

THE LOOKMAN REPORT 2020

Week Eighteen – The Hunt for Red February

“Once more, we play our dangerous game, a game of chess against our old adversary - The Blitzburgh Stillers. For forty years, your fathers before you and your older brothers played this game and played it well. But today the game is different. We have the advantage.” – Cleveland acting HC Mike Priefer before last week’s wild card game.

PROLOGUE

The Look Man might’ve taken liberties with the Captain Marko Ramius speech in the 1990 film *Hunt for Red October*, but you get the message. The Browns shocked the world last week, and may have changed the destiny of both franchises in the process. The Stillers have already terminated O-Coordinator Randy Fichtner, and Big Ben and JuJu Smith-Schuster are twisting in the wind. Pittsburgh could pull “a crazy Ivan” and rebuild for the future.

The expanded Super Wild Card playoffs included upsets and some two-chinstrap games, featuring defensive intensity is so high that one needs to double up so as not to lose one’s helmet during play. Baltimore at Tennessee was such a contest, and so was Browns at Stillers. These defenders were hitting so hard that without crowd noise, you could hear the players grunt on nearly every tackle.

The balance of the SWC weekend was odd, with Rams QB Jared Goff returning from a surgically repaired thumb to manage the Rams to an upset of the Seahawks. The Washington Football Team gave Tampa Bay a game when an unknown QB named Taylor Heineke(n) brewed up one of the gutsiest performances evah in a playoff game. His diving TD from the four was awesome, and who knows what the outcome might have been if half the Tampa Bay team wasn’t wearing black and white striped jerseys.

The Tournament advances to the Divisional Round and the Look Man is really looking forward to Saturday and Sunday football again this weekend.

LAGNIAPPE

When You Believe in Things That You Don’t Understand...

The Look Man considers himself to be pretty rationale, believes in the Scientific Method and uses his head at all times. There is, however, one area in which he succumbs to existentialist thought: superstition.

Each year, one week after the Super Bowl, the Look Man takes all of his assembled sports gear and places it in a sealed container. That gear includes hats, receivers’ gloves, jerseys, sweatshirts and pants, and assorted swag from game day participation. The unstated purpose is to allow the gear to gain sympathetic magic for the next season. The thought process is that luck, like radiation, can be amplified based upon proximity configuration of the gear.

At the start of each season, the Look Man examines the gear and selects a few items for the season. There are rules in play: (1) never wear new gear to a Big Game; (2) attempt to match color scheme for home and away contests, based upon the likely combination being worn on game day, and (3) if the gear produces the desired result, do NOT launder it. To do so washes away the collected magic.

One of the basic play book directions for roving or free defensive players away from the point of attack is “Ball Go, I Go.” It means if you are not engaged, look to see where the ball is going, and run to that

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spot. Whether you call it ball hawking or just common sense, it often results in turnovers in the form of interceptions or fumbles. Turnover margin is the largest empirical indicator for wins and losses in the National...Football...League.

You may scoff at these actions, saying, “Look Man, I ain’t going for no banana in the tail pipe!” But the Look Man extracted his number 95 Jamir Miller Browns jersey with the “Ball Go, I Go” nameplate for the Wild Card game at Blitzburgh. The first play from scrimmage was a high snap over Big Ben’s head and a Browns recovery for a defensive TD. The Browns TO margin was 5-0 in their first win in eighteen years at the Confluence.

Nuff said.



Any of these look familiar?

THE LOOKAHEAD

Saturday Games

4:35pm - Rams at Cheeseheads (-6.5 / 45.5)

LA played stifling defense to knock off Seattle, and the pick six thrown by (Dange)Russ Wilson was really the margin of victory. The Rams travel to Flambeau this week to face a Pack offense that is enjoying Aaron (Discount Double Check) Rodgers’ best season in many.

DDC throws to All-World WR Davante Adams, who has racked up 115 for 1,374 yards and a league-high 18 TD catches. But the real heart of the Pack is the running game, courtesy of Aaron Jones, Jamaal Williams and AJ Dillon. These guys can also catch the rock, making them dual threats. This offense is loaded, with the Big Three of DDC, Adams and Jones, supplemented by TE Robert Tonyan and wideouts Marquez Valdes-Scantling (MVS) and Allen Lazard.

Rams QB Jared (Subway) Goff, already suspect, is playing with a bad thumb, and those things have a bad way of acting up when exposed to cold weather. Like the late Sean Connery said in Hunt for Red October, “...be careful what you shoot at. Most things in here don't react too well to bullets...”, and Goff will see plenty of lead in Titledown.

The Look Man likes *the Rodgers Rate*, and believes they are the best team in the NFC. They win this one to set up the NFC Title Game in Breen Gay. Go, Pack, go.

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I'll take NFL MVPs for \$400 please..."

8:15pm - Dumpster Ducks at Bisons (-2 / 50)

Baltimore demolished the Flaming Thumbtacks in Nashvegas last week, but the game started out close. QB Lamar (L-Jack City) Jackson couldn't hit the broad side of a barn early, and used his legs to loosen up the defense and dominate for his first playoff win. Tennessee lacked the team speed to spy on L-Jack City, and he made them look silly.

Crapchester doesn't have that problem. They have an elite secondary, and a Swiss Army Knife linebacking corps featuring Tremaine (the Squire of Gothos) Edmunds and former Saint/Black Cat Matt Klein. Edmunds handles the fast guys while Klein stuffs the power. It is a solid tandem, amplified by Matt (Charmed) Milano, who brings both attributes and can spy the QB.

The Bisons' back end has shutdown CB Tre'Davius White, with two active safeties in Jordan Poyer and Micah Hyde. These latter two join CB Josh Norman as Gilligan's Island castoffs who have found a new home in the Land of Chicken Wings.

Bisons QB Josh Allen, is a Brobdingnagian QB with arm talent and speed. The Look Man liked Allen and Wentz coming out of college, because they played in inclement western weather and were five tool players. Former Browns OC Brian Daboll has turned Allen into the real article, blending a nice running game with a vertical passing game. Crapchester can put up a Fitty Burger or grind it out, depending on the opponent. They are missing Zack Moss, their best runner, this week but they have been winning with Running Back by Committee all season.

The Look Man likes the young Bisons, and HC Sean Michael McDermott, an Italian immigrant with guts and moxie. He also believes Baltimore is too limited offensively; great when throwing between the hash marks to TE Mark Andrews, but good shutdown defenses with speed expose their shortcoming - - - the boundary throws. They cannot make them.

Bisons cover and win.

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Sunday, Sunday!

3:05pm - Browns at Baby Backs (-10 / 56)

Cleveland shocked the World with a win over the Stillers in the Super Wild Card, and are rewarded with a trip to beautiful Kansas City, where the baby back ribs flow and the scoreboard is electric. The problem: HC Andy (Kool-Aid) Reid is 25-5 following a bye week, and this Baby Backs team is electric, with an embarrassment of offensive riches.

KC is not the same juggernaut Super Bowl champion from last season. This team has won close games, nearly losing to the Raiders twice and struggling at Foxboro. These games were a study in how to defeat KC and the Browns have a better running and play action game than either team. They also have RB Kareem Hunt, acquired after he was summarily terminated by KC two years ago for conduct unbecoming. Hunt knows the KC offense and is highly motivated to have a big game.

HC Kevin Stefanski, O-Line Coach Bill (Dirty Harry) Callahan, CBs Denzel Ward and Kevin Johnson, and pro Bowler RG Joel Bitonio also return, but ST coach Mike Priefer and QB Coach Alex (AVP) van Pelt did a fine job in Super Wild Card Weekend. They called a great game, mixing the pass and run well, and generally having fun. The only down side was the defense giving up 300 passing yards in the second half. Apparently, D-Coordinator Joe Woods pulled our Butch Davis “Drop 3 Cloud” defense for the occasion, used once every eighteen years, and with good reason.

The Browns must mix up zone and man coverage in the Divisional Playoff or Mahomes will make mincemeat of their defense. The Look Man favors a cover three ‘robber’ scheme, in which the safety and corner create a little game. It is played similarly to the T-E stunt pass rush, allowing one or the other defensive back to play loose, read the QBs eyes, and make a play on the ball.

The Raiders and New England ran variations of this scheme, which drops a boatload of defenders into coverage. The Chowds actually ran an exotic 1-7-3 alignment when they played KC, featuring one lineman, seven DBs/LBs and a three-deep zone.

Perhaps more importantly, the Browns must keep Mahomes in the pocket, because when he rolls, big plays follow. The speed of the Cheetah, Watkins, and Kelce makes them deadly. The goal is to minimize the deep ball, limit possessions, and force KC to beat you with double digit play drives instead of quick strikes.

One offense, the Browns should run or pass to the running backs 30 times. Play action passes will ensue, but keep the clock running. (Cake) Baker Mayfield cannot turn it over, and possessions, already reduced in the postseason, can be further limited by ball control. During the regular season, offenses run about sixty plays on ten to twelve possessions. That number drops to six or seven in the playoffs, and efficiency is paramount.

Take the Browns to cover and the over in a back and forth scoring contest. Browns, baby Browns.

6:40 pm - Expensive Corn Kings at Religious Icons (-3 / 52)

The Corn Kings have been dubbed “Tom-pa Bay” with the renaissance of QB Tom (Zoolander) Brady in his new home. Brady is no favorite of the Look Man, who believes, like Michael Jordan, the world will never know how good he could have been without the help of the zebras.

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When you have transcendent talent, you don't need help from the guys in the black and white jerseys, but Zoolander gets plenty. The Corn Kings dispatched an overmatched Washington club last week, but the officiating was questionable at best. And that is no different than Zoolander's previous reign at Foxboro, which benefitted both from a horrible division (the AFC Least) and calls that defied logic and suborned reason (The Tuck Rule).

N'Orleans has been up and down this year, but have struggled historically in the postseason. And those struggles include their one Lombardi, which required an onside kick and a pick six to post a comeback win. As much as the Look Man loves Drew (Cool) Brees, he just hasn't been a beacon in the Tournament. Superior opposing defenses have created turnovers and come up with stops, limiting points (see also the 2018 NFC Championship where the Rams stole the game on a DPI no-call).

The Icons defense is strong in the middle, it features some large, pipe-swinging D-Linemen, a stiff linebacking corps, and a secondary that is athletic and ball-hawking. The Look Man likes two underrated guys in particular: (1) MLB DeMario Davis, an old school 'backer who calls the shots and delivers them with equal zeal, and (2) DE Trey Hendrickson, a rising star who quietly acquired 13.5 sacks in 2020. The front seven is backed up by safety Malcom (In the Middle) Jenkins, who has replaced a lost step with an agile mind that reads and reacts with the best of them.

Tampa will attempt to play power football with RB Leonard (Kravitz) Fournette, but Brady wants to take the top off the D with Antonio Brown and Mike Evans. The Corn Kings will be unable to do this, and will instead use slot receiver Scott Miller, the Poor Man's Julian Edelman.

Won't work this week. Tampa Bay hasn't beaten a good team all year. Saints beat Brady, Arians and the Zebras. New Orleans covers and wins to advance to the NFC Championship.

EPILOGUE

The NFL is obviously rooting for a storybook ending to NFL101. The pandemic guarantees a captive audience for Super Bowl LV in Tampa, and there is no shortage of storylines. Old QB vs. Young Gun, Underdog vs. Favorite, and First Super Bowl Evah are just a few which come to mind.

NFL101 has been an unusual season and its culmination will be a coronation, and just the type of distraction this country needs. We are only two weeks into the calendar year and we've already had the largest number of pandemic deaths in a single day, domestic terrorism at the Capitol building and the second impeachment of the US President. In the words of Admiral Josh Painter from *Hunt for Red October*, "This business will get out of control. It will get out of control and we'll be lucky to live through it."

We need a collective win to turn the tide and the Look Man believes we will soon get one.

Peace,

The Look Man