needs another season in the system. "You don't have that experience in Year One," Palmer said to the Tampa Bay Times. "You need Year One to go back and watch the film and see yourself doing it wrong and the receivers seeing themselves doing it wrong and then Year Two, really things start to click. That chemistry starts to develop and that trust and that confidence in the offense starts to develop. If Jameis is back in Tampa, I would expect Year Two to be a massive year for him."

The Look Man agrees, but Winston needs a short leash. You simply cannot average nearly two picks per game.

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If the Bucs agree with Palmer about what Winston can do with time in the offense under his belt, it seems unlikely that they'd let him walk away this offseason but the message out of Tampa hasn't been a clear one in either direction to this point.

Diversity?

The Rooney Rule is clearly not working as intended, and Eric (Sleeping with) Bienemy in KC, Leslie Frazier (Buffalo), Marvin Lewis and others are waiting on the sidelines while retreads like Pat Shurmur, Josh McDaniels, and Mike McCarthy get all of the love.

How does a league that is sixty percent staffed by minority players have only three minority head coaches? It's like the NHL having 20 African American head coaches - - it defies the laws of average.

The Look Man would like to see the NFL incentive the hiring of minorities, perhaps proffering compensatory draft picks. This incentive could turn the tide in a situation where there is no salary cap. Many teams are paying coaches who were fired years ago, and we are talking millions of wasted dollars.

The players cannot get guaranteed contracts unless they are QBs; coaching contracts are not subject to the salary cap, and are fully guaranteed until and unless they take another position with another team. At that point, the original team simply pays the difference between the guarantee and the new salary.

THE LOOKAHEAD

Week Nineteen, the Divisional Playoffs, is one of the best weekends in sports. It rivals the first weekend of March Madness for excitement, and sets the table for the Conference Championships. Football on Saturday and Sunday is always a pleasure and these matchups are full of suspense. It could be the toughest week to pick of the entire season.

Saturday:

Minnesota at Frisco (-7)

The Vikes defeated the Saints with a very questionable and very uncalled Offensive Pass Interference on Rudolph's TD catch. What was not questionable was the poor coaching by HC Sean Payton and bad execution by Drew Brees. New Orleans bows out again in a walkoff, and the Payton-Brees Era is starting to look like a lost opportunity.

Cousins seemingly got the 'chokes in big games' monkey off his back, and his reward is a YUGE game in Frisco. Luckily, his Hornheads defense is the real reason they beat New Orleans. If they get pressure on Jimmy G the way they did in the Superdome, watch out.

The Look Man got a newfound appreciation for Minny, and that D-line and front seven is no joke. If you have not heard of DT/DE Ifeadi Odenigbo, you're going to. The DE from Northwestern joins Danielle Hunter and Everson Griffen as headhunters, and Jimmy G is going to need to run for his life.

The Niners have a defense of their own, and Nick Bosa and Richard Sherman have something to say about the outcome. Jaquiski Tartt and Kwon Alexander rejoin the squad after injuries, and Head Coach Kyle Shanahan is no joke. If Shanahan runs the rock and avoids the mistakes he made as O-Coordinator in Super Bowl LI, the Niners win handily.

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Cousins turns it over twice, Mike Zimmer makes the boneheaded decision to blitz on every down, and the Hornheads lose. Niners.

Tennessee at Baltimore (-9.5) Pepto Bismol Upset Pick

Baltimore arrives rested and ready following a well-deserved bye week as the Number One seed. This team has the best resume of any in the playoffs, having beaten the Niners, Bills, Patriots and Texans in 2019. Their two losses were to KC and Cleveland, and the latter isn't in the tournament.

Still, if you review that Week Four Cleveland win at Baltimore, you will notice that the game plan was exactly like the one likely to be employed by Tennessee: run the football down their throats. Derrick (John) Henry is two hundred fifty pounds of a rolling ball of butcher knives, perfect for this game plan. the Flaming Thumbtacks should change their official name to: The Team No One Wants to Play.

QB Lamar (L-Jack City) Jackson is the MVP, and he will play a large role in the outcome. Still, you have to take the discussion about the prowess of the Ravens defense with more than one grain of salt. Any defense can be great if they are only on the field for 15 minutes per game. The Baltimore double digit offensive drives are reminiscent of the old Bengals teams under Sam Wyche. Even Reggie Williams can play middle linebacker if he doesn't play too many minutes.

Ryan Tannehill threw for only 72 yards in the win over New England, and this secondary may be better. You cannot throw at Marcus Peters, but perhaps you don't have to. The Look Man would focus on TE Jonnu Smith and pound the rock. Two TE formation would be preferred, and you keep running the football. Yes, there will be some suspicious holding calls, but that's when you torch them with speed.

Tennessee matches up well with Baltimore and the game should be excellent. Look for the Flaming Thumbtacks to cover and win in an upset. Tacks.



Things may be much larger than they appear...

Sunday:

Houston at Kansas City (-9.5)

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Apparently, Vegas has seen Bill O'Brien coach and they think it will finally catch up with the Texans. QB Deshaun (Houdini) Watson saved Billy O's bacon with some incredible magic tricks in the Wild Card Weekend, and Vegas doesn't believe it will happen twice in a row. The Look Man concurs; hopefully there won't be a wet paper bag on the sidelines, because O'Brien could not coach his way out of one.

As a side note, everyone focused on Watson's athleticism is missing the point. There are a lot of guys who can get out of sacks and run for touchdowns. But the guys who can avoid the rush with spin moves and come up firing can be counted on one hand with fingers remaining. Watson doesn't lose his read under pressure; his eyes are always down field and he is always ready to throw. Toss in his nose for the goal line, as demonstrated by the two-point conversion in Wild Card Weekend, and you have the whole package. With due respect to the incredible contributions of JJ Watt, Houston wins in spite of O'Brien and because of Watson.

Enter Andy (Kool Aid) Reid, a possible Hall of Fame coach, for the rested Baby Backs. Kansas City has gotten healthy on offense, returning WR Sammy Watkins to the fold. On defense, they have looked more stout since learning Spagnuolo's system, and they are stuffing the run and mixing it up plenty.

Andy Reid is the rare combination of head coach and CEO. He saw the lack of team speed was hurting the Chiefs, and went out and acquired it in spades. They are now one of the fastest teams in the NFL, and speed kills.

Reid and O-Coordinator Eric (Sleeping with) Bienemy run, pass and score in a blowout. Chiefs cover and set up another shot at the AFC Championship in Week Twenty. Chiefs.



"Oh, YEAH!!"

Seattle at Green Bay (-4)

The Seahawks are a complete enigma; they play down to the bad teams (21-20 in Week One over the Bengals), and up to the competition (last week's WCW over the Iggles). Seattle has a fabulous road record, blemished only in a loss to division rival Frisco with the football at the one-yard line.

(Dange)Russ Wilson has made lemonade out of lemons, garnering wins while missing key offensive weapons. The Seattle O-Line is a patchwork of guys held together with chewing gum and baling wire.

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Starting TEs Will Dissly and Luke Willson are out. RB Travis Homer was plucked from the practice squad. They are a mess.

Green Bay enters the game rested and ready, with a 13-3 record that is a little deceiving. Sure, they won a boatload of games, but other than the NFC Norse, they haven't played anyone. The three losses came to the Raiders, Chargers and Niners, the latter a blowout loss to a legitimate playoff contender. The lone quality win was over KC, and that was when QB Matt Moore rolled his wheelchair onto the field to replace an injured Patrick Mahomes.

Lambeau provides a wonderful home field advantage, both in the stands and with the zebras. DangeRuss is 0-3 at Flambeau, where the rules of football can be bent, and some broken. He did beat the Pack 28-22 in the 2015 NFC Championship, but that one was at Century Link in Coffee Town.

The Look Man likes the Hawks, and believes that rookie HC Matt LeFleur will struggle in his first playoff appearance. Every possession is important in the NFL postseason, and Aaron (Discount Double Check) Rodgers simply has not been very sharp in 2019. Perhaps it's his racing car GF Danica Patrick. Hawks cover and win.

EPILOGUE

This divisional playoff sets up for a wonderful conference championship. The eight remaining teams are all sponge-worthy, so the NFL cannot lose. Unless inexperienced Zebras screw up like they did in the NFC Championship last year.

Shawn (Baby Hulk) Hochuli is doing Sunday's Texas-Chiefs game, and despite being a second-generation zebra, he has not covered himself in glory in NFL100. You may remember his father, Hulk Hochuli, whose explanations were like congressional statesmanship.

The apple apparently fell in a different county with Shawn, who will be joined by two members of his regular-season crew plus four all-star zebras from other teams. The all-star approach to officiating has never been successful, and the Look Man hopes it doesn't put a damper on one of the season's best matchups.

The Divisional Playoff Weekend is a possible referendum for a few quarterbacks. Kirk (Curt) Cousins is attempting to justify his salary in a walk year. Jimmy Garoppolo faces his first post-season test after an ACL. Patrick Mahomes lost the AFC Conference Championship in his MVP season last year, and Lamar Jackson laid an egg in his lone year one postseason outing.

Whoever breaks out in the postseason is going to have an opportunity to take control of the NFL for a long time. This New Era of young gunslingers is exciting TV. Who knows, it may rival Bird-Magic from the 1980s, a rivalry that likely saved the NBA.

Peace,

The Look Man