

THE LOOKMAN REPORT 2025
WEEK TWENTY-ONE: Stupid is as stupid does...

"They're going to have plenty of rest after this one. Two weeks," – Denver HC Sean (Secret Squirrel) Payton about his squad following the AFC Championship with New England. If Denver wins, they will advance to the Super Bowl, which is played two weeks after the conference title game.

PROLOGUE

The Look Man has always liked Wild Card Weekend, where whippersnapper teams often rise up and secure one shining moment of glory before going down like free beer. The Divisional Playoffs can then segregate the men from the boys.

The weekend did not disappoint, as we saw two contests go to overtime and two relative blowouts. The common theme emerging was one of sloppiness, as even the winning teams showed chinks in their armor.

The Look Man grew up in Cleveland, Ohio, and when watching LeBron James play there for the Cadavaliers, there were always one to three moments in a game that made you utter, "Wow!" Caleb Williams had such a moment last weekend.

Williams completed a 14-yard TD pass to TE Cole Kmet in which the ball was thrown nearly 70 yards in the air. Caleb beat the rush by backing up like Shedeur Sanders, only to throw up what looked like a prayer. The rock came down with ice crystals for a 4th down touchdown to close the Rams' lead to one point and force the eventual overtime. This Kid is special.

The counter to that play might have been the Bisons first half closeout in Denver. Down fifteen points, HC Sean McDermott should've kneeled and retooled at the half. Instead, he let Josh Allen turn over the ball and gave up three pre-halftime points that reflected the ultimate margin of victory. And he got canned.

Without further ado, the Week That Was.



Sean Payton talking smack too soon?

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LAGNIAPPE

Who guards the guardians?

Rams owner Stan (Officer) Kroenke tripled his money by moving the team from St. Louis to LA. He didn't care that the city of St. Louis offered a billion to stay, as he knew the LA opportunity was money in the bank.

Kroenke now owns more land than any other private individual in the United States, surpassing the Emmerson family's 2.44 million acres, Malone's 2.2 million acres, and Turner's 2 million acres. His portfolio now 560,000 acres in Wyoming, 124,000 in Montana, the historic W.T. Waggoner Ranch in Texas, 800,000 acres in Nevada, and British Columbia's Douglas Lake Ranch.

The Look Man is concerned that this kind of money leads to power to change the outcomes of games. If you tack on the Walmart ownership group in Denver, you are talking about a lot of one percenters. It is noteworthy that Raiders owner Mark Davis is the poorest owner in the NFL, and he has three billion in the bank and a football team with a sweetheart stadium deal.

Money certainly talks, but let's hope we don't see Denver and LA for the Lombardi. It's a bad look.



Officer Kroenke...

May the Schwartz be with you!

Browns DC Jim Schwartz is getting a second interview in Cleveland, creating the sense that he could be The Guy. The Browns need to weigh promoting someone in house, or losing him to another team, possibly an AFC North squad.

Owner Jimmy Haslam believes Schwartz is a "...great coach..." but the Look Man believes an offensive start is in order. Defensive head coaches are notoriously bad at clock management and QB development; two things badly needed in CLE.

While the Browns finished fourth in yards allowed during the 2025 regular season, with 283.6 per game, Schwartz's defenses have finished between first and fourth since 2023, his first as Cleveland's DC. Still,

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another edge rusher, a DT, LB, and speed at safety are on the draft shopping list if he is to maintain that level of play.

Schwartz was the DC of the Iggles Super Bowl in 2017, and he previously interviewed for other head coaching jobs. He was beat out by Stefanski in 2020, but received little attention in the current HC cycle.

The Look Man's preferred picks are Klint Kubiak and Grant Udinski, two Wunderkind OCs who would shake up the culture and perhaps work with Shedeur Sanders. If Sanders doesn't mature the Browns can go into the Draft for another guy in 2027.

So, the plan should be simple: get a LT, WR, and some other help in the 2026 draft, and figure out which way the galaxy blows in 2027. This rebuild cannot occur at Ludicrous Speed; it has to be deliberate and calculating irrespective of the HC.



Dark Helmet doesn't like the hire...

Stefanski in the ATL

Stefanski's hire in the ATL includes longtime friend Bill (Dirty Harry) Callahan, the best offensive line coach in the NFL, and OC Tommy Rees from the Browns. Stefanski will leverage his offensive genius with the talent, and win the division in Year One. Sure, he will face tough competition in Carolina and New Orleans, but DC Jeff Ulbrich will be key. And his kid won't be texting draft picks again, telling them to get ready to come to [insert team here].

For the Look Man's money, this Dirty Birds team is loaded with talent, and even if BPE and Kirk (Curt) Cousins do not return. The front office is looking to acquire Mac (the Kinfe) Jones from the Niners, but even a middling QB can put up numbers with this O line and offensive skill group.

If nothing else, Atlanta Fan likely won't have to yell, "Run the ball, Kevin!" as Cleveland Fan did for the past few seasons. Bijan Robinson is a boss, and Dirty Harry Callahan will beat this line into shape.

Meanwhile in Tampa...

The Corn Kings just hired OC Zac (Will) Robinson, with QB (Cake) Baker Mayfield making a significant push for the hiring. Robinson is returning to the Jupiter II, after guiding Atlanta to a sixth-place finish in total yards per game and 13th-place ranking in points per game. The Dirty Birds offense took a step backwards in 2025, contributing mightily to the dismissal of (Radio) Raheem Morris.

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This despite significant offensive talent in RB Bijan Robinson (no relation), WR Drake London (Bridge) and TE Kyle Pitts. The Look Man sees Bijan and London as 'special' and the final 8-9 record in the woeful NFC Souse Division was largely resultant from issues with QB Michael (Big) Penix (Energy). BPE tore up another knee, and is now in jeopardy of blowing his NFL career.

Zac Robinson is nothing special, and HC Todd Bowles is already on the hot seat. If the Corn Kings don't win the division and make a deep playoff run, Bowles is headed to the bread line. This situation is reminiscent of Cleveland in 2022 when Cake forced his way onto the field despite a bad left shoulder.

That shoulder is again injured, and Cake is in a contract year. If he fails to lead this team to playoff wins, he will be right next to Bowles in the unemployment line. After all, the Corn Kings started off 6-2 before ending up with 8-9 and out of the Tournament. Cake figured large in the seven losses in the back end of the schedule, including one each to New Orleans and Carolina.

Mayfield's injured shoulder resulted in him playing fourteen games in 2021, when he refused to heal up on the bench and allow Case Keenum to help the team. His shoulder was injured following a red zone pick, when he attempted to make a tackle. He reinjured the should in 2025 attempting to run over a defensive back on a scramble. An 8-9 finish after starting 6-2?

Check out the eerily similar stat lines:

Cake Baker Mayfield Stats							
	Team/Year	Yards	Completion PCT	YPA	TDs	Picks	Rating
	Corn Kings 2025	3,693	63.2	6.8	26	11	90.6
	Browns 2021	3,010	60.5	7.2	17	13	83.1

The departure from the Browns was awful, as Cake was looking for a \$45 million annual deal in 2021, something he still hasn't received in Tampa. His four-year \$100 million contract expires next season, and he is looking for Dak Prescott money. Unfortunately, Cake does not have Dak Prescott maturity.

This situation is not going to end well in Tampa. Cake already trash talked Stefanski, the new ATL HC, and it will be a bad look when the Dirty Birds win the division in 2026. However, Cleveland Fan/Baker apologists are asking the simple question: "What I would say to Baker is, why light the fire? You gotta play Stefanski twice a year. I don't know, does it help him get fired up?"

Sure, Baker is a 'good' QB. If you want to see what the Number One pick overall should look like, see Caleb Williams in Chicago. Baker was a punk in CLE, and he is a punk now.

ZEBRA OF THE WEEK

The officiating in the Divisional Round was acceptable, and it was hard to grouse in the two blowouts. Still, the two OT games featured controversial decisions on which the games pivoted.

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LA Rams at Chicago Monsters of the Red Hots: Shawn (She-Hulk) Hochuli

Shawn (She-Hulk) Hochuli practiced his usual efficient style, but still suffered from one or two bad calls. The Look Man noticed some offensive rubs/pick plays that favored the Rams and hurt da Bears. He also let 'em play, including some nasty hits on Davante Adams and helmet contact to both QBs.

The Look Man has seen more calls where the zebra was out of position and made the call anyway. In Rams-Bears, the Side Judge called roughness on a flop by an O-lineman which was worthy of the NBA.

Crapchester at Denver: Carl Cheffers

Buffalo came roaring back in the second half, dominating the previously impenetrable Denver defense. Josh (Irwin) Allen sent the game to OT, both by exploding in the fourth quarter and imploding with turnovers in the first and second.

The game pivoted on a controversial, but predictable play; the Brandin Cooks catch-INT. the play was further evidence that no one knows what a catch is anymore. Cooks clearly caught the ball and went down on a knee and back, but was unable to perform an act common to the game. In other words, he failed to take the football out to dinner, buy drinks, and use a condom afterwards.



One knee = two feet...sometimes

Sure, Crapchester had 53 penalty yards on the final game winning FG drive by Denver, but this call determined the outcome of the game, pure and simple. And that statement ignores a missed DPI on Cooks that might have sealed the win for Buffalo. Not to mention the two DPI calls on Buffalo that resulted in Tre'Davius White slamming his helmet in front of the zebra and getting fined \$35 large.

In truth, the Look Man has looked at this play ad nauseum, and he actually supports the call on the field. Cooks has to do more to maintain possession and not give the Denver zebra crew a chance to officiate. A wise man once said, "You play stupid games and you win stupid prizes."

What he does not support is the inability to challenge the play in OT, and the puffery from NFL Grand Poobah of Officiating Walt (Disney) Anderson, who claimed the NFL simply wanted "to move the game along."

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The goal of officiating is to get the call right, not to speed up the game. If speeding up the game were the goal, we would not have this ridiculous 'both teams must get a chance to possess the ball' rule. Sudden Death was the mantra for decades, and now we have to institute a fairness doctrine that thwarts the meritocracy.

The NFL postseason is comprised of All-Star officiating crews instead of rewarding the standard crews the Head Zebra worked with all season long. Zebras teams are comprised of seven members: Referee, Head Linesman, Side Judge, Line Judge, Back, Side and Field Judges. They operate as a team, with specific areas of focus. One toe-tap catches, the Side Judge checks the feet, and the Back Judge checks the hands. If they agree, you might notice a quick nod, and signal for possession.

These new All-Star teams cannot agree on anything.

The Zebra contract comes up for renewal in 2026. As always, the NFL wants full time officials, but that isn't going to change. In this age of legal wagering, it will only worsen the problem.

THE LOOKAHEAD

The Look Man's WC weekend success didn't last long. He went 0-4 in the Divisional Round despite the two OT contests. The home field advantage was too great for Denver, and Chicago went down valiantly in brutal conditions at Spaceship Field. The other two blowouts were attributable to fatigue and mental errors.

Without further ado, the Lookahead:

New England Chowderheads at Denver Walmartians (+4.5/45.5)

The Chowds prevailed after Houston QB CJ Stroud choked like a dog, giving up turnovers in an uninspired performance. Houston's defense simply wore down after too many short fields and idiotic picks. The Stroud hates contact, and held the ball too long in crucial situations.

New England QB Drake Maye didn't fare much better, but he didn't have to in this one. If the Chowds are going to need a lot better performance if they want to advance at Mile High Investigation Field.

Enter Jarrett Stidham in place of Bo Nix, who broke his ankle on the final possession. Stiddy is actually a better QB in Sean (Secret Squirrel) Payton's system where you just go with the play. Payton hated Russell Wilson because he changed plays. Nix is better, but really makes plays off schedule with his legs.

Ironically, Nix has the fewest Completions Per Air Yard (CAY) of any QB left in the field. He is actually ranked lower than Shedeur Sanders, but his receiver YAC is among the highest in the NFL.

If you compare CAY numbers with Maye, you actually see how poorly Nix has performed in Payton's system. What doesn't show up is fourth quarter heart, and the fact that his legs get him out of difficult down and distance situations.

Stidham fixes that deficit, but Payton's system is still predicated on long, double digit play drives without penalties. Luckily, the zebras wear blinders in Denver, and his defense is next level in sacks, with two lockdown cornerbacks.

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Analytics is for the squints, and though figures never lie, liars can figure. New England is a well-coached team that plays with violence and few mistakes. Look for Mike Vrabel to parlay Payton's bulletin board material into a tough, physical game. Not to mention that Denver QB Jarrett Stidham has not thrown an NFL pass since 2023.

Vrabel and the Chowds will have to beat Denver and the zebras, but if anyone can do it, they can. Chowds move on.

LA Rams at Seattle Seahawks (-1.5/45.5)

The Rams have beaten Carolina and Chicago on the road, and they have gotten beaten up in the process. Stafford has not played particularly well, except when it really counted. It is noteworthy that Davante Adams has played in five conference championship games, but zero Super Bowls.

Speaking of not playing well, Sam Darnold has done just enough to win. The Legion of Whom has made up the delta, and is playing outstanding ball. Mike McDonald has implemented a next-level Tampa Two shell, with several twists that confuse the opposition. He has the athletes and the intellect to execute this style of play, which can erase nearly any turnover deficit.

Specifically, Seattle eschews man-to-man employing nickel and dime zone on nearly every play. They mix it up well, but got torched for 550 yards in the last Rams meeting. While SS Nick Emmanwori is a wild card who can score off turnovers, the biggest challenge will be shutting down the multiple TE formations for LA. These guys include Ferguson, Parkinson, and Higbee, who can all run and catch with the football.

The Seahawks did get a bad break in losing RB Zach Charbonnet, who provides a slashing alternative to Kenneth Walker III. At its heart, Seattle is a run-first team that throws just enough to win. And it has talent at every position, even if they are not folks you have heard of before.

LA has dodged bullets the last two weeks, and the One Seed got extra rest. Hell, if Ben Johnson went for two-point conversion in regulation, LA doesn't even get to the NFC Championship. The Look Man likes Darnold and Seattle to carve up this Rams defense and advance. Seahawks.

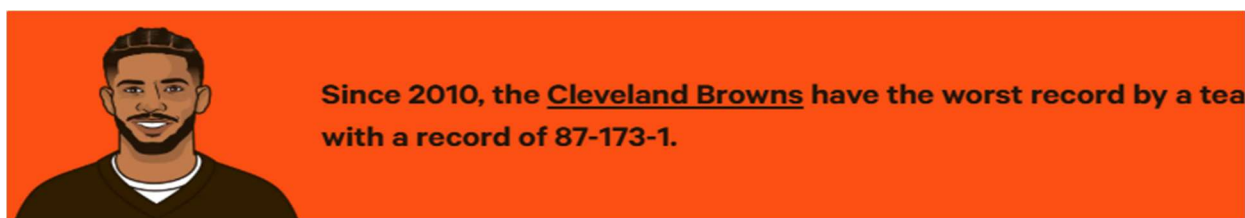
EPILOGUE

The conference championships have included KC or New England in each of the last fifteen years. These teams have solid organizations, excellent coaching, and outstanding talent evaluators.

These appearances are far from luck, just as the recurring theme of bottom feeders like Cleveland, the Jets, Raiders, Flaming Thumbtacks, and Deadbirds. The things these teams share is the exact opposite of the Baby Backs and Chowds in terms of ownership, organization, coaching and talent evaluation.

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	TEAM	REC	W%	GP	W	L	T	TD	PTS	PPG	OPP PTS	OPP PPG
1	Browns	87-173-1	.335	261	87	173	1	550	4,919	18.8	6,176	23.7
2	Jaguars	90-171	.345	261	90	171	0	563	5,137	19.7	6,323	24.2
3	Jets	96-165	.368	261	96	165	0	521	4,922	18.9	6,274	24.0
4	Raiders	102-159	.391	261	102	159	0	586	5,398	20.7	6,727	25.8
5	Giants	102-158-1	.393	261	102	158	1	607	5,400	20.7	6,256	24.0
6	Commanders	105-154-2	.406	261	105	154	2	613	5,495	21.1	6,458	24.7
7	Panthers	110-150-1	.423	261	110	150	1	614	5,501	21.1	6,214	23.8
8	Titans	111-150	.425	261	111	150	0	620	5,461	20.9	6,194	23.7
9	Cardinals	113-146-2	.437	261	113	146	2	625	5,612	21.5	6,169	23.6
10	Bears	116-145	.444	261	116	145	0	618	5,525	21.2	5,925	22.7
11	Buccaneers	118-143	.452	261	118	143	0	685	6,013	23.0	6,273	24.0
12	Dolphins	124-137	.475	261	124	137	0	613	5,504	21.1	6,049	23.2
13	Texans	125-135-1	.481	261	125	135	1	611	5,677	21.8	5,905	22.6
14	Lions	125-134-2	.483	261	125	134	2	736	6,364	24.4	6,331	24.3
15	Bengals	127-130-3	.494	260	127	130	3	684	5,974	23.0	5,937	22.8

The Usual Suspects...

Just as good teams have a plan, bad teams fail to plan. They draft QBs without offensive lines, resulting in the pummeling of their draftees. They go for skill players instead of linemen, and boy scouts instead of hardcases. And the results are self-evident; they continue to languish near the bottom of the rankings for wins and playoff appearances.

But professional sports in general and the NFL in particular, live for dominant, legacy teams. The Dodgers stockpiled an incredible roster on their way to back-to-back championships. New England garnered seven rings in the Belicheat/Brady era. The Celtics and Lakers have far and away the most NBA championships.

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America loves a winner, until they don't. The chatter about KC getting all the calls got so loud that they have gotten jobbed in each of the last two seasons. Nor can we forget that a team named "the Patriots" has had inordinate success since 9/11, when they stole a ring via *the Tuck Rule Game*. Since then, they have heated footballs for FGs, suffered from *Videogate* and *Inflategate* but the common theme is winning - - by any means necessary.

The 2025 NFL season is looking at a changing of the guard. Seattle and Chicago are back in a big way, and LA and New England are two of the most valuable franchises in professional sports. Let's hope money doesn't talk, and you know the rest.

Peace,

The Look Man