

THE LOOKMAN REPORT 2025

WEEK SEVENTEEN: IN THE CLINCHES

"He's got me a lot," – Bengals QB Joe (Brr) Burrow on whether Browns Myles Garrett can set or break the NFL sack record in the Battle of Ohio in Week Eighteen. Garrett needs one to set a new mark of 23 in a season.

PROLOGUE

The Look Man took some time this last two weeks. He was contemplating his navel, and preparing for the holiday season.

Division titles, NFL playoff berths and playoff seeding are at stake in the final week of the NFL regular season, which consists of two games on Saturday, Jan. 3, and 14 games on Sunday, Jan. 4.

Without further ado, the Week That Was.

LAGNIAPPE

The Battle of Ohio

The mythical NFL Battle of Ohio (BOH) between the Browns and Bengals has been going on since 1970. That year coincides with the AFL-NFL merger, and Cleveland was one of two teams which agreed to move to the newly created American Football Conference to ensure parity. The move really just created an equal number of teams, which facilitated scheduling.

The BOH, AKA the Buckeye State Series, has produced two of the eight highest scoring games in NFL history. The Look Man attended both of these contests, one in Cincinnati where backup QB Kelly (Tires) Holcomb dropped four balls in passing and five TDs in a 58-48 Browns loss. That 2004 game was the second highest scoring game in NFL history at the time.

The other was in 2007, a 51-45 Browns win in Cleveland, where Derek (DA) Anderson posted 328 and five TDs to go along with RB Jamal Lewis' 216 rushing yards. (Johnny, Mr. Tonight Show) Carson Palmer threw six TDs in the loss.

While this game is largely based upon a shared geographic and cultural history, the real driver is legendary HC Paul Brown, who founded both franchises. The similarity in team colors is in stark contrast to the geopolitical differences between Northeast and Southwest Ohio. While Browns Fan is rowdy, Bengals Fan sits quietly. Ironically, the stadiums are nearly identical, produced by the same architect, who apparently had a sweetheart deal with a concrete vendor.

Perhaps the most telling event in the rivalry occurred when Bengals Fan threw snowballs onto the field of play in 1989, leading Bengals HC Sam Wyche to yell into the microphone, "You don't live in Cleveland, you live in Cincinnati!" That bit of hubris amped up the rivalry to new heights, and placed every Bengals Fan attending the BOH in Cleveland to risk mortal jeopardy.

Wyche is deader than a pig in Cincinnati, but the rivalry lives on. This Week Eighteen game is a symmetrical bookend to the Week One contest in Cleveland. The Bengals stole that Week One game 17-16, setting the stage for Browns QB Joe Flacco to be shipped to the Bengals. Flacco went 1-4 in replacement, but his 470-yard, four TD Thursday Night win over the Steelers was a career best. Who knew a 40-year-old QB could succeed with All Star receivers and one of the worst defenses in NFL history?

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Fast forward to Week Eighteen, a game in which neither team has much to play for. Joe Brr Burrow and the Orange and Black would love to finish strong, if only to (falsely) claim they are on the road to legitimacy. Cleveland counters with rookie QB Shedeur Sanders, who attempts to prove he is a franchise QB in a city that has started over 40 since Bernie Kosar.

Who will win? No one knows, but bring your popcorn, cuz it's gonna be a show...

<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-around; align-items: center;"> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Cincinnati Bengals</p> </div> <div style="text-align: center;">  <p>Cleveland Browns</p> </div> </div>	
Location	Cincinnati, Cleveland
First meeting	October 11, 1970 Browns 30, Bengals 27 ^[1]
Latest meeting	September 7, 2025 Bengals 17, Browns 16 ^[1]
Next meeting	January 4, 2026
Stadiums	Bengals: Paycor Stadium Browns: Huntington Bank Field
Statistics	
Meetings total	104 ^[1]
All-time series	Bengals: 56–48 ^[1]
Largest victory	Bengals: 37–3 (2015) Browns: 34–0 (1987) ^[1]
Most points scored	Bengals: 58 (2004) Browns: 51 (2007) ^[1]
Longest win streak	Bengals: 7 (2014–2017) Browns: 7 (1992–1995) ^[1]
Current win streak	Bengals: 4 (2023–present) ^[1]

This one is for all the marbles...

The Golden Age of QBsII?

The Look Man believes QB play has never been better than right now in the NFL. He grew up with Unitas, Bradshaw, Stabler, Staubach and others, but this group is incredible. Perhaps it is because of the impact of CV19 extending college careers, or the NIL free agency. Either way, there is a crew of young gunslingers in the NFL which overlaps with the Old Guard.

Phil Rivers started games at 44 years of age, and Aaron (Discount Double Check) Rodgers and Matt Stafford are playing well at advanced age. Joe Burrow doesn't even appear in the QBR table below due to injury, but the interesting thing is it reads as a Who's Who of wide receivers. The second tier of 11-20 includes all star receivers in Tampa, Detroit, and Philly. Even the bottom tier captures Rodgers and up and comers like Tyler Shough (Corn) and Bryce Young.

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But it is the middle tier that excites the Look Man. Bo Nix, Caleb Williams, Sam Darnold and Trevor Lawrence could all win the Lombardi in 2025 and beyond. Each QB comes from teams that have been cellar dwellers which amassed player talent in the draft and could threaten for years to come. The key is to have a QB whisperer who can develop with the young hurler.

Rank	Name	Team	QBR	PAA	PLAYS	EPA	PASS	RUN	SACK
1	Drake Maye	Chowds	76.5	55.9	637.0	108.4	87.5	19.1	(16.2)
2	Jordan Love	Pack	73.4	37.5	531.0	86.5	72.9	11.2	(8.6)
3	Dak Prescott	Pokes	71.9	48.7	707.0	108.0	94.2	8.5	(13.1)
4	Matthew Stafford	Rams	70.1	35.7	627.0	89.4	90.8	-4.8	(10.3)
5	Patrick Mahomes	Baby Backs	68.7	32.7	621.0	88.6	61.2	24.7	(11.5)
6	Josh Allen	Bisons	65.1	27.8	633.0	83.2	54.7	22.9	(16.7)
7	Mac Jones	Niners	63.8	12.1	344.0	42.6	38.9	3.2	(6.2)
8	Daniel Jones	Ponies	63.5	17.1	471.0	57.6	51.7	3.3	(9.0)
9	Lamar Jackson	Dumpster Ducks	63.3	13.5	398.0	49.2	29.3	17.4	(15.0)
10	C.J. Stroud	Slim Shadies	61.9	15.9	492.0	59.5	48.6	7.4	(10.8)
11	Baker Mayfield	Expensive Corn Kings	60.8	16.8	646.0	75.5	46.1	26.1	(13.4)
12	Justin Herbert	Bolts	60.2	23.0	688.0	85.3	58.0	25.4	(21.3)
13	Bo Nix	Donkeys	58.3	22.7	720.0	87.4	73.4	12.8	(6.8)
14	Sam Darnold	Seahawks	58.3	11.2	534.0	58.4	56.6	-0.8	(10.7)
15	Jaxson Dart	Jynts	58.1	7.5	460.0	47.0	19.7	24.3	(12.8)
16	Caleb Williams	Bears	58.1	14.9	664.0	75.1	62.5	14.4	(9.3)
17	Jared Goff	Cadillacs	57.2	13.8	612.0	67.4	69.9	-2.3	(15.9)
18	Michael Penix Jr	Dirty Birds	56.9	7.8	330.0	38.6	32.8	5.5	(6.3)
19	Trevor Lawrence	J-Squareds	56.6	10.4	688.0	70.5	50.8	17.3	(12.0)
20	Jalen Hurts	Iggles	55.3	12.4	624.0	69.1	49.7	15.1	(13.2)
21	Spencer Rattler	Religious Icons	49.7	2.2	327.0	31.2	23.0	7.1	(6.7)
22	Tyler Shough	Religious Icons	48.3	0.7	374.0	32.3	28.3	3.7	(13.4)
23	Bryce Young	Black Cats	48.0	(0.6)	555.0	48.9	36.0	10.8	(14.2)
24	Aaron Rodgers	Stillers	41.9	(15.8)	517.0	32.4	32.1	-0.9	(11.4)
25	Jacoby Brissett	Deadbirds	41.3	(11.3)	549.0	34.3	27.6	5.2	(13.2)
26	Joe Flacco	Bengos	40.9	(8.7)	480.0	35.0	29.8	3.1	(8.3)
27	Justin Fields	Aeronauticals	38.1	(9.7)	325.0	19.2	11.5	7.8	(10.5)
28	Tua Tagovailoa	Marine Mammals	37.3	(17.5)	461.0	24.0	32.7	-8.5	(12.1)
29	Geno Smith	Raiders	34.1	(28.7)	575.0	24.0	20.5	0.9	(23.8)
30	Cam Ward	Flaming Thumbtacks	32.1	(39.8)	666.0	21.1	15.3	5.7	(23.3)

Are you listening Cleveland?

While the window is closing in Crapchester, Cincinnati, Detroit, Tampa, and KC, it is opening in J-Ville, Houston, and Chicago. Each of these teams has parlayed high draft picks into something special, and youth will be served.

The common denominator seems to be team talent. Cellar dwellers now have solid young players who can compete for the brass ring. You need a QB, but if your defense can leverage talent before your QB gets a big payday, you have a legitimate shot at a ring.

Once you have to pay your triggerman in excess of \$50 million, you lose offensive and defensive linemen which can stop the run and win championships. You also lose depth in the back end, and skill positions.

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THE LOOKAHEAD

The Look Man has bounced back late with his picks, and this week focuses on his Flaming Five:

Saturday

Carolina Black Cats vs. Tampa Bay Expensive Corn Kings (-2.5 / 44.0)

This Tampa team started off 8-2, and now need to beat Carolina AND get help to make the postseason. Early season chatter about a Baker Mayfield MVP have devolved into six TDs and five picks over the last five games, with ignominious losses to Atlanta and Carolina.

Cake has struggled after losing his offensive coordinators in two years. Dave Canales was his guy before Liam Cohen, and Canales has this Black Cats team playing with fire and passion. Black Cats win and get in with the NFC South Division title. Black Cats.

Seattle Seahawks vs. Frisco Niners (+1.5/ 49.5)

Both Sam Darnold and Brock Purdy are lighting it up, but the Niners have the home field here. The Seahawks defense is vulnerable to good TE play, and George Kittle is slated to suit up. Look for a shootout on Saturday night, with the winners in solid position to take the NFC crown. The Look Man likes the Niners to win the West and the One Seed, but take the under.

Sunday

New Orleans Religious Icons vs. Atlanta Dirty Birds (+3.0 / 43.5)

Rookie QB Tyler Shough (Corn) is playing his cobb off lately, and the ATL left a lot on the field last Monday Night. Bijan Robinson is a special player, and Kirk (Kohl's Cash) Cousins won't allow this team to let down. ATL.

Cleveland Browns vs. Cincinnati Bengals (- 7.5 / 44.5) – the Battle of Ohio Part Deux

The focus all week has been on Myles Garrett and the Sack Record. Sure, Myles is chasing history, but the Bengals have suddenly become dynamic offensively. The Browns don't know how to win a shootout, but perhaps they find out. Browns, Baby, Browns.



"There can be only one, Highlander."

Baltimore Dumpster Ducks at Blitzburgh Stillers (+3.5/ 41.0)

Blitzburgh TE Washington is out with a forearm broken in the Cleveland loss, and it now looks as if Lamar Action Jackson will play. Tomlin wants this one after losing to CLE, and this defense will take no quarter. The Look Man expects another low scoring slobberknocker. Stillers and the under.

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EPILOGUE

This week is crunch time, but most of the seeds are fluid. While the teams are locked into the playoffs, the top seeds remain open. The only real intrigue is in the NFC South, where Tampa, Carolina and Atlanta are still in play, and the AFC East, where Blitzburgh or Baltimore will be in or all the way out. There will not be a wild card for any of these teams.

The Look Man believes the NFC One Seed will be the Niners, but Seahawks could sneak in. In the AFC, Denver, New England or Jacksonville are all in play, but the Look Man believes it will be the Chiefs.

The rest of the AFC is a jumble, with Buffalo, Houston and the Bolts slipping around between the two and seven seeds. Higher is better, as no one wants to face the middle seeds, which all have excellent defenses. Any way you slice it, this 2025 NFL season promises excitement in the Tournament.

Peace,

The Look Man