

THE LOOKMAN REPORT 2021

Week One – Car Wash

"I think he may be the greatest athlete of all time. I think if Michelangelo was around today and about to sculpt David, he'd go, 'Maybe I should do Muhammad Ali.' Just a beautiful human specimen who's also funny, who's gregarious, who's difficult, who's you know, passionate about life and is an inspiration to this day for people concerned about social justice." - Ken Burns, profiling Muhammad Ali, perhaps the greatest athlete of all-time.

PROLOGUE

The NFL opened its 102nd season in fine form last week, taking a page out of the NCAA playbook by creating incredible matchups in the opener. The week featured Dallas at Tampa Bay, Cleveland at KC, and Baltimore at Las Vegas, just to mention a few. There were a few clunkers, like Green Bay at New Orleans (played in Jacksonville due to Hurricane Ida), but you will have that.

By the time Week One had ended, some of the most entertaining (if not really well played) games of the last few years had been contested. It is a tribute to the NFL, and to its fans.

The new rules regarding taunting didn't affect the outcomes, and the asses in the seats made it special. Other than the quiet excommunication of one Cam Newton in New England, and the specter of Deshaun Watson in prison, the thing came off without a hitch. And that is saying something in these interesting times.

Without further ado, the Look Man Report 2021 for Week One.

LAGNIAPPE

Car Wash – Past is Prologue

The Look Man reviewed the Cleveland Browns schedule and noticed immediately that two of the Bucket List venues: Arrowhead and Flambeau appeared. The former was in Week One, before the season really gets going, and the Green Bay game is on Christmas Day. That made for an easy choice relative to the 24th NFL Stadium road trip, so the Look Man packed his bags for the BBQ Capital of the Midwest.

The 2020 Cleveland Browns finished with a flurry, beating the Stillers in the Wild Card and nearly repeating the upset with a win at Arrowhead. The Baby Backs sealed it on a thirteen-yard run by backup QB Chad Henne on 3rd and 14, followed by a short completion to the Tyreek (the Cheetah) Hill to ice the game 22-17.

It was an ignominious loss to a team Cleveland should have beaten, and it could have set up a Cinderella run to the Super Bowl LV. The NFL wagered serious money in Vegas, so no one was going to beat Tom (Zoolander) Brady en route to his seventh ring. In some ways, the Browns were spared.

Segue to 2021, and the media was in full hype mode, predicting an AFC Championship preview in Week One. The Look Man secured airline and game tickets and proceeded to fly into KC for the festivities. While waiting in the rental car line, he noticed a number of Browns Fans in full gear, and the excitement was electric. That excitement was not even dampened by a three-hour wait for a rental car.

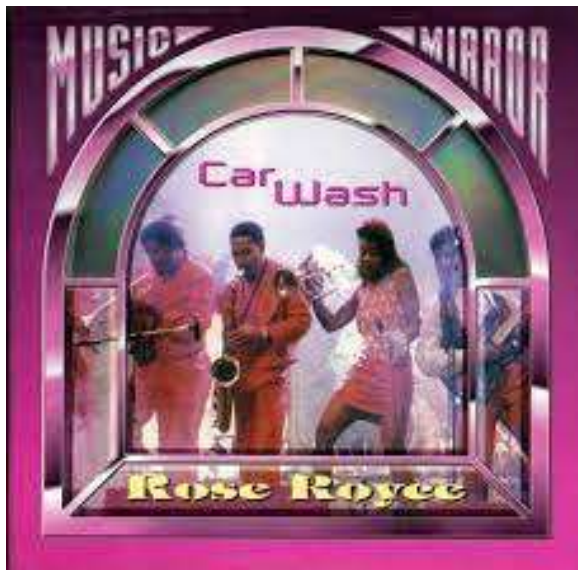
The rental car line moved slowly, with the pandemic shutting down half of the agency booths. After a one and a half hour wait inside, we received paperwork and headed outside to pick up our cars. Not so fast, my friend; another long line awaited, this time in the blazing Missouri sunshine.

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A cool breeze kept folks from passing out, and it became obvious that the Pandemic impacts were not limited to inside. The line stretched out to 60-70 folks, who quickly realized that the limiting factor was car availability. Each delivered car was still dripping from the car wash because the car jockeys were cleaning cars and re-renting them at Ludicrous Speed.

The crowd was good natured, and it got to the point that each time the distant car wash fired up, a cheer arose from the line. The Look Man started singing the lyrics to the Rose Royce classic hit, *Car Wash*: “*you may not ever get rich, but you know it’s better than digging a ditch. At the Car Wash. Singing about the Car Wash, uh.*” Folks joined in with the lyrics and the whole process repeated each time the roar of the car wash started. When a dripping wet car would pull around, the lucky winners would yell something clever (“Here we go, Brownies, here we go, Woof! Woof!”) load the rig, and burn rubber on the way out of the lot.



“...and the Boss don’t mind sometimes if act a fool...”

KC is a great town under normal circumstances, with a tight little downtown littered with hotels, bars, restaurants and outdoor concert venues. One doesn’t really even need a car, because there is a streetcar system that hits the major spots, and Uber works fine. The Look Man wished he had known that before he stood in line for three hours.

When game day arrived, the Look Man walked to the local Browns Backers club, drinking cocktails with the faithful, and watching the early games. Arrowhead is situated about eight miles from downtown, with back-to-back football and baseball stadia with plentiful parking. Unfortunately, they charge \$45 to park, in an attempt to encourage mass transit. The tailgating game is strong, right up there with Chicago and Boston. KC Fan is very friendly, welcoming visiting fans to their tailgates, sharing food, alcohol and fellowship. It was very cool.

Arrowhead itself is a cash-free zone, perhaps because of the ‘Rona, or maybe simply because it is easier to rake. There were no beer or hot dog vendors in the aisles, and the inside vendors quickly ran out of bottled water and Bud Heavy on a 90F day. If you have ever had liquor on a hot day at the Stadium, you know how quickly you can devolve into a hot mess.

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The game was a tale of two halves, with the Browns dominating early and KC charging back in the third and fourth quarters. The Barking Dawg D bowed its back and held, holding the Baby Backs to a FG and turning the ball over to Cake Baker with about two minutes remaining.

The crowd was truly a factor, including the fumbled punt snap, but clearly Cake was rattled before the pick. You couldn't even hear yourself think in that noise, and he failed to pick up the presnap blitz read. Based upon the one remaining timeout, Cake had time to ground that ball and prepare for the next play. Instead, he got confused and tackled while throwing by Neiman, the safety who blitzed. He never saw the two guys wide open on the right, choosing to throw to his third string TE with the game on the line.

The aftermath was pretty pleasant. Baby Backs Fan was polite, and the bus ride home was marked by loud music, singing and big tips for the driver. The only close call was one Browns Fan who blamed the defense for the loss, and the Look Man's angry response was blunted by KC Fan who laughed in the face of the offending idiot. The defense gave up ten first half points, and of the remaining 23, seven were attributable to 73-yard heave that should have been picked, and two fumbles in Cleveland territory that resulted in scores.

Pat-A-Cake Pat-A-Cake Part Deux

The Look Man has never been a (Cake) Baker Mayfield fan since his Numero Uno selection in the 2018 draft. At the airport, the Look Man queried Browns Fan about their opinion of Cake. Almost to a person, Browns Fan supported Mayfield, saying, they liked him, and wouldn't take Aaron (Discount Double Check) Rodgers if he became available. The Look Man just walked away, shaking his head.

If they re-sign Mayfield, it will cost \$40 million annually, and they will lose OG Wyatt Teller, Odell Beckham Jr. and Kareem Hunt. They already allowed DT/DE Sheldon Richardson, the heart of the Barking Dawg D to walk, as well as LB BJ Goodson, whom they could use now that Anthony Walker has his annual four game injury of the year.

The NFL model for winning is riding a young, underpaid QB and a talented defensive squad to a ring. Think Seattle, New England and KC. The Browns are on the verge of squandering their offensive and defensive talent to sign a hack whose upside is just north of Johnny Manziel. Baker is the fifth best QB in the AFC North, right behind Browns backup Case Keenum.

MEDIA RECOMMENDATION OF THE WEEK

Ken Burns is at it again, this time with a four-part documentary on Muhammad Ali. Burns completed the project over seven years with his daughter, and the outcome looks spectacular. If you enjoyed Baseball, The Civil War or any other of Burns PBS projects you are guaranteed to love this one.

Ali was a personal hero of the Look Man, and he changed the way Americans interact with people of color. His story influenced the lives of others, and gave us Howard Cosell, Dick Schaap and probably Steven A. Smith and *Pardon the Interruption's* Mike Wilbon.

Check it out if you can.

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“There will always be baseball, Ray.”

ZEBRA OF THE WEEK

The Look Man is not doing a ZOTW this week, but not because there was any lack of candidates. The biggest issue is Walt (Disney) Anderson, who has taken over the replay team in Manhattan. The ejection of Browns SS Ronnie Harrison for shoving a KC assistant coach was never called on the field. The replay went up at Arrowhead, and Walt Disney had Harrison ejected all the way from the Big Apple.

After Harrison and OLB Mack Wilson tackled KC RB Edwards-Helaire, Harrison was jostled into stepping on the running back. The KC running backs coach then shoved Harrison, who fired back with a high palm shiver that rattled the coach’s headset. The original unsportsmanlike conduct on the KC bench was changed to offsetting penalties by referee Bill Vinovich after the yardage was marched off.

The Look Man has anticipated this since the zebras went to headsets, and it now looms over the game. The Zebras should call what they see, not what the NFL sees in NYC. It is now just a matter of time before a game is taken over by the eye in the sky, turning the on-field zebra talent into just bystanders.

THE LOOKAHEAD

Cincinnati at Chicago (-2.5)

Da Bears have an injury depleted O-line, especially at left tackle, and Andy (The Beige Water Pistol) Dalton was savaged last week by the Rams. Bears Super Fan is calling for Justin Fields to start could see their first-round pick knocked out for the year.

Speaking of which, Joe (Goat Boy) Burrow is on pace to suffer 85 sacks in 2021 after suffering through five by the Hornheads in Week One. Goat Boy escaped with a ‘W’ courtesy of Minny RB Dalvin Cook, who put the rock on the ground in OT, and Kirk Cousins, who played like crap.

The Nati has added free agents in DE Trey Hendrickson, LT Riley Reiff, DT Larry Ogunjobi and CB Chidobe Awuzie, but that O-line is still gahbitch. Goat Boy is operating with a surgically repaired knee which cannot endure this for long. He could become the next Greg Cook, whose career ended with a bad wheel.

Meanwhile, TBWP wants revenge and has weapons. They use rookie QB Justin Fields in special packages near the goal line to good effect. Look for the Monsters of the Furniture Mart to win, and send both squads to 1-1 records. Da Bears.

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Houston Slim Shadies at Cleveland (-12.5)

The Browns come off a frustrating loss, only to face their former signal caller, Tyrod Taylor. You may remember Taylor was knocked out of a starting job with the Bolts, courtesy of a pain killing needle which punctured his lungs. Rookie Justin Herbert took over, and the rest is history.

Taylor is now in Houston, starting because Deshaun Watson went all Big Ben Rapelessberger. Watson is on the trading block, and Taylor looked great in Week One. The setup pits (Cake) Baker Mayfield against the guy who lost his job in C-Town to Johnny (Football) Manziel.

The Look Man is no fan of Cake, and the Browns offense would run better with a QB with wheels. In other words, a game manager just like Tyrod. Chubb and Hunt can run it on anyone and the Slim Shady defense also includes former Browns LB Christian (Christina) Kirksey, who makes a lot of tackles eight yards downfield.

The rest of the Houston team includes retreads like RBS Mark Ingram from B-More, Phillip Lindsay from Denver, WR Danny Amendola and former Browns TE Pharaoh Brown. It makes for an interesting story about a bunch of Joe's who overcome their mediocrity and tear up the AFC Souse Division. Or maybe the Look Man is thinking about the movie *The Longest Yard*?

The Look Man likes the Browns to win, but not by double digits. Defensive signal caller Anthony Walker is out. Browns win, Houston covers the points.

Vegas Raiders at Blitzburgh (-6.5)

The Raiders look different this year; the defense is mauling, and QB Derek Carr is showing some moxie. He is still a bum, mind you, but now he is a bum with moxie.

Meanwhile, the Stillers surprised the Bisons last week in Crapchester, largely due to a bevy of sacks by JT Watt and free agent DE Melvin Ingram. Blitzburgh keeps reloading, and head coach Mike (Omar Epps) Tomlin has never had a losing season.

Jon (Chucky) Gruden got lucky, but the bloom was never really on this rose. Carr didn't really face a pass rush last week, but he will on Sunday. Also, the Raiders were demolished by injuries, losing DT Gerald McCoy for the year, and half of the rest of the team is not practicing. Stillers.

Dallas Cowpokes at LA Bolts (-3.5)

It's early, but the Bolts look outstanding this year. They have fixed their O-line by importing former Cheeseheads Cory Linsley and Bryan Bulaga, along with two other new starters. QB Justin Herbert is the real deal, dropping dimes like a pimp in Vegas. They have Joey Bosa and Derwin James on defense, and once their RBs get healthy, these guys could compete for the AFC West crown. They look like the 2020 Browns except with a better QB, and real chance to win now.

The Pokes' O-line is a mess, with a new center and La'el Collins on suspension. Zak Elliott barely touched the rock in Week One, and Dak Prescott threw the ball 58 times. That is not a recipe for winning football.

The Look Man likes the Bolts to beat America's Team and the Zebras in this one. DE DeMarcus Lawrence broke his foot and is out for six to eight weeks. The rest of Doomsday Lite looks pedestrian at best.

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Pokes fall to 0-2, on track to win the NFC Least with a 9-8 record. If Dak throws it sixty times again, he is going to need to see Rudy Wells, *the Six Million Dollar Man's* surgeon.

Go, Bolts, go.



“So that is what a circumcised mosquito looks like...”

Tennessee Flaming Thumbtacks at Seattle Blue Man Group (-5.5)

(Dange) Russ Wilson is cooking already and the Flaming Thumbtacks got punched in the nose by Arizona in Week One. The Blue Man Group does miss LB KJ Wright, but the offense took over the contest.

They could not keep Ryan Tannehill upright, and Chandler (Bing) Jones was not his Friends, notching five takedowns in a single game. The NFL record for sacks is seven, and Bing would have gotten it if not for Rachel giving him love the night prior.

Hawks HC Pete Carroll turned 70 this week, with no signs of a slowdown. Dange Russ and the BMG take down the Tacks, leaving them swirling the AFC playoff picture drain. BMG.



Mrs. Dange Russ would like you to watch...

KC Baby Backs at Baltimore Dumpster Ducks (3.5): Football Night in America

KC had to overcome a brutal first half to beat the Browns at home last week. They travel east to STD-more to face a Dumpster Ducks squad that lost in OT to the Raiders. These two teams are perennial top five AFC contenders, and this could be the Game of the Week.

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Vegas pulled a rabbit out of a hat in Week One after Ducks QB Lamar (Action) Jackson coughed it up three times, with two coming in the fourth quarter and OT. The Ducks ran out of running backs and the injury bug also claimed Pro Bowl DB Marcus Peters, RB JK Dobbins and most of the rest of the City of Baltimore. These guys have fourteen players on IR and resemble a M*A*S*H unit.

Neither DE Frank Clark nor SS Tyrann (the Honey Badger) Mathieu suited up for the Browns game, but both should be back in Week Two. KC has not yet demonstrated much ability to stop the run, but somehow Baltimore is a fully owned subsidiary of the Chiefs. Baby Backs cover and win.

EPILOGUE

NFL viewership is way up in 2021, and the presence of fans changes the dynamic dramatically. NFL 101 was the first year in which visiting teams actually had a winning record. The Arrowhead crowd won that game for the Baby Backs.

Whatever the situation, fans in the stands have a different feel. The Look Man hopes that we don't have super spreader events in the NFL, but loves the feel of the crowd. Some folks would rather watch the games on television to avoid the crowds and the expense. The Look Man loves live games, where he can read defenses, see the whole field, and pick up little tidbits.

One such item was Browns placekicker Chase McLaughlin, who went onto the field during each second half TV timeout to check the wind conditions. Chase would stroll out, throw a handful of grass in the air, and simulate kicking the game winning FG/XP. And he would have done it too, if not for Baker. The offense put up 22 points in the first half, and could manage only seven thereafter. Not good enough.

The Look Man hopes to avoid a rematch of KC and Tampa Bay in February, but stranger things have happened. And Brady is putting up better numbers at 44 than he did at 24. Perhaps it is better living through chemistry, but whatever it is, someone needs to put a stop to it.

Peace,

The Look Man