

## **Punt, Pass, and Predict**

By Gregg Easterbrook

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Slate is about to inaugurate a new "" feature on pro football, "Tuesday Morning Quarterback." During the NFL season, Tuesday Morning Quarterback will run every—if you can't figure out when it will run, we're not going to tell you.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback will feature 20/20 hindsight on each weekend's games, especially far-after-the-fact analysis of blunders in strategy and tactics. You may say: That's unfair, football players and coaches must make their decisions under pressure, everything is clear in hindsight. Exactly! They earn millions chasing a ball in publicly subsidized stadiums, the least we can do is second-guess. As a matter of policy, Tuesday Morning Quarterback will be consistently unfair. Please join me, starting tomorrow, Tuesday, Aug. 29.

And now as a warm-up, here is the official TMQ NFL preview:

Right now every sports page, tout service, and betting parlor is running its season preview. But only Tuesday Morning Quarterback gives you certified guaranteed predictions! That's right—all TMQ forecasts are totally, absolutely guaranteed to be predictions. So you can't go wrong! Although you're not likely to be correct.

Please do not use these free, guaranteed predictions as the basis of any wager, such as an IPO.

Super Bowl Matchup: I absolutely guarantee that I have no idea who the Super Bowl teams will be. Neither does anyone else. Last year nobody—not Sporting News, Sports Illustrated, Pro Football Weekly, the New York Times, or USA Today—called the Super Bowl in advance as the Rams vs. Titans. Predictions of this nature are so weak statistically that they essentially correlate with random choices. Professional sportswriters and tout services pretend that's not what they are doing. Tuesday Morning Quarterback, on the other hand, guarantees that what it is doing is making random choices.

Division Winners: Of the six division winners from last season—Indianapolis, Jacksonville, St. Louis, Seattle, Tampa, and Washington—only one was a repeat from the previous year. In each of the two prior seasons, only one division winner repeated from the preceding year. This is a statistically strong indicator, and thus it seems safe to predict that of last year's division winners, only one will repeat this year. But TMQ has no idea which one it will be.

Actual Predicted Final Score: 13-10. Tuesday Morning Quarterback feels certain there will be a game with this score this year, and that you will wish you hadn't watched it.

## **Team-by-Team Forecasts**

Arizona Cardinals: This team was outscored 118-19 in the first quarter last season. It was wracked by injuries, holdouts, and poor player relations; this year, for a refreshing change of pace, it is wracked by poor player relations, holdouts, and injuries. The Cardinals have had one

postseason victory in the last 52 years. The true NFL devotee should say of this franchise what Rousseau said of Paris: "We can never get far enough away from you." Forecast finish: 4-12.

**Atlanta Falcons:** In 1998, the Falcons made the Super Bowl and looked pretty darn good. Since then they have had two off-seasons in which they lost important free agents while signing almost no one. In 1999, the Falcons committed one of the dullest trades in recent memory by swapping their year 2000 No. 1 pick to Baltimore for the Ravens' 1999 No. 2 choice. Through this crafty transaction Atlanta snagged Reggie Kelly—yes, the Reggie Kelly!—a nondescript backup who caught eight passes last year, while Baltimore ended up with the fifth selection overall in the 2000 draft. The Reggie Kelly trade was made by Dan Reeves (actual title: "Executive Vice President of Football Operations/Head Coach"), who enjoys a shiny media aura despite having lost all four of his Super Bowl coaching appearances by a combined score of 170-59. Forecast finish: 5-11.

**Baltimore Ravens:** Baltimore has a fabulous, tenacious defense and a strong offensive line; OL play is the least-appreciated key to football. The Ravens also sport purple-swirly-Q uniforms that would embarrass a high-school squad. But then, high-school uniforms didn't stop Tennessee last year. (The proliferation of high-school-style uniforms, started by Jacksonville, is one among many disturbing NFL trends, the shocking truth about which is being suppressed.) Baltimore feels in some ways like a destiny team, except for its puzzling decision to go with Tony Banks at QB. Banks is 20-33 as a career starter and is the proud holder of the NFL all-time record for most fumbles in a season—21, or more than one per game. Forecast finish: 12-4.

**Buffalo Bills:** Most NFL teams have never simply waived a future Hall of Fame player. Departures of those bound for Canton are accompanied by ceremonial PR blitzes and festivals of nostalgia. Most NFL teams have never lost two Hall of Fame players in the same season, let alone on the same day. On one single day last February, the Bills simply waived three Hall of Fame players—Andre Reed, Bruce Smith, and Thurman Thomas—and all were cut loose without commemoration or even a phone call. Thomas found out he'd been released by watching the crawl at the bottom of the screen on ESPN2. That these players were in decline is not the point, nor is the nutty detail that the league's salary cap effectively forced the Bills to say goodbye to three once-in-a-generation players who were popular draws both for home ticket sales and NFL network ratings. The point is how it was done. Reed, Smith, and Thomas were cast aside like the shrink-wrap on a Lunchable. The football gods will punish Buffalo for this affront. There will be rending of garments and gnashing of teeth. Forecast finish: 7-9.

**Carolina Panthers:** Despite his Super Bowl ring from San Francisco, despite his career victory mark of .736 being second-best all-time in the NFL, George Seifert never gets credit as a great coach. Seifert looks wimpy—he could be the acting vice chairperson for diversity recriminations at the Modern Language Association—and when he was in SF, the fans waxed angry at him because he didn't win it all every year. Last season Seifert went to Carolina, a woeful team that had been 4-12 the previous season, had cut its Pro Bowl QB Kerry Collins in a snit, been stripped of its high draft choices in the woeful Sean Gilbert deal and, equally woeful, then been stuck with having to have Sean Gilbert. Seifert took these Panthers to an 8-8 finish, playing many, many gentlemen you've never heard of. Why Seifert never gets his media due for such

accomplishments is a mystery. No, wait, there's a simple explanation—the media. Forecast finish: 10-6.

**Chicago Bears:** What, exactly, were the Bears doing passing for 4,136 yards last year? Don't they know they are the Bears? Apparently not. But though the Bears gained loads of yards last year they only scored 272 points, a middling figure, while their defense was pliant. This year the Bears are the deepest wide-receiver team in the league but are gambling heavily on temperamental, underachieving complainers such as defensive end Phillip Daniels and running back Curtis Enis. Fun fact: If a deal is reached to tear down and then rebuild Soldier Field, the Bears may play their home games next season at Notre Dame. Forecast finish: 8-8.

**Cincinnati Bengals:** Rousseau also said that because the "treadmill of competition" causes vanity, "we should therefore desire mediocrity in all things." He must have been a Bengals fan! The Bengals had the most losses in the '90s, a cover-your-eyes net record of .325 for the decade. Cincinnati has been so egregiously bad for a solid decade that Bengals management this year tried to insert into rookie contracts a clause forbidding players from denouncing the team in public. That's all right, they don't have to—everybody else does. Redeeming Bengals virtue: They have no vanity. Forecast finish: 2-14.

**Cleveland Browns:** OK, they're an expansion team, but so far, not much of one. Mid-'90s expansion teams Carolina and Jax both jumped to the playoffs in their second years thanks to blank salary caps that enabled them to sign players established teams could not afford. Don't expect a playoff leap this season for the Browns, who have done an undistinguished job of fishing the free-agency pool. Ominous sign: Cleveland has been experimenting with extensive use of five-wide, "empty backfield" formations that lack any running back. This is a formula for a lot of tedious 45-27 losses, plus for getting QB Tim Couch broken in half by defenses that can all-out pass rush on every play. Roster note: The Browns will start a rookie named JaJuan Dawson. JaJuan—wasn't he a character in Star Wars? Are players from other galaxies now allowed to compete in the NFL? Of course, that could explain Kurt Warner. Forecast finish: 3-13.

**Dallas Cowboys:** They were America's team, then they were Mexico's team, and now, unfortunately, they are Jerry Jones' team. Jones fired Jimmy Johnson for winning two Super Bowls. Jones fired Chan Gailey for merely going 18-16 with a playoff appearance in his first two years. Jones was mad about Gailey's offense, which only put up 352 points in 1999—the league average was 332. So Jones traded two No. 1 draft picks for receiver Joey Galloway. Last year, the Seahawks were 6-2 when Galloway didn't play and 3-6 when he did. Meanwhile, the Cowboys have an emergency situation at cornerback, and no draft picks or cap room to do anything about it. Boy, what a relief that Jerry Jones is kept far from any responsibility for anything real, like the Bush campaign. Cowboys redeeming virtue: It is the only NFL franchise that lists "cheerleader director" among its management titles. Forecast finish: 6-10.

**Denver Broncos:** This team won two straight Super Bowls, then turned in a creditable season last year despite the retirement of John Elway and season-ending injuries to Terrell Davis, Shannon Sharpe, and John Mobley. Davis and Mobley are back, though Sharpe is gone to Baltimore in a salary-cap purge. (Can it really be in the interest of NFL fan continuity, to say

nothing of the league's network ratings, to have Sharpe in Baltimore and Bruce Smith in Washington and all the year's other cap-cut famous players in confusingly new places? One reason baseball ratings are down is that no one has any idea who's on which team.) Denver should remain a contender, if only because it practices and performs in the depleted Colorado air. Playing at Mile High Stadium is like starting every season with a two-game lead and then just having to hold it—the Broncos for decades have been one of the top home-record franchises, owing to anoxia, the bends, and similar unpleasant effects on the cardiopulmonary systems of the visiting team. Aside: Has anyone noticed that when Bob Griese broadcasts games involving Broncos starter Brian Griese, Dad seems singularly unenthusiastic about his son? Musta been a lot of loves and hugs growing up in that Griese household. Forecast finish: 8-8.

**Detroit Lions:** What does it tell you about this team that it managed to get Barry Sanders so mad he retired when he was just about to become the NFL's all-time leading rusher? Here's what it tells you: nothing. Sanders is one strange duck. His bitterness against the Lions—which only made him a multimillionaire star for a decade, why didn't they do more for him, huh?—reflects badly on Sanders, not Detroit. Many NFL observers have thought for years that the Lions have been held back by Sanders' self-centered tirades and the poor example he set, especially his refusal to block. Emmitt Smith and Thurman Thomas throw blocks and are winners; Sanders wouldn't and wasn't. Now that Barry is finally, irrevocably, off the roster and out of the team's psyche, this could be an up-arrow year for the Lions, so long as the Ace-bandage-loving duo of Herman Moore and Charlie Batch can stay on the field. Forecast finish: 10-6.

**Green Bay:** Doing Dallas one better, the Packers canned Ray Rhodes after a mere single season at 8-8. Memo to Packers' General Manager Ron Wolf: Rhodes had to coach with the players you gave him. Four years ago in its Super Bowl win, the Pack starters on defense: Reggie White, LeRoy Butler, Doug Evans, Santana Dotson, Gilbert Brown, Sean Jones, Brian Williams, George Koonce, Craig Newsome, Eugene Robinson, Wayne Simmons. What a lineup! Two future Hall of Famers, several Pro Bowlers. Today, just four years later, only three of those guys are still with the team, and the gentlemen who have replaced them, well, you don't wanna know. The Packers are at the dead end of a talent cycle, and this will be an R-word year. Fans will be screaming, "Bring back Rhodes." Forecast finish: 4-12.

**Indianapolis:** Possibly the league's most fun team to watch this season, since the Colts will both score and surrender lots of points. The QB-WR-RB trio of Peyton Manning, Marvin Harrison, and Edgerrin James has the potential to be as long-term good as Aikman, Irvin, and Smith at Dallas or Kelly, Reed, and Thomas at Buffalo. And the Colts' big three are all under long-term contracts, so fans can get used to seeing them together, which is a pleasure in this age of the revolving-door roster. Forecast finish: 12-4.

**Jacksonville:** Four years ago when Jax made the postseason as a second-year expansion team and stunned Buffalo and Denver with road playoff victories, this team felt like it would become the scrappy underdog everybody loved to root for. Instead, in our accelerated-pace life, Jax has already transformed into the most bloated, overrated, arrogant team in the league. Last year the Jaguars finished the regular season 14-2 and the players bragged, bragged, bragged—despite a cotton-candy schedule, Jax playing only two games against teams that finished above .500 and losing both. Jax also bragged, bragged, bragged about how its defense allowed a league-low 13.5

points per game—then gave up 33 points at home in losing the AFC title contest to Tennessee. TMQ would dearly love to project this paper jaguar as a loser in the coming season, but the league has once again awarded a walkover schedule: eighth-easiest among the 31 NFL teams, opponents with a combined record of 119-137 in 1999. These candy schedules—just what does Jax management have on NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue, one wonders? Forecast finish: 9-7.

**Kansas City:** In the past decade, no team has consistently gotten more performance from less ability than the Chiefs. They've been in the postseason seven of the last 10 years, a tremendous achievement considering the names on the backs of their uniforms. Last year KC barely missed the playoffs despite having the very average Elvis Grbac at QB, a leading rusher with 627 yards, and a defense staffed almost entirely by who-dats. Arrowhead Stadium is the key to this success—Kansas City has become the perennial league leader in attendance, selling out to 79,451 very, very noisy people each Sunday. The Chiefs had the NFL's best home record in the '90s, and it happened mainly because of decibels. Chiefs fans sustain such oppressive domelike noise in an open-air stadium that every single one of the 79,451 of them should be listed on the team's roster. Forecast finish: 8-8.

**Miami:** Dan Marino is gone; Damon Huard and Jay Fiedler have arrived. Even if you hate the Miami Dolphins—and TMQ, for sectarian reasons, has always hated the Dolphins—it was a joy and a privilege to watch Dan Marino play the game of football. It will not be a privilege to watch Damon Huard and Jay Fiedler play football. And that killer Miami defense of 1998? Check the stats from the second half of 1999; you won't find it. Forecast finish: 6-10.

**Minnesota:** What, you haven't played quarterback for Dennis Green? This year the Vikes roll out their eighth new QB starter in nine seasons. There was plenty of notice for the Bills' salary-cap losses this off-season; less noticed was that Minnesota had a cap crash that cost the team Randall McDaniel, Jeff Christy, and Jeff George. In performance terms, this was worse than Buffalo's loss, because Christy and George still have peak years ahead. Minnesota may rise to average this year, but the club has train-wreck potential. Redeeming Vikings virtue: Dennis Green proves that you can have absolutely no idea what you're doing (remember when he threatened to sue his owner?) and still win NFL games, which offers nice fantasies for the Walter Mitty set. Forecast finish: 7-9.

**New England:** The P-Men owner, Robert Kraft, wanted Bill Belichick as his coach so bad, he gave up a No. 1 draft pick for him. But Belichick is 37-45 lifetime as a head coach. Does Kraft know something we don't? More likely, Kraft doesn't know something we do—that Belichick is a fine defensive coordinator but lacks the people skills to be a head coach. Belichick is famous for sitting in his office with the door closed; he may have ample reason to do so this season. Speaking of people: New England has 'em at linebacker but not on the offensive line. Drew Bledsoe's best chance of protection will be going into an office and closing the door. Another team with train-wreck potential. Forecast finish: 6-10.

**New Orleans:** Everybody who follows football has a high opinion of rookie head coach Jim Haslett. Everybody who follows football was impressed by the Saints' off-season and the promising group of free agents obtained. Everybody who follows football assumes QB Jeff Blake will blossom now that he's out of the NFL Elba that is Cincinnati. Everybody who follows

football knows that the Saints wish they could return Ricky Williams and get their draft choices back. And everybody who follows football knows that New Orleans annually, reliably, always tanks. The Saints is the sole NFL franchise that has never won a postseason game. (That stat depends on which side one takes in the dispute regarding whether the expansion Browns or the relocated Ravens are the "real" Browns, and don't get us started on which team is the "real" Colts.) Forecast finish: 5-11.

**New Jersey Giants:** Two seasons ago the Giants had a thousand-yard rusher. Can you name him? I didn't think so. No NFL team is more anonymous, and that's something considering the Giants play somewhat close to New York, the world's media center. Giants management has recently expended a vast number of high draft picks on RBs and WRs with only modest results; meanwhile, the lines on both sides of the ball have been allowed to atrophy. That clucking sound you hear is the chickens coming home to roost. Redeeming Giants virtue: They've gone high school too with their new uniforms, but it's '50s-era high school. Giants are the first team ever to design uniforms with the express intent of making its own players look slow. Forecast finish: 5-11.

**New Jersey Jets:** OK, Keyshawn Johnson is obnoxious. But you don't have to be his friend, you only have to let him catch the ball. Johnson is an impact player at the height of his career, and the Jets traded him for draft choices that became John Abraham and Anthony Becht. Keyshawn Johnson for John Abraham and Andy Becht—it's like one of those baseball trades where they give Tom Seaver for six minor-leaguers and a case of Michelob. The Jets say they had to trade Johnson because they might have lost him to free agency in 2002. Great, so they lost him two years sooner. Why put off problems till tomorrow when you can have them today? This is a very New York attitude, at least. Speaking of problems: Fans who saw the Jets in the second half of last season saw a very poised, very intelligent young QB in Ray Lucas. Now Lucas is third on the depth chart behind the returning Vinny Testaverde and the big-money glamour pick Chad Pennington. There's a hint in the air that the Jets wouldn't take Lucas seriously as a QB because he is black and hails from Rutgers, where no one in his right mind wants to play college football but where Lucas must have learned something because he sure seems to know what he's doing. Brushing aside Lucas is a potential source of discord for the Jets, especially given the media-capital factor. Forecast finish: 6-10.

**Oakland Raiders:** The Raiders' buzz this year is like the Titans' buzz was last summer—that of an up team about to put it all together. TMQ hopes this does not happen, for two reasons: Al Davis. But a big Raiders year may be in store. Only horrifying place-kicking kept Oakland out of the playoffs last year, and now the team has Sebastian Janikowski, who may become the Russian army of place-kickers. ("Drunk he beat Denver, drunk he beat Carolina ...") The Raiders enjoy solid DBs, OL, and RBs and a potentially weak division to play in. Forecast finish: 12-4.

**Philadelphia Eagles:** In the last decade, Philadelphia and Cincinnati have competed for the distinction of worst-run NFL franchise. Losing teams, unhappy players, budget cuts, unstable management—if the Eagles and Bengals tried as hard to be good on the field as they try to be bad off the field, they'd meet annually in the Super Bowl. Philadelphia even has the league's worst stadium, the Vet, with its crumbling stands and runway-like playing surface. But ominously, the Eagles are showing signs of improvement. They're acquired a level-headed

coach, some decent linemen, and a smart young QB, Donovan McNabb, who may well outdo the QBs taken ahead of him (Tim Couch and Akili Smith) in last year's draft. The Eagles appear on the upswing. But then, liberalism is supposed to be coming back, too. Redeeming Eagles virtue: The Vet is a pleasant venue for road teams, since the Philly home crowd usually roots for the visitors. Forecast finish: 8-8.

(Technical note: Due to a conspiracy, the Official Tuesday Morning Quarterback NFL Preview was posted Monday without the Eagles entry. TMQ has now heard from roughly 8 zillion readers on this blunder. One reader, Nic, asked in "The Fray," "Have the Birds fallen so far off the NFL radar as to not even warrant a brief mention?" Nic goes on to project a good year for the Eagles, owing to "a schedule that ought to be served with a fruit topping," but cautions that the weak Philadelphia WR contingent means "McNabb will be throwing most of his passes to television crews." Nic, give TMQ a break! It's only existed for one day, and already you are coming up with better lines.)

**Pittsburgh Steelers:** Talk about being at the end of a talent cycle. The Steelers have lost a dozen Pro Bowl players to free agency in the last decade and basically brought in no one. Bad drafts, too: They just cut a couple of recent high picks. Now they are both depleted and stuck in the Kordell Stewart morass. Stewart is benefiting from reverse discrimination in a big way. There's no chance a white quarterback playing as poorly as Stewart has for two years (1999 passer rating: 64.9) would still be on the field. But Pittsburgh committed itself to Stewart come hell or high water, and at this point, high water sounds attractive. In order to keep Stewart from complaining about racial politics, Pittsburgh did not bring in any credible alternative during the off-season: The No. 2 QB is the pedestrian Kent Graham. The Steelers may self-destruct over the Stewart situation and to top it off: 1) Stewart is blowing his chance to become a great wide receiver; and 2) by the end of the season the team may be playing rookie Tee Martin, who's black but, unlike Stewart, belongs at the QB position. Forecast finish: 4-12.

**San Diego:** The novelist Reynolds Price has said, "Few human beings of any sex or background are called to anything grander than dinner." He must be a Chargers fan! San Diego is among the least talented teams in the NFL, partly because it traded so much for Ryan Leaf. Last year the Chargers' leading rusher had a LOL 365 yards—Doug Flutie, a quarterback, ran for more yards in 1999. The team's defense, which was top-rated in 1998, last year flowed downward, the Bolts pass defense finding its level in the bottom quartile of the rankings. Unless Leaf has really pulled himself together, creaking Jim Harbaugh or the great Moses Moreno will be at QB. Redeeming Bolts virtue: At sunny home games, there are thousands of women in halter tops. Forecast finish: 6-10.

**St. Louis:** Defending champs and a talented, fast, deep team. Last year commentators were so interested in the Kurt Warner story that they missed the Rams' league-leading rushing defense. But what a story: Kurt Warner wins the regular-season and Super Bowl MVP awards when he had never played a down before in the NFL. Boy, they must be proud of Kurt on his homeworld. Right now it's fashionable to be suspicious of another good St. Louis year. Yeah, yeah, the Rams lost a couple of linemen to free agency, they have a new coach, and people will be gunning for them. Yeah, yeah. Forecast finish: 12-4.

**San Francisco:** I don't wish to alarm you, but when the Niners take the field on opening day, the first team will include Scott Gragg, Monty Montgomery, Jeremy Newberry, Chike Okeafor, and Pierson Prioleau. Zach Bronson, John Keith, Ben Lynch, Phil Ostrowski, Joe Wesley, and Matt Willig will also see action, and none of these gentlemen are kickers. Bill Walsh said last winter that "guys who are right now sitting in frat houses and sports bars will be playing for the Niners in the fall," and Walsh has been true to his word. The cause is the implosion of the Niners' salary cap, and the detonation may not yet be over, if the league, as rumored, penalizes San Francisco for past contract shenanigans by revoking future draft picks. (Bear in mind that San Francisco is among the best-connected NFL franchises in terms of league politics—if the Niners draw a serious penalty, they must have really been out of line.) Not only will the Niners defense, soft last year, be squishy again, the team's offensive line may be a disaster. The Niners have used only one No. 1 draft pick on an OL in the last 33 years. They've always had good fortune in finding talented unknowns. This year, they have only managed to find unknowns. Forecast finish: 4-12.

**Seattle:** At one point last year, the Seahawks were 8-2; they finished 9-8, losing at home in the opening round of the playoffs to a Miami team that was itself spiraling toward the water. That's 1-6 for Seattle down the home stretch, not exactly the stuff legends are made of. But the Hawks improved by unloading Joey Galloway. They have defensive talent and Mike Holmgren at the helm. Question: Why are they still giving out cash bonuses instead of stock options? Forecast finish: 10-6.

**Tampa Bay:** Last year the Bucs were perhaps one incredibly bad officiating call away from the Super Bowl. Trailing by five, Tampa completed a pass deep in Rams territory with about a minute to go in the NFC championship game. Officials called the completion correctly on the field but, incredibly, instant replay overturned the ruling, taking away the catch and turning a correct call into an incorrect one. The drive then failed. In Tampa, this bizarre sequence of events has been the subject of endless discussion. Less discussed is that the game ended 11-6—Tampa scored but six points in a title game. Hoping to correct this, the Bucs made major offensive additions in the form of Keyshawn Johnson, Jeff Christy, and Randall McDaniel. But they still enter the season with the unproven Shaun King at QB, backed up by the inexcusable Eric Zeier. (Rhymes with "extinguished"—you Georgia fans will get that one.) It's rare for a team to make the Super Bowl without a premium QB. Forecast finish: 11-5.

**Tennessee Titans:** The Flaming T's (check their helmets) were terrific last year and should be better this year, as the receiving corps, the team's main weakness, has been strengthened, while Steve McNair finally gets the green light to throw deep. The T's have as good a shot to repeat as conference champs as any team ever does. Plus they're playing in the same place for the second straight year, talk about your luxuries. Redeeming Tennessee virtue: T's players showed great sportsmanship in 1999, never boasting about their three straight pastings of rival Jax and openly admitting, after beating Buffalo on the Music City Miracle kick return, that the play had been illegal. Forecast finish: 12-4.

**Washington Indigenous Persons:** First off, that name is offensive. (Sure there are Braves and Indians, but neither of those terms is intended to insult.) Washington is in the midst of losing a lawsuit over its proprietary claim to "Redskins"—you're not supposed to be able to trademark

offensive language. Once legal appeals are exhausted and anyone can make "Redskins" merchandise, the team name will have to be changed in order to protect marketing revenue. Second off, Washington greed-head Daniel Snyder, first NFL owner to charge fans to watch training camp, is also offensive. May he lose many, many lawsuits. Snyder is already well on his way to replacing Jerry Jones as Most Hated Owner. Snyder and the Persons are spending \$100 million on players this season, the most ever for a football club. Maybe this money will buy happiness. But bear in mind how much of the sum was expended on Deion Sanders, who hasn't played a full season in four years and who performs with one thing in mind, and it's not the team. Third off, let's add this about Snyder: Dorothy Parker said, "If you want to know what God thinks of money, just look at the people he gave it to." Forecast finish: 11-5.

Technical note: Keen-eyed readers may note that the predicted records do not add up to 248-248, which is what the league final tally must come to, barring ties. Tuesday Morning Quarterback has observed that few media organizations, when running their season forecasts, make the predicted wins and losses add up to a wash. Since this oversight appears integral to sportswriting, who is TMQ to do otherwise?

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## Let Us Now Praise Preston Ridlehuber

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Wednesday, Aug. 30, 2000, at 8:00 PM ET

Because of technical problems, Tuesday Morning Quarterback did not post on Tuesday morning. For the remainder of the NFL season, however, Tuesday Morning Quarterback will appear every—well, if you can't figure it out, we're not going to tell you.

The NFL begins anew on Sunday: The fumbles, hype, folly, repetitious eight-yard outs, and lethargic three-yard plunges will fill the airwaves once again. I don't know about you, but I can't get enough. Personally I am glad the NFL is not on year-round, because I would never do anything but watch. I'm so hooked I would even watch the Cincinnati Bengals. Of course, the first step to recovery is admitting you have a problem.

This new column will be dedicated to the addicting inanities of the NFL, including 20/20 hindsight on the tactical blunders in each week's games. (Click here for the official Tuesday Morning Quarterback NFL season preview, full of statistical minutiae and sweeping generalizations.) But since the fun does not start till this weekend, we don't yet have anything to second-guess. Therefore, to inaugurate the column, let us pause a moment to honor the most important player in NFL history: Preston Ridlehuber.

Ah, Preston. Man among men, bravest of the brave, fleetest of the fleet, we intone onto you tribute. We adulate you. We salaam to you, every NFL-hooked one of us. Preston, you may not make it into Canton, but someday you will ascend to the halls of Asgard, where great warriors will celebrate your arrival with song and feasting and the recounting of your noble deeds. Or deed, in this case.

Preston Ridlehuber was the hero of the greatest single NFL play of all time, at least from the standpoint of the modern fan. The day was Nov. 17, 1968. It was the nationally televised game, pitting the New York Jets and the Oakland Raiders, in the year that the Jets and Joe Namath were the talk of football and, ultimately, this upstart American Football League team would win the third Super Bowl, knocking off the old-line National Football League to everyone's shock, and beginning modern (or is it postmodern?) fascination with pro football as the nation's sport. It was also in that time, so dimly remembered, when nationally televised NFL football games were rationed to one per week.

The Jets had just kicked a field goal to take a 32-29 lead with 50 seconds left. Oakland had the ball, but the situation looked hopeless. The clock ticked to 7 p.m. ET, the old, highly formalized starting moment for prime time. Without comment, the football scene dissolved, to be replaced by a gauzy image of ein kleines Mädchen collecting flowers and skipping through the Swiss Alps as someone yodeled.

Yes, it was the Heidi Game. Millions of viewers were outraged by the unexplained substitution of wholesome family entertainment for the crunching, mindless violence they had been enjoying. They raced to call local TV stations to get the final result—this was in that primordial epoch before cable, sports radio, and the Web, when ringing up the local affiliate was the way all right-

thinking people checked out-of-town scores. The callers were stunned to learn that Oakland put up two touchdowns in the final 49 seconds to win 43-32. The decisive moment? A wild fumble that was kicked, booted, muffed, and scrummed by countless gentlemen until fallen upon in the end zone for six by the most important player in NFL history, Raiders third-string halfback Preston Ridlehuber.

Ridlehuber's subsequent accomplishments may have lacked distinction—his total career stats show 22 games, 12 rushes for 55 yards, four receptions, and a punt return. But learning of the Oakland comeback and knowing they had missed the good part drove millions of viewers into mass frenzy. Station switchboards were inundated. The networks were stunned by the intensity of the reaction—hard as it seems to believe today, at that point, programming executives did not seem fully aware that Americans were just plain nuts about football. A few hours after the Heidi Game, NBC announced that henceforth it would never cut away from a game, no matter what. CBS, the other football network of the time, quickly matched. This established a national consensus on an essential precedent: Nothing is more important than football.

No cutting away, no matter what! It can be Green Bay 48-Cincinnati 3 late in the fourth quarter of a lightning-delayed game that's running toward bedtime with a reserve punter in to kneel on snaps and grind the clock, yet we will see every tedious tick, even if the pope is at that moment reading a homily pronouncing mandatory homosexuality, even if Ehud Barak and Yasser Arafat are at that moment appearing at the White House to announce a joint nuclear strike on Belgium. After the Heidi Game, no one dares question that in TV terms, nothing comes before NFL football.

Of course, not all is perfect in this realm. Networks continue to waste valuable time on the meaningless—to say nothing of poorly played—NFL preseason. Not even s should watch NFL preseason games, which are ugly, ugly, ugly, in addition to being no more than rehearsals conducted before a paid audience. Let's put it this way: You don't want to watch Cindy Crawford shaving her legs: You want to watch her modeling the lingerie. This should be our attitude about the NFL preseason too.

Last weekend, in the final preseason games, most coaches held out their starters to avoid injuries and played only those whom the teams fully intended to cut the following day anyway. In the Baltimore Ravens' concluding preseason game, a gentleman named Germany Johnson caught five passes for 82 yards and a touchdown. Anyone unfortunate enough to have watched the game would have sworn the whole Ravens strategy for 2000 was going to be to work the ball to Germany Johnson. The following morning, Johnson was released.

What, I ask, is the point of all this, especially before paid audiences and on television? Rehearse in private, I say. The NFL preseason should be reduced to two games, or even eliminated. There's no Lyric Opera preseason, no American Ballet Theatre preseason, no Stratford Upon Avon preseason, certainly no rehearsal columns of Tuesday Morning Quarterback! (Although Al Gore does seem to be perpetually in preseason.) Cutting back or eliminating the preseason would mean the real nonsense could start sooner, and we could all park ourselves on the recliner to dial in real games and wallow in the pleasantly addled stupor the NFL induces.

For we live today in the world Preston Ridlehuber made: Monday, Sunday, and Thursday night games. Weekly national double-headers and regional cards. Saturday double-headers in December. This year, a Saturday night game the night before Christmas Eve. Endlessly repeated, interminable highlight reels on ESPN, ESPN2, ESPN Coke Classic, CNN, Fox, and PBS for all I know. Every game played everywhere, if you're in the elect that has DirecTV. When the season kicks off on Sunday, pause and utter a word of thanks to Preston Ridlehuber, who made all this possible. But don't bow your head. You might miss a three-yard plunge.

Weekly Tuesday Morning Quarterback Features:

- There will be a weekly item ridiculing incorrect predictions about games from the Big Media. Since the incorrect predictions don't start till this weekend, the item cannot start till next Tuesday.
- There will be a weekly item noting the most embarrassing Dennis Miller moment from each Monday Night Football broadcast. TMQ feels certain that future historians will study this item, attempting to discern the true cause of the downfall of Western civilization. This cannot be guaranteed to be a permanent running item, however, because TMQ does not expect Miller to last out the season.
- There will be a weekly trivia question, to which readers are invited to submit responses via "The Fray." The prize for the best response each week: a Tuesday Morning Quarterback cap, as soon as Microsoft marketing finishes copyrighting the word "morning" and Slate lawyers approve the disclaimer. The lawyers are insisting the caps come shrink-wrapped with a 60,000-word disclaimer that says anyone who opens the wrapping consents to having his or her DNA sequence copyrighted by Microsoft. Otherwise, it's a cool cap. This week's trivia question: Which is not the actual name of an actual former NFL player—Fair Hooker, Wonderful Monds, Earthwind Moreland, Sheepy Redeen, or Vitamin Smith?

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## Returns, and Many Happy

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Sept. 5, 2000, at 10:00 PM ET

The inanity, the tediousness, the predictability of the NFL—it's back, and what a relief. Opening weekend saw games that were monotonous (Carolina-Washington, Jets-Packers), games that were excruciatingly bad (Bolts-Raiders), and two fabulous games (Bills-Titans and Rams-Broncos) both played in prime time where everyone could see them. But mostly it saw no basic changes in what makes the NFL both lovable and exasperating, and that was the best part.

(Note: Complaints about Monday Night Football to follow at end of column.)

All summer, for instance, it was standard to hear that the NFL was about to be totally transformed by "vertical game" deep passing. In imitation of the Super Bowl champion Rams, everyone would be throwing monster long TD passes. Instead, opening weekend saw five TD passes of 40 yards or more (Warner to Hakim for 80, Warner to Faulk for 72, Banks to Ismail for 53, McNown to Robinson for 48, Chandler to Mathis for 44) vs. seven plus-40 TD passes last year on opening weekend—when everyone said the league would be swept by a vast, sweeping switch to power running, in imitation of the then-champion Broncos, and that didn't happen either.

Much more prevalent than "vertical" passes were touchdown returns. Nine punts, kickoffs, fumbles, and interceptions were returned for touchdowns on opening weekend, a high figure. There's nothing teams hate more than working, working, working for each hard-won meter of field position (note: TMQ is considering using the metric system, as in, "It was 2.8 meters and a cloud of dust"), only to see some gentleman suddenly sprinting untouched the length of the field. And it's almost always a little, skinny guy who gets to do the sprinting too, driving the bulked-up, pumped-up NFL middle class crazy.

Among other vast, sweeping changes that failed to occur, it was reassuring to see that individual team makeovers turned out to be mostly puff. For instance, every summer every NFL offensive coordinator says he is going to make a commitment to being patient and establishing the running game—when he knows perfectly well the plan is to push the panic button by the middle of the second quarter. Thus Arizona and Pittsburgh, two teams that made off-season commitments to the running game, went pass-wacky immediately after their first two drives were stuffed: The Cardinals threw 49 times vs. 20 runs, while the Steelers threw 39 times vs. 18 runs, each trend beginning long before the score was one-sided. The sight of the Cardinals and Steelers attempting to pass is not something for the faint-hearted.

And every summer, every NFL defensive coordinator says his charges are going to play attacking, blitzing defense—when he knows perfectly well that the plan is to fall back into coverage to keep things from getting even worse. Thus Dallas, Cleveland, and Seattle yesterday all switched early to soft zones to guard against long scores that would turn defeat into embarrassment. (Interesting that we have Dallas and Cleveland in the same sentence as teams that stank on opening day, isn't it?) Coverage-based strategy may make sense: Of last season's

top three defenses—Buffalo, Baltimore, and Tampa—none play a blitz-based scheme. It's just the entertainment value of the annual, obligatory claim that this year we will have an "attacking" defense. What TMQ wants to hear is some defensive coordinator someday saying, "Our plan is to lay back, block the seams, and get incompletions."

**Best Call of the Day:** At Dallas, the Eagles began the game with an onside kick. An onside kick is a desperation play, and there were 15 minutes on the clock in the first quarter. But the Eagles were desperate! They've been horrible for years. The gamble worked and set Philadelphia on a course for an impressive 41-14 opening-day road win. The psychological angle here is that players often would rather gamble and fail than play percentages. An onside kick or a try on fourth and short shows that you are unafraid, whereas punting on fourth and short communicates the opposite message. The Eagles started the game by telling the Cowboys that they weren't afraid, and boy did it work. Bonus: Jerry Jones had to watch.

**Worst Call of the Day:** New Orleans held the visiting Lions to just 189 yards yet somehow was trailing by four as the clock wound down. (Wait, we know how—they are New Orleans.) The Saints had the ball deep in Detroit territory, third and five, about 30 seconds left. The call? New Orleans set RB Ricky Williams far out to the left like a wide receiver, hoping to draw the Lions defense that way, and then rolled QB Jeff Blake right. But Williams is such a terrible receiver he might as well stop in the middle of pass patterns to call his agent and complain about his contract. So the Lions ignored him, and Blake was smothered. On the next and final play, we saw why the Lions had ignored Williams on the previous down. The Saints called a short middle curl pass to Williams, and he listlessly jogged out (probably searching for his cell phone), then barely bothered to fight for the ball as a Detroit player made the breakup that ended the game. Tactical explanation: Defenses always shrug at heavy RBs who line up as WRs, unless it has been shown that these gentlemen can run real patterns and catch balls. Lining up a heavy RB as a flanker is the equivalent of handing out cards that say, "We're rolling the other way."

**Best Performance of the Day:** Turned in by Cincinnati, which did not lose. But then, it had the opening bye. Face it Bengals fans, your team peaked early.

**Stat of the Day:** Seattle, which lost 23-0, is now 6-19 all-time on opening day. Ye gods.

**Pun of the Day:** CB Paul Miranda just signed with these very Seahawks. Was he given a warning?

**Play of the Day:** Nobody seemed to notice the biggest play of the weekend, maybe because it happened at 11:57 p.m. ET Sunday night. Buffalo was about to best defending AFC champs Tennessee in a game already dubbed Home Run Payback. (Like 747 airplanes with individual names, games that merit names are the best kind.) The Bills went ahead on a field goal with a few seconds remaining, exactly as they had in the Music City Miracle game, and had only to kick off and make one tackle to start celebrating, exactly like the Music City Miracle game. Buffalo kicked. The Ts returner cut though the Bills like they were all dialing their agents and broke into the clear at the 50. The crowd fell into paralyzed silence. Would there be a Twilight Zone-esque repeat of the Music City Miracle? There might have been, except that placekicker Steve Christie tackled the returner in the open field.

The kicker saved the game—and (fun fact) he's a Canadian! No NFL play on opening weekend was bigger or athletically more impressive, not even Az-Zahir Hakim's Monday-night sprints. Though Christie will never get credit because he's a kicker and because of the sinister anti-Canadian conspiracy. In an ominous sign for Western civilization, Bills fans began parking RVs and mobile homes in the stadium lot on Thursday night to get the best spots for tailgating.

Tactic of the day: Against the Broncos, the Rams both rolled up yards like Patton moving through France and ran the single sharpest-looking play design of the weekend. WRs Hakim and Terry Holt lined up in the backfield, then shifted to slot stances on each side but didn't come to a halt. They then very purposefully exchanged positions, one sprinting from the left slot to the right and the other vice versa. It gave the impression that something important was about to happen based on where the WRs lined up, and the Broncos bought it, jumping their LBs out to the slots. Then Kurt Warner simply gave the ball to Marshall Faulk straight up the middle for a 27-yard gain. Great deception. The tentacled, silicon-based lifeforms on Warner's homeworld obviously have studied human football tactics.

Now for the complaints about Monday Night Football. The buffoon in the dark glasses is gone, and that is to the good. You still hear him, but at least you don't have to look at him. The shaded buffoon is so mediocre he should be delivering pints of ice cream for Kozmo.com, not appearing on national television. TMQ had planned to propose Loreena McKennitt as his replacement.

And shots of the boys yukking it up in the booth were reduced; the first did not come until 10:14 p.m. ET. Last year they showed the booth more than the game. Less booth, too, is to the good.

But what's up with this new premise of new producer Don Ohlmeyer that the booth has to become "entertainment"? TMQ always thought that the game was supposed to be the entertainment—last night it sure was. But if the assumption is that the game itself no longer counts as entertainment, then Spaulding Gray should do stream-of-consciousness play-by-play, the Boston Pops should be performing on the sidelines, replays should be stylized into MTV clips (we may regret suggesting that), and Cindy Crawford should strip during timeouts. Of course, TMQ thinks having Cindy Crawford disrobe is the solution to nearly any problem.

### Running Items Department

Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment: There were so many to choose from—Miller's opening soliloquy in the yellow throwback blazer was incomprehensible, and his self-promotional references to being on the cover of TV Guide made strong men gag.

But TMQ goes with the fact that three days before his debut, Miller announced he would talk less. This is like Al Gore declaring he will spend less time trying to seem genuine. Someone feels his popularity will rise if he speaks less; now, what does this tell you? Reflecting our age of pseudo-precision, Miller proffered that he would reduce his verbal production by "15 to 20 percent"; he also announced that rather than interrupt colleagues, he would "let it breathe." Fine red wine needs to breathe. What Dennis Miller needs, according to a proprietary algorithm developed by TMQ, is to talk 72.54 percent to 86.93 percent less.

Most Embarrassing Big-Media Prediction: There were so many to choose from, but TMQ goes with the New York Times and its habit, in a full-page NFL predictions package that runs each Friday, of attempting to predict each game's final score.

Trying to call the spread is improbable enough. Remember, bookmakers' spreads have nothing to do with projecting how many points the winner will win by—spreads are calculated so as to entice equal betting on both sides of a contest, leaving the bookmaker whole no matter what the outcome. But attempting to call an exact final score is a complete waste of time, to say nothing of statistical nonsense. Predicting an exact final score is like predicting exactly how many shots of boysenberry-almond vodka will be downed in a specific cafe in Copenhagen on April 24, 2008, but only if the Daughters of Abba are playing on the sound system. (If you're thinking, "Hey that one's easy, it would be zero," then you have not been to Denmark lately.) The odds against predicting a final score are quite high, and even if you're right, it's a fluke, and then so what?

Thus, you won't be surprised to learn that the New York Times went zero for 15 in its attempt to predict an exact final score. Times predicted final: Atlanta 17, SF 10. Actual: Atlanta 36, SF 28. Times predicted final: Tampa 19, Patriots 7. Actual: Tampa 21, Patriots 16. And so on.

There will be 259 NFL games this year. TMQ will track the Times weekly—in a running item to be called "New York Times Final-Score Score"—to determine if, in 259 chances, the paper ever predicts a final score.

### TMQ Trivia Challenge

Tuesday Morning Quarterback wishes to announce that, according to Microsoft's cheerful, carefree lawyers, this is not a "contest." We guarantee you will lose time, endure frustration, and receive nothing, OK? (Just like going on a date!) Our rules are so completely incomprehensible, we refuse to explain them. (Just like antitrust law!) We make no warranties, express or implied. (Just like Firestone tires!) Each week's winner will have his or her name published in the next column. You might get a TMQ cap at season's end, but the final decision will be completely arbitrary and we promise nothing. We don't even promise the season will end. If you're a Cleveland fan, it may seem like the season never ends.

Of many, many entrants, the sole correct answer to last week's question came from Ben Domenech of William & Mary University in Williamsburg, Va. Here was the question:

Which is not the actual name of an actual former NFL player—Fair Hooker, Wonderful Monds, Earthwind Moreland, Sheepy Redeem, or Vitamin Smith?

Many, many entrants went with Wonderful Monds, because he is a minor-league baseball player. But, aha! The baseball player is Wonderful Terrific Monds III. His father, Wonderful Terrific Monds Jr., played a season with the Niners in 1978.

Actually, all the names were actual names of NFL players. Domenech correctly choose Earthwind Moreland as the answer, because Earthwind is not a former player—he just signed with the Jets after being released by Tampa Bay.

Otherwise, Fair Hooker was a WR for the old version of the Cleveland Browns (the Browns Release 1.0). Sheepy Redeen plied his trade for the no-faceguards Minneapolis Marines in 1921. Vitamin Smith was a member of the 1951 championship Los Angeles Rams (the Norm van Brocklin team) and briefly held an NFL record for kick-return TDs.

Though the week's challenge goes to Domenech, TMQ simply must reproduce the following entry from someone screen-named Dfos. Good Dfos fell into the Monds trap but otherwise gets a tip of TMQ's nonexistent cap for composing his entry as a poem:

To pigskins did Sheepy aspire,  
While the Bucs test young Earthwind in fire.  
Fair Hooker's gams  
Helped swallow Vitamin's Rams  
But Monds never could quite get hired.

Now this week's TMQ Trivia Challenge:

The sole player ever to get One for the Thumb was Charles Haley, who appeared in five Super Bowls and left with a ring each time. Cornelius Bennett also played in five of the big games, with the opposite result—no rings. In terms of total appearances, both these gentlemen are staring at the tail lights of the only player ever to perform in six Super Bowls. Who is he?

To enter, use "The Fray" and subject-line the reply, "Trivia Answer." (In case of ties, first-read wins—but that's not a rule since it's not a contest.) If answering in verse, slug your posting, "Trivia Poem."

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## **Sideline in Autumn**

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Sept. 12, 2000, at 9:00 PM ET

Bartender, comebacks for everyone!

The Jets came back from 19-7 late in the fourth. The Raiders came back from 21-0. The Ravens came back from 23-7. Last year's Super Bowl combatants had to come back: the Rams coming back to win with 23 seconds on the clock, the Tennessee Flaming Ts coming back to tie with 50 seconds left, then to win in overtime. The Cardinals came back to win on the final possession—of course Arizona is in a comeback situation from the opening kickoff. Even the New Orleans Saints won in a last-second comeback.

Merely typing the words, "the New Orleans Saints won in a last-second comeback" holds for TMQ the same thrill and novelty as typing, "collapse of the former Soviet Union" or "quarterly profit announced by Web retailer."

(See complaints about Monday Night Football below; special Dennis Miller denunciations section.)

**Best Call of the Week:** On the road in Indianapolis, the Raiders had rallied from their 21-0 deficit to take a 31-24 lead at the beginning of the fourth quarter. Oakland had the ball deep in its territory and the home faithful were roaring in the Colts' noisy dome. Worse, far worse, the crowd was armed with towels; strong men grow weak when they glimpse Indianans politely sitting in seats holding towels. (See "New York Times Final-Score Score" below.) Steeling themselves against towel-induced panic, Oakland staged a nearly 10-minute clock-killer drive that ended with the touchdown that put the game away.

TMQ salutes the fact that on this drive, Oakland coaches called runs on 10 of 13 plays. It's astonishing how often, in late-game situations, the team with the lead goes jackrabbit and attempts passes—which fall incomplete and stop the clock from grinding—rather than just mindlessly bashing into the line and sustaining that tick-tick-tick. Oakland dared to be mindless and was rewarded with victory.

**Worst Call of the Week:** Trailing by six in the opening half, the Eagles had first and goal at the Jersey Giants one. Did they pound the ball once, twice, three times, four times? No, QB Donovan McNabb dropped back, back, back and lost 15 yards on a sack; it turned into a passing series, and Philadelphia had to settle for a field goal.

Then, trailing by 17 in the second half, the Eagles had third and one in Giants territory. Did they pound the ball once, twice? No, they threw incomplete on third and kicked on fourth. Jimmy Johnson used to say that if you can't gain one single yard by running straight ahead, you don't deserve to win. The Eagles didn't even try to gain the key single yards of the game by running, and did not win. Fun fact: After Eagles back Duce Staley had a great opening day,

Sportstalk.com declared him an NFL MVP candidate. Staley production this week: 11 yards on seven carries.

The Minkey Is off Their Back: Baltimore took its first-ever lead in the AFC Central on the strength of its first-ever defeat of Jacksonville. Ah, it was good to see Jax coach Tom Coughlin—one of the league's worst sports, he shouts insults at the other team and stomps in anger when the opposition makes good plays the way 6-year-olds do—suffer on the sideline.

Football Haikus of the Week: A sensitive entrant to last week's TMQ Trivia Challenge went the poetry option one better and responded in haiku. (See below.) This threw TMQ into a deeply contemplative, reflective mood in which he dreamed wistfully of the beauty of nature, the fleeting flutelike melody that is life, the taste of beer, and the sight of Cindy Crawford in that movie poster she did half-naked and wearing handcuffs.

Thus it seemed time for a few football haikus. First, to refresh your memory of the form, a classical 5-7-5 haiku goes like this:

On a withered branch  
A crow has alighted  
Nightfall in autumn.

—Basho, 1679

Football haikus go like this:

The fumble bounces  
Distant, a raccoon sneezes  
Oh, dive for the ball

Upon the hash mark  
A seagull alights, pensive  
Where is that landfill?

The cheerleaders' skirts  
Lifted by diffident gusts  
Long enough, it's good!

On Brett Favre's helmet  
Beer falls, and the cup crumples  
Sideline in autumn

—TMQ, 2000

Note: The second canto is dedicated to those courageous men and women who attend games at Meadowlands Stadium, built in a place where God did not intend for any Homo sapiens to be, let alone 80,000 borderline lunatics with painted faces.

Readers are invited to submit their own football haikus via "The Fray." (Literary merit optional.) Enter a deeply meditative mood before composing.

Historical Perspective of the Week: Cumulative records for the Cincinnati Bengals and the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.0) coming into the Battle of Ohio last season and this weekend: 6-24.

These are the teams that represent the state that is home to Canton, Ohio, birthplace of William McKinley and site of the Pro Football Hall of Fame. These are the teams that represent the state that is home to Massillon High School, the most famous prep football program in the nation. (Ticket sales limited to four per person, the school's recorded message will tell you.) After getting a bye on opening day and an extra week to prepare—the league just can't do anything more to help the Bengals, save perhaps allowing them to use CFL rules—and benefiting from the extra pump-up of the first game in a brand-new \$453 million cost-overrun palace of a stadium, Cincinnati nevertheless looked listlessly pathetic in losing 24-7 to the team with the worst record in the league last year. TMQ proposes that Massillon High replace the Bengals in the NFL.

Tomato-Based Ploy of the Week: Playing at home, the Buccaneers reached the Bears one and called time. During the pause, Tampa sent its cheerleaders out onto the field to dance in the end zone, inches away from the Chicago defenders. True to the hallowed tradition of Florida cheerleaders, the Bucs babes take an enlightened attitude toward apparel: Why should the sun be wasted on fabric when you can feel it directly on your skin? (TMQ has long believed that skimpy attire empowers women and helps them get in touch with their sensuality.) The Bears defenders gawked and barely seemed to notice when the Bucs returned to run the next play and score. TMQ anticipates that sending the chicks onto the field to distract the visiting team will become a leaguewide ploy. During timeouts in high-pressure playoff games, cheerleaders will be shouting at the opposition, "What am I bid for this phone number!"

Stat of the Week: Ultimately the Bears lost 41-0 to Tampa Bay. Chicago plays Tampa twice a year and has now gone 14 consecutive quarters (3.5 games) without scoring a touchdown against the Bucs defense. Ye gods.

Hidden Indicator of the Week: Last season, through the first two weekends, NFL teams scored 12 touchdowns on punt, kickoff, interception, and fumble returns. This season, through the first two weekends, 17 return TDs were scored. This shows the kind of hidden, underlying trend that is essential to an insider's knowledge of the game. Unfortunately, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has no idea what it is.

### **Running Items Department**

Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment: Once again, the opening monologue was incomprehensible—and we're supposed to be so impressed that he spoke the word "Plantagenet." (Miller was certainly impressed that he spoke it, and repeatedly told us so.) We also got an incomprehensible reference to Hopi psychiatric philosophy and this Beckett-style exchange:

View: Stadium seen from air, swirling electro-graphics.

Miller: That's it! [Inaudible.] Lloyd Bucher, man.

Al Michaels: Bucher ... the Pueblo.

Commercial break.

If you can figure out what the capture of the U.S.S. Pueblo in 1968 had to do with anything in the Jets-Patriots game, you are a deep, deep thinker of Miller-esque stature.

Along the way, Miller reassured us of that viselike grasp of NFL detail that we've heard so much about. When Antonio Langham got a pick, Dennis immediately squeaked, "Every time you think he's out of the league, he makes a big interception." Dan Fouts jumped in to note that, ah, Langham hadn't made an interception in two years. Michaels jumped in to note the game date from two years back. Both seemed more than pleased to make their colleague appear an idiot. Some teamwork environment you've created there, Don Ohlmeyer. Were they lying in wait for Miller to look bad, or what?

And here's the Woody joke that he used to open the show. "The new owner of the New York Jets is Woody Johnson. The New England Patriots have a second-year center named Damien Woody. So Al, as is often the case in life, what it's probably gonna come down to is who has the better Woody." Pretty hysterical, huh? ABC has already listed it on its Web site as the No. 1 "Miller Moment" from last night.

But the real problem with Miller isn't the grating comments or the football slips. The real problem is the shamelessness of the self-promotion. Miller must sense that he isn't going to be on long and feel he's got to gush while he has the chance.

Last week, Miller excruciatingly patted himself on the back for his own press coverage.

This week he flacked Drew Carey and the new cast of Spin City. Flack, flack, flack. He gushed about his personal vision for the actor Michael J. Fox, who is ill, but this had nothing to do with the game or the situation or the search for disease cures and everything to do with making Dennis Miller sound like a Hollywood player.

Miller told us with gushing approval how Patriots owner Robert Kraft is "a class act." Why? Because Kraft had complimented Miller and given him a gift. (Dan Dierdorf, once a promising Monday Night Football commentator, started downhill when he began boasting about riding with the owners in their private jets and smoking cigars with them.) When actor Michael Douglas, one of the best-connected people in "the industry," as Hollywood calls itself, entered the booth, Miller slurped so shamelessly that there was practically saliva on the inside of your TV tube.

Dennis Miller isn't a bold, risk-taking, free spirit, he's just another Hollywood toady whose ultimate goal in life is the right party invitations. Put him back on cable where he belongs, please.

New York Times Final-Score Score: The Paper of Record again goes 0-15 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score. Season final-score score: 0-30. Times predicted: Bengals 27, Browns 17. Actual: Browns 24, Bengals 7. Times predicted: Washington 27, Detroit 23. Actual: Detroit 15, Washington 10. Times predicted: Seahawks 30, Rams 28. Actual: Rams 37, Seahawks 34. Times predicted: Colts 26, Raiders 17. Actual: Raiders 38, Colts 31.

Of the latter game, the Times predicted that the Raiders would not only lose but find playing in the Colts' stadium "scary" because "the fans there are loud and wave their white towels in a frenzy." What, the Raiders were supposed to be afraid of towels? Oh, but they're moving towels—who wouldn't be terrified!

### **TMQ Trivia Challenge**

Several entrants to last week's Trivia Challenge had the temerity to complain that the question was too easy, on the grounds that you could find the information using Web search engines. TMQ notes that most entrants who made this complaint then offered the wrong answer. Ask Jeeves, for example, advised one unfortunate entrant that the correct response was Dan Reeves. Dan Reeves may be the answer to some questions (such as, "OK guys, which one of you ordered the boysenberry-almond martini?"), but not to the question TMQ had asked.

The amazing thing about the Internet is that it allows people anywhere in the world, for almost no cost, to very quickly and conveniently find things that are worthless! Such as the wrong information in NFL trivia and other important categories of life.

Here was last week's question:

The sole player ever to get One for the Thumb was Charles Haley, who appeared in five Super Bowls and left with a ring each time. Cornelius Bennett also played in five of the big games, with the opposite result—no rings. In terms of total appearances, both these gentlemen are staring at the taillights of the only player ever to perform in six Super Bowls. Who is he?

Many, many entrants proposed Don Beebe, who was on four Super Bowl teams with Buffalo and two with Green Bay. But, aha! the question asked for the only player ever to perform in six Super Bowls. Beebe was on injured reserve for one of the tilts and inactive for another; he performed in four.

Garry Hoyt of Grapevine, Texas—which sounds like a whistle stop in a remote egg-farming region but is actually a Dallas suburb where fundamentalist Cowboy worshippers recently voted to refuse to ordain women as sportscasters—suggested, "The answer is Al Gore, who played in six Super Bowls before inventing the Internet."

Will Work of Cambridge, Mass., won the challenge by being first to submit the correct answer: Mike Lodish, who played in Buffalo's four Super Bowls, then signed with Denver and promptly played in two more. This raises the question, why wasn't every NFL team trying like mad to get its hands on Mike Lodish? Work's reply came in 64 minutes after the column went up. The

fastest (non-winning) reply was received just 11 minutes after the column posted, which makes even TMQ's head spin.

Later, Tuesday Morning Quarterback was thrown into its deeply contemplative mood by reading this reply from Brad Hammill, who phrased his answer as a haiku:

Defensive tackle  
With Denver and Buffalo  
Mike Lodish in six

Yup, that's 5-7-5 all right. To confirm the validity, the lines were submitted to the Haiku-o-Matic Web site, which verified the lyric structure and replied, "Thank you for your marvelous haiku!" (Haiku types are pretty nonjudgmental, something TMQ is counting on heavily.) Presumably, Hammill's work is now immortalized within the data banks of Haiku-o-Matic. But Brad, you forgot to title your work. TMQ suggests, "Lodish Resplendent." Or is that already the title of a Saul Bellow novella?

And now for this week's Trivia Challenge, designed to cause weeping and laments by those who said last week's was insufficiently hard.

The big Division 1 schools produce most NFL players—429 all-time from Notre Dame, 361 from USC, 267 from Penn State. Then there are the small schools that have, in their histories, produced just one NFL player—the Paducah CCs and Peru States of the world.

Below are the names of four small colleges that have sent only one player to the NFL, followed by the names of four NFL athletes from single-player schools. Match each player to his alma mater.

Schools: Brockport State, Isothermal CC of North Carolina, Mount Senario, Shippensburg.  
Players: Rob Davis, Percy Howard, Craig Jay, Mike Jones.

Good luck cut-and-pasting that into Ask Jeeves! I was going to add another single-athlete school to the list, Belgrade University (Serbia), but had a sneaking feeling entrants would not need advanced technology to match it with NFL player Momcilo Gavric.

Remember, this is not a contest. The first-read correct reply might receive a TMQ cap at season's end, but the final decision will be completely arbitrary and we promise nothing.

Submit your answers to "The Fray," slugging them "Trivia Answer." If answering in haiku, title the reply "Trivia Haiku." (Good luck fitting "Isothermal CC of North Carolina" into a standard haiku line.) If answering in a full-length epic poem, slug the reply, "Trivia Cantos." Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

Article URL: <http://www.slate.com/id/89473/>

## **New Jersey Resplendent**

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Sept. 19, 2000, at 9:00 PM ET

It would have taken a man with a heart of stone (or, alternatively, any woman) to keep a dry eye watching Dan Marino at his number-retirement night, walking across the field in a business suit rather than pads. Ye gods, that gentleman could throw the football. The question of whether Marino was the greatest quarterback or merely the greatest passer will fuel years of sports-bar arguments conducted over micro-brewed unfiltered half-dark white wheat ale and shots of frozen boysenberry-almond schnapps. But if you were open and wanted the ball to arrive exactly at the center of your sternum in exactly one microsecond—often, even if you weren't open—Marino was your man. Come back again in another life, OK?

Marino retirement bonus: During the halftime ceremony, Miami shot off so many fireworks that a pall of smoke hung over the ballpark (official name: Your Trademark Here Stadium) as the second half began. The Dolphins took the kickoff and quickly moved for their first touchdown, as Baltimore defenders seemed to have trouble seeing who had the ball.

Monday Night Football complaints below; also, special Dennis Miller gushing praise item.

Best Plays of the Week: Best No. 1. Cleaving to a principle explained in an earlier TMQ—that defenses ignore trick-play decoy receivers (quarterbacks split wide, etc.) unless they have been shown to be able to run real routes and make real catches—the Jets sent cornerback Marcus Coleman, who had never once run out for a pass, in as their Hail Mary target on what was assumed to be a pro forma wasted play from midfield on the final snap of the first half against Buffalo. Sure enough, Bills defenders ignored Coleman as completely as if he'd been the Natural Law Party candidate at a presidential debate. This gentleman sprinted uncovered straight through an ultra-prevent defense composed entirely of backpedaling DBs and leapt for a touchdown as the clock ticked to 0:00.

Best No. 2. Tampa Bay threw for six to SUV-sized lineman Randall McDaniel, who lined up as an eligible receiver in a trick formation and was, in keeping with the rule above, completely ignored. McDaniel officially becomes the slowest player ever to catch an NFL touchdown pass. (Postwar era only.)

Best No. 3. Reaching the Steelers 13-yard line with a few minutes to play, Cleveland did not go pass-wacky but pounded the ball for five straight running plays. The result was that the Browns (Release 2.0) had to settle for a field goal and only a three-point lead, but left so little time on the clock that Pittsburgh bungled its comeback attempt. (See next item.)

Best No. 4. On fourth down at the Indigenous Persons three-yard line, Dallas quarterback Randall Cunningham faked a quick step right, then flipped the ball left to Emmitt Smith. Emmitt Smith is the NFL's all-time touchdown leader among running backs. Yet the Persons seemed to have no idea, not a clue, that he was going to get the ball and bought the fake. You could practically see money-crazed Owner/Twerp Daniel Snyder screaming in his box, "What do you mean I'm not allowed to order players killed!"

Worst Plays of the Week: Worst No. 1. Criticizing the Steelers for botched offense seems at this point a little like criticizing Bill Clinton for his recently announced agreement, on leaving office, to become audition director for Baywatch. Nevertheless we must face the fact that, trailing by three with 35 seconds remaining, Pittsburgh had a first down and a stopped clock at the Cleveland nine-yard line and through substitution confusion and a succession of clock-management snafus, never got a field-goal attempt airborne. The Steelers did look quite formidable with twice the normal numbers of players in to block for the place-kicker as time expired, though.

Worst No. 2. Facing fourth and goal on the Minnesota four and trailing by 14 at the start of the fourth quarter, New England went for it. P-Men coaches kept just six men back to block despite an expect-the-blitz down-and-distance; the Vikings blitzed, and Drew Bledsoe was immediately sacked. Later, facing fourth down with two minutes to play and now trailing by eight—if they'd taken that FG, it would have been five—the Patriots again kept just six in to block on a blitzing down. Another instant sack.

Worst No. 3. After hitting Randall McDaniel with the trick touchdown pass in the first half, Tampa tried the same thing in the same situation in the second half. The term "element of surprise" includes the word "surprise." The result of the play can be summarized with the technical term "clang."

Stat of the Week: The Rams have scored an incredible 119 points in three games, which puts them on the pace for 7,543 points in the decade. (Actual figure at the current rate.) That photonic vortex beam generator Kurt Warner brought with him from his homeworld on the star-cruiser sure seems to be paying off!

Quote of the Week: New England safety Lawyer Milloy, denouncing sportswriters who say there is turmoil inside the 0-3 Patriots organization: "You guys can't possibly understand what's going on in here, because a lot of times we don't know what's going on in here."

Great Moments in Management: During preseason the Bills' rookie kick-returner had fumble problems, so just prior to opening day, Buffalo traded him for Denver returner Chris Watson. The normally astute Bills management seemed not to have checked the fumble charts, which show Watson led all NFL returners in coughing up the ball last season; nor to have read the Denver Post, which reported that the Broncos were relieved to unload a liability. On Sunday, Watson fumbled away two consecutive punts in the fourth quarter, causing Buffalo to self-destruct.

New Jersey Resplendent: Everyone's noting that the two New York City teams have not been a combined 6-0 since the late Eisenhower administration. But aha, then they actually were New York City teams! Since both now play in New Jersey (official state motto: Don't Worry, That Stuff Is Biodegradable), this marks the first time in NFL history—in fact, the first time in the entire recorded history of known civilization—that the Garden State has been 6-0.

Here is how the NFL standings break down by state: adjusting for the fact, pointed out by many irked New-York-area readers, that the Washington Indigenous Persons are really the Maryland Indigenous Persons:

New Jersey: 6-0  
 Florida: 7-2  
 Missouri: 4-2  
 New York: 2-1  
 Maryland: 3-3  
 Ohio: 2-3  
 Texas: 1-2  
 California: 2-7  
 Pennsylvania: 1-4  
 All other single-team states: 16-20

The Curse of Potential: Under the NFL's quarterback rating formula, a Pro Bowl year is a figure of about 100, while if every single pass thrown by a quarterback simply clangs to the ground incomplete, the rating is 40. After three appearances Ryan Leaf, second pick in the 1998 draft, has a QB rating of 32.6. He's worse than pure incompletions. Ye gods.

Reader Haiku of the Week: TMQ reserves the right to go haiku without warning, in times and places of its own choosing. This week, however, will be given over to verse submitted by readers.

This from reader W. E. White:

The rush attempt fails  
 The passes—all incomplete  
 We are the Steelers

Here, from reader David Waghalter:

New team in Houston  
 Houstonians much too long  
 Settle for Texans

This, from a reader screen-named Betty Boop:

Monday Night once more  
 No one to talk to again  
 I take up haiku

And a reader screen-named Woman Reader writes:

If I have to read  
 One more Cindy Crawford ref

It's one too many

TMQ takes your point on that last one. Cindy never calls anymore, anyway. What a blunder it was to mispronounce "Versace" in front of her. (Wait, that was a ref.)

Readers are invited to continue to submit football haiku or heroic couplets. No blank verse, though: TMQ is a traditionalist. Use "The Fray," and title your entries "Football Haiku" or "Football Heroic Couplets," and so on. Don't try to cheat on the iambic pentameter. TMQ once took an English lit course in college—"The Analogy as a Metaphor for Symbolism"—and will catch you.

Gorzon, Activate the Nedney Unit! Sebastian Janikowski, the Oakland Raiders' No.-1-draft-pick huge-bonus place-kicker, is now two-for-five in field-goal attempts. On Sunday, he fell down on his rear while attempting a kickoff. Joe Nedney, the minimum-salary kicker Oakland cut to make room for Janikowski, went four-for-four kicking for the Broncos as they defeated—the Raiders.

Hidden Indicator of the Week: Five teams scored touchdowns in the final minute of the first half, but no team scored a touchdown in the final minute of the second half. This is the kind of hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's understanding of the NFL. Unfortunately, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has no idea what it means.

### **Running Items Department**

Obscure College Score of the Week: (New item.) Tuesday Morning Quarterback has long experienced a sense of peace and contentment whenever reading, on Sunday mornings in the fall, those long columns of scores from football games involving obscure schools such as Bemidji State, Ferrum, Indiana of Pennsylvania, Lenoir-Rhyne, Ursinus, and Wisconsin-Stout.

TMQ has no idea where these schools are (particularly Indiana of Pennsylvania) or whether they actually exist (some determined prankster may be calling a "Lenoir-Rhyne" score into the Associated Press weekly). Yet TMQ finds it reassuring to think that at hundreds of small schools in the glorious autumn, people strap on pads, tape their fingers, and slam into each other repetitively, all for the sheer inexplicable joy of it. Audiences clap, bands play, car alarms go off in the parking lot: the cycle of life. How comforting to know that long after we have left this Earth, each Saturday all over the country, people will still be slamming into each other pointlessly and—well, I'm entering a contemplative state. Better stop before I go haiku.

Obscure College Score of the Week: Chadron State 66, Colorado Mines 2.

Most Magnificent Dennis Miller Moment: TMQ was so, so wrong about Miller. He's brilliant! That waffling crack to Al and Dan, "Oh, you men with your football talk!" Nobody's ever brought drag sensibility to network football commentary before, and it's so original in show business, so unusual. And dropping the names Dante and Stephen Hawking! Sure the references were incomprehensible, but they did what they were supposed to do—impress us! And his predictions at the "top" of the broadcast, as booth types gratingly say: that Deion Sanders and Brad Johnson would have the game's big nights? So what if Sanders fumbled a punt, and

Johnson threw the killer interception in the fourth, nobody remembered by 11:45 p.m. what Miller had said at 9:15 p.m. And oh, how masterfully Miller praised Owner/Twerp Daniel Snyder! The key to understanding Hollywood self-promotion is that the kneepads are put on whenever the money guys are in view, and Dennis Miller now brings that sensibility to Monday Night Football. What a genius!

The Stephen Hawking remark: "Deion Sanders has a sense of the moment like Stephen Hawking." That's it, no further comment or explanation.

Hawking once postulated that perception of time would accelerate in proportion to any rise in the Hubble Constant, then reverse during cosmological contraction if lambda was overcome. Maybe this is what Miller was alluding to. Readers are invited to submit explanations of Miller's comment—if any are possible—via The Fray, titling entries "Sanders-Hawking Postulate."

New York Times Final-Score Score: The Paper of Record goes 0-14 in its quixotic attempt to predict an actual final score, bringing the season's Times Final-Score Score 0-44 combined.

Times predicted: San Diego 20, Kansas City 17. Actual: Kansas City 42, San Diego 20. Times predicted: Carolina 28, Atlanta 24. Actual: Atlanta 15, Carolina 10. Times predicted: Eagles 17, Packers 14. Actual: Packers 6, Eagles 3. Times predicted: Tampa 13, Detroit 9. Actual: Tampa 31, Detroit 10. But wait, in the Dolphins-Ravens game, the Times projected a final of 20-6 and barely missed the actual of 19-6! Unfortunately the Times said Baltimore 20, Miami 6 and the actual was Miami 19, Baltimore 6.

TMQ's Irrefutable Reasons to Torment the Times: Several readers have written in suggesting the New York Times' quixotic quest to predict an exact final score isn't really that at all: Rather, it is a coded way of signaling point-spread advice. The Times has a policy of not printing the spread, to discourage the sin of wagering—although this does not prevent the paper from reporting in detail on IPOs.

According to this theory, when the Times projects, say, a final of Washington 28, Dallas 21 (Friday's edition), and the line is Washington giving 10 (Friday's line), the Multicolored Lady through this artifice is covertly advising clued-in readers to cash their Halliburton options and let it all ride on the Cowboys. Sounds pretty good as hidden advice, since the final was Dallas 27, Washington 21, meaning Cowboys bettors collected.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback would like to believe that the Times is so amusingly devious as to plant hidden messages in football predictions, especially if clandestine control of the sports pages by the Israeli government could somehow be worked into the theory. But TMQ takes Times predictions at face value. Why? Because viewed as encrypted betting advice, the Times predictions finished 7-7 against the spread this week, which sounds more like chance than a hidden hand. And many predictions did not follow the secret-advice form.

Two examples: Friday, when the spread was Broncos plus three at Oakland, the Times predicted a final of Raiders 24, Broncos 21. What, the Times was signaling readers that it thinks this game will wash against the line? Not even the guys at Gamblers Anonymous try to call ties.

And on Friday, when the line was San Diego plus four at Kansas City, the Times predicted a final of Bolts 20, Chiefs 17. It wasn't necessary to forecast a San Diego victory in order to send Times readers an encrypted message to sell their Chagalls and bet on the Bolts; predicting that San Diego would lose by less than four would have encoded the same hidden command. Projection of a Bolts straight-up win was unattractive as a cipher because the chance of being wrong was very high: Kansas City has the league's best home record in the last decade, while San Diego is in such dire straights, it started the great Moses Moreno at QB. As we now know, San Diego not only failed to win straight-up but failed to cover the spread by 29: If this is betting code, Times readers had best grab hold of their wallets. Thus TMQ believes the only rational explanation for the Times prediction was that the paper actually believed San Diego would win. (Wait, we said "rational" explanation.)

Of course, perhaps as part of the conspiracy, the Times deliberately inserts a few misleading calls such as the San Diego projection, in order to throw naïfs like TMQ off the scent. Or to steer bettors way from games the Israeli government is wagering on.

TMQ Trivia Challenge: Last week, Tuesday Morning Quarterback offered a trivia question he was sure would send readers scurrying to the darkest recesses of sports archives, if not flying to London to hop the Tube to the British Museum. Instead the first correct reply came in with scorching Rams-like speed a mere 23 minutes after the column posted.

Here was the question:

Below are the names of four small colleges that have sent only one player to the NFL, followed by the names of four NFL athletes from single-player schools. Match each player to his alma mater.

Schools: Brockport State, Isothermal CC of North Carolina, Mount Senario, Shippensburg.  
 Players: Rob Davis, Percy Howard, Craig Jay, Mike Jones.

Some readers questioned whether an "Isothermal Community College" actually exists. It's there, in lovely Spindale, N.C.: Check out its Web site, which offers no explanation of why the school is named after a feature on weather charts. Maybe there was once a great man named Jeremiah Isothermal.

Others wrote in to question the existence of Mount Senario. It's "on the banks of the Flambeau River in Ladysmith, Wisconsin," as its home page declares.

TMQ just loves the name of this school, which sounds like an objective in a Pentagon war game: "Blue team will assault Mount Senario at oh five hundred hours."

With his Rams-like blistering speed, Bill Peterson, who declined to publish his hometown (or to say whether he is a member of Homo sapiens—given the response time, TMQ suspects the

involvement of an experimental AI), was first to give the correct matches:

Brockport State—Mike Jones  
Isothermal—Percy Howard  
Mount Senario—Craig Jay  
Shippensburg—Rob Davis

Here is this week's TMQ Trivia Challenge:

Dan Marino was introduced at his number-retirement ceremony by the only other player whose number the Dolphins have retired, Bob Griese. In whose honor was each of the following jerseys put to pasture?

Arizona: No. 99  
Denver: No. 18  
Green Bay: No. 3  
New Jersey Giants: No. 4  
San Francisco: No. 73

Offer your replies via The Fray, titling the entry "Trivia Answer."

First correct reply will be cited in next week's column. And you might get a TMQ cap at season's end, but remember, the final decision will be completely arbitrary and we promise nothing. Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

Article URL: <http://www.slate.com/id/89829/>

## "The Catch" Becomes "A Catch"

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Sept. 26, 2000, at 8:30 PM ET

The San Francisco quarterback rolls right against the Cowboys at the goal line. He's under pressure, he lobs it at the corner of the end zone, the receiver leaps: touchdown! That happened on Sunday, but it sure wasn't "The Catch"—1982, Joe Montana to Dwight Clark with Too Tall Jones in pursuit, what a moment. Sunday's pass will go down in football annals as "A Catch"—2000, Jeff Garcia to Terrell Owens with Alonzo Spellman in pursuit. No thanks. To paraphrase Julie Brown, it was a play I'll remember for as long as I can.

San Francisco and Dallas met for some of the best, tensest, and highest-rated games of recent decades, including stirring NFC championship matchups. This weekend's Niners-Boys tilt wasn't even nationally broadcast, since the teams went in a combined 1-5. San Francisco had the most wins of any NFL team during the 1990s (122), while Dallas tied Buffalo for second-most (113). Now both franchises are gasping for air. To top it off, Dallas has already surrendered its No. 1 pick in next year's draft, while San Francisco is expected to lose picks for salary-cap violations. This demonstrates Newton's Third Law of NFL Motion: For every bad team that gets hot, such as the Rams and Ravens, there must be an equal and opposite great team that goes in the tank.

And what was that business of Terrell Owens of the 1-3 Niners strutting and prancing at midfield as if he'd just won Powerball? Hasn't this gentleman looked at the standings lately? (We're assuming here that he can read.) Hard to believe such trash from the Niners, which in the dim mists of history (that is, before shoe contracts) were a classy team. Yesterday, San Francisco announced Owens would be "excused" from next week's game. Not suspended, excused. Maybe he brought in a note from his Mommy. Plus, his agent will have to write on the blackboard 100 times, "My client will not act like a buffoon." Jeesh, how embarrassing.

Monday Night Football complaints below; also, special Dennis Miller solidarity item.

Best Plays of the Week: Best No. 1. By acclamation the play of the week was the Jets' halfback pass, Curtis Martin to Wayne Chrebet, to win the game with 52 seconds left in Tampa. What a call! Two years ago, the Jets missed the playoffs on the season's final day when a halfback pass in the same situation went awry, yet they were not afraid to try again. Martin was the perfect man for the job, since he'd just scored a touchdown by running straight through two Tampa tacklers. The Bucs were obviously worried about him repeating the feat, and the moment Martin took the pitch, safety John Lynch came across the line. Getting the safety to bite on the apparent run is the key to success of the halfback pass. Martin even had the presence of mind to rip his gloves off as the Jets were lining up for the play, so that he could throw correctly. Luckily for him no zebras noticed the dropped gloves, as some call a penalty for equipment on the field. If any of the Bucs noticed Martin ripping off his gloves, it didn't click.

And the fact that the winning pass went to Chrebet—subject of weeklong derision by obnoxious motormouth Keyshawn Johnson—was poetic justice. Johnson, who's made a strange second

career of dissing Chrebet and then being outplayed by him, announced that he was a star and Chrebet was a flashlight. On Sunday, Chrebet was the star and Johnson, with one yard of total offense, was a nightlight. The poetic justice was so sweet, it causes your columnist to go haiku:

Speaks with play not mouth  
Chrebet stands tallest at end  
Keyshawn now looks short.

—TMQ, 2000

Best No. 2. Long bombs seem to work best when teams "max protect," holding eight players back to block. St. Louis demonstrated this principle against the Falcons. Leading 27-13 and facing third and long from their own 15 early in the fourth, Rams coaches called a "go route" to WR Torry Holt, keeping back both backs and a tight end in addition to the regular five blockers. The Falcons rushed four. That meant nine Rams players were behind the line (eight blockers and QB Kurt Warner), while seven Falcons were available to guard just two receivers. Holt blew through the Falcons for an 85-yard touchdown reception that iced the game. Seven on two, and advantage to the two!

Worst Plays of the Week: Worst No. 1. Leading the Jets by three, Tampa had second down on its own 24 with about 1:40 to go. A first down would have won the game for the Bucs, but all Tampa really had to do was dive ahead, grind the clock, and punt; the Jersey contingent would then have had to go the distance in less than a minute, on the road against an excellent defense. Tampa's call? Hand the ball to fullback Mike Alstott, who is on the Frequent Fumbler plan. Last year, Alstott tied Ricky Williams of the Saints for most RB fumbles in the NFC. Alstott promptly put the rock on the ground, setting up the Jets' winning play. Worse, he fumbled after being hemmed in, with no chance of getting away and absolute certainty the Jets would be "tackling the ball," as defenders say of this situation. Alstott was trying to grind out an extra half yard, completely unneeded under the circumstances but engaging a huge risk that someone could tomahawk the pigskin out, exactly what happened.

Worst No. 2. Trailing by seven, New England faced fourth and two at the Miami three with about a minute to play. The P-Men came out with two receivers split right, one of them TE Eric Bjornson, and threw him a fade-lob whose execution was so shaggy, he never even got a hand on the ball. The Marine Mammals had lined up with double-coverage on the tall Bjornson, clearly expecting a lob, but P-Man QB Drew Bledsoe did not check off to something else. New England has now had a chance to win or tie on the final possession of all four of its games and woofed each time.

Stat of the Week No. 1: Through four games Kurt Warner has thrown for 1,557 yards—more than Kordell Stewart passed for all year in 1999—which puts him on a pace for 73,958 yards during the decade. (Actual figure at current pace; Dan Marino's all-time passing record is 61,361 yards.) That neutrino transference array Warner brought with him on the star-cruiser from his homeworld sure is coming in handy!

Stat of the Week No. 2: At this point, criticizing the Cincinnati Bengals for poor performance seems a little like criticizing Sen. Joe Lieberman for his recently announced agreement to make a cameo appearance as a chain-saw killer in the new movie *Naked Sorority Slaughterhouse III* in return for soft-money donations from Hollywood. Nevertheless we must face the fact that the Bengals not only win less and have been shut out twice, they have been outscored by a combined 74-7. Ye gods.

Stat of the Week No. 3: Pittsburgh has lost 10 of its last 11, stretching back to last season, and this once-storied franchise has not won a division home game since late November 1998. Newton's Third Law of NFL Motion has hit this team hard. Adding to the ignominy, Pittsburgh's victory momentum seems to have been transferred to the annoying Jaguars, in accordance with Newton's Second Law—"the acceleration (a) of a mass (m) by a force (F) is directly proportional to the force and inversely proportional to the mass, expressed as  $a = F/m$ "—even though the quality of these paper Jaguars can be expressed by the equation  $Jax = O/R$ , where O represents (over) and R represents (rated).

Historical Note of the Week: Martin's toss to Chrebet was the first time a nonquarterback has won an NFL game with a touchdown pass in the fourth quarter since 1969, when a game-winner was heave-hoed by the most important player in football history, third-string halfback Preston Ridlehuber. For TMQ's paean to this gentleman, "Let Us Now Praise Preston Ridlehuber," [click here](#).

Reader Haikus of the Week: Haikus keep flowing in from those who have entered contemplative states. Reader Bob Krasner offers,

Niners and Cowboys  
 Combined record two and six  
 Mighty are fallen

Krasner again,

This year Warner throws  
 Too many interceptions  
 Recalled to homeworld?

Reader Tony Nowikowski offers,

In Cincinnati  
 Paul Brown spinning in his grave  
 One more Bengals loss

Reader E. Piermont Tuttle writes,

Steak and beer at dawn  
 WASPs devolve into rednecks  
 Glorious tailgate

From Bill Oldach,

Obscure references

The sound of one man laughing  
Dennis Miller speaks.

Readers are welcome to continue submitting via "The Fray," titling entries "Football Haiku," "Football Heroic Couplet," "Football Veda," and so on, depending on the form.

Quote of the Week: Chicago tackle Blake Brockermeier, asserting that team's winless status did not faze him: "If we are 0-16, then that's a pretty big bummer. My confidence will be down then." Previously, Brockermeier was manager of the Lamar Alexander for president campaign.

Hidden Indicator of the Week: The teams that scored the most points on Sunday (the Rams and Niners, with 41) each ran more times than they passed, while the teams that scored the fewest points (the Bengals with zero and the P-Men and AZ-Men with 3) each passed more than they ran. This is the kind of deep, hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's understanding of the NFL. Unfortunately, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has no idea what it means.

Running Items Department

Obscure College Score of the Week: In response to TMQ's questioning the existence of Lenoir-Rhyne College, one reader e-mailed a hyperlink to a MapQuest page purporting to show driving directions from Microsoft headquarters to the campus. "Total estimated time: 51 hours, 12 minutes"—TMQ loves that pseudo-precise "12 minutes." But you can't trust the Web, these kinds of things can be faked. For instance if you seriously believe there's a "Microsoft," then you have fallen for one of the great stock swindles of the—well, perhaps best not to go there.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback remains unconvinced that Lenoir-Rhyne College actually exists. The hoax appears complex, though, since reader Matt Miller sent in a press release, complete with photos, from the last-second victory of Presbyterian College over the alleged Lenoir-Rhyne in a recent game at Clinton, S.C. Presbyterian College wins? It must have been predestined! (They've heard that one before, but I was fated to use it.) Reader Miller also informs that the Presbyterian team is nicknamed the Blue Hose. This does not mean the melancholy courtesans but apparently is a reference to stockings covertly worn by Scotsmen during the 17th century to protest the all-black dress code imposed by Oliver Cromwell. Oh, those wacky, zany 17th-century Scotsmen. And Cromwell—he must have been a Raiders fan!

Know an obscure college nickname that could rival the Blue Hose? Submit it via The Fray, titling your entry "Funny Nickname (Not Mine)."

Obscure College Score of the Week: Slippery Rock 42, Edinboro 7.

Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment: Flowers for Algernon? The Great "Santucci?" Jeesh. Maybe he should be excused for a week.

Dennis Miller Solidarity Item: Many deadly serious, quite somber readers have written in at length to protest the Dennis Miller items. Their arguments boil down to:

- 1) Sure he rambles incoherently, but so do all football announcers.
- 2) At least he's trying to crack wise.
- 3) The pretentious references to Stephen Hawking or Marsilius of Padua (Miller hasn't actually gotten to Marsilius yet, but according to TMQ's calculations, is on a pace to mention him by the Dec. 4 Monday Night game between Kansas City and the Patriots) are not designed to promote Miller by making him seem a fatuous showoff. Actually, they are ironic attempts to spoof other people who utter pretentious references in order to promote themselves.
- 4) Eventually there will be an awful Monday Night game and Miller will ridicule it on air, and that will be a hysterical great moment for television-age self-irony.
- 5) So stop ridiculing him.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback is impressed by how extremely seriously some readers take any comments about a guy who is, after all, supposed to be a comedian. TMQ replies to the points in order:

- 1) Not all announcers ramble, though many aspire to. TMQ recently watched a game announced by Dick Enberg and Dan Dierdorf. The calls were informative, professional, and sometimes witty. And they talked about the game, not about their careers and their egos and which rich people they wanted to impress.
- 2) Yes, some Miller lines have been genuinely funny: TMQ particularly admired the infinite-pocket crack. Considering that Miller is a highly paid professional, however, the ratio of funny to clunker ought to meet or exceed 1:1.
- 3) Miller is already perilously close to becoming what he is spoofing. In fact, according to calculations by TMQ, Miller is on a pace to become what he spoofs by the Nov. 6 Monday Night game matching Minnesota and Green Bay.
- 4) and 5) Since Miller exists to ridicule others, why so touchy about any cracks launched in his direction, huh?

Reading all the reader comments did, however, cause TMQ to experience a moment of ironic solidarity with Miller. We've both got the same problem—audiences don't realize that we're kidding!

Sanders-Hawking Postulate Solved! Last week, TMQ cited the incomprehensible Dennis Miller remark, "Deion Sanders has a sense of the moment like Stephen Hawking," and asked readers to

explain what, if anything, this meant. Jim Gardner of Bloomington, Ind., offered this Nobel-quality analysis, which will be forwarded to the appropriate authorities in Stockholm:

Dating back to his days at Florida State, Deion has worked closely with Professor Hawking on some of his more esoteric areas of research. It was early on in this relationship that Deion developed a corollary to Hawking's postulate regarding the Hubble Constant and its effect on perception of time. Deion stumbled across something he calls the "Bauble Constant" and recognized that any rise in the Bauble Constant directly accelerated the perception of distance and time (distance, of course, divided by time equals velocity). In layman's terms, what he discovered was that if he wore an excessive amount of jewelry, it looked like he was faster than hell: And in our cosmos, perception is reality. Deion and Hawking had something of a fallingout over this postulate. Hawking felt the "Bauble Constant" was solely related to the amount of jewelry worn, whereas Deion insisted on the presence of a "g-squared" multiplier (gaudy and garish), which could also increase the constant's value.

New York Times Final-Score Score: The Paper of Record goes 0-14 in its quixotic attempt to predict a final score, bringing its season Final-Score Score to 0-58. Times predicted: Dallas 27, San Francisco 23. Actual: San Francisco 41, Dallas 24. Times predicted: Saints 15, Eagles 14. Actual: Eagles 21, Saints 7. Times predicted: Arizona 17, Green Bay 9. Actual: Green Bay 29, Arizona 3. Times predicted: Colts 30, Jax 26. Actual: Colts 43, Jax 14.

Sinister Times-Israel-San Diego conspiracy? After last week inexorably predicting a San Diego victory at Kansas City—the Bolts lost by 32 points—this week the Times predicted San Diego 19, Seattle 14 and added this player-specific forecast: "Ryan Leaf should make good on his second chance this season as San Diego's starter." The actual was Seattle 20, San Diego 12, and Leaf was yanked after throwing an interception run back for a touchdown. How to explain the Times' touting of the woeful 0-4 Bolts? Obviously, the Israeli government must have some hidden interest in the San Diego franchise. If any reader can propose what this hidden interest may be, send your entry to The Fray, slugging it "Sinister NYT-Israel Sports Page Conspiracy."

TMQ Trivia Challenge: Last week's challenge asked,

Dan Marino was introduced at his number-retirement ceremony by the only other player whose number the Dolphins have retired, Bob Griese. In whose honor was each of the following jerseys put to pasture?

Arizona: No. 99

Denver: No. 18

Green Bay: No. 3

New Jersey Giants: No. 4

San Francisco: No. 73

Reader Greg Narver of Seattle was first with this correct breakdown:

Cardinals No. 99: Marshall Goldberg

Broncos No. 18: Frank Tripucka

Packers No. 3: Tony Canadeo  
Giants No. 4: Tuffy Leemans  
49ers No. 73: Leo Nomellini

Here is this week's challenge:

Walter Payton is the all-time rusher, Reggie White all-time first in sacks, George Blanda all-time first in scoring. Now let's get to some really important records: What gentleman holds the all-time mark for the most two-point conversions?

Send your entries via The Fray, slugging them "Trivia Answer." Each winner might get a Tuesday Morning Quarterback cap at season's end, but remember, the final decision will be completely arbitrary.

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## **The Masses Huddle**

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Oct. 3, 2000, at 7:30 PM ET

Because the presidential debates begin tonight, "Tuesday Morning Quarterback" will momentarily put aside its normal obsession with such vital matters as lead blocks and line stunts to bring you, as a public service, the candidates' positions on the NFL:

Al Gore:

Favors "targeted" passes. (You'd be surprised how many teams don't!) Federal inspectors would participate in game-plan sessions to ensure that teams throw the most passes to the lowest-paid players. FBI to listen in on coaches' headsets for evidence of discrimination in play-calling.

Free steroid benefits. All androgens, supplements, and painkillers would be covered under new "prescriptions for performance" plan.

Working families, single mothers, gays and lesbians who recycle, H1-B visa holders, and NEA and Sierra Club members to get federally subsidized cotton candy at games.

Spread-the-field formations would be banned as sprawl.

Field goals would become field quotas.

French kissing of cheerleaders before kickoffs; 45-second clock to be used.

George W. Bush:

Favors higher defense spending. Salary cap for defensive players would be raised to \$350 billion per team. Linebackers to be compensated on a cost-plus basis.

Privatize stadiums. All NFL venues would become private clubs; fans must be "tapped" by gate agents to gain entry. Tapping criteria would not be explained!

Affirmative action for the slow. Each NFL team would be required to have at least one white DB or WR.

Marriage penalty reduced from 15 yards to five yards.

Stock options instead of cash bonuses. Yards gained must "vest" before they can be counted in league statistics.

Corporate sponsorship of referees: "This chop-block call brought to you by ExxonMobil."

Pat Buchanan, Reform Party:

Deport foreign-born place-kickers.

Confiscate property of Jewish owners.

Training camps to be renamed concentration camps. ("Just for nostalgia's sake," candidate says.)

Mandatory blitz.

John Hagelin, Natural Law Party:

Total, unlimited prosperity for all clubs; every team would be undefeated every year at no cost to anyone!

Obsolete 19th-century concepts (muscle on muscle, most points wins, etc.) to be replaced by advanced, nonmaterial 22nd-century paradigms of quantum physics. (Players would dream-visualize the game without actually playing, fans would remote-view using relativistic Einsteinian time dilation coupled with unified-field Higgs boson tunneling as prophesied by the yogic Zen master of the fourth manifestation of the ... ZZZZZ.)

Ralph Nader, Green Party:

Huddles must be open to the public.

In tonight's debate, air time will be wasted on such supposedly "important" topics as Social Security and nuclear disarmament instead of things that really matter, like football. So as a public service, Tuesday Morning Quarterback projects what would happen if the candidates were asked a football question:

Moderator Jim Lehrer: Would, that is to say, would, in your opinion, in a manner of speaking, would each of you tell us, that is would each of you at this time be willing to state, would you at this time tell us in your opinion at this time whether bobbled-catch calls at the sideline should be subject to review in the final two minutes of each half. Please be succinct.

Al Gore: I am fighting for the working families of America who care about sideline reviews in the final two minutes! Powerful interests oppose the review of these plays. But I am fighting! Fighting for you! If elected, I would appoint a presidential commission composed of working families, single mothers, gays and lesbians who recycle, H1-B visa holders, and NEA and Sierra Club members to analyze the critical issue of sideline bobble calls. We would use the best available science and data. We would hold interminable meetings. I would appoint my hot, sexually insatiable wife Tipper to head the commission. By the way, I guess ya'll have heard that Tipper and I still make out like teen-agers. But only in public; at this age we need a little extra kick, if you catch my drift. After the commission returned its report, I would very, very seriously discuss the findings with scientists, philosophers, and theologians, and then take no action. When I took no action, I'd be doing it for you. For you!

George W. Bush: Sideline judgment calls are a matter for the states, for the states to—I like my chances of getting that call reversed, I really do. That's why I'm here today. I haven't played in the football games of the past. So I'm not going to argue with the officials—I am going to bring all Americans together in one big stadium, where we can munch on the hot dogs of freedom and drink the lite beer of diversity and cheer for the future of this country! No tengo ninguna idea

como responder a esta pregunta, pero cuando cambio a español, nadie se da cuenta.\* People can disagree—I know I have! But we don't need big government intruding on the sidelines of our God-given football games. The Foundling Fathers wanted the states to determine sideline calls. That's where I think I stand. And I am not afraid to say it.

\*I have no idea how to respond to this question, but when I switch to Spanish, nobody knows that!

Best Play of the Day No. 1: Facing third and five on the Tampa Bay eight with four minutes remaining, the Maryland Indigenous Persons ran a quick-snap play that started the instant the linemen set. Several Tampa defenders, including extremely highly paid Pro Bowl DT Warren Sapp, were talking to each other and not looking when the play began. Touchdown.

Best Plays of the Day No. 2: Trailing by a point with the ball on their own 31, with 1:04 left and the crowd generating military-afterburner-class noise, the Colts marched into field-goal range and launched the winning kick as time expired in Buffalo. On this seven-play, 42-yard minidrive, Indianapolis never once panicked and threw deep, sticking to methodical short plays. Following the Ken Stabler Principle—go down the middle in the final minute because the defense will expect you to go to the sidelines—Colts QB Peyton Manning threw or ran to the middle on six of the seven plays. Manning performed with the total poise one would expect of a 28-year veteran like him. (Third year? That's got to be a misprint.)

Worst Play of the Week No. 1: Facing third and four at its own 30 in a close game, Tampa Bay set up in run formation against the Indigenous Persons. Knowing Tampa's conservative game plan, the Persons put nine players on the line, meaning a golden opportunity to pass but no chance of a successful run. Tampa ran anyway and lost seven yards.

Worst Play of the Week No. 2: Trailing Miami 31-13 halfway through the last quarter, winless Cincinnati faced fourth down at the Marine Mammals 17. Rather than going for the first and at least a chance to stage a comeback, they kicked a field goal so they would only lose 31-16. Maybe this will help the Bengals in the NCAA college ranking next week.

Bonehead Play of the Week No. 1: Steelers rookie WR Plaxico Burress caught a long pass against Jax, went down, and then strutted and spiked the ball. This was not only boneheaded because spiking draws a yellow flag: Burress had not been tackled. In college whenever a runner hits the ground the play is over, but in the NFL the action continues if the runner falls on his own, as Burress had. So when he spiked it was a live ball—a fumble—grabbed by Jax and returned almost to the Steelers' goal line.

Bonehead Play of the Week No. 2: Miraculously leading Miami 13-3 with nine seconds to go in the first half, winless Cincinnati had the ball at its own 35. Rather than order a kneel-down, Bengals coaches called for a pass that, if successful, would have accomplished technically nothing. Marine Mammals DE Jason Taylor broke through, snatched the ball from the hand of Bengal QB Akili Smith—it looked like Taylor was taking a Statue of Liberty handoff—and ran for a touchdown as the clock expired.

Reader Haiku of the Week: This gem from reader David Foster concerns the Indigenous Persons, which have regrettably fallen into the hands of Owner/Twerp Daniel Snyder, and is dedicated to FedEx Field:

Owner spends much cash  
Expensive team, costly loss  
Six dollar Bud, please

Here's a football heroic couplet from reader Jon Gabriel:

Chrebet doth glitter like a morning star  
Keyshawn, just a firefly trapp'd in a jar

More verse will run in the future; submit yours to "The Fray," slugging entries "Football Haiku," "Football Heroic Couplet," "Football Love Sonnet," and so on.

Stat of the Week No. 1: The Rams have now put up 2,527 yards of offense through five games, which puts them on a pace for 96,026 yards (54.6 miles, actual figure at current pace) during the decade. That temporal damping field oscillator Kurt Warner brought with him on the star-cruiser from his homeworld sure is coming in handy!

Stat of the Week No. 2: On Sunday, final day of the baseball regular season, five major-league baseball games produced more total runs than there were total points in the Ravens-Browns contest.

Stat of the Week No. 3: Kurt Warner's passer rating is now 158.3. This is the maximum under the NFL formula; there is no 158.4. If Warner keeps improving, the league will have to publish gold stars next to his name in the rankings.

Stat of the Week No. 4: In losing to the Flaming Ts, the Giants held the ball just 17 minutes and ran just 49 plays to 80 by Tennessee. Ye gods.

Defensive Player of the Month: TMQ increasingly admires Dallas safety George Teague, the gentleman who sprinted halfway across the field to lay out Niners WR Terrell Owens as he performed his excruciatingly embarrassing prance-dance in the SF-Cowboys game. True, Teague's hit came a full minute after the whistle sounded, which falls short of ideal. But at least Teague was defending the dignity of the game. (Technical note: In football terms, a man dancing is embarrassing, while two people slamming into each other violently is considered dignity.)

Now the league has imposed an elaborate new rule to prevent Owens-esque displays. Additional rules are not needed. The league should simply adopt Teague's solution—any visiting player who excessively celebrates runs the risk of being body-slammed by home-team players—and let the fellows police themselves.

(Perhaps TMQ should not use the term "police" in the context of the Dallas team. Internet joke: Did you hear that the Cowboys have adopted the honor system? Yes, Your Honor. No, Your Honor.)

Tires of the Week: TMQ, whose ancestral roots are in Buffalo, over the weekend attended a family gathering and the Colts-at-Bills. TMQ's brother Neil, a professor at Texas Christian University (proposed new nickname: Genetically Mutated Frogs), picked up the rental car. He had reserved a midsize but at the Hertz counter was offered a free upgrade to full-size. Neil said sure. (Aren't professors supposed to be skeptical?) We walked out to behold our free upgraded vehicle—a Ford Explorer with Firestone Wilderness AT tires. Unsought bonus: You get a much better look at the countryside when you're driving very slowly!

Sociological indicator: Above Wilson Stadium during the game flew a small plane towing the banner, "Shop at Buffalo Gun Center."

Tuesday Afternoon Quarterback? TMQ has heard from many who ask why a column with "morning" in its name is posting about 1 p.m. Eastern. Officially that's morning in the Seattle alternate universe where Slate production is located. But scientific studies have determined that 1 p.m. Eastern is afternoon for many readers.

Why the delay? Get this: Microsoft claims it has computer problems. TMQ files the column at 8 a.m. Eastern, after watching the Monday Night game, sleeping a few restive hours with visions of two-deep zones in his head, rising well before dawn for a column-day breakfast of steak and eggs (served by Cindy Crawford in that little French maid's number she just picked up at the new 20-acre sex outlet mall in Paris), and then entering a contemplative state. But Microsoft actually says that because of technical difficulties involving computers, the column cannot post until afternoon in half the country. Business at the speed of—walking!

TMQ has brought the matter to the attention of Microsoft at the highest levels. Consider the following intercepted e-mail exchange:

Billg: This TMQ problem could bring the whole company down. Why doesn't the whole country just switch to Seattle time?

Ballmer: Great idea. We'll use monopoly power to force them to!

Microsoft is now putting some of their best people on it. Within a few weeks, TMQ will post in the morning everywhere.

Hidden Indicator of the Week: Judged by Sunday's game clocks, the Rams had broken 50 points before seven teams—the Bills, Bucs, Browns, Cardinals, Giants, Packers, and Jaguars—had broken 10 points. This is the kind of hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's understanding of the game, and this time Tuesday Morning Quarterback knows exactly what it means: NASA had better accelerate its search for Kurt Warner's homeworld.

## Running Items Department

Obscure College Score of the Week: Keep submitting your obscure team nicknames to The Fray, slugging them "Funny Nickname (Not Mine)." An item loaded with obscure nicknames will run soon.

Obscure College Score of the Week: Western State of Colorado 83, Panhandle State 0. Bonus Obscure College Score: Indiana of Pennsylvania 24, Slippery Rock 20.

Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment: Seattle coach Mike Holmgren "carpet-bombed them back to the tree line. I love the smell of napalm in the morning, it smells like victory." This isn't merely bad taste: It is offensive. What napalm does to human beings should not be a subject for promotional jokes, not even for a corporation as unfeeling as Disney (owner of ABC).

The Monday Night Football Web site's "Miller Moments" section declares, "On Oct. 2, Dennis Miller delivered many amusing highlights throughout the Seahawks-Chiefs AFC West contest." How very strange that the "I love the smell of napalm" line isn't there.

Check out the miserable quality of what is there, bearing in mind that these are what Disney considers the highlights. Time to end the Miller fiasco while MNF still has some ratings left to save.

New York Times Final-Score Score: Once again the Paper of Record goes 0-14 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, bringing the Times Final-Score Score to 0-71 for the season so far. Times predicted: Giants 15, Titans 13. Actual: Titans 28, Giants 14. Times predicted: Carolina 21, Dallas 13. Actual: Dallas 16, Carolina 13. Times predicted: Chiefs 18, Seahawks 10. Actual: Chiefs 24, Seahawks 17.

Some readers have said of TMQ's deflating of the New York Times predictions, "Why don't you pick on someone your own size?" An advanced, pan-media review of predictions is in the works.

TMQ Trivia Challenge: Like Borg drones being hit with Federation phaser blasts, TMQ readers are adapting. A month ago, Trivia Challenge answers filtered in over a few days, and for each correct reply there were several wild guesses. Now a barrage of answers comes within the hour after the column posts, and this week every one was correct.

Have readers rushed out to buy football encyclopedias, then positioned themselves at screens waiting for Tuesday afternoon to arrive and the Tuesday morning column to post? The Official NFL 2000 Record & Fact Book, source authority for some TMQ Trivia Challenge material, has jumped on Amazon.com from sales rank 31,587 a few weeks ago to 4,645. Obviously it's a Tuesday Morning Quarterback phenomenon; I've just got to find a way to get a commission on this action.

Here was last week's question:

Walter Payton is the all-time rusher, Reggie White all-time first in sacks, George Blanda all-time first in scoring. Now let's get to some really important records: What gentleman holds the all-time mark for the most two-point conversions?

TMQ expected readers would guess old AFL stars like Cookie Gilchrist and Charley Hennigan from the '60s two-point-wacky era. Every reply was dead-on with the correct answer, Terance Mathis of the Atlanta Falcons, a current player who has done the two-point deed an unprecedented six times. (The Falcons go for two a lot because they are behind so often.) The first correct reply, from reader Chad Hart of Ames, Iowa, came scorching in just 32 minutes after the column posted.

Here is this week's TMQ Trivia Challenge:

On Sunday the St. Louis Rams rang up 614 yards of total offense. Not too shabby, but a middling effort compared to the best days in NFL annals. Of the four listed below, which is not an actual NFL record for total offense?

735 yards, Los Angeles vs. New York Yanks, September 1951  
686 yards, San Francisco vs. Los Angeles Rams, September 1994.  
683 yards, Pittsburgh vs. Chicago Cardinals, December 1958.  
682 yards, Chicago vs. New York Giants, November 1943.

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## **Jax Agonistes**

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Oct. 10, 2000, at 7:00 PM ET

In its preseason preview, TMQ described the Jacksonville Jaguars, which last season posted the best record in the AFC and entered this season as a Super Bowl favorite in many quarters, as "the most bloated, overrated team in the league." Now it turns out that assessment was too generous! Jax is 2-4 and has two straight defeats at home. Stretching back to last season, when the team lost the AFC championship on its own field, Jax is 2-5 in its most recent contests, including three home losses. Sunday night against the Ravens, extremely highly paid Jax players fumbled eight times, and just to prove that as no fluke also tossed three interceptions.

Jax seemed strong last year owing to a candy schedule, but its current skid traces directly to the most disastrous event in team history: the Jaguars' 62-7 victory over Miami in the AFC divisional playoff round last January. After this megawin many Jax players bragged, bragged, bragged about how they were kings of the world. But only one team may brag at only one point in the NFL season—those gentlemen who have just won the Super Bowl obtain the right to say whatever they wish. Anyone else who sings his own praises is disciplined by the football gods. Jax's punishment has now begun.

It's only going to get worse for these paper Jaguars. The team is already a stunning \$30 million over the projected 2001 salary cap, having thrown money wildly in order to secure its present, underperforming roster. Jax used numerous contract gimmicks to shift payment of cap charges into the future, as if the bill would never come due. But next winter it will. For instance, bust linebacker Bryce Paup will count \$3.6 million against the Jacksonville cap in 2001—even though Paup has already been cut and isn't playing for Jax this year, let alone next. Last winter's roster purges at Buffalo and San Francisco were caused by cap overage of about \$12 million per team, which looks like cab fare compared to the Jax situation. To trim \$30 million off its payroll, Jax will have to cut so many players it may have trouble filling out a 53-man roster. The coming cap collapse is the hidden reason for persistent rumors that poor-sport coach Tom Coughlin will flee to the Notre Dame head coaching job the instant the NFL season ends, leaving the Jax wreckage for someone else to deal with. Maybe, but why would Notre Dame want a guy who exceeds an unlimited budget, then sets the fine example of screaming insults at the opposing team?

One apparent lesson of the Jax decline: Cut costs on the offensive line. Though Tuesday Morning Quarterback, like all NFL purists, believes offensive line play to be the essence of football success (only QB efficiency matters more), this year the low-paid lines are doing notably better than the high-paid ones. Jax has the NFL's most overpriced OL: Its tackles each hold contracts worth \$50 million-plus on paper, yet the team has already surrendered 27 sacks. Buffalo, with the second-most overpriced OL (a \$30-million guard, a \$26-million tackle, a \$13-million center, and a \$12-million guard), has given up 22 sacks. Meanwhile the Niners, fielding a who-dat platoon of OLs with nary a megabucks deal among the starters, have surrendered just three sacks. The Giants, who line up with relatively low-paid retradees (three of their OL starters were let go by other teams), have allowed just eight sacks.

Best Plays of the Week: Best No. 1. On the final down of the first half, with the ball at midfield, the P-Men sent in seldom-used quarterback Michael Bishop, who had not thrown a pass all season. Since big-arm QB Drew Bledsoe came out for the play and Bishop has a reputation as a wacky scrambler, the Colts assumed he was sent in to run. Instead Bishop dropped back and threw a standard Hail Mary, which the P-Men's Tony Simmons caught for a touchdown at 00:00, helping propel New England's upset of Indianapolis.

Best No. 2. Oakland's safety Anthony Dorsett blocked the short field-goal attempt by the Niners that would have won the Raiders-San Francisco game in OT. The game looked so over that Niners sideline personnel had practically already left for the locker room. Oakland then won on a Rich Gannon toss to Tim Brown. Dorsett is Tony's son; a journeyman till this year, he now starts for the Raiders and has at last earned the right to pronounce his name dor-SETT instead of DOR-sett. (You Pittsburgh fans will get that one.)

Worst Plays of the Week: Worst No. 1. With the score tied, 30 seconds remaining in regulation, and the ball deep in his own end, Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb was chased and, rather than throw the ball away and let the game go to OT, put up a wild heave-ho that traveled toward no player other than senior citizen Darrell Green of the Maryland Indigenous Persons. Green returned the INT to position for the Persons' winning figgie as time expired. At age 40, Green remains the fastest player on the Persons. Fun fact: Green owns a vintage '60s Volkswagen Beetle (the pre-Internet-based color choice model) and says the reason he likes the car is that he can beat it in a 40-yard dash.

Worst No. 2. Two weeks ago, Tampa Bay lost a shocker at home to the New Jersey/B squad when Frequent Fumbler Mike Alstott put the rock on the ground with a minute to go, and then Jets RB Curtis Martin hit a halfback pass for the winning touchdown. Last night in Minneapolis, as Tampa faced fourth and one on its 47 with six minutes left and trailing by four, somehow the thoughts "Alstott" and "halfback pass" merged in the minds of Bucs coaches. They ran the halfback pass for Alstott—career zero for one passing—and he delivered himself a heave-ho in the general direction of, well, maybe he was aiming for Darrell Green. Minnesota took over and marched for the clinching field goal.

Worst No. 3. Against Detroit, three-time MVP Brett Favre threw a pick returned for six in the second quarter, and then in the fourth, with the Pack trailing by a touchdown, threw picks on consecutive plays from scrimmage. To prove these plays were no flukes, Favre also fumbled twice. Ye gods.

Worst No. 4. In the first quarter against the Niners, Oakland lined up in a trick formation with RB Napoleon Kaufman split almost at the sideline. The inexperienced Niners defense, which starts four rookies, left Kaufman completely uncovered—nothing but grasslike substance between him and six. Raiders QB Gannon quick-snapped to get the ball out to Kaufman before the Niners could notice their blunder and react. The short pass arrived on target, and Kaufman dropped it like he'd been thrown a rabid ferret. Just to prove this was no fluke, on the next Raiders possession, Kaufman fumbled a handoff.

Retired Numbers of the Week: Last month the Dolphins retired Dan Marino's number, bringing to two the jerseys that the Marine Mammals have set aside perpetually. Like Miami, most clubs rarely retire a number: The Steelers, despite their 1970s dynasty team, have but one prohibited integer, that of Ernie Stautner. Three clubs—Buffalo, Dallas, and Oakland—do not retire numbers at all.

Then there are the Chicago Bears. Numbers 3, 5, 7, 28, 34, 40, 41, 42, 51, 56, 61, 66, and 77 all cannot be worn by current Bears because they hang in recognition of gentlemen past. And Mike Singletary isn't even on that list! This leads to a perpetual number-crunch when Chicago is handing out jerseys. Fortunately, in order to avoid making the situation worse, the Bears have a strict team policy of not developing any more great players.

Stat of the Week: Atlanta, playing at home against the Giants, rolled up 13 yards rushing on 14 attempts. Ye gods.

Psychological Ploy of the Week: With the University of Colorado at 0-4, coach Gary Barnett ordered school logos removed from team helmets, telling players they could not wear the logos again until they proved themselves worthy. Colorado proceeded to beat heavily favored Texas A&M on the road. TMQ therefore suggests:

1. The Bengals should have the stripes removed from their helmets until they win a game or complete a drive, whichever comes first.
2. The Giants should have the stylized "NY" emblem on their helmets changed into a stylized "NJ" until they prove they are truly worthy of pretending to be from New York.
3. The Browns, the only franchise with a no-logo helmet, should put something onto their helmets until they prove they are worthy of not having anything.

League To Rank Teams by SATs: While DE Marcellus Wiley (Columbia) was chasing QB Jay Fiedler (Dartmouth) around in the Bills-Miami game, C Matt Birk (Harvard) was starting for the Vikes, DT Seth Payne (Cornell) starting for Jax, FB Chris Hetherington (Yale) playing for the Panthers, LB Isaiah Kacyvenski (Harvard) and FB Jim Finn (Penn) covering kicks for Seattle and Indianapolis, and QB Jason Garrett (Princeton) carrying the clipboard for the Giants. Eight Ivy leaguers—what is the NFL coming to? Are there no more standards? Or to flip it around, couldn't any of these guys get into medical school?

Nedney Unit Active! Regarding the item on placekicker Joe Nedney, some readers wrote in to assert that the subhead—"Gorzon, Activate the Nedney Unit!"—fell somewhat short of fully self-explanatory.

First, the latest on Nedney: He went 8-for-10 in field goal attempts for the Broncos and was rewarded by being cut. On Sunday, Nedney went 4-for-5 for his new team, the Panthers. So far, the Earth authorities suspect nothing.

As for Gorzon, all I can say at this time is that the star-cruiser that brought Kurt Warner here from his homeworld is capable of moving forward and backward in time simultaneously—sort of

like the Al Gore personality reinvention team. A malfunction of the temporal paradox damping field on the ship caused a word from a future TMQ to appear in a past column, and that word was Gorzon. A future TMQ will reveal the shocking truth about Warner's homeworld, including the identity of Gorzon. Be afraid. Be somewhat afraid.

**Hidden Indicator of the Week:** So far this year three teams (the Jets, Lions, and Patriots) have hit long Hail Mary touchdowns on the last play of the first half, but no team has hit a Hail Mary on the last play of the second half, including Tampa's close-but-no-cigars on the final down against the Vikes on Monday night. This is the kind of hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's understanding of the NFL. Unfortunately, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has no idea what it means.

### **Running Items Department**

**Most Embarrassing Don Ohlmeyer Moment:** (New item.) Monday Night Football begins with: images of Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech, of the bridge at Selma, Ala., of King's "content of our character" declaration. This has got to be some kind of mistake, right? No, it is Don Ohlmeyer declaring that last night's Tampa-Minnesota game—the first NFL contest to square off two black head coaches and two black starting QBs—is actually an event in the civil rights struggle!

Yes, the black coach/black QB moment was significant: perhaps one-zillionth of 1 percent as significant as King or Selma. After the images of King and Selma flashed, viewers saw Vikes and Bucs coaches talking very seriously about such critical civil rights issues as home field advantage in the NFC Central.

There's a weird sense among many like Ohlmeyer in the Hollywood-network establishment that they have a special claim on King's legacy because television helped advance his cause. Maybe, but to use that special claim for football promotion is beyond distasteful. An NFL game equated in significance with Dr. King—what's next, Nelson Mandela endorses Taco Bell?

**Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment:** Since even stripping off his shirt on camera (which Miller did last night) can't come close in desperation to using Selma footage as a MNF intro, TMQ for humanitarian reasons proclaims a temporary moratorium on Miller.

**New York Times Final-Score Score:** Once again the Paper of Record goes 0-14 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, bringing the Times Final-Score Score to 0-85 for the season. Times predicted: Bears 16, Saints 10. Actual: Saints 31, Bears 10. Times predicted: Jets 28, Steelers 10. Actual: Steelers 20, Jets 3. Times predicted: Colts 23, Patriots 17. Actual: Patriots 24, Colts 16. Readers continue to write in suggesting that the Times has covert betting-based motives for attempting to predict an exact final score; more on this soon.

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Georgetown of Kentucky 71, Cumberland of Kentucky 9. **Bonus Obscure Score:** Catawba 24, Tusculum 19. **Double Bonus Obscure Score:** Kutztown 17, East Stroudsburg 16.

Obscure College Physically Impossible Feat: As Menlo College was bowing 37-32 to Cal Lutheran, Menlo's Zamir Amin threw for 731 yards. Surely the tentacled, silicon-based lifeforms on Kurt Warner's homeworld took note.

TMQ Trivia Challenge: Last week TMQ mused that unlike the rockets in missile-defense tests, Trivia Challenge answers are coming in ever faster with ever greater accuracy. This week the first correct answer, from Chad Hart of Ames, Iowa, came scorching in a mind-boggling 5 minutes, 33 seconds after the column posted.

Realistically, such a feat could only have been accomplished if this gentleman spent Tuesday sitting at his screen, football encyclopedias at the ready, browser set to [www.slate.com](http://www.slate.com), endlessly pressing the "refresh" button so that he could read Tuesday Morning Quarterback the very instant it appeared.

Chad—you have your priorities in order!

Because, however, Mr. Hart is a previous winner, and since it has been previously warned that all rules for the Challenge are completely arbitrary, TMQ gives this week's nod to the second correct reply from Wanda Montagna of Fulton, N.Y. Her note added, "I think the column is an absolute riot to read." Wanda—you, too, have your priorities in order! She might receive a TMQ cap at season's end, but that decision will also be completely arbitrary.

One reader screen-named CDS wrote in with an incorrect answer, then a few moments later sent another message saying he'd realized the answer was erroneous and was "withdrawing" it. Now that is trivia decorum! If only the presidential debates were conducted on such a high plane of discourse.

Here was last week's question:

On Sunday the St. Louis Rams rang up 614 yards of total offense. Not too shabby, but a middling effort compared to the best days in NFL annals. Of the four listed below, which is not an actual NFL record for total offense?

735 yards, Los Angeles vs. New York Yanks, September 1951  
 686 yards, San Francisco vs. Los Angeles Rams, September 1994  
 683 yards, Pittsburgh vs. Chicago Cardinals, December 1958  
 682 yards, Chicago vs. New York Giants, November 1943

Wanda Montagna correctly identified 686 yards by San Francisco in 1994 as the phony record. Though we think of the NFL as having in recent years gone offense-wacky, all the biggest yardage days are well in the past, when men were men, women were women, and you could still tell the ACs from the DCs.

Here is this week's Trivia Challenge:

The Falcons' 13 yards rushing (at home!) this week may not seem like much but represents a Herculean effort compared to the worst rushing days in NFL history. Which of the following is not an actual NFL record for running futility?

- 53, Detroit vs. Chicago Cardinals, October 1943
- 36, Philadelphia vs. Chicago Bears, November 1939
- 33, Philadelphia vs. Brooklyn, October 1943
- 24, Seattle vs. Chicago Bears, December 1985

Submit your answers via "The Fray," titling each entry Trivia Answer. Decisions of the judges will be firm, fair, and arbitrary.

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## **It's a Fake!**

Why fakers are rewarded in the NFL.

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Oct. 17, 2000, at 7:00 PM ET

If there's one thing NFL coaches dread, it is the gutsy call. When a coach's deliberate gamble goes bust, in Monday's papers he is to blame. When a coach plays the percentages and things go bust, the players, the refs, the wind, and the rotation of the Earth are to blame.

This is why, facing fourth and short in the fourth quarter, so many coaches send in the punting unit: They may be accepting defeat, but the loss won't seem their direct fault ("well, shoot, I was counting on the defense to get the ball back") as it would if they went for it and failed. And this is why faked punt, field-goal, and PAT kicks are rare in the NFL. Although the faked field goal is probably the single most effective offensive play in football—and though faking a one-point PAT and trying for two is so unexpected it almost always works—coaches rarely make these calls. Better to play it safe and shift blame to that Austro-Serbo-Moldavian place-kicker.

Yet this weekend it was bartender, fake kicks for everyone!

Against the Falcons in the second quarter, the Rams faked a one-point PAT and ran for two, setting in motion a game with a total of five two-point conversions, the most in NFL annals. The Saints faked a punt using a guy they'd barely met while the Jets faked a field goal using a linebacker as a running back. The Eagles ran the classiest field-goal fake of the day, having the holder flip a no-look lateral from his kneeling stance to 180-pound kicker David Akers, who ran for the first down. The Bills sneaked deep-threat WR Eric Moulds onto the field as a blocker (!!) for a field-goal attempt, then threw him a touchdown pass that was hysterical to behold and was called back because the refs hadn't whistled play to start. Even the Bengals faked a field goal, though in their case the result was, well, take a guess.

Coaches, please note: On Sunday, every NFL team that attempted a fake kick won. Except for Cincinnati, which is not, so far as anyone can tell, an NFL team.

In other action San Francisco and Green Bay, who played so many memorable and important matchups during the 1990s, staged a fabulous game full of exciting plays, last-second drama—everything you could ask for. When it was over, the teams stood a combined 5-9.

Best Play of the Week: Best No. 1. With its place-kicker injured, St. Louis faced fourth and 15 on the Falcons' 30, score tied at 21 and 11 seconds left in the half. The Rams passed. Kurt Warner pump-faked, even though, with time almost expired, a short completion would have accomplished nothing; only the end zone mattered. The Falcons bit on the pump-fake, and Az-Zahir Hakim scored as the half expired.

Best No. 2. From the Jaguars' 21, the Flaming T's sent Eddie George and two linemen right for what looked like a screen set-up. TE Frank Wycheck blocked on that side as if aiding the screen—then broke over the short middle, because the pass was to him, for an 18-yard gain that

set up a Tennessee touchdown. Double-screen-action plays usually don't work; seldom has one been executed so sweetly.

Football Gods Note: After last night's loss, the bloated, overrated Jax is 2-5 and, stretching back to last season, 2-6 since the day it won a playoff game 62-7 and its players proclaimed themselves the greatest in NFL history. Hubris is penalized more severely than holding; read your Greek theater, gentlemen.

Best No. 3. Leading Carolina 10-6 in the fourth, New Orleans lined up to punt. Into the game came career special-teamer Fred McAfee, whom the Saints had just signed. It's a fake! The ball was direct-snapped to McAfee by someone whose name McAfee surely doesn't even yet know, and he ran for 40 yards, setting up the game-icing TD.

Best No. 4. The Jets faced fourth and two on the Patriots' 22, leading 14-10, late in the first half. They lined up for the field goal. It's a fake! Holder Tom Tupa—now a punter, but a career 258 of 502 as a QB—ran up behind center to take the snap. The Patriots, suspecting nothing, did not call time. Tupa pitched it to linebacker Mo Lewis, who ran for the first; a touchdown followed, and the Jets began to pull away.

Worst Play of the Week: High-schoolish uniforms are bad enough; San Diego coach Mike Riley announced he would use high-school tactics by playing QB Jim Harbaugh in the first quarter at Buffalo, then switching to the great Moses Moreno for the second quarter. Harbaugh finished the first quarter with six straight completions and the Bolts in a 3-0 lead. Sticking to the plan, Riley promptly yanked him. On his first snap, Moreno fumbled; Buffalo recovered and scored six. On the next possession, Moreno fumbled again; another Buffalo touchdown. Harbaugh then returned. For the four plays Moreno was on the field, San Diego was outscored 14-0; for the rest of the game with Harbaugh playing, the Bolts outscored Buffalo 24-13. You do the math.

Worst No. 2. In the Battle of Maryland, the Baltimore Ravens reached the Indigenous Persons' one, first and goal, 10 seconds left in the first half and the score tied at three, Baltimore holding two timeouts. The Ravens could have pounded the ball twice and, if unsuccessful, still been able to stop the clock for a field goal. Instead on first down Baltimore coaches called a pass, which QB Tony Banks forced into double coverage for the INT. Baltimore ultimately lost by seven. Mitigating virtue: The Ravens can donate their unused timeouts to charity.

Stat of the Week: Stat No. 1. There were more punts (22) than points (15) in the Steelers-Bengals game.

Stat No. 2. After 286 yards running and catching against the Falcons, Marshall Faulk has 1,083 yards from scrimmage this year, which puts him on a pace for 34,295 yards in the decade. (The NFL record for career yards gained is 21,803 by Walter Payton.) That sidereal resonance transducer Kurt Warner brought with him on the star-cruiser from his homeworld sure is coming in handy!

Stat No. 3. An astonishing 23 individual players—David Akers, Morton Andersen, Gary Anderson, Cary Blanchard, John Carney, Steve Christie, Martin Gramatica, Al Del Greco, Jason

Elam, Marshall Faulk, John Hall, Jason Hanson, Edgerrin James, Sebastian Janikowski, Ryan Longwell, Olindo Mare, Curtis Martin, Joe Nedney, Terrell Owens, Wade Richey, Matt Stover, Matt Vanderjagt, and Jeff Wilkins—have outscored the entire Cincinnati team.

Stat No. 4. The Ravens are 5-2 despite not having scored a touchdown since Sept. 24.

Kick of the Week (Rule Quirk): In overtime against the Chargers, Buffalo kicker Steve Christie missed the winner from 41 yards, but a Bills lineman was whistled for false start. Because false start is a "dead ball" infraction, the Bolts did not have the option of declining the penalty and taking possession: San Diego was compelled to accept the flag, which allowed Buffalo to repeat fourth down. On his second try, Christie hit from 46, ending the game.

Kick of the Week (Sociological): Heather Mercer, an aspiring place-kicker who was cut from the Duke University team, sued in federal court claiming discrimination. The jury comes back—the foreman is up—and it's good! Mercer awarded \$2 million.

Now if being cut from a football team entitles you to \$2 million, doesn't this mean that the men of the United States are, collectively, owed approximately \$148 trillion? Duke coaches may indeed have wanted Mercer gone because of her gender, which is discrimination: The trouble is that big-time sports discriminate against almost everyone on the basis of physical attributes. We won't stop to make the tedious, serious point about the social priorities of conferring a huge windfall upon someone whose sole injury was that she failed to qualify for a special privilege—two-thirds of those who try out for college football rosters are cut, and there's certainly no right to be on a team—while denying much smaller amounts to countless deserving people who would, for example, give anything receive an education at Duke University.

Employee of the Week: Kicker Michael Husted won two consecutive games for the Maryland Indigenous Persons by nailing field goals on the final play. As his reward, the Persons cut him. Doesn't this mean he is entitled to \$2 million?

Equipment Disclaimer of the Week: For several years now, NFL helmets have sported warning copy—that block of text that can be glimpsed but not read during telecasts. Logically, warnings are only relevant to those unaware of risks; if an NFL player doesn't know football is dangerous, a block of lawyer-written gibberish is unlikely to do much good. But as a public service, Tuesday Morning Quarterback presents the actual NFL helmet disclaimer:

#### WARNING

Use of this helmet may cause injury or deceasement. You must sign the release before wearing; please do not read the release. Concussion, ringing in ears, torn body parts, and intense pain are normal during use. Manufacturer not responsible for points scored, bonuses offered, or crowd response. Bird claws, lightning bolts, or other mythical imagery on helmet do not confer these properties on wearer. Never use your helmet in a deliberate attempt to injure other players: Attempts to injure should appear to be inadvertent. If ringing in ears persists more than five years after your final game, consult doctor. The coffee at your pregame breakfast may be very hot!

Comeback of the Year: Don Ohlmeyer tossing Chris Berman from Monday Night Football is the greatest thing that could have happened to Berman, and thus good for fans. Once Berman was the embodiment of the sarcastic sports-nut attitude that made the old ESPN such a pleasure; his one-hour NFL Primetime, with Tom Jackson, was also by a huge margin the best NFL show, knowledgeable and funny and admired for showing not just touchdowns but incomplete passes and stuffed runs and other plays that tell as much about a game as the flashy stuff.

Then came the Disney-ESPN-ABC unholy alliance. Disney tried assiduously to turn ESPN into the House of Shill, devoted to breathless corporation promotion. NFL Primetime was cut back. Berman was assigned his Monday Night Football halftime slot, which, if better than what MNF now runs (see below), was his worst work ever. His soul was in danger of going to the Dark Side—that is, Disney.

Now that Berman has been exiled back to ESPN, his old flair has returned: So has NFL Primetime's hourlong format, complete with incompletes. When Ohlmeyer was dithering around early in the season, trying to come up with a new halftime format that was bad enough to meet his standards, he compelled Berman to narrate a couple of canned segments. The contempt in Berman's voice was so pointed, only a very highly paid network executive could have failed to notice. Now Berman is back to doing what he does best. Thanks, Don, for setting him free.

Haiku of the Week: Tuesday Morning Quarterback has not abandoned its commitment to football poetry; there was just a space crunch in last week's column. Here is a staff effort:

George Bush or Al Gore  
Which one will throw out the ball  
At XXXV?  
—TMQ

Here are reader efforts:

TMQ 10/10  
Contained no reader haikus  
Where the heck were they?  
—Bob Krasner

A pack of rabid  
Weasels have more team spirit  
Than the sad Bengals  
—Tony Nowikowski

See Dennis Miller  
Funny man, just not clicking  
He may be gone soon  
—Patrick Reddy

In manuscript form Krasner's entry said h-e-double-hockey-sticks, not "heck," but TMQ bowdlerized him because this is a family column, except for the Cindy Crawford-in-a-leather-harness references. And TMQ was thrown into a deep contemplative state by the metaphysical question of just what, exactly, kind of team spirit would be exhibited by rabid weasels.

Readers are invited to continue submitting verse (literary merit optional) to "The Fray," titling entries "Football Haiku" or "Football Heroic Couplet," and so on.

Hidden Indicator of the Week: Of the five top-ranked defenses by yards allowed, only two are also top-five by points allowed. Miami, with a league-leading spectacular figure of 8.5 points per game allowed, doesn't make the top five for yards allowed. This is the kind of hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's understanding of the game. In this case, everybody knows exactly what it means.

### **Running Items Department**

Most Embarrassing Don Ohlmeyer Moment: Last year's Monday Night Football halftime restaurant tie-in had to go. Excruciating were those promotional shots of ESPN Zone diners quaffing microbrewed raspberry-mango Belgian lite pale dark ale as they "spontaneously" cheered. But at least the old halftime plays of the week were inherently interesting. The new halftime stuff is about as compelling as a data screen of barometric pressure readings from Bolivia. Players get "miked up," and we learn that during games, they say fascinating things like "let's go!" and "c'mon, guys!" What is the plan—to encourage viewers to mute the halftime, or did it just work out that way? Halftime filler bonus: Now there's plenty of time to make that Dagwood sandwich.

Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment: Deconstruction of Miller has been suspended for humanitarian reasons. Though: "They call the wind Melissa" sung after Melissa Stark spoke? TMQ couldn't tell whether this was a) just stupid or b) intended to insult Stark. TMQ guesses nobody else could tell either.

Obscure College Score of the Week: Mount Senario 74, Marantha Baptist 6. Bonus Obscure Score: Carson-Newman 77, Tusculum 24. Double Bonus Obscure Score: Slippery Rock 38, California of Pennsylvania 20. TMQ eagerly awaits the Nov. 4 showdown between California of Pennsylvania and Indiana of Pennsylvania.

Obscure Physically Impossible Feat: Several readers wrote in to point out that one weekend ago, when Zamir Amin of Menlo College threw for an all-levels record of 731 yards, the St. Louis Rams were dark. Did Kurt Warner use the shape-shifting abilities of his homeworld technology to become "Zamir Amin" for the bye week? The conspiracy deepens, yet so far Earth authorities suspect nothing. This weekend, "Zamir Amin" threw for a modest 421 yards as the final was St. Mary's of California 71, Menlo 34.

New York Times Final-Score Score: Once again the Paper of Record goes 0-14 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, resulting in a Times Final-Score Score of 0-99 so far this season. Times predicted: Patriots 16, Jets 10. Actual: Jets 34, Patriots 17. Times predicted:

Ravens 28, Indigenous Persons 24. Actual: Persons 10, Ravens 3. Times predicted: Tennessee 18, Jacksonville 14. Actual: Tennessee 27, Jax 13. And so on.

Readers continue to write in suggesting that the Times' quixotic quest is not an actual attempt to predict a final score, but rather a device to signal betting tips without actually printing the spread. Tuesday Morning Quarterback is skeptical: The full argument against the Times covert-advice theory can be found here, under "TMQ's Irrefutable Reasons for Tormenting the Times."

To recap, if the Times' true intent were to signal bettors, the paper would not need to forecast upsets, only margins that beat the spread. For instance last Friday, when the line was Raiders plus three at Chiefs, the Times predicted a final of Raiders 30, Chiefs 29. If the purpose were encrypted betting advice, predicting a Raiders loss by two or one would have encoded the hidden message that Times readers should sell their Sag Harbor ocean views and let it all ride on Oakland: There was no need to add the improbable forecast of a Raiders straight-up victory considering that the Chiefs had won 10 of the last 11 at home against their Bay rivals. Therefore TMQ thinks the Times predicted a Raiders win because the paper guessed this would happen—which it did, though not by the predicted score. (Actual: Raiders 20, Chiefs 17.) If its predictions are viewed as encrypted betting advice, this week the Times went 8-6, which sounds more like chance than a hidden hand.

Honored Guest Predictions of the Week (New Item): In an effort to indict the entire national media, not just the New York Times, for failed football predictions, TMQ will single out an honored guest each week.

Since we laud Berman of ESPN above, let's check his predictions. Berman styles himself as the Swami and sometimes wears a turban for his predictions segment. He doesn't forecast all games—reducing his chance of error—only those he has a feeling about. His calls this week: Bills over Bolts, Cowboys over Giants, Rams over Falcons, Saints over Panthers, Seahawks over Indy. That's just 3-2, and achieved by picking the Rams—easiest call on the card—but steering clear of could-go-either-way games like Packers-Niners.

Brad Hammill Final-Score Score (New Item): Reader Brad Hammill writes in to suggest that the Times or anyone would have a better chance of projecting an exact final score by simply endlessly issuing this generic prediction:

Home Team 20, Visiting Team 14.

TMQ will track the generic prediction to see if it does better than the carefully considered views of professional sportswriters who have access to exclusive insider information. In its debut weekend, the Brad Hammill Final-Score Score went 0-14.

TMQ Trivia Challenge: Speed has become so essential to the Trivia Challenge that last week a cluster of replies came in within an hour after the column posted, then everyone else gave up. Last week's question:

The Falcons' 13 yards rushing (at home!) this week may not seem like much but represent a Herculean effort compared to the worst rushing days in NFL history. Which of the following is not an actual NFL record for running futility?

- 53, Detroit vs. Chicago Cardinals, October 1943
- 36, Philadelphia vs. Chicago Bears, November 1939
- 33, Philadelphia vs. Brooklyn, October 1943
- 24, Seattle vs. Chicago Bears, December 1985

For the third straight week, Chad Hart of Ames, Iowa, was first to answer, correctly identifying Seattle vs. Bears as the phony record. Though we think of inability to run the football as a modern disease, all the really disastrous running days came in the past. Perhaps Atlanta can find some small consolation in this. Small consolation is the only kind Falcons fans will get this season.

But because Mr. Hart is a previous winner, the judges summarily toss out his entry. TMQ was amused by someone screen-named Decorum, who sent in four separate replies, each claiming one of the four records to be false, thus covering all bases. But sheer guesswork won't win anyone the highly coveted, hardly assured chance of a TMQ cap at season's end. So this week's nod goes to Scott Schiefelbein, who provided the first non-Hart nonguesswork correct reply.

For future challenges, TMQ suggests: If you want to post a fast, accurate reply without doing any actual work, just check The Fray and copy whatever Chad Hart says. But to prevent a speed arms-race from taking over this collegial event—the Trivia Challenge should be as warm and genuine as the Bush-Gore debates--TMQ decrees a rule change. The winner will be the first-read, not necessarily first-posted, correct reply. And how will TMQ choose which entries to read first? That decision will be completely arbitrary.

Now here is this week's Trivia Challenge:

This week future Hall of Fame quarterback Troy Aikman of Dallas heave-hoed five interceptions against the Giants. Not good, but careful ball management compared to those QBs who have thrown even more INTs in one game. The NFL record for picks in a game is eight. Below is a list of those who have thrown either seven or eight INTs in a single game. Which gentleman was guilty of the all-time worst eight?

Zeke Bratkowski, Chicago Bears; Steve DeBerg, Tampa Bay; Jim Hardy, Chicago Cardinals; Ken Stabler, Oakland Raiders; Bob Waterfield, Los Angeles Rams.

Reply to The Fray, slugging your entries "Trivia Answer."

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

Article URL: <http://www.slate.com/id/91511/>

## Presidential Point Spreads

Bengals Romp, Jets Come Back From 30-7, Ralph Nader Elected in Landslide

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Oct. 24, 2000, at 8:00 PM ET

The team cruises to an easy victory, smashing yardage barriers while a running back wearing No. 28 has a record afternoon. Another day at the office for the other-worldly St. Louis Rams.

But wait, this was Cincinnati! The Bengals: 0-6 when Sunday dawned, worst overall record in the past decade, the Yugo of NFL franchises. These selfsame Bengals pasted a very respectable Denver team. They piled up 408 yards rushing, close to the all-time team mark of 426 set by the Lions in 1934. Back Corey Dillon, who wears that Marshall-Faulk-ish No. 28, ran for 278 yards—most ever in an NFL game, eclipsing the 275 accomplished by the sainted Walter Payton.

Sure, a few things never change: In one of the best performances in team history, the Bengals nevertheless managed to complete just two passes. But still!

Could the game be confirmation of the Brownian-jump theory? This idea holds that since all atoms constantly vibrate randomly in Brownian motion, if by chance every atom in an object vibrated in one direction, when it vibrated back the object would spontaneously move—a brick could fly into the air for no clear reason. The effect is so improbable that physicists estimate that throughout the history of the cosmos, no object above molecular size has ever actually spontaneously propelled itself. Yet Sunday, inexplicable physics-defying motion was the rule for the Bengals. Perhaps they could be renamed the Cincinnati Brownians.

Corey Dillon management footnote: This gentleman now owns two of the top five rushing days in NFL history, Sunday's effort and a 246-yard performance in 1997. Last winter, when the Bengals were trying to jaw down Dillon's signing request, the team posted a lengthy article on its official Web site criticizing his skills as a runner. Dillon responded with a contract maneuver that makes him a free agent after the season, ensuring he will leave Cincinnati. Congratulations to those heady personnel managers at the striped-helmet franchise.

Presidential Point Spread: The Tuesday Morning Quarterback line: Bush giving 2 percent. Over/under: 45 percent voter turnout.

Subway Series Note: New York City owns baseball this year, but resplendent New Jersey owns football, with Jersey/A Giants and Jersey/B Jets a combined 11-3. (California teams a combined 8-14, Florida a combined 10-12.) If the Giants and Jets meet in January's Super Bowl, an appellation will be required. How about the Swamp Series?

Jets Comeback Note: The Dolphins had outgained Jersey/B by 207 yards to seven yards in the first quarter; they led 20-0; the Jets didn't record a first down until 6:56 left in the half. Yet TMQ stared at the Marine Mammals on his TV set and cried aloud with full confidence, "Thou art doomed, doomed!" You are just going to have to believe that.

Best Plays of the Week: Best No. 1. The Jets' lineman-eligible trick pass to 300-pound tackle Jumbo Elliott to tie the Dolphins and send a great Monday Night game into overtime. Not many teams are willing to risk throwing to a lineman; when was the last time someone did this with 42 seconds to play and the game on the line? Elliott now replaces Tampa guard Randall McDaniel, who caught a lineman-eligible earlier in the season, as the slowest person ever to catch an NFL touchdown. (Postwar era only.)

Best No. 2. Twice against the Rams, Chiefs QB Elvis Grbac got big gains—a 30-yard touchdown and a 36-yard pass interference penalty—by not just play-faking but using "crouch fakes." In a crouch fake, the QB bends over the ball momentarily after feigning the handoff. Few quarterbacks do this, yet those who do (Boomer Esiason was a master) know regular success. So, why aren't all QBs coached to crouch-fake? The movement is unnatural—from coaches' boxes above, it is a dead giveaway of a play-action pass—but effective at hiding the ball from the defensive front. The fact that coaches in a skybox can see what's going on with the crouch fake seems to prevent most from remembering that what matters is not what they see, but what the defense sees.

Best No. 3. Trailing the heavily favored Bucs 11-3 with seconds remaining in the first half, the Lions had the ball on the Tampa five. Surely they wouldn't dare run against the fearsome Bucs defense. Detroit sent James Stewart up the middle (on a trap, no less) for the touchdown, then ran again on a similar play for the deuce to make it 11-11 at intermission and start the Lions on their way to a 28-14 road upset.

Worst Plays of the Week: Worst No. 1. The Patriots were leading the Colts 16-7 midway through the third, Indianapolis pinned on its own 22. Colts coaches called a fly pattern for Marvin Harrison, one of the best deep receivers. New England was in a nickel. Harrison streaked down the field, man-covered though three auxiliary DBs stood in the deep center of the defense. No one came over to help on Harrison. The single-covered gentleman caught a 78-yard TD pass that turned the momentum toward Indianapolis for its eventual win; the three DBs got a fine view of Harrison's back.

Worst No. 2. Looking at fourth and 11 on the Raiders 31 in the first half, the Seahawks went for it rather than attempting a 48-yard field goal. The pass was incomplete (technical term: "clang"), and soon the rout was on. The problem was that Seattle has no confidence in its field-goal kicker; in the offseason, Hawks coach and general manager Mike Holmgren cut veteran Todd Peterson to make a small salary cap savings. Peterson had only set a Seahawks all-time scoring record, 134 points, in 1999 and is only No. 5 all-time in kicking accuracy.

Worst No. 3. With the score Chiefs 13, Rams 0 in the first quarter, St. Louis punter John Baker lined up. Punters normally take two steps and boom on the third; though the snap was fine, Baker broke into a little five-step number that looked like the latest hip-hop club move and didn't boom until his sixth step. The punt was blocked and returned for a touchdown, setting in motion the big KC win. Six steps before punting? But then being with the Rams, Baker doesn't get much practice. Including Sunday's game, the Rams have punted just 17 this year, versus, say, 47 punts for the Browns.

Florida Teams Spiral Toward the Water, Part One: Jax is now 2-6 and 2-7 stretching back to last season (including 1-4 at home) since the most disastrous event in franchise history, the Jaguar's 62-7 playoff win over Miami. Reader Rogers Cadenhead, a dismayed Jax fan, writes in to remind that late last season, several Jacksonville stars took time out to record "The Jaguars Super Bowl Song," complete with a music video in which they strutted and preened. The song, which boasts that the club is "Super Bowl bound," played nonstop in Jacksonville after the 62-7 game—and it's been downhill ever since as the football gods punish the rodomontading franchise. As for "The Jaguars Super Bowl Song," as late as last week you could still hear this portent of doom on [www.Jacksonville.com](http://www.Jacksonville.com). Suddenly it's disappeared.

Florida Teams Spiral Toward the Water, Part Two: What to make of the Buccaneers, 3-4 after four straight losses? Unlike the bloated, overrated Jax, Tampa Bay seemed the genuine article: Top defense, stellar coaching, team chemistry. Into the test tube was dropped a chemical contaminant, Keyshawn Johnson, now known inside the league as Me-Shawn. The most indulged and expensive player in Bucs history, Johnson has done little on the field but lots off, shifting the Tampa Bay story from team cohesion to Me-Shawn self-promotion. Me-Shawn has called personal press conferences—yes it's a free country, but players who call personal press conferences ought to be mulched—and even when the Bucs were winning complained loudly about how he personally wasn't getting enough star treatment. Put "The Buccaneers Super Bowl Song" on hold.

Combined Yards of the Week: TMQ has long favored the "combined efficiency" hidden indicator, the mix of a team's offense and defensive rankings. Year in, year out, teams strong in one category and weak in another fall by the wayside as the season progresses while Super Bowl winners sport solid units on both sides of the ball. Last year the clear leader in combined efficiency was the Rams, at 7—1st offensive, 6th defensive. And last season when Seattle was 6-2 at the midpoint and being widely hyped, closer analysis showed the Hawks were doomed, doomed by a combined-efficiency number that was fourth quartile.

Right now in combined-efficiency ranking, the Rams are a mediocre 29—1st offensive, 28th defensive. This suggests St. Louis may be vulnerable down the stretch. Another team that may have to wake up and smell the frozen shade-grown double decaf kiwi-walnut latte is Detroit. Though 5-2, the Lions have a disturbingly low combined-efficiency number of 48—29th offensive, 19th defensive.

Minnesota, sole remaining undefeated team, looks good at a ranking of 18—5th offensive, 13th defensive. And please don't be alarmed, but the team that seems have the statistical Super Bowl armament at the moment is the 6-2 Maryland Indigenous Persons, at 12—6th offensive and 6th defensive.

Then there is the No.1 team in the NFL in combined-efficiency terms: the Buffalo Bills, at 11—7th offensive, 4th defensive. This figure not only leads the league, it is only slightly off the 7 rating achieved by the Rams in 1999 when they ran away with NFL stats. Buffalo is even positive in turnover differential. Yet the Bills' record is 3-4, which means players can start looking at brochures for early January resort reservations. How can you be tops in overall

efficiency, positive in turnovers, and still struggling at 3-4? Oh, ye of little faith in the football gods! They are punishing Buffalo for how it treated Bruce Smith and Thurman Thomas.

Genome Uncertainty of the Week: On Sunday, Kurt Warner went down in obvious pain, shielding his left hand. He came off the field clutching his left hand. A broken finger; Warner will miss the four to six games. But the broken finger turns out to be on his right hand. When you're a shape-shifted, silicon-based, normally tentacled lifeform, these human sensory inputs can be really confusing!

Stats of the Week: Stat No. 1. The Flaming Ts defeated the low, low, low-scoring Ravens—no TD since Sept. 24, 246 clock minutes without entering the end zone—despite recording just seven first downs.

Stat No. 2. Even without Kurt Warner, the Rams ran up 428 yards and 34 points.

Stat No. 3. After being outscored 118-19 in the first quarter last year, Arizona has been outscored 56-3 in the first quarter this year. On Sunday, the Cardinals trailed Dallas 24-0 before the Cowboys completed their first pass.

Favor of the Week: These selfsame Cardinals firing coach Vince Tobin. A large disclaimer should be erected over gates to Sun Devil Stadium reading, CAUTION: MAY CONTAIN FOOTBALL-LIKE SUBSTANCE.

Combined Score of the Week: The Cowboys, Raiders, and Steelers defeated the Cardinals, Seahawks, and Browns by a combined 101-10. Ye gods.

Crowd Blunder of the Week: In the Ravens-Tennessee game, Baltimore had the ball at midfield, trailing 7-6, closing seconds of the first half. Fragile-confidence Ravens QB Tony Banks threw a conservative short checkoff, and the crowd responded with vigorous booing. This is the Ravens' first winning season, and the crowd is already so jaded it's booing individual QB reads when the team only trails by a point with two quarters remaining! Banks seemed so shaken by the nasty intensity of the boos that he looked up at the stands bewildered. When the third quarter started, Banks proceeded to throw INTs on three straight possessions, honking the game.

All This Assumes We Want To Look at Him: One occupational hazard of being a multimillionaire NFL owner is that the networks flash scenes of you in your box, frowning at fumbles by some gentleman to whom you just signed a hefty bonus check. Camera pans of your box are just one of those things you learn to live with when you're a multimillionaire sports owner.

But not if you are Owner/Twerp Daniel Snyder of the Indigenous Persons. Snyder's minions recently sent letters to the networks that telecast the NFL, demanding they not show his box to protect his "privacy." Lawyers will giggle at the thought of someone asserting a right of privacy at a nationally televised event being held in an 80,000-seat public accommodation that was constructed precisely for the purpose of attracting attention. (In law, people have a privacy interest regarding images of themselves in their homes, offices, and so on, but generally

surrender this protection when attending public events; those who "seek the limelight," as Snyder has, broadly surrender privacy rights.) Note that Owner/Twerp Snyder only asks that his own punim receive a special privacy right. He doesn't ask it for the paying customers in the stands. But then, Snyder is the first owner in NFL annals to charge admission to watch training camp, so we already know what he thinks of the fans.

Bonus great moment in customer respect: For the recent Battle of Maryland, Ravens versus Persons at FedEx Field, many Baltimore residents were in attendance. The Snyder-employed FedEx Field announcer actually shouted into the stadium PA system during pregame festivities, "Ravens fans suck." How festive!

Little Guy of the Week: With a late FG Sunday, Minnesota kicker Gary Anderson became the all-time leading scorer in NFL annals, notching 2,004 points. Anderson has been cut or not re-signed four times in his career—let go by Buffalo, Pittsburgh, Philadelphia, and San Francisco. In lieu of the man who would become the league's all-time leading scorer, the Bills kept Greg Cater; the Steelers kept Norm Johnson; the Eagles kept Chris Boniol; and the Niners kept Wade Richey. Congratulations to the personnel managers who made these heady decisions.

Corey Dillon Historical Footnote: Dillon broke Payton's game mark of 275 yards, set in November 1977. On that day the Bears beat the Vikings 10-7 as Chicago, with the clock ticking down, passed on a chance to kick a last-second field goal in order to give Payton the extra carry he needed to best the previous record, which was 273 yards.

This stab at the record books turned out to sabotage Chicago's season. The Bears and Vikes were going down to the wire for a postseason slot. Previously in the season, Minnesota beat Chicago by six. Had the Bears, trailing by three in the Payton record game, kicked the figgie and won by six, it would have washed the net-points calculation between the two teams (at that time an important tiebreaker) and, a month later, activated another tiebreaker that would have given Chicago a home game in the 1977 playoffs. Instead Payton ran, the Vikes finished with the playoff tiebreaker edge, and Chicago got sent to Dallas where it was creamed, 37-7. Somehow the Bears braintrust went into the November 1977 game unaware of this calculus. TMQ, watching that game at Soldier Field, remembers screaming "NOOOOOO!!!!!!!!!" as Payton trotted out for the final carry and Bears fans screamed "Yeahhhhhhhh!!!!!!!!!" Would Bears faithful have been better off with the memory of that Payton record or with the postseason home game they missed? Only the football gods can say.

Hidden Indicator of the Week: Four of the weekend's top five passers (Brian Griese, Jeff Garcia, Doug Flutie, and Mark Brunell) played in losing efforts while four of the weekend's top five rushers (Corey Dillon, Tyrone Wheatley, Ricky Williams, and Edgerrin James) played in winning efforts. This is the kind of hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's understanding of the game, and it's pretty obvious what it means.

## **Running Items Department**

**Most Embarrassing Don Ohlmeyer Moment:** Just what exactly did Ohlmeyer change about MNF? Well, the producer's name is now prominently the first credit we see when the shows rolls. And that producer's name is—hey, Don Ohlmeyer!

**Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment:** Suspended for humanitarian reasons. Though that three-second shot of a Britannica.com Web page showing both Miller's punim and a disquisition on the Hebrew tetragrammaton YHWH was one of the great "huh?" moments of television history.

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Baldwin-Wallace 52, Muskingum 7.

**Bonus Obscure Score:** Cortland State 42, William Paterson 3. Well, of course an entire team will beat one single person! Note: may not apply to hypothetical future exhibition matchup of Kurt Warner against entire Arizona Cardinals.

**New York Times Final-Score Score:** Once again the Paper of Record goes 0-14 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, bringing the New York Times Final-Score Score to 0-113 for the season. Times predicted: Tampa 23, Detroit 13. Actual: Detroit 28, Tampa 14. Times predicted: Raiders 28, Hawks 23. Actual: Raiders 31, Hawks 3. Times predicted: Jets 13, Marine Mammals 10. Actual: Jets 40, Mammals 37.

**Brad Hammill Final-Score Score:** Reader Brad Hammill's attempt to pit a generic final score prediction—Home Team 20, Visiting Team 14—against the considered judgment of the experts also goes 0-14, bringing the Brad Hammill Final-Score Score to 0-28 since its inception.

**Honored Guest Final-Score Score:** The Multicolored Lady of New York City is not the only paper that engages in quixotic attempts to predict an exact final score. This week we check in on the Newark Star Ledger, queen newspaper of New Jersey, published in America's resplendent football state.

Like the Times, the Star Ledger went 0-14. Star Ledger predicted: Chiefs 28, Rams 27. Actual: Chiefs 54, Rams 34. Star Ledger predicted: Jax 23, Indigenous Persons 21. Actual: Persons 35, Jax 16. In the case of the Star Ledger, there is no chance these predictions are covert attempts to signal the point-spread since the paper prints the spread on the same page as the predictions. Openly printing the spread is probably mandatory under New Jersey law.

Does your favorite newspaper engage in a quixotic attempt to predict an exact NFL final score? Let TMQ know, and we'll add the paper to all this gay frivolity. Send an entry to "The Fray," titling the entry "Guest Nominee Newspaper." Note: Realistically, it should be a newspaper that posts its predictions on the Web.

**TMQ Trivia Challenge:** Last week the column stopped observing its own rules—kind of like the NFL refs stop calling pass interference in the final two minutes—and decreed that each winner would not be the first posted, correct reply but the first one the judges decided to read. TMQ hoped this would cause entrants to draw attention to their submissions by attaching JPEG files containing nude modeling by Cindy Crawford: still need some of the early-years pics to

complete the collection. Sadly, nothing but entries politely headlined "Please read first." Decorum continues to rule the Trivia Challenge.

(Technical note: TMQ is considering switching its standard daydream from Crawford to Jennifer Lopez. The spike-heels and leather-with-buckles aspect is unlikely to change, however, experts predict.)

For the fourth consecutive week, Chad Hart of Ames, Iowa, filed the first correct reply, this time giving it up by including in his message a line disclosing his favorite trivia-confirmation online source. What is that source? No chance we'll say.

The winner, first-read on a completely arbitrary basis, was Kate Urquhart, who correctly replied "Jim Hardy" to the following question:

This week future Hall of Fame quarterback Troy Aikman of Dallas heave-hoed five interceptions against the Giants. Not good, but careful ball management compared to those QBs who have thrown even more INTs in one game. The NFL record for picks in a game is eight. Below is a list of those who have thrown either seven or eight INTs in a single game. Which gentleman was guilty of the all-time worst eight?

Zeke Bratkowski, Chicago Bears; Steve DeBerg, Tampa Bay; Jim Hardy, Chicago Cardinals; Ken Stabler, Oakland Raiders; Bob Waterfield, Los Angeles Rams.

Reader Mark Longbrake gets a tip of TMQ's maybe-it-will-exist cap for this outstanding trivia addition: Though Bratkowski peaked at a mere seven INTs in a pro game, he once threw eight picks in one afternoon at the University of Georgia.

Now this week's Trivia Challenge:

On Sunday the spiraling-toward-the-water Cleveland Browns recorded just five first downs. Pretty depressing, but a Herculean effort compared to those times in NFL history when teams have managed no first downs at all. Of the four games listed below, which is not an actual instance of a team finishing a game with zero first downs?

Giants vs. Green Bay, 1933  
Eagles vs. Lions, 1935  
Broncos vs. Oilers, 1966  
Saints vs. Steelers, 1995.

Submit your answers to "The Fray," slugging them "Trivia Answer." First-read correct reply might win a TMQ cap at season's end.

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

Article URL: <http://www.slate.com/id/91919/>

## Why It's Great To Be Way Behind

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Oct. 31, 2000, at 6:45 PM ET

Like Richard Nixon, who would never turn off a bad movie because it might get better—it's Halloween, and Nixon is the scariest thing TMQ can think of—Tuesday Morning Quarterback is never discouraged by "insurmountable" leads because they just create opportunities for memorable comebacks! The Jets showed this to the Dolphins last Monday night when they came back from a 20-0 deficit. Miami showed it to Green Bay on Sunday, coming back from 17-0.

What most huge comebacks share in common is that they occur when a team takes its "insurmountable" position in the first half, then promptly nods off as if the game is already over—although if you've taken a big lead before intermission, that means there is as much time left for your opponent to overcome the cushion as you consumed in building it.

In the greatest-ever NFL comeback, Buffalo recovering from 35-3 to beat Houston (Release 1.0) in the 1992 playoffs, the Oilers hit the 35-point mark on the first play from scrimmage of the second half, then switched to a soft-zone defense and began admiring themselves in the mirror; yet half the clock remained. All-time comeback No. 2, San Francisco rallying from 35-7 against New Orleans in 1980, followed the same script: The Saints achieved that margin just before halftime, and New Orleans players began composing their boasts of victory. In the recent Jets-Miami tilt, the Dolphins went to sleep when they got so far ahead so rapidly but should have remembered that a rapid big lead is much more vulnerable than a slowly built big lead. Just last season the Marine Mammals themselves fell behind New England 14-0 after the game's third series and came back to win (on the road no less) as the P-Men began to act like it was over with three-quarters of the clock left to run. Big early leads just set the stage for comebacks.

Tactics note: The Jets posted their incredible 30-point fourth quarter against Miami partly by letting Vinny Testaverde call his own plays. This was done to save time so that plays need not be signaled in, but will any of the NFL's control-freak coaches take heed of how well the tactic worked?

When the QB is a veteran who makes smart decisions, letting him call his own game helps offensive rhythm, inspires teammates—pros go harder when they know they, not coaches, are fully determining the outcome—and, not inconsequentially, gives offensive personnel an extra moment in which to prep mentally for the upcoming play since an on-field call goes out into the huddle faster than a signaled-in call. Yet Jim Kelly, who retired in 1996, was the last NFL starter to call his own plays. Modern coaches want to believe only they could possibly understand the incredibly subtle details of a game plan. Yet when handed the car keys, Testaverde did not make impatient or crazy calls—he just kept advancing the chains with rhythm plays that worked.

Elsewhere, one of the sweetest traditions in sports lore involves the 1972 Dolphins, who finished 17-0, the only perfect season in NFL history. Each year at the moment when the last remaining unbeaten NFL team honks a game, every surviving member of the 1972 Dolphins uncorks a bottle of champagne that he set aside to cool on opening day. And it's genuine Champagne champagne, not Chilean sparkling French-type-style mango-chutney white

zinfandel/Gewürztraminer blend. As the Vikes, last undefeated of 2000, left the field in Tampa mumbling "#@&\*%#\$@!" to each other, corks popped. Gentlemen of 1972, TMQ hopes you enjoyed your Sunday afternoon draught. You earned it and are likely to savor these bubbles annually until the day when the football gods summon you to Asgard for song and feasting.

Best Plays of the Week: Best No. 1. Honoring a TMQ law of football (Fake Kick = Victory), the Dolphins pulled off one of the classiest trick punts in years. Midway through the third quarter, Green Bay leading 17-14, Miami lined up to boom away from its 45. Punter Matt Turk convincingly leapt into the air as if he was trying to snag a bad snap, drawing the Packers' attention as the ball was actually direct-hiked to LB Larry Izzo, who lumbered for a 39-yard gain that set up the go-ahead TD. (Note: The burgundy gentleman's failed punt run on Monday night, followed by a loss, does not invalidate this rule because the play was a botched snap rather than a called fake. Bad Snap ? Victory.)

Best No. 2. Trailing 13-7, the Indigenous Persons had the ball on the Tennessee 34 with 10 seconds left and were looking for that one quick pass to improve field-goal position. That one quick pass went directly to Flaming T's CB Samari Rolle, who staged one of the best return plays ever, staying on his feet for a seemingly endless 81-yard touchdown return. Rolle had marvelous awareness of the fact that it was score or nothing—the clock ticked to double zeros as he crossed midfield. Rolle's teammates had marvelous awareness of the clock situation, sprinting from all over the field to block for him mightily. The extremely highly paid Indigenous Persons, the NFL's most expensive team, had scant awareness of the situation, almost ignoring Rolle. Though all that was required for this play to become harmless was for any burgundy-clad individual to push Rolle out of bounds, many Persons just stood around watching, as if it were somehow insulting to them, as extremely high-paid types, to bother with this reversal of fortune.

Best No. 3. Late in the third, trailing 24-17, the Rams lined up on the San Francisco 19. The sal-cap-depleted Niners start five rookies on defense. St. Louis shifted from a standard set to an "empty backfield" with RB Marshall Faulk as the slot receiver left, and this fairly standard shift so befuddled Niners rookies that no one lined up to cover Faulk, who ran uncontested to the end zone to catch for six. The play was a testament to why people watch game film. A week ago against Carolina, a fairly standard Panthers shift so befuddled Niners rookies that when the ball was snapped, Carolina had six gentlemen to the right of the center and San Francisco had but three; no one covered RB Tim Biakabutuka, who ran uncontested to the end zone to catch for six.

Worst Plays of the Week: Worst No. 1. First and goal on the Jets one, score tied at 17, middle of the fourth quarter, Buffalo figured to pound the ball for the all-but-assured touchdown, taking time off the clock in the process. Or maybe there would be a play-action fake from a "jumbo" run package of the team's most ample gentlemen. Instead Bills coaches called a regular pass from a regular formation; the receiver drew an offensive-interference flag that pushed the spot back to the 11; three straight incompletions took nothing off the clock, and a field goal was settled for, leaving Jersey/B time to respond with its own field goal that tied the game.

Football purists know that the closer you get to the end zone the harder it becomes to complete a pass because the defense has steadily less territory to guard: Near the goal line, defenders are

packed into so little space that it's very hard for receivers to break free. This is why almost all successful goal-line plays are runs, roll-outs (which create confusion), or play fakes designed to throw to a TE or OL who looked like a run blocker: Regular passes rarely work at the goal line. Seattle made the same mistake when it went for the deuce conversion to tie the Chiefs late in the fourth. Ball spotted on the two, rather than run or roll out, the Hawks tried a standard passing play, and no one was even a little bit open.

Worst No. 2. After Buffalo settled for the above-cited field goal, the resplendent New Jersey gentlemen moved to third and one at the Bills 14 with 2:30 remaining, trailing by three. Surely the Jets, noting their opponent just bungled a similar situation by throwing, would pound the ball to move the chains, grind the clock, and one way or the other (six or three) score with only a few ticks left. Instead, exhibiting no short-term memory, Jersey/B coaches also called a pass, in this case a screen. Can't anybody run straight ahead on a short-yardage down anymore? Bills LB Sam Cowart beautifully read the screen and leveled a Jets back for a 5-yard loss, forcing Jersey/B to settle for a field goal and leave enough on the clock for Buffalo to position itself for the third late kick of the game—the winner as the clock hit 0:00.

Injections of the Week: Battered, beat-up Troy Aikman of Dallas had six cortisone shots to his lower back before attempting to play against Jax, then left in the first quarter anyway. Aikman wears three Super Bowl rings and will be first-ballot Hall of Fame. Troy—it's not worth it.

Portent of Doom: As Tampa pulled away from the Vikings, Bucs DT Warren Sapp strutted, preened, and danced on the sidelines. What is it about the combination of Florida and football that inspires rodomontade? (Cf. Me-Shawn Johnson, Jax in 1999, the University of Miami, etc.) One does not strut, preen, and dance when one's team will end the day 4-4: The football gods notice such things and rarely show mercy. Tampa's season is doomed, doomed.

Put the Dogs Back: TMQ views with dismay the viruslike spread throughout the league of spinning "Who Let the Dogs Out" when a home-team defender makes a play. Scant weeks ago, hardly anyone outside the Backstreet Boys/Vitamin C/Mindy D'Stasio's musical orbit had heard this underwhelming ditty. Now half the league's stadium sound systems are sampling it at military-afterburner decibel levels, and another stadium falls each week. The song snippet has propagated much more rapidly than the similarly annoying "Whoomp! (There It Is)" of the early 1990s. At the current rate, "Who Let the Dogs Out" is on a pace to replace "Hail to the Chief" at the January 2001 presidential inaugural.

TMQ will leave it to pop psychologists to explain why defensive players would wish to be compared—by their home-field staffs!—to loose dogs. But rather than encourage negative thoughts and inflame passions, Tuesday Morning Quarterback feels it would be more appropriate to play Loreena McKennitt through stadium loudspeakers following sacks. This would calm the crowd, allowing them to reflect on the spiritual themes in their lives.

We're All Professionals Here: The Lions-Colts game featured nine turnovers, a safety, and a missed 29-yard field goal.

**Skinny Guy Feat of the Week: Skinny Feat No. 1.** In the above-cited game, Indianapolis punter Hunter Smith ran down Lions returner Desmond Howard from behind to prevent what seemed a sure touchdown. TMQ just loves it when kickers make athletic plays. Fun Desmond Howard fact: Though he is tied for the league's all-time lead in punt return TDs and barely missed the record Sunday, Howard has been released by four teams.

**Skinny Feat No. 2.** Bills kicker Steve Christie, who has won three games this season with last-second field goals, is now 15 of 17 in his career on game-winning attempts in the final two minutes or overtime. Cold, cold Canadian blood (hometown: Thunder Bay, Ontario) runs through this gentleman's veins.

**Unis of the Week: Man,** those San Diego baby-blue throwback uniforms look fine. Why don't the Bolts switch to them? Explanation: The Chargers have a strict team policy of avoiding success. (See below.)

**Grade Inflation Strikes NFL:** Only five QBs in NFL history—Steve Young, Joe Montana, Troy Aikman, Bret Favre, and Jim Kelly—averaged a statistically significant amount above 60 percent completion for their careers. Right now, with the drip, drip, drip of the West Coast offense proliferating, no fewer than 13 NFL QBs are above that level. Even the woeful Jon Kitna is running a Hall of Fame percentage; his 62.1 completions is nearly the same as his bottom-quartile 66.3 passer rating. Something's wrong when you can hit 62.1 percent of your passes and still be awful.

**Stat of the Week: Stat No. 1.** The Steelers have not allowed a touchdown in four games, outscoring opponents by a combined 66-9.

**Stat No. 2.** The Titans have totaled just 377 offensive yards and 21 first downs in their last two games, yet won both.

**Stat No. 3.** Baltimore has now gone five games—59 possessions, 306 clock minutes, the entire month of October—without scoring a touchdown. This for a team that had the fifth and 10th picks overall in the 2000 draft and spent both on offensive players. Unfortunately, TMQ does not know a printable ejaculation that is stronger than ye gods!

**Stat No. 4.** The Rams rolled up 34 points and 447 yards even without Kurt Warner. Rams tailback Marshall Faulk has 14 touchdowns, which puts him on a pace for 332 touchdowns in the decade. (NFL career record is 185 by Jerry Rice.) That plasma pulse anti-decompensator Warner brought with him on the star-cruiser from his homeworld sure is coming in handy!

**Save Time, Start Your Annual Swoon Early:** From the point at which Seattle was 2-2 and led Kansas City 17-7 on Monday Night Football, the Hawks have lost five straight and been outscored 135-49.

**Quote of the Week:** After the 2-6 Bengals beat the cover-your-eyes Browns while scoring only 12 points and managing just 240 yards of offense, new Cincinnati coach Dick LeBeau declared, "It doesn't get any better than this." Hey, it's the Bengals: He's right!

Disclaimer of the Week: A football writer TMQ admires is Paul Zimmerman ("Dr. Z") of Sports Illustrated. But how to explain the disclaimer that appears at the bottom of Zimmerman articles on [www.cnnsi.com](http://www.cnnsi.com), the joint CNN-SI sports-obsession site: "The opinions expressed here are solely those of the writer."

What, Zimmerman's musings do not reflect the official policy of the swimsuit-babe weekly? Must Z have his articles cleared by Wen Ho Lee? Apparently CNN's board of directors feels it must distance itself from such red-hot controversial Zimmerman comments as, "It's always risky to play rookie runners too soon." TMQ inquired about what, exactly, constitutes the official policy of Sports Illustrated. But at a secret debriefing, a magazine spokesman referred me to an informed senior official who insisted on staying on background for national security reasons.

For Halloween They Dressed as Empty Seats: The frighteningly bad football-like Cardinals played at home before 35,286 people.

Cartographic Perfection Achieved: Reader Kyle writes in to protest that TMQ's practice of referring to the national capital area's NFL team as the Maryland Indigenous Persons does not really solve the problem posed by the team's phony Washington name since while the Persons play in Maryland, their headquarters and practice facility are in Virginia.

It's a global world, but Kyle has a point. The Persons and Jersey/A (Giants) and Jersey/B (Jets) are hardly the only clubs with cartographically flummoxed names. The Buccaneers call themselves the "Tampa Bay" Bucs though their city is Tampa and the bay in question is a body of water where, presumably, the team neither practices nor performs. (The Green Bay Packers are OK as they represent the city of Green Bay.) Perhaps there is a littoral solution to this literal problem. From now on TMQ will refer to the Chesapeake Watershed Region Indigenous Persons.

Name Perfection Achieved: And should the above-cited franchise lose the lawsuit that seems on a course to force it to abandon its present name, reader Chris Reynolds suggests the team be renamed the Foreskins. TMQ would gladly give them back their illusion of playing in the nation's capital in return for a team called the Washington Foreskins. Condom-company sponsorship, MTV ads, etc. Really convenient team-logo seat cushions: Just rub them, and they become a king-size bed. And to fire up the crowd, the cheerleaders could—well, anyway.

Great Moments in Management: Why are the Chargers the only NFL team without a W? In winter 1998, the same time the team gave up 1998 and 1999 No. 1 choices and more for the draft rights to Ryan Leaf, San Diego also traded its 2000 No. 1 for the draft rights to Mikhail Ricks, who is not an obscure Ukrainian lyric poet but an obscure American WR. A few weeks ago the Bolts quietly waived Ricks, who was a bust even on special teams. Toting up these two canny transactions, San Diego surrendered three consecutive No. 1 draft picks (including the third and eighth selections overall), a high No. 2 pick, and players in return for: a bust now cut and Leaf, the lowest-rated passer in the NFL. Ye gods.

New Economy Score of the Week: Giants defeat Eagles 24-7.

Hidden Indicator of the Week: The Bengals, Browns, Cardinals, Eagles, Falcons, Panthers, Raiders, Ravens, Steelers, and Vikings—10 teams—combined to score six touchdowns. This is the sort of hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's understanding of the game, and in this case everyone knows what it means: *ZZZZZZZZ*.

### Running Items Department

Obscure College Score of the Week: Bemidji State 70, Minnesota-Morris 0. Bonus Obscure Score: Albion 80, Olivet 7. Double Bonus Obscure Score: Swarthmore 29, Franklin and Marshall 21. Well of course an entire team would beat just two guys! (Disclaimer: Statement may not apply to all Swarthmore teams in all seasons.)

Obscure College Game of the Year: Indiana of Pennsylvania, which lost to Clarion 21-13, and California of Pennsylvania, which lost to Shippensburg 21-17, were both caught looking ahead to next weekend's monster Indiana of Pennsylvania-California of Pennsylvania showdown, which TMQ proclaims the Obscure College Game of the Year. People all over the world can listen to the play-by-play via the Internet, follow the links at [www.iup.edu/athlet/sports/fb](http://www.iup.edu/athlet/sports/fb). Sorry, no network TV coverage.

Obscure Nicknames Milestone: Two weekends ago, Hobart defeated both those guys of Franklin and Marshall, 28-10. Alert reader Kevin notes that by team nicknames, this game, held while the Middle East emergency summit was in progress, pitted the Statesmen against the Diplomats. Wonder if either team wore striped—no, I can't finish that sentence.

Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment: Suspended in respect for the troubled Middle East. Though last night Miller didn't come on until 9:08, his latest bow yet, and his opening segment was the shortest yet. The phrase "easing him out" leapt to TMQ's mind.

Reader Haiku of the Week: Here are two haiku and a heroic couplet. TMQ admires the structured minimalism of the Eddie George lines while being unsure about the conclusion of the couplet. Keep your football verse coming; it gives the column a highbrow patina to offset the leering sex references. Submit manuscripts via "The Fray," titling entries "Football Haiku," "Football Sonnets," and so on.

Eddie George runs ball  
Will run again if not stopped  
Eddie George runs ball  
—Ted Arrowsmith

Janikowski kicks!  
Raider faithful close eyes, pray  
At last he makes them  
—Bob Krasner

Johnson's shoulder 'neath his sternum lies.

Behold! The Flutied Buffalo shall rise!  
—Marcus Koval

New York Times Final-Score Score: Once again the Paper of Record goes 0-14 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, bringing the season Times Final-Score Score to a combined 0-128. Times predicted: Lions 23, Colts 19. Actual: Colts 30, Lions 18. Times predicted: Panthers 20, Falcons 14. Actual: Falcons 13, Panthers 12. Times predicted: Packers 21, Marine Mammals 20. Actual: Mammals 28, Packers 20.

Brad Hammill Final-Score Score: Reader Hammill's generic prediction—Home Team 20, Visiting Team 14—again goes 0-14, leaving the Brad Hammill Final-Score Score at 0-42 since inception.

Honored Guest Predictions: Since we laud Dr. Z above, let's check his forecasts. Zimmerman danced around the Flaming T's-Persons matchup by saying he liked Tennessee if Eddie George played but liked the Persons if not: TMQ dreams of finding the bookie who would take both ends of the same bet. Zimmerman also picked the Bills, Bengals, Bucs, Giants, Chiefs, Jax, and Ravens. That's 7-1-1 if you throw out the Tennessee fudge-bet and 8-1 if you include it; not too shabby.

TMQ Trivia Challenge: Last week Tuesday Morning Quarterback inaugurated a new policy of lauding the first-read correct reply, not the first-received. Would readers include enticements to lock in on their submissions? It seemed to be paying off when Fray entries from Doug Butler and Ben Domenech appeared with titles "Claudia Schiffer Dominatrix Pix" and "Jennifer Lopez Leather Party Invite." Naturally TMQ opened these first! But sadly they contained no sordid, prurient material, just politely worded entries. Another eye-catching submission, from a reader screen-named JDG, was titled "Read First, I am in League with K. Warner." This entry threatened to report TMQ to the silicon-based masters of Warner's homeworld unless JDG was awarded victory. Ha! As if I would quail before such peril! Wait—what's that tentacled thing materializing by the credenza?

On a completely arbitrary basis, the judges hand last week's Trivia Challenge to Brodie Jarrell of Conshohocken, Pa., who correctly answered "Steelers-Saints" to the following question:

On Sunday the spiraling-toward-the-water Cleveland Browns recorded just five first downs. Pretty depressing, but a Herculean effort compared to those times in NFL history when teams have managed no first downs at all. Of the four games listed below, which is not an actual instance of a team finishing a game with zero first downs?

Giants vs. Green Bay, 1933  
Eagles vs. Lions, 1935  
Broncos vs. Oilers, 1966  
Saints vs. Steelers, 1995

A tip of TMQ's maybe-it-will-exist cap to reader Mark Longbrake, who adds that of the five times in NFL history when a team has achieved zero first downs, three times that team won. New hope for the Baltimore Ravens!

Here is this week's Trivia Challenge:

Last week Gary Anderson became the NFL's all-time highest scorer—despite having led the league in scoring during the season just once in his 19-year career. Name another gentleman who holds the NFL all-time mark in a major category yet led the league in that category only once during the season or not at all.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback has fiendishly crafted this question to render it impossible to answer by searching [www.nfl.com](http://www.nfl.com) or scanning the index of the NFL 2000 Record & Fact Book. This one will require thought, expertise, and flipping through dusty volumes. So let's see if it takes the winner more than 45 seconds. And for added fun confusion, there may be more than one correct answer.

As always, send replies to The Fray, slugging them "Trivia Answer." The first-read correct reply might receive a TMQ cap at season's end. Remember to include your e-mail address in the highly remote, extremely unlikely chance that you win.

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Nov. 7, 2000, at 7:30 PM ET

Announcers and sportswriters love the blitz. Fans scream, "Blitz! Blitz!" Tuesday Morning Quarterback screams, "Don't blitz!" Never was that rule on better display than last weekend:

- Denver leads 23-20 with nine minutes left, third and 14 on the Jersey/B 47. All the Jets need is to play straight defense and get a stop—since the average NFL pass attempt yields 6.4 yards, the numbers are on their side. It's a blitz! Six gentlemen charge across the line, and nobody's available to cover Ed McCaffrey, who catches a 47-yard TD pass for the winning points.
- Pittsburgh has Tennessee on the ropes, leading 7-6 with 2:11 left, and the Flaming T's facing fourth and eight on the Steelers 42 with only one TO left. The Steelers get a stop, and the game's over. It's a blitz! Steve McNair takes a five-step drop, the blitzers don't reach him, and he calmly throws for 17 yards, setting up the winning kick.
- Winless San Diego has Seattle gasping for air, leading 15-14 with 1:21 to play, and the Hawks facing third and 16 on the SD 37. If the Bolts just take the odds with a regular defense, Seattle will end up either with a long field goal attempt or a desperation heave. It's a blitz! Six Bolts charge across the line, including a defensive back. Bottom-quartile QB Jon Kitna hits Darrell Jackson for the first, positioning the Hawks to kick the wining figgie as time expires.

Blitzes work sometimes but more often transform long-yardage down-and-distance that favors the defense into big gains for the offense. Why? Because offenses want to be blitzed. A surprise blitz can really hurt, but a blitz in an obvious passing situation, when expected, leads to man coverage on receivers, and man coverage is what every QB nods off at night dreaming about.

Was this weekend a fluke? The Rams beat the Broncos on opening-day weekend largely on the strength of long TD passes to Faulk and Hakim when Denver big-blitzed and someone was uncovered. In September's Rams-Falcons game, the score was tied late in the first half, and St. Louis was stuck at its 20; Atlanta blitzed six and saw Torry Holt take a short flip 80 yards for six, breaking the game open. The Packers were leading Miami by 10 in the middle of the third when the Dolphins faced second and long; Green Bay blitzed six, including a DB, and Miami hit a 50-yard pass that ignited its winning rally. Und so weiter.

Defensive coordinators are blitzing more than ever because they want to "make a play" in flashy fashion: Though nine times out of 10, the single most effective D outcome is an incomplete pass clanking to the ground. It's worth noting that of the league's most effective defenses this season—Baltimore, Buffalo, Miami, New Orleans, the Persons, Pittsburgh, and Tennessee—none is blitz-addicted. They might send someone on occasion but rarely bring six. (When announcers erroneously say "zone blitz" to describe what the Steelers and T's are doing, most of the time only four guys are rushing.)

Oh thou defensive coordinators, take this humble counsel—drop thine men into coverage and play for the clang! of an incompletion.

In other Tuesday Morning Quarterback advice that was inexplicably ignored, Jersey/B reached first and goal on the Denver 2, trailing by seven, 42 seconds left. Last week TMQ detailed how the plays that work at the goal line are power run, roll-out, or "jumbo" formation play-fake, but mamma don't let your sons throw regular passes. So the Jets pounded Curtis Martin (5-yard per carry average in the game) straight ahead, right? There was enough clock for three quick rushing plays even without timeouts, and who can stop three quick runs at point-blank range? First down, the Jets play-passed from a regular formation, incomplete. Regular pass on second down—against the nickel, ideal for a run!—incomplete. Regular pass on third down, incomplete. Regular pass on fourth down, incomplete. Game over. Ye gods.

Best Plays of the Week: Best No. 1. Facing third and goal on the Niners 1 with 12 seconds remaining in the first half, leading 21-0, did New Orleans go pass-wacky? Thanks be to the football gods, no. Power set, Ricky Williams off tackle for six, game effectively over. You don't know how happy it makes offensive linemen when coaches call runs, not passes, in this kind of situation.

Best No. 2. Facing second and goal on the New England 9 in the second, the Bills ran a roll-out right. Jay Riemersma, lined up as the TE right, dove forward to block and tumbled to the ground as if he'd missed his block badly. Then he leapt up and ran to the left curl zone where not a single defensive gentleman remained; Doug Flutie threw back to him for an elegant six. This fall-down fake, followed by a "drag" route across the flow, is a high-school favorite that dates approximately to the Cretaceous Period. The Patriots acted like they'd never seen it.

Best No. 3. Facing second and goal on the Chiefs 2, leading 35-24 with four minutes left, the Raiders lined up in a jumbo set, play-faked and threw to TE Ricky Dudley for the six that iced the game.

These three Best Plays demonstrate what works near the goal line—straight ahead running, roll-outs, or play-fakes from heavy formations. Oh thou offensive coordinators, take thee heed.

Worst Plays of the Week: Worst No. 1. Facing fourth and six on the Panthers 35, scored tied at 24, midway through the fourth, the Rams had these choices: 1) Go for it with the league's No. 1 offense; 2) attempt a long field goal with Jeff Wilkins, who is 12 for 12 on the season; 3) fake a kick, thus ensuring victory (see below); or 4) punt, running the risk that the ball sails into the end zone for a touchback and a field-position net of a mere 15 yards. The daring, fearless Rams coaches chose (4). Punter John Baker shanked it out of bounds at the Panthers 27, netting just 8 yards, and Carolina marched for the winning score.

Spoiled crowd note: When St. Louis reserve QB Trent Green was sacked out of field goal range earlier in the game, home fans booed. These Rams have only won 23 of 28 and the Super Bowl. But what have they done lately!

Worst No. 2. With first down at the Eagles 11 and the game scoreless, Cowboys coaches ignored Emmitt Smith (134 yards rushing on the day) and called a pass so badly bobbled that three Dallas receivers and six Philadelphia defenders ended up in the same corner of the end zone. Into this committee meeting Randall Cunningham forced the ball, INT.

Worst No. 3. Last Monday night, the overpaid and undermotivated Chesapeake Watershed Region Indigenous Persons gave up a punt return TD to Tennessee, then stood around and watched one of the Flaming T's run 81 yards for an interception score. On Sunday, after extremely highly paid halfback Stephen Davis fumbled at the Arizona goal line, these selfsame Persons stood around and watched Aeneas Williams run the ball 104 yards to the house, tying the longest return in league history. Most NFL teams give up two to three return touchdowns per season; the Persons gave up three in less than a week. Redeeming virtue: one step closer to the inevitable Queeg-like meltdown for Owner/Twerp Daniel Snyder.

Stats of the Week: Stat No. 1. Miami and Tampa Bay each sacked opposing quarterbacks on three consecutive snaps.

Stat No. 2. Pittsburgh has not surrendered a touchdown for five straight games yet couldn't stop the T's on fourth and eight.

Stat No. 3. Elvis Grbac threw for 504 yards in the Chiefs' loss to the Raiders. Four of the top five passers on Sunday (Grbac, Trent Green, Peyton Manning, Vinny Testaverde) were losers.

Stat No. 4. In the Bucs-Falcons game, Tampa punter Mark Royals had more passing yardage than Atlanta QB Chris Chandler.

Stat No. 5. Owing to penalties, the P-Men had a sequence in which they ran four consecutive plays from the Buffalo 1, three of them first and goal. They failed to score.

Vote Nader, It's Over: This football factoid has been making the rounds, but in case you missed it: For each of the past 15 presidential ballots, if the capital area's burgundy-clad gentlemen won their final home game before Election Day, the party in power kept the White House; if they lost, control of the White House changed. The loss to Tennessee was the Persons' final home appearance the election. Congratulations, National Security Adviser-elect Condoleezza Rice.

Candidate Withdraws in Swing State: TMQ warned two columns ago that the Lions were over their heads at 5-2 but never would have guessed coach Bobby Ross would resign, saying "I feel like I've failed" because of a two-game skid. A losing streak confined to two games constitutes success for several NFL franchises! Bring back Wayne Fontes, who's been unemployed since Ross supplanted him in 1996. Fun fact: Fontes is both the winning-est (66) and losing-est (67) coach in Detroit history.

Great Moments in Management: Jeff Blake of the red-hot Saints was 20-26 for 275 yards and three touchdowns while Akili Smith of the cool-to-the-touch Bengals was 15 of 27 for 137 yards and no TDs. Cincinnati, which once had Blake, used the second pick overall of the 1999 draft to take Smith and later released Blake. The Bengals could have kept Blake and traded that 1999

selection to New Orleans, whose then-coach Mike Ditka offered Cincinnati three No. 1s to get into position to draft Ricky Williams. Summing these canny transactions, Cincinnati could have had the effective Blake plus three No. 1 choices, two of them high in the draft, or the floundering Smith and no picks. It opted for the latter. Ye gods.

Fashion Statement of the Week: George Seifert wore sunglasses on the sidelines of the Carolina-Rams game, which was played indoors at night.

Quote of the Week: After Oakland advanced to 8-1 with a victory over KC, Raiders coach Jon Gruden cryptically announced, "I realize we've got to lay a lot of bricks to reach our goals." In sports slang to lay a brick means to play horribly.

Søren Kierkegaard, Chargers Fan: Reader Scott Shirley writes to note that when Bolts star Junior Seau signed a long-term contract extension last week—he would have been a hot free agent—he committed to an 0-9 team that is likely to be woeful for the remainder of his career. This, Shirley says, makes Seau an existential hero: "Fate put him in San Diego and he is not going to argue. He will continue to give his stellar effort in spite of the futility and utter pointlessness of it all." Kierkegaard wrote, "The more one ponders [philosophy], the more it comes to mean that life in the temporal existence never becomes quite intelligible." Obviously Kierkegaard had been trying to figure out the Bolts!

Histrionics of the Week: In high-pressure games between contenders, as the QB approaches the line for a big play, he motions the roaring home crowd for quiet. When Akili Smith of the Bengals brought his club to the line for first and goal at the Ravens 4, he waved his arms frantically to silence the crowd. Except—they were already silent. It was Baltimore 24, Cincinnati 0 at the time, and hardly anyone was cheering. Combined score note: In their last three meetings, the Ravens have outscored the Bengals 86-7.

Frostback of the Week: Bills kicker Steve Christie, who had already won three games this season with figgies in the closing seconds, hit from 48 in a steady rain as regulation expired in Foxborough to force the extra session, then hit from 32 in OT for the win. In his career Christie is an astonishing 20 of 22 on kicks to win or tie in the final two minutes or overtime. Frosty, low-low-Celsius Canadian blood (Precise temperature of Canadian blood: It's pretty cold, eh?) runs in this gentleman's veins.

Nedney Unit Active! Kicker Joe Nedney, who has been cut by two teams this season, hit 4-for-4 for the Panthers, raising his performance to 24 of 27 on the year. Still the Earth authorities suspect nothing.

Heppner Unit Malfunctions! A few weeks ago the overpriced Chesapeake Watershed Persons cut kicker Mike Husted—he had only won games with last-second field goals on consecutive weeks—in order to sign kicker Kris Heppner. On Sunday, Heppner hooted a 33-yard fourth-quarter attempt that would have given the Persons victory over the football-like AZ-Men. On Monday Heppner was cut, the third kicker the Persons have waived this season; in a canny move, Owner/Twerp Daniel Snyder passed on the 24-for-27 Nedney.

**Harmonic Convergence:** The Raiders and Dolphins each had their first offensive snap on the opposition 46, and each called the same trick play, sending a WR on a fake end-around then giving up the middle to the RB behind a FB lead-block. For the Dolphins the result was a 46-yard touchdown by Lamar Smith; for the Raiders, a 37-yard gain by Tyrone Wheatly.

**Hustle of the Week:** It's that time of year when office football pools get serious, and Tuesday Morning Quarterback has just one question for those who participate: Do you know anyone who's ever actually won an office pool?

Some smiling, friendly guy in your office—one of those guys who works hard at, well, you're not sure what he does, but he always seems busy—hands out the sheets and then collects them with your untraceable cash. Jovial co-conspirators work the building. Come Tuesday you didn't win, but neither did anyone else you know. Even if you kept a record of your picks, you have no way of knowing if someone else did better. You never actually meet anyone who won the pool anywhere in your building, county, Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area, or the Northern Hemisphere. Next Thursday the guy is back, handing out the sheets, smiling. And the government's going after Sotheby's and Christie's, which are supposed to be hustles, while this runs unchecked!

**Hidden Indicator of the Week:** One of TMQ's laws of football (Fake Kick = Victory) was on display as the Bears, Bucs, and Dolphins all ran trick kicks and won while no losing team attempted a fake kick. (Minnesota's wobble-pass by the holder on the field goal that would have won the Monday night game at the end of regulation does not violate this law as it was a botched snap, not a planned fake: Bad Snap ? Victory.) The relationship between fake kicks and victory is the kind of hidden indicator essential to an insider's understanding of the game, and in this case Tuesday Morning Quarterback knows what it means but can't understand why many NFL coaches seem not to.

#### Running Items Department

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Lambuth 56, North Greenville 0. **Bonus Obscure Score:** Alfred 41, Canisius 7. (One single guy beats an entire team!) **Double Bonus Obscure Score:** Emory & Henry 24, Washington and Lee 10. (Was this game staged on two connected fields with 44 players attacking each other at right angles?) **Triple Bonus Obscure Score:** Rhodes 9, Millsaps 6, in two overtimes. All scoring came in overtime; it was 0-0 at the end of regulation. This comes tantalizingly close to what TMQ feels would be the ultimate final score, 2-0 in OT.

**Obscure College Game of the Year:** Indiana of Pennsylvania defeated California of Pennsylvania by the New Economy score of 24-7. Tuesday Morning Quarterback is left wistfully dreaming that next year, Indiana of Pennsylvania will play Pittsburgh of Kansas.

**Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment:** Suspended in respect for today's vitally important candidates fated to become tomorrow's who-dats. Though that thing with the hand puppet, followed by Miller almost falling out of the screen laughing at himself ... when entertainers laugh immoderately at themselves, the end is near.

New York Times Final-Score Score: The Paper of Record goes 0-15 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, bringing the season New York Times Final-Score Score to 0-143. Times predicted: Colts 28, Bears 17. Actual: Bears 27, Colts 24. Times predicted: Vikings 26, Packers 20. Actual: Packers 26, Vikings 20. Reader Brad Hammill's attempt to predict a generic final score—Home Team 20, Visiting Team 14—also goes 0-15, bringing this item to 0-57 since its inception.

Honored Guest Predictions: Today's guest is the Sporting News, which once, in the mists of prehistory (early Clinton administration), back when sports tout sheets were still delivered by the postman rather than via the Web from satellites orbiting Jupiter, had football-purist fanaticism practically to itself. These days, TSN electronically convenes a panel of seven to offer football forecasts. This commission includes three gentlemen identified by TSN as "NFL experts," which presumably means they hold advanced degrees in the molecular biology of ice packs. One commission member is identified by TSN as a "fantasy expert." Perhaps the reference is to rotisserie leagues, but TMQ's fantasies lie elsewhere and immediately jumped to thoughts involving spike heels, riding crops, and a minimum of three Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders in leather restraints. (After all, the subject here is "expert"-level fantasies. Novice-level fantasy: Charlie's Angels adjust their tube tops.)

The commission of TSN experts went 9-6 picking straight up—quite a bit less challenging than trying to call the spread—predicting victories by the Colts, Lions, Jets, Persons, Rams, and Vikings, each teams that lost. It's always reassuring when The Experts don't do appreciably better than random chance.

Reader Animadversion (New Item): Reader Andy Hoefler protests TMQ's description of Jersey/B tackle Jumbo Elliott as "the slowest person ever to catch an NFL touchdown pass (postwar era only)." Hoefler points out that Refrigerator Perry caught a touchdown pass in 1985, and Perry may have been the slowest NFL player of all time. But aha! TMQ's qualifier "postwar era only" did not specify which war. Post-Gulf War, Elliott rules the nonfleet afoot.

Reader George Best protests that TMQ's search for a cartographically correct name for those overpaid burgundy-clad gentlemen isn't necessarily solved by the label Chesapeake Watershed Region Indigenous Persons. While the Chesapeake encompasses Washington, Maryland, and Virginia, Best notes, Baltimore Harbor is also in its watershed, and Baltimore has the Ravens. Best suggests the even more cumbersome appellation Lower Potomac Drainage Basin Indigenous Persons, adding, "I like to see the word 'drainage' in conjunction with Dan Snyder." Highly sympathetic, TMQ replies, "Copy that!" But the plan is to stay CWRIP for the time being.

TMQ Trivia Challenge: Fiendishly, diabolically, TMQ worded last week's challenge so as to make it impossible to answer merely by racing to some Web-resident archive; actual book research seemed required. Would someone still post the correct answer in 90 seconds? No! Replies came in gradually over about 24 hours. Tuesday Morning Quarterback is pleased by this result: It means NFL buffs have not actually committed all league statistics and records to memory, something TMQ had begun to fear.

Here was the question:

Last week Gary Anderson became the NFL's all-time highest scorer—despite having led the league in scoring during the season just once in his 19-year career. Name another gentleman who holds the NFL all-time mark in a major category yet led the league in that category only once during the season or not at all.

On a completely arbitrary basis, TMQ names Tim Schmidt of Round Lake Beach, Ill., as the winner for answering, as did several others, Walter Payton. Sweetness, who today sits in Asgard singing and feasting with the football gods, was the all-time leading rusher and yet led the league in rushing yards but once, in 1977. Payton got the career mark by giving his all game after game after game. Both the way he carried the ball and the way he carried himself will always be remembered. Few pro athletes did a better job of setting an example others should actually follow or better exemplified the adage, "It's not what happens to a person but what happens inside a person." (Policy note: As a matter of policy, TMQ will rarely be sincere, but mention of Payton brings it out. You can hear Payton's son Jarrett touchingly give his father's Hall of Fame entry speech here.)

Fiendishly, the question had more than one correct answer. Reader Brent Hutto noted that Paul Krause is the all-time interceptions leader but led the league in picks just once, his rookie season. Über-trivia-meister Mark Longbrake noted that Chris Doleman is the all-time leader in forced fumbles but finished first in this category just once, in 1987. And a tip of TMQ's maybe-it-will-exist cap to Jeff Roy, who dug deep, deep into dusty record books to note that Ted Hendricks holds the career mark for safeties with four but never led the league at all. In each of the four years Hendricks notched a safety, some lesser mortal got two.

And now this week's Trivia Challenge, again calculated to require meticulous flipping of pages:

Among the rarest species in the NFL are players who hold all-time marks for more than one team. Last month Morten Andersen joined that elite group when he became the career leading scorer for the Falcons; he was already career leading scorer for the Saints, who dumped him as washed-up 582 points ago. Two running backs hold the all-time single-season yardage records for two different clubs. Name these gentlemen.

Submit entries to "The Fray," titling them "Trivia Answer." And remember to include your e-mail address in the incredibly remote chance that you win.

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## **Jax Demands a Recount!**

By Gregg Easterbrook

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OK, fans, the score is Bush 2,910,299-Gore 2,909,911 in the third overtime. Ball on the Florida 1. Next recount wins. But wait, the coaches are challenging the referee's call!

TMQ feels that if the country is going to establish a new national standard that we keep altering election results until they favor whoever's in power, two other adjustments are in order: 1) The name "United States" be changed to "Romania," and 2) don't confine this exciting new definition of "result" to voting. Web sites failing to do brisk business should keep changing their numbers until they report 6.8 billion unique page views per day. People with weight troubles should keep changing the scales until they report losing 25 pounds in five minutes, just like the ads promise! Businesses that have 0.000004 percent minorities in management positions should keep recounting until they report that their upper-tier demographics look exactly like the congregation at a Desmond Tutu sermon.

And when it comes to pro football, obviously Jacksonville should demand a recount. In the standings Jax is 3-7, meaning 3-8 since the most disastrous event in franchise history, the team's 62-7 playoff victory last January. (Which, after a hand recount of scoring, actually was a 14,980-53 win, Palm Beach County officials announced at 3:47 this morning.) Yet Jax is the party in power by NFL standards—fresh off a championship game, widely hyped, openly favored by the league with two consecutive cotton-candy schedules. Jax at 3-7? That can't be the will of the players. They must have been confused by an improper playbook! Jax should demand a recount until it is undefeated. And what a coincidence, the recount could be held in Florida.

How could Tuesday Morning Quarterback principles be applied to the ongoing presidential controversy? First, TMQ always advises to resist the urge to blitz. Therefore the Republicans should not have sued; down-and-distance was in their favor, but when they tried to force the issue, they got caught with their legal arguments single-covered and the federal judge going deep. Second, TMQ supports the fake kick: Gore's fake concession may qualify. Third, TMQ would sternly warn both contenders: When you get to the goal line, don't go pass-wacky. The next presidency will come down to whether the first team to come within a yard of victory sticks with a traditional power play or panics and tries some improbable heave-ho. The pressure will be on.

Elsewhere in the league, a Tuesday Morning Quarterback law of football, Fake Kick = Victory, was on display as never before. Five teams—Dallas, Indianapolis, Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Tampa Bay—ran trick field goals or onside kicks and won. (The Bucs' onside was unsuccessful but set a tone.) Stuningly, a losing team also ran a successful trick kick, the Packers scoring six off a FG fake yet still succumbing to Tampa. The presence of fake kicks on both sides of that contest seems to have disturbed the natural football order.

There were also fake-kick-looking plays by two losing teams, the Cincinnati Bengals and the Arizona (CAUTION: MAY CONTAIN FOOTBALL-LIKE SUBSTANCE) Cardinals. But the

Bengals event was a botched snap, not a called fake, and Bad Snap ? Victory. On the bizarre Cardinals play, the holder spotted the ball, and the kicker inexplicably failed to swing his leg. Kicker and holder then stood there giving each other significant looks for an instant until both were slammed into by assorted enormous gentlemen. (An instant is all you get for significant looks these days.) TMQ can thus proclaim a corollary to the kicking laws: Inexplicable Failure To Swing Leg ? Victory.

Best Plays of the Day: Best No. 1. Trailing 10-7 against Atlanta with 5:20 to go and fourth and inches at the Falcons goal line, first-game Lions coach Gary Moeller sent in the field-goal unit. Fans groaned. Tie game; on the next series the Falcons turned it over, and Detroit kicked the winning figgie shortly afterward. A good call is anything you can walk away from.

Best No. 2. Facing fourth down at the Bengals 1, leading 10-6, the Cowboys also lined up for the field goal as fans also groaned. It's a fake! Still kneeling, the holder handed the ball off to kicker Tim Seder, who ran up the middle for the touchdown. A very classy-looking play design and Skinny Guy Feat of the Week for the 180-pound Seder.

Best No. 3. Several clubs reaching the goal line were rewarded by following the purist dictum of power-run, play-fake, or roll-out, but no regular passes. Indianapolis, Miami, and Oakland scored with power running. Minnesota and Buffalo scored when QBs faked into the line, then bootlegged left. Tampa hit a touchdown pass with play-action from a jumbo set followed by a QB roll. San Francisco play-faked, and then the QB ran it in when the TE was covered. And teams that attempted regular passes from the goal line? See below.

Worst Plays of the Day: Worst No. 1. Trailing 28-7 with the ball on the Rams 40, 1:48 to play in the half, Jersey/A faced a fourth and inches do-or-die. The G-Men lined up in a wide-split, then shifted to a power formation, then sent a TE in motion back wide, then Ron Dayne ran for no gain. Rams ball. Gentlemen, this is not a dance contest; delete the choreography, please. (Maybe the call was, "American Ballet Theater left on two!") Two possessions later the Giants reached third and goal at the Rams 1 and again ran for no gain, this time on a play that appeared to be called "stumble left." The G-Men then settled for the field goal, effectively raising the white flag for their eventual defeat. It's one thing to take a field goal in close when the kick ties the game, another when the kick leaves you 11 points behind the highest-scoring team in history.

Worst No. 2. At the Seahawks goal line with the game clock expired, trailing 28-21, a defensive foul awarded Jacksonville one last try. Did Jax use the power-run, play-action, or roll-out? No, the paper Jaguars ran a regular pass from a regular set, and it ended with two receivers colliding as the ball sailed over their heads. According to William Daley, however, the pass was complete for the touchdown.

Worst No. 3. Trailing Buffalo by 10 with 11:25 left in the fourth, Chicago faced third and two. The Bills sent in an outlandish "overstack" alignment of three DLs, five LBs, and three DBs, daring the Bears to throw. Chicago ran anyway and was stuffed; the Bears punted, and the game effectively was over.

**Defense Budget Overrun of the Day:** A B-2 stealth bomber flew above Adelphia Coliseum before the T's-Ravens game.

**Pavlovian Reaction of the Day:** Tennessee lost for the first time ever at Adelphia, which opened a year and a half ago. As the final gun sounded, in a conditioned response, the crowd cheered.

**Doomed To Repeat History:** A week ago Jersey/B reached the Denver 2 in the closing minute, needing a touchdown to force overtime, and went incompletion, incompletion, incompletion, incompletion—no attempt to run. On Sunday night the Jets reached the Colts 28 with 1:09 and a timeout and went incompletion, incompletion, incompletion, incompletion—again no run. Ye gods. Redeeming virtue: The unused timeout can be donated to the Florida secretary of state.

**Welder of the Week:** NFLforHer, the women's pro football Web destination (there seems to be rising female interest in football, which some Biblical scholars interpret as a sign of the apocalypse), featured Monique Beuk, who is both one of the Raiderettes and ... a skilled union welder who repairs engine fan blades for United Airlines. TMQ expresses its admiration for Beuk's career achievement. But speaking of admiration, Oakland's Raiderettes, as purists know, consistently rank with Dallas and Miami cheerleaders for aesthetic appeal. Thus 95 percent of manly men and, if sociological trends are correct, more women than might admit it will be disappointed by the story's distressingly tasteful photograph of Beuk cooking dinner with her mother rather than doing the calendar modeling, cheerleading, and aerobics repeatedly cited in the text. Look, nobody's interested in the players for their minds, either.

**Stats of the Day:** Stat No. 1. At the Jersey/B 4-yard line, the Colts handed the ball to reserve FB Jim Finn for the first carry of his career. He fumbled.

Stat No. 2. The Eagles and Steelers combined to throw 86 passes for a net of 342 yards, or 3.9 yards per passing attempt.

Stat No. 3. In two games this season, the Saints sacked Panthers QB Steve Beurlein 14 times.

Stat No. 4. The Beaujolais nouveau release date this year was Nov. 11, and JAL air-freighted 500,000 bottles to Japan on the first day. The airline expects to fly 5 million bottles of nouveau to the home islands before Christmas, smashing last year's record of 3.1 million. TMQ demands that those bottles be recounted!

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again:** Numerous teams paid the price for blitzing. The Steelers blitzed when Philadelphia reached the Pittsburgh 44 in OT; the Eagles completed an easy circle pass to the RB whom the blitzing LB would have been covering, gaining 18 yards and position for the winning field goal. The Flaming Thumbtacks (see below) blitzed the Ravens when they had them down to fourth and two with 53 seconds left; the deep receiver was single-covered and drew a defensive pass interference flag in the end zone, setting up Baltimore's winning touchdown. Earlier in that game, Tennessee blitzed the Ravens on third and 18, a down when the odds strongly favor the defense, and gave up a 46-yard touchdown pass to a man-covered WR. Contrapositive proves the rule: On the four straight Jets incompletions that won the game for

Indianapolis, the Colts did not blitz. When the Raiders faced third and six from the Broncos 25, Denver did not blitz, and the result was an interception.

Great Moments in Management: Last week's TMQ explained in detail how Cincinnati botched the Akili Smith/Jeff Blake business. Yesterday the Bengals announced they were benching Smith, who has supplanted Ryan Leaf as the lowest-rated passer in the league. Summary of the Bengals' canny QB transactions: Rather than having the red-hot Blake and three No. 1 draft picks, Cincinnati now has a guy who doesn't even start. Ye gods.

Zipper of the Week: The best sideline reporter this season has been Bonnie Bernstein of CBS, who achieves the sports-chick trifecta: She is knowledgeable, an accomplished jock, and quite a babe. That Bernstein is a jock herself creates rapport with players. Interviewing Tennessee safety Blaine Bishop as he came off the field at halftime on Sunday, Bernstein said with total ease, "I noticed you got popped in the groin pretty bad; how's it feel now?" Bishop answered, though perhaps not in complete detail.

Bernstein's bona fide is that she was an all-American gymnast. She maintains an impressively fit physique and has admitted that when interviewing players she sometimes wears short skirts in order to flash a little skin. But the skin Bernstein wants to flash is her knee, which has a "zipper"—the distinctive scar of reconstructive ACL surgery from her gymnast days. NFL players respect people with zippers. This establishes the kind of rapport that allows Bernstein both to do her job unusually well and to get late-breaking groin bulletins.

Harmonic Convergences of the Week: Harmonic No. 1. Two defensive players with the same last name, Joey Porter of Pittsburgh and Daryl Porter of Buffalo, returned fumbles for touchdowns in the same minute, at 3:49 EST.

Harmonic No. 2. A week ago, the Raiders' first offensive play was a fake end-around with an RB following an FB lead-block for a huge gain. Last night against the Raiders, the Broncos called an identical play on their first possession, and Terrell Davis took it 11 yards for the touchdown.

Quote of the Week: CBS commentator Mark May, trying to compliment the surging 2-8 Chicago franchise: "The Bears are a team now that just eludes confidence."

Haiku Corner: Here are staff and reader haiku:

Harvard versus Yale  
Goes OT in Sunshine State  
Sudden-death recount.  
—TMQ, 2000

So, Enhanced TV™  
Explains the Miller koans?  
How lame can you get.  
—Harris Collingwood

Early Tuesday morn,  
 Perhaps greatest catch ever.  
 TMQ ignores.  
 — "DSJ"

Whether the satirical <sup>TM</sup> in the Collingwood verse should be pronounced determines if it is structurally a haiku; Tuesday Morning Quarterback will leave this for future scholars to debate.

The catch referred to by the reader screen-named DSJ was Antonio Freeman's falling-down, off-the-back, off-the-helmet, off-the-foot, in-the-driving-rain grab to win the Week 10 Packers-Vikings overtime contest at nearly 1 a.m. EST. TMQ winced when this play began, for Green Bay faced third and four, and it's a blitz! Minnesota sent six gentlemen, leaving Freeman single-covered deep and ensuring doom. But yes, the column should have lauded Freeman's effort, which might have been the greatest catch in NFL history if not the greatest catch in the history of civilization.

Previous greatest catch in the history of civilization: Mark Antony catching his breath when Cleopatra and her 100 famously nubile handmaidens greeted him topless at Alexandria harbor in 37 BC. The Raiderettes of the ancient world! (Nubile handmaiden crowd estimate proved by The Associated Press.)

Keep submitting your verse to "The Fray," titling entries "Football Haiku," "Football Dirge," and so on.

Tuvok, Raise Shields: Using the orbiting Chandra X-Ray Observatory, astronomers at the University of Maryland last week discovered a gigantic cavity within an immense cloud of hot gases that enshroud the galaxy Cygnus A, about 700 million light-years from Earth. The gigantic cavity is shaped like a football. (To view Cygnus A, [click here](#).) If this isn't a clue to the location of Kurt Warner's homeworld, what is? TMQ hopes the information has been passed on to the military.

Nickname Perfection Achieved: Nashville reader James Bagwell, a Titans fan, proposes that TMQ should really call his favorites the "Flaming Thumbtacks"—check the team logo closely at [www.titansonline.com](http://www.titansonline.com) to see what he means.

Just Plain Doomed: Last night in that face-in-the-box feature for player presentations on Monday Night Football, Raiders DT Darrell Russell introduced himself as "defensive game-plan focus Darrell Russell." The football gods note such things and are rarely amused; one boasts after games, not before. Russell is doomed, doomed!

Historical Perspective of the Week: The New Orleans six-game winning streak brings the franchise overall record to 195-310-5. This means that to reach .500 all-time as a franchise, the Saints need only go undefeated from now until December 2007.

Hidden Indicator of the Week: Through the last two weeks of NFL play, there have been 13 instances in which teams have had a chance to win or tie on the final play of regulation or

overtime, and 10 times the attackers have succeed over the defenders. This is the kind of hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's understanding of the sport. Unfortunately, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has no idea what it means.

### **Running Items Department**

Obscure College Score of the Week: Muhlenberg 45, Moravian 20. Bonus Obscure Score: Mount Union 60, Heidelberg 7. Harmonic Obscure Scores: Bethel of Kansas defeated Sterling 28-19 while Bethel of Minnesota was beating Augsburg 25-20.

Obscure College Stats: On Saturday, Charles Roberts of Sacramento State, a player no one has ever heard of, passed Tony Dorsett, Ricky Williams, and Ron Dayne to become the all-time NCAA Division One rushing leader with 6,553 career yards. Roberts is 5 foot 6 inches tall and weighs 171 pounds. The week before, Roberts' Sacramento State defeated Cal State Northridge by the basketball-like score of 64-61. It was the highest-scoring Division One game ever with 125 combined points and 18 touchdowns, or a touchdown every 3.3 minutes.

Also on Saturday another player no one has ever heard of, R.J. Bowers of Grove City College, became the all-time NCAA all-divisions leader both in rushing, with 7,353 career yards, and in scoring, with 562 career points. Bowers is a 26-year-old former player in the Houston Astros farm system.

Here are the top five all-time NCAA rushers: Bowers, Brian Shay of Emporia State, Kevin Galliard of American International, Dayne of Wisconsin, Damian Beane of Shepherd College. Here are the top five all-time NCAA scorers: Bowers, Shay, Carey Bender of Coe College, Scott Pingel of Westminster of Missouri, Trevor Shannon of Wartburg. Nine of 10 record holders from small schools. Obscure colleges rule!

Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment: Suspended out of respect for Theresa LePore, the Democratic elections supervisor who approved the Palm Beach County ballot. Though Miller's infantile habit of giving everyone "-y" diminutives grows increasingly wearisome. Last night he repeatedly referred to Mike Shanahan as "Shanny," which no one ever calls him. Maybe "-vich" or "-chen" would be tolerable, but "-y" is baby talk. Miller also calls Cornelius Bennett "Corny." Bennett's nickname is Biscuit: TMQ would not want to be the one who had to fill out the health insurance claim forms if Miller ever called Bennett "Corny" to his face.

Most Embarrassing Don Ohlmeyer Moment: MNF ratings have sunk to their lowest ever despite a run of fabulous games. Let's see: Ohlmeyer and Dennis Miller arrive, games are fabulous, ratings decline. In this case, the square of one plus the cube root of 27 probably equals four.

New York Times Final-Score Score: Once again the Paper of Record goes 0-15 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, bringing the New York Times Final-Score Score to 0-158 for the season. Times predicted: Jersey/A 24, St. Louis 21. Actual: Rams 38, Giants 24. Times predicted: Chiefs 38, Niners 30. Actual: Niners 21, Chiefs 7. Times predicted: Steelers 11, Eagles 6. Actual: Eagles 26, Steelers 23. Reader Brad Hammill's attempt to predict a generic

final score—Home Team 20, Visiting Team 14—also goes 0-15, bringing this item to 0-72 since inception.

Honored Guest Predictions: Today's Honored Guest is the New Orleans Times-Picayune, which also engages in a quixotic attempt to predict exact final scores. This weekend the Times-Picayune went a perfect 0-15. But check one prediction: Broncos 27, Raiders 21. Actual: Broncos 27, Raiders 24. Awfully close, Times-Picayune, but not exact.

Readers whose hometown papers predict final scores are invited to alert TMQ. Send a message to The Fray titling it "Hometown Paper Predictions." Realistically, it must be a paper that posts its predictions on the Web or that you, this selfsame reader, would volunteer to e-mail to TMQ.

Reader Animadversions: Many, many readers caught TMQ suggesting that the Rams might have tried highly dependable kicker Jeff Wilkins for the field goal rather than punting from the Panthers 35 in Week 10. As the many, many readers pointed out, this particular gentleman was on the inactive list for that game; past-his-prime Pete Stoyanovich was suited up. TMQ blames confusing roster cards designed by Democratic election officials for his error.

The reader screen-named DSJ protests both TMQ's anti-blitzing bias and his item complaining that the Jets used only regular pass plays on their final series against the Broncos and registers his protest in haiku:

Sage counsel twists facts:  
Not only did Vinny roll,  
Denver also blitzed.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback is duly impressed by a haiku complaint! But DSJ, I'm going to twist out of this one slicker than Clinton twisted out of the Paula Jones deposition.

First, Vinny did roll out on the final, fateful play but only because a Denver rusher forced him to; the play was called as a dropback pass. Second, the Denver rusher was a blitzer, LB Glenn Cadrez. This was the only play on the four-down sequence on which Denver blitzed (one earlier play was a "dog," but this is so common at the goal line it can't count as a surprise), and this blitz did work in that it ended the game. But it depends on what the definition of "worked" is. Cadrez, the blitzer, would have been covering Jets RB Richie Anderson. Because Cadrez blitzed, Anderson was by his lonesome in the corner of the end zone, waving his arms for the ball. Cadrez caused a broken play on which Testaverde rolled right to escape the blitz, saw Anderson all alone a mere 10 yards away, and simply honked the pass, throwing it to his teammate's feet. Had this relatively easy pass been on target, the blitz would have caused Jersey/B to score the tying touchdown.

TMQ Trivia Challenge: TMQ readers may adapt faster than Borg drones, but TMQ can adapt, too. Having figured out that certain types of trivia questions can be answered using Web sites and search engines, Tuesday Morning Quarterback worded one in a way that required such antiquated practices as thinking and looking at books. Here it was:

Among the rarest species in the NFL are players who hold all-time marks for more than one team. Last month Morten Andersen joined that elite group when he became the career-leading scorer for the Falcons; he was already career-leading scorer for the Saints, who dumped him as washed-up 582 points ago. Two running backs hold the all-time single-season yardage records for two different clubs. Name these gentlemen.

Many, many incorrect answers came in—meaning readers were reduced to using their noggins rather than Web searching. TMQ found this gratifying. Many readers suggested Marcus Allen, John Riggins, and George Rogers, backs who chewed up lots of turf for two different teams, but none among them double team-record holders. On a completely arbitrary basis, this Trivia Challenge goes to reader Steve Place, who correctly answered Eric Dickerson (Rams and Colts) and Curtis Martin (P-Men and Jersey/B). Place even had the presence of mind to use TMQ terminology in his reply.

Once again a tip of TMQ's maybe-it-will-exist cap goes to über-trivia-meister Mark Longbrake, who answered correctly in haiku:

Eric Dickerson  
Curtis Martin hold records  
For multiple teams

The über-trivia-meister also points out that of the 31 team single-season rushing records, only three were set prior to 1977. A phenomenon of increasing the season to 16 games, surely.

Which inspires TMQ to compose another page-flipping-required Trivia Challenge based on historical changes in NFL format. Here is this week's question:

Everyone knows pro football at one time did not allow the forward pass. (At least, everyone with priorities in order knows this.) Of the following, identify any inaccurate statement about pro football days of yore:

- Grabbing the facemask was legal.
- A field goal was worth five points.
- A field goal was worth four points.
- Balls deflected off the officials remained in play, leading to the famed "zebra bounce" trick play immortalized by the Massillon Tigers.
- For night games, the ball was white with black stripes.
- There was a team called the Pottsville Maroons.
- There was a team called the Kenosha Steam Roller.

Submit your answers via The Fray slugging replies "Trivia Answer." And remember to include your e-mail address in the extremely remote chance that you win. Note: Trivia Challenge finishes are never recounted. All decisions are completely arbitrary, just like in Florida.

## Take Off Those K2 Parkas!

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Nov. 21, 2000, at 7:00 PM ET

Last year Tuesday Morning Quarterback attended the Miami at Buffalo game, held on a blustery day. Your columnist wore a flannel shirt and tweedy sportcoat. Bills coaches trotted out in team sweaters. Then Jimmy Johnson, meister of the visitors, appeared from the tunnel dressed in a heavy North Face parka—the kind designed for assaulting K2—with the hood pulled up and wearing those enormous mega-gloves intended for snowmobiling. TMQ turned to his companion (not Jennifer Lopez, but I can't say who because Jennifer gets insanely jealous) and remarked, "This game's over." So it was: The Dolphins lost by 20. Fear of cold doomed them before the ref even whistled play to begin.

Never was this phenomenon on better display than this weekend. Indianapolis, a dome-based team for whom "cold" is a setting on the air conditioning, went to Green Bay and tried to perform in swirling snow. Colts QB Peyton Manning, a Tennessee-based gentleman, had the ball flop out of his hand trying to pass on the first snap, costing the Colts a safety in a contest the Packers ultimately won by two. On the sidelines, Colts coaches wore McMurdo-base parkas and ski caps pulled over the ears; Packers coaches wore varsity jackets and baseball hats. Tampa Bay, a Florida team now 0-18 lifetime when the kickoff temperature is below 40, went into Chicago at 37 F and honked to the woeful Bears. Tampa sideline staff wore not only heavy parkas but balaclavas. Did they think 37 degrees was the Amundsen-Scott expedition? The Arizona (CAUTION: MAY CONTAIN FOOTBALL-LIKE SUBSTANCE) Cardinals left their land of sun and halter-tops and went to Philadelphia. Kickoff temperature was in the 40s, and the coaches wore heavy parkas. Parkas in the 40s: God help them if it should drop below freezing!

Ah, for the days of manly-man Minnesota coach Bud Grant. Back before the Vikes took their game indoors, Grant allowed the visiting team to have sideline heater units but banned them for his own players: Grant believed it was an advantage to shrug at the cold while others fretted about staying warm, and how right he was. This weekend every warm-weather team whose coaches overdressed lost in cold-weather cities. Contrapositive proves the rule: Dome-based Detroit won in frosty New Jersey as Lions coaches wore varsity jackets while Florida-based Jax won in Pittsburgh as Jaguars coaches wore varsity jackets and baseball caps on a nippy night. Thus TMQ proclaims two more laws of football: Cold Coaches = Victory, while Ridiculous K2 Survival Gear on Sideline ? Victory.

Best Plays of the Week: Best No. 1. Well-designed offenses have "series" plays in which an action shown early sets up something for later. In the first quarter, the Vikes faked to Robert Smith up the middle while a fake end-around was drawing the attention of Carolina defenders, then Smith snuck into the flat for a screen pass he took 53 yards to the house. In the second quarter the same action started again—Smith heads up middle, end starts around—causing defenders to think, "It's that screen!" This time Minnesota gave the ball to Smith, and he ran for the touchdown.

Best No. 2. When Jax faced third and five from the Steelers' 18 with 15 seconds remaining in the half, Pittsburgh did not go blitz-wacky but rushed just two gentlemen and dropped nine. Jaguars

QB Mark Brunell, expecting the blitz, was so befuddled he threw the ball away though no one was anywhere near him.

Best No. 3. Jersey/B second-string QB Ray Lucas lined up as a receiver in a trick formation and drew a pass interference penalty from a Dolphins DB, helping set up a field goal.

Worst Plays of the Week: Worst No. 1. Trailing Baltimore 17-0 in the third, spiraling-toward-the-water Dallas faced fourth and one at midfield. Tough-guy Emmitt Smith could have carried the ball behind one of the league's heaviest lines. Instead, boom goes the punt. Cowboys coach Dave Campo might as well have phoned Ravens counterpart Brian Billick to concede. (Wait, you can only do that at 2 a.m.) As the snuggly warm Jimmy Johnson used to say, if you can't make one single yard, you don't deserve to win. Dallas didn't even try to make one single yard. Final: Ravens 27, Cowboys 0.

Worst No. 2. One of the dumbest mistakes a QB can make is to heave-ho with a pass rusher right in his face, blocking view of the field. Doing this looks macho and avoids the sack but reliably generates INTs. Atlanta trailed San Francisco by three in the third quarter, ball in Niners territory, when a DL broke cleanly through the Falcons' line and came straight at Chris Chandler. He heave-hoed to nobody in particular, and Niners DB Jason Webster ran the pick back 70 yards for six.

Worst No. 3. As Jersey/A CB/pitchman Jason Sehorn was chasing a Detroit runner in the third quarter, his pants came untied. Sehorn's dilemma: make the tackle to prevent a touchdown or stop to pull up his pants to prevent loss of cool. He chose the latter, and the Lions scored. Hey, image is everything! No one chewed him out on the sideline. Sehorn, who has skipped practices to film TV commercials, continues to be coddled by Giants management, partly because he is the team's only white star.

Day of the Deuce Disasters! Disaster No. 1: Indianapolis scored a touchdown making it Packers 19, Colts 9 early in the fourth. A two-point try would pull the Colts within eight, meaning one more touch and deuce could tie. Instead Colts coach Jim Mora took the single PAT and a nine-point deficit. Indianapolis ended up losing by two when a deuce attempt on its final touchdown would have been pointless owing to the lack of the first deuce attempt.

Disaster No. 2: In New Orleans, the Saints scored with 1:09 left to pull within nine before the conversion. Coaching theory here says take the single PAT because that puts the deficit at eight and sustains the chance of a last-second tie. If you go for two at this point and fail, the rest is silence. Saints coach Jim Haslett went for the deuce, failed, and fans got a jump heading for the parking lot.

Stats of the Week: Stat No. 1. Aaron Brooks, replacing the injured Jeff Blake at QB for the Saints, threw his first career pass. It was intercepted. But there's hope: Colts RB Jim Finn, who fumbled his first career carry a week ago, scored a touchdown Sunday.

Stat No. 2. The Flaming Thumbtacks turned it over seven times against the Browns (Release 2.0), including give-aways on six of their first seven possessions. On the plus side, turnovers meant they only had to punt once.

Stat No. 3. In their four losses, the Giants have been outscored 80-7 in the first half.

Stat No. 4. The Cowboys defense has allowed five opposition running backs to have their career-high games this year.

Stat No. 5. The Bengals have played 11 games and completed three touchdown passes. Ye gods.

We're All Professionals Here: At one point in the Buffalo-Kansas City game, there were penalties on four consecutive plays.

Combined Efficiency Watch: Readers know this column favors its proprietary "combined efficiency" ranking, the blend of offensive and defensive performance—with 2 being the ideal ranking (1st offensive plus 1st defensive) and 62 being worst. A month ago, based on combined efficiency analysis, TMQ suggested that Buffalo should rise and Detroit decline. Since that point the Bills have gone 4-0 and the Lions 2-2.

What do combined numbers show now? The Chesapeake Watershed Region Indigenous Persons lead the league at 8 (6th offensive, 2nd defensive), followed by the Bills at 15 (10th offensive, 5th defensive), the Saints (13th offensive, 4th defensive) and Ravens (16th offensive, 1st defensive) tied at 17, and Minnesota at 18 (4th offensive, 14th defensive). Defending champ St. Louis appears shaky at 27 (1st offensive, 26th defensive), while the club playing above its watermark is Miami at 33 (24th offensive, 9th defensive). The cover-your-eyes franchises are the Falcons and Az-Men tied at 51 and the Bengals last at 53 (30th offensive, 23rd defensive). Based on the numbers, TMQ forecasts that the Persons look strong for the stretch run while the Marine Mammals will falter.

HMO Nightmare of the Week: Denver guard Mark Schlereth, who has had 29 operations during his 12-year career, just had his 15th surgery on his left knee.

Soon They Can Have All January Off: Seattle coach Mike Holmgren gave his players the entire bye week off as a reward for performance. The Seahawks are 4-7.

New Franchise of the Week: The next NFL expansion team has announced it will be known as the Houston Texans, rejecting TMQ's preferred choices: the Texans Release 2.0 (the Kansas City Chiefs were originally the Dallas Texans), the Houston Gridlock (kudzu has been observed growing on the tires of immobilized SUVs during rush hour in this supposed free-market paradise), and the Houston Problems (as in, "Houston, we have a ..."). The Houston Problems had great potential as a marketing-campaign line: "There's just no end of Problems!" And as a sportscaster line: "Those Problems sure have problems." Now we'll never know.

The Texans have not yet displayed their sure-to-be-high-schoolish uniforms but have unveiled a lovely cow-inspired logo and announced the team colors will be "battle red, liberty white and

deep steel blue." (Check out their lovely cow-inspired logo at [www.houstontexans.com](http://www.houstontexans.com); TMQ's favorite aspect of this site is that it offers a "team history" section, though the Texans will not exist until 2002.) Liberty white? The sample looked an awful lot like Copy Machine White to TMQ. And battle red? Get with the times, Texans: Road Rage Red.

Besides, the NFL is supposed to be manly sport for manly men: The last thing it needs is cute J. Crew color names. J. Crew copywriters would make the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.0) into the Cleveland Warm Butterscotch. New England, which lately has been changing uniforms on an annual basis, could switch to Mayan Multicultural Mocha. Tampa could call its dominant color Pewter Out. San Francisco could be decked in Cap-Maxed Gold. Jax could call its color Squeamish Teal. The Raiders color could be Orthodox Sabbath Black. The Vikes? The Color Purple Purple. And that ordinary white on every team's road jerseys? This is America: Make it Death to the King White.

Football Gods Intervene: Intervention No. 1. When Ryan Leaf threw a TD early against Denver, he made firing-a-six-shooter gestures toward Broncos players. At that moment, the gentlemen in question had three touchdown passes and eight interceptions on the year while his team was 0-10. The football gods are not amused by boasting and preening on the part of terrible players from cellar-dwelling teams. Leaf's punishment was that his Bolts were allowed to take a 34-17 second-half lead, then forced to watch the lead evaporate during a Denver comeback victory. The football gods may grind the clock, but they grind exceedingly small.

Intervention No. 2. Final Saturday: Yale 34, Harvard 24. Be they right, be they wrong, the football gods have spoken.

Great Moments in Management: Buffalo let Bruce Smith go because he was "too old"; Smith, who had three sacks and a safety last night, may end up as Defensive Player of the Year. The Persons' victory over the Rams was a sterling example of how defense trumps offense. The Rams went in averaging 39 scored, and the Persons averaging 16 allowed. Defense prevailed, as 20 were allowed, a slight increase for the Persons but a big drop for St. Louis.

Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! Failed blitzes of the weekend: Detroit faces third and eight, odds favor the defense; the Giants send seven, 32-yard TD pass to the Lions' Johnny Morton. San Diego backed up deep in its territory, the Broncos send six, 83-yard TD pass to Jeff Graham. The Saints blitzed six, including a DB, when the Raiders faced third and long; 25-yard completion on a shovel pass on which the blitzers merrily rushed past the RB with the ball.

Guaranteed Winners! In an improbable e-mail, reader Donna DeFrank of Mantua, N.J., writes, "Thanks to your article 'Punt, Pass, and Predict,' I have won the football pool at work twice—the first week picking EVERY GAME correctly!" How come my own advice never works for me? TMQ hasn't ever won the office football pool. Donna also sweetly reminds that in the August article in question, TMQ predicted a generic final score of 13-10. She asks, has it happened this season? Why, how kind of you to inquire: It was Chicago 13, Tampa Bay 10 this weekend and Detroit 13, Falcons 10 last weekend. But though TMQ chides others for failed final-score forecasts, no credit is deserved here. This piddling excuse for a prediction succeeded solely by blind chance.

Here lies one of the essential differences between Tuesday Morning Quarterback and other football columnists. While they feign insider information and confidently make predictions in hopes that no one will ever go back and check, TMQ absolutely guarantees he has no idea what he's talking about. One of the goals of this column is to show that amateur football writers can be just as wrong as professionals. And the goal is being achieved! The professional football columnists do nothing all day long except live in the NFL alternative reality. TMQ, on the other hand, is wrong strictly in his spare time. TMQ has a real job—actually several real jobs; I'm on the mortgage-payment incentive plan—and dictates this column to Cindy Crawford while shaving. (Himself, not her.)

And We're Sorry That on the Pro Bowl Ballot, If You Punch Next to "Levon Kirkland," the Vote Goes to Sam Cowart: For the third time this season, the league formally apologized for blowing a call in a Pittsburgh game. Most recently, in the Steelers' loss to the Eagles, Philadelphia recovered a late onside kick that allowed it to boot the field goal that caused the overtime it won; turns out the Eagles committed an uncalled penalty during the onside. Against Cleveland, refs mishandled the final seconds of the clock, depriving Pittsburgh of its chance to launch a tying field goal. And after the Steelers' three-point loss to Tennessee, the league admitted Pittsburgh should have prevailed on a challenge to an official's ruling. Because the call was not overturned, Pittsburgh lost a timeout that would have been valuable during a last-second drive for a field goal to tie. Harmonic weirdness: Two of the three blown calls involved the same player, Hines Ward.

TMQ sympathizes with the Old Economy team (surely the Pittsburgh Silicon would be a better name today), which now has at least one L as a result of zebra follies—the Eagles contest would have been over had the onside penalty been called. But there's contributory negligence, as lawyers would say. Consider the circumstances of the Tennessee call. Late in the third, Pittsburgh trailing the Flaming Thumbtacks by seven, Ward caught a long pass and appeared to score. Officials ruled him down at the Tennessee 1. Steelers coach Bill Cowher challenged the call and lost a timeout when the spot was upheld; later the league acknowledged Ward had broken the plane. But the Steelers scored on the next play anyway. Cowher challenged a ruling that resulted in first and goal, Steelers. You're supposed to challenge calls that help the other team, not calls that give you first and goal.

Calling Katherine Harris: If you go to [www.nfl.com](http://www.nfl.com) and click the "Pro Bowl Ballot" line, the section that appears is ... confusing! And there's a big disclaimer that says, **NOTE: BALLOTS WILL NOT BE COUNTED UNTIL THEY HAVE BEEN REVIEWED AND FORMALLY SUBMITTED.** "Formally submitted" to an NFL Properties marketing division? Maybe what Palm Beach County needed was a ballot disclaimer. This makes TMQ wonder, did Bruce Matthews really win his Hawaii trip all those years?

Fake Kick = Victory: The Bills and Persons ran surprise fake kicks and won; the only trick kick by a losing team was the Saints' last-gasp onside that everyone expected.

Haiku Corner: Here are staff and reader haiku:

Belichick picks Pats  
Jets soar, P-People founder  
What was he thinking?  
—TMQ, 2000

Eight won and three lost  
Great numbers for "rebuilding"  
Marino? Who's he?  
—Chris Lipe

Weekend sports Sabbath  
No Bush/Gore stuff on Sunday  
Time for beer and ball.  
—"James"

Ryan Leaf drops back  
Another incomplete? No,  
It's intercepted.  
—"Trace"

In South Florida  
Two strange ballots in one week  
First the Canes, now this.  
—Kevin Carey

Keep submitting your verse to the "The Fray," slugging entries "Football Haiku," "Football Six-Part Cantos," and so on.

Correction of the Year: Actual correction from the New York Times: "The Q&A column in Science Times on Nov. 7 about the mucus that makes frogs' tongues sticky misstated the feeding process of tongueless aquatic frogs. They move food into their mouths with their limbs, not by using water currents." One is left to wonder which frog wrote in to complain about the story. And one marvels that the same newspaper that is so fastidious about correctly characterizing the feeding process of tongueless aquatic frogs is so cavalier about endlessly printing incorrect predictions of exact final NFL scores. Is the New York Times trying to suggest that tongueless aquatic frogs are more important than football?

Hidden Indicator of the Week: Three quarterbacks (Rich Gannon, Rob Johnson, and Kordell Stewart) finished as their teams' leading rushers while a fourth (Shawn King) out-rushed the lead back of the opposition team. This is the sort of hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's understanding of the sport. Unfortunately, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has no idea what it means.

## **Running Items Department**

Obscure College Scores: Nebraska-Omaha 14, Pittsburg of Kansas 3. Bonus Obscure Score: Mid-American Nazarene 27, Azusa Pacific 21. Double Bonus Obscure Score: Richmond 21, William & Mary 18. Well of course an entire city would defeat one guy and one woman!

Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment: Suspended out of respect for Natural Law Party candidate John Hagelin; not one single person anywhere in the country voted for him by mistake. Though not only did Miller, last night, for the second time devote his opening monologue to discussing how important it was that his own face had appeared on a magazine cover, his cryptic reference to Jeff George having a rifle arm "like a Manlicher-Carcano" was simply revolting. A Manlicher-Carcano was the rifle used to murder John Kennedy.

Most Embarrassing Don Ohlmeyer Moment: Ohlmeyer announced that despite MNF's all-time-low ratings amid a run of fabulous games, Dennis Miller would "probably" return next season. This is like Bill Clinton announcing he "probably" will be faithful.

New York Times Final-Score Score: Once again the Paper of Record goes 0-15 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, bringing the New York Times Final-Score Score to 0-173 for the season. Times predicted: Broncos 23, Bolts 17. Actual: Broncos 38, Bolts 37. Times predicted: Chiefs 17, Bills 14. Actual: Bills 21, Chiefs 17. (Half right!) Times predicted: Rams 30, Persons 24. Actual: Persons 33, Rams 20. Reader Brad Hammill's generic final score—Home Team 20, Visiting Team 14—also goes 0-15, bringing this item to 0-87 since inception.

Honored Guest Predictions: The Miami Herald is another newspaper engaged in a quixotic attempt to predict exact final scores of NFL games. This weekend, as TMQ looked in, the Herald went 0-15. Herald predicted: Steelers 24, Jax 13. Actual: Jax 34, Steelers 24. Herald predicted: Dolphins 27, Jersey/B 20. Actual: Jersey/B 20, Dolphins 3. (Half right!) According to a Herald spokesperson, however, hand recounting of NFL statistics shows the paper has been 100 percent correct on every prediction this season.

If your favorite paper predicts scores and they can be viewed on the Web or e-mailed, let TMQ know via The Fray, slugging your entry "Hometown Paper."

Reader Animadversions: Several readers wrote in to protest TMQ's political references to the election food fight. On reflection, maybe they're right. As Thomas Jefferson so wisely said, all men and women "are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and lifting the home blackout rule 72 hours in advance." So why taint football by association with politics?

TMQ Trivia Challenge: "Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to do poorly on the Trivia Challenge." (TMQ, 2000.) This is the lesson from last week's question. It was:

Everyone knows pro football at one time did not allow the forward pass. (At least, everyone with priorities in order knows this.) Of the following, identify any inaccurate statement about pro football days of yore:

- Grabbing the facemask was legal.

- A field goal was worth five points.
- A field goal was worth four points.
- Balls deflected off the officials remained in play, leading to the famed "zebra bounce" trick play immortalized by the Massillon Tigers.
- For night games, the ball was white with black stripes.
- There was a team called the Pottsville Maroons.
- There was a team called the Kenosha Steam Roller.

Most entrants knew grabbing the facemask was once legal—doesn't it seem like a natural gesture?—and that the value of field goals has changed. But entrants tended to disbelieve the white ball and the existence of the Pottsville Maroons. The Maroons were a popular barnstorming team from a coal-mining town in Pennsylvania. Scheduled to play in the 1925 NFL championship, they were tossed out when the team defied league orders by playing an exhibition against former Notre Dame players; the result was that the 1925 championship was awarded to Chicago by league fiat, leaving no champion who prevailed on the field of honor. This "Anthracite Antic" helped end the days of barnstorming; the lore of the tragic Pottsville boys is sung here. TMQ feels that, today, the Arizona Cardinals would be better off as a barnstorming team.

On a completely arbitrary basis, the judges hand this Trivia Challenge to Paul Decker of Lexington, Mass., who correctly noted that there was never a "zebra bounce" and never a Kenosha Steam Roller: Though there was a club from Kenosha and, there was a club called the Steam Roller from Providence. Isn't the Steam Roller a great name for a football team? A lot more evocative than the Houston Texans, whom TMQ plans to call the Texas Texans. Über-trivia-meister Mark Longbrake adds the fun detail that grabbing the facemask became illegal in stages. First, players could grab anyone's. As of 1956, grabbing was legal exclusively for tackling the ball-carrier. Only in 1962 was all grabbing of the facemask criminalized.

As a second history lesson, here is this week's Trivia Challenge:

Of the following, identify any inaccurate statement about pro football days of yore:

- A touchdown was worth five points.
- Offensive linemen were eligible receivers.
- Pudge Heffelfinger was the first gentleman ever paid to play football.
- There was a team called the Chicago Bullies.
- Officials had horns, not whistles.
- The Duluth Eskimos immortalized the "fumblerooski," in which the ball is deliberately left on the ground.
- Helmets were optional.
- Roughing the passer was legal.

Submit your answers via The Fray, titling them "Trivia Answer" or something clever like that. And remember to include your e-mail address in the highly improbable event you win.

## TMQ Script Revealed!

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Nov. 28, 2000, at 7:15 PM ET

Bill Walsh coaching disciples go into each game armed with The Script, a list of the first 15 plays to run. Walsh disciples are trained to stick to The Script regardless of down and distance, except for fourth down. Right now two Script teams reside high on the landfill in offensive stats: the Broncos at second overall, with disciple Mike Shanahan, and the Niners at fifth overall, with disciple Steve Mariucci. A Script game plan helped the Broncos roll up 538 total yards on Sunday despite average offensive personnel. Brett Favre used a Script during his Super Bowl years. Joe Montana and Steve Young were Script quarterbacks, and life pretty much seemed to work out OK for them. Yet despite the track record of The Script, most coaches do not employ this approach. Why? Your guess is as good as TMQ's. (Technical note: This means you will be wrong.)

This column also uses a Script approach. Here, on an exclusive basis—exclusive because no one else would carry it—is The Script employed by Tuesday Morning Quarterback:

- 1) Wild, sweeping generalization.
- 2) Sentence that appears to refer to A but actually refers to B.
- 3) Counterintuitive assertion.
- 4) Wry allusion.
- 5) Incredibly detailed statistic that readers assume to be true.
- 6) Mention of Kurt Warner's star-cruiser, given pseudo-scientific gloss by terms from physics chosen at random à la any Star Trek: Voyager episode.
- 7) Unfalsifiable claim about football tactics, meaning of life, etc.
- 8) Leering reference to Cindy Crawford, Jennifer Lopez, or Cindy Crawford with Jennifer Lopez.
- 9) Bondage reference. (Tasteful.)
- 10) Knowing use of sports terminology to suggest expertise.
- 11) Cheap shot.
- 12) Joke reworded from previous column.
- 13) Insertion of phrase, "Ye gods." (Relevance optional.)
- 14) Haiku. (Literary merit optional.)
- 15) Astonishingly complicated trivia question that someone will answer in 30 seconds.

Best Plays of the Week: Best No. 1. Taking possession at their own 14, three minutes left, trailing by four on the road at the Colts, the Marine Mammals seemed doomed. But last year in Indianapolis, the Dolphins were in a nearly identical last-gasp situation, and the Colts let them off the hook by blitzing, blitzing, blitzing, creating big-play opportunities for the winning comeback. One of those cartoon light bulbs must have gone off in Miami coaches' minds. Mammal coaches called the sort of passes designed to counteract blitzes, and sure enough the Colts cooperated by blitzing on six of nine downs on the final drive. Miami flew down the field as if Indianapolis wasn't there, scoring the winning six with 1:09 left.

Best No. 2. How to resist that urge to blitz? Trailing 10-7, Atlanta faced third and 15. The Raiders rushed just three while putting five defensive backs in a straight line across the field at the first-down marker. The Falcons had no choice but to throw under, and the receiver was tackled short. This defensive set is a rare pure innovation—a formation no one has seen before. Let's see if it catches on.

Best No. 3. A week ago, Minnesota stung Carolina with a classy-looking play series in which there was a fake end-around while the RB took a screen or went straight up the middle. Like Borg drones, the Panthers adapted. Last night against Green Bay, Carolina ran a classy-looking fake end-around in which the RB went straight up the middle for a 26-yard touchdown.

Worst Plays of the Week: Worst No. 1. The cover-your-eyes Bengals trailed Pittsburgh 38-21 in the third when a shotgun snap sailed over QB Akili Smith's head. Smith chased the ball, and, failing to recover it, this extremely highly paid gentleman simply sat down on the field and watched as Steelers LB Jason Gildon scooped up the live rock and ran it back for six.

Worst No. 2. Last week the Rams made their fatal mistake on a play that was first and goal at the 5, trailing the Chesapeake Watershed Region Indigenous Persons by 11 in the fourth. Rather than a power-run, play-action, or roll-out, the defending champs simply used a regular pass from a regular set—the worst possible goal-line call—and gave up the INT that iced it for the opposition. This Sunday, trailing the Saints by seven in the fourth, St. Louis lined up with first and goal on the 5. Surely the Rams learned from the identical situation the previous game, right? St. Louis ran a regular pass from a regular set: sack, fumble, turnover.

Worst No. 3. Score tied at 31, four minutes to go, Denver had the ball on its own 20. Seattle lined up with seven players in the "box," the space defined by the OLs and TE. Seven men in the box is a run defense that dares the opponent to throw. Denver ran anyway, and third-string tailback Mike Anderson went 80 yards for the winning touchdown; no Seattle defender even touched him.

Stats of the Week: Stat No. 1. Chicago RB James Allen fumbled three times in 25 carries.

Stat No. 2. The Bucs received a punt and were sacked by the Bills on three consecutive snaps, then punted back. The possession consisted entirely of sacks.

Stat No. 3. Eagles quarterback Donovan McNabb personally out-rushed 13 teams.

The Football Gods Chuckled: Kansas City RB Tony Richardson had a nice run to the goal line against the Bolts. He rolled into the end zone, jumped up, and wildly spiked the ball to celebrate his touchdown—except he'd been stopped on the one. The spike cost the Chiefs 15 yards (spiking is unsportsmanlike conduct unless the player has scored), causing them to settle for a field goal in a game they ultimately lost by a point.

Who-Dats of the Week: Who-Dat No. 1. The Saints rose to 8-4 despite losing their QB and star RB in successive games. Inexperienced replacement QB Aaron Brooks threw an INT on his first pro pass last week, but TMQ urged readers to take him seriously; on Sunday, Brooks tossed for

one touchdown and ran for another. Though the football gods were surely displeased to observe Brooks waving the ball at Rams players as he crossed the goal line. Accomplished veterans are punished for such rodomontade: What do we suppose will happen to he who taunts the defending champions in his very first career start? Let us see if the football gods send a sign.

Who-Dat No. 2. The Eagles are highly impressive at 9-4, even considering they received the league's easiest schedule based on the NFL schedule-strength formula. What is especially impressive about Philadelphia is that the team has a passing game despite WRs named: Torrance Small, Charles Johnson, Todd Pinkston, and Na Brown. Who dem?

Who-Dat No. 3. The Panthers ran up 31 points on MNF despite starting these gentlemen on offense: Brad Hoover, Chris Hetherington, Jeno James, Matt Campbell, Frank Garcia, Jamar Nesbit, Chris Terry, Kris Mangum, Isaac Byrd, Muhsin Muhammad, and Steve Beuerlein. Now, be honest: Other than Beuerlein and Muhammad, had you ever heard of any of them? Hoover, an undrafted rookie from what-dat Western Carolina University ("one of the nation's 100 most-wired campuses," according to its Web site), had 117 yards rushing in his first career start.

Stop Me Before I Blitz Again: In the second quarter, the Raiders faced second and 12, odds favoring the defense. Atlanta blitzed seven, including a DB, and Rich Gannon threw 28 yards to Tim Brown for the touchdown that started the rout.

If Intellectuals Were Football Columnists (New item): From Catherine MacKinnon's football column, "Silenced Cheers":

It is impossible for me to express the totality of my disgust regarding the Oakland-Atlanta game. The Raiders used oppressive power to degrade and dominate the weaker Falcons. Exploiting unfair biological advantages, Oakland males repeatedly compelled Atlanta players to assume passive, submissive positions, such as flat on their faces. The Raiders "forced" the ball into Falcons territory, violating the personal space of defenders; fans screamed for the latter-day gladiators to "force it down their throats," and do not attempt to tell me the sexual imagery here is a mere figure of speech. Oakland players aggressively thrust themselves toward Falcons players who, replays clearly showed, were never asked for consent. There was no attempt to gently stroke and tease Atlanta's defenses in order to secure voluntary agreement for later thrusts—assuming the notion of "voluntary" can ever apply to a power-structure arrangement in which the team with the superior record is allowed to have its way with a franchise conditioned to view itself as one of the league's "losers." Atlanta players who attempted to show assertive self-dignity were silenced, pump-faked or knocked on their keisters.

If this contest were to have been fair, why weren't the best players from both sides divided equally just before kickoff and then challenged to show that they could win their opponent's genuine, voluntary consent for scoring? Because there is no such thing as true consent to be scored upon in football games! And the idea that losing players are glad to be in the NFL or even actually "like it" and want to play again shows only they have been socially conditioned to accept losing roles. Equally socially conditioned are the cheerleaders who objectify themselves and the media representatives who misuse their so-

called First Amendment "rights" to file deceptive reports tricking the public into believing that the results were determined by merit and that the cheerleaders actually engaged in voluntary competition to win their demeaning positions, rather than being drugged and forced. All cheerleaders are in reality drugged and forced, the media simply will not report this: they are degraded twice, first when issued those skirts, second when "enthusiastically" performing cartwheels.

Until such time as the First Amendment is abolished and no inappropriate comment may be written or spoken by anyone for any reason (in an ideal society, I would be sole judge of what is appropriate); until football players are compelled by government to take estrogen injections to feminize their physiques; and until the domination concept of "scoring" is replaced by female-led group consensus, I can only view NFL games with contempt. Besides the networks don't show the guys' behinds enough, and I took the Falcons plus 11 and lost my shirt.

**Indigenous Wild Fowl of the Week:** One festive holiday tradition is that Dallas and Detroit play at home every Thanksgiving. It's festive, all right—if you are Dallas or Detroit. This custom, begun years ago by the teams themselves when they switched home dates to T-Day, gives the Cowboys and Lions an annual advantage over the 29 other teams. Opponents for Thanksgiving must play Sunday, prepare on a three-day "short week" basis and then travel; Dallas and Detroit have a short week, too, but don't have to travel and get the home-crowd buzz to compensate for exhaustion. Over the last 20 years, the hosts are a combined 25-15 on T-Day; essentially, the tradition allows Dallas and Detroit to start each season with a half-game bonus in the standings. Detroit and Dallas at home each Thanksgiving is the sole exception the NFL makes to its random-scheduling policy. Other franchises have asked the NFL to rotate the Thanksgiving host slot to equalize the advantage it creates. But the league refuses because the status quo confers a slight advantage on the NFC over the AFC (both Dallas and Detroit are N teams), and favoritism to the NFC remains a dark side of NFL internal politics.

**Creaking Old Guy Feat of the Week:** In the off-season, the Persons released Brian Mitchell, the league's all-time return yardage leader, in order to free up salary cap space for a \$10 million bonus for erratic LB LaVar Arrington. Mitchell took his release in ill humor, as he should have. In the Eagles-Persons game Sunday, the 33-year-old, 210-pound Mitchell, now with Philadelphia, hit the 22-year-old, 250-pound Arrington so hard that Arrington had to sit out the rest of the game with ringing ears.

**Miscellaneous Persons Insults:** During the above-cited tilt, injured Chesapeake RB Stephen Davis walked the sidelines wearing a turtleneck sweater, jean jacket, and parka, though it was 58 F at kickoff, striking a new low on the Ridiculous K2 Survival Gear ? Victory scale. The Persons lost when kicker Eddie Murray honked a field goal to tie with a minute remaining, this being the third time in the last 13 games, stretching back to last season, that Owner/Twerp Daniel Snyder's crew has gone home with an L owing to a blown FG in the closing seconds. Could this persistent kicking malfunction have anything to do with the fact that the Persons have waived no fewer than four place-kickers during the period? Bet Murray felt real secure and confident lining up for that try.

Great Moments in Management: The Bears have changed starting quarterbacks eight times since Dick Jauron became head coach. And look how well it's working! The team is 9-19 in that span.

Endless Game of the Week: Score at the end of regulation: Bush by 1,784. Score at the end of the first overtime: Bush by 327. Score at the end of the second overtime: Bush by 300. Score at the end of the third overtime: Bush by 930. Score at the end of the fourth overtime: Bush by 537. Wait, the officials are signaling for a fifth overtime! Gore's down and distance: backed up on his 1 with an apparently infinite amount of time to play but needs a 99-yard Hail Mary followed by a 532-point conversion.

Retirement of the Week: It looks like the end of the road for Thurman Thomas. Few players have received more attention for screw-ups and less for achievements. Thomas is known mainly for losing his helmet at the Super Bowl and for an insufferable youthful ego: He once refused to attend a league-sponsored media event, claiming the press wasn't giving him enough attention, on the very day Sporting News named him Player of the Year. Yet when Thomas matured from a loudmouth into a team leader, little was said. Sportswriters endlessly condescended to him as an "all-purpose back," code for not a manly-man "pure" runner: though Thomas rushed for more yards than Jim Brown, Earl Campbell, Larry Csonka, Leroy Kelly, Jim Taylor, and similar "pure" backs and had to run over countless enormous, ill-tempered gentlemen to do so. Generally, RBs who are good receivers have this held against them by the sports media when the rushing pantheon is discussed, while running backs who can't catch are revered for being "pure" runners. Witness Marshall Faulk, who rarely gets credit for his ball-carrying accomplishments, versus endless media praise for Jerome Bettis, a liability on passing downs.

And while the sports media don't give enough credit to the RB running-receiving combination, they put no store at all in whether backs throw blocks. In his latter years in Buffalo, when no longer the third-down go-to option, Thomas developed into one of the best blitz-blocking RBs ever. This transition was remarkable both given his size (198 pounds) and the fact that star backs hate to block. Star backs believe that because the human body can absorb only so many hits, every block they throw is one carry subtracted from their career stats. Probably this theory is right; by volunteering to block (he could have pulled rank), Thomas cost himself one or two rungs on the all-time rushing Top 10. Nevertheless, as Thomas matured into a man, he became a blocker because it was what his team needed at the time, and he never complained about the role. Because this growing up was admirable, the sports media pretty much said nothing.

Thomas' final numbers: 1st all-time postseason points, 1st all-time postseason yards from scrimmage, 6th all-time yards from scrimmage, 9th all-time rushing, only player ever to lead the league in yards from scrimmage four consecutive years, only back ever to start in four straight Super Bowls. Since the mid-1980s, 14 players weighing less than 200 pounds have rushed for more than 1,000 yards, and eight of them are Thurman Thomas. Attention, Hall of Fame voters: first ballot, please.

Haiku Corner: Readers lament the fallen and the falling:

First Ricky, now Jeff.  
God—what do you have against

the New Orleans Saints?  
—"Sad Man"

Ricky break, Blake break  
Show Sainthood isn't easy  
Could it be—SATAN?  
—"Bob K"

Couch is done, Ty too  
Penderson under center  
Cleveland wins no more.  
—Kristofer Newman

Now at four and eight  
are the Hawks miserable  
or just plain lousy?  
—Jerry Neufeld

Teams visit the Vet  
Losing players left and right  
Eagles should get grass.  
—Brodie Jarrell

The Vet-bound should be pleased by Philadelphia's announcement that it will replace its aircraft-carrier-deck-like playing surface this off-season with something vaguely similar to living vascular organisms.

Readers are invited to continue submitting haiku and other verses via "The Fray," slugging entries "Football Haiku," "Football Psalms," and so on.

Actual Pain in the Butt: Jets back Curtis Martin missed a week of practice with a strained gluteus maximus.

Hidden Indicator of the Week: Coaches always preach the running game: On Sunday, six of the 15 losing teams rushed for more yards than the winners. This is the kind of hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's understanding of the sport. Unfortunately, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has no idea what it means.

### **Running Items Department**

Obscure College Scores: Alas, most obscure college teams have folded their tents and stolen off into the desert until 2001, when those pleasing, life-affirming rituals of colliding gentlemen, stupefied crowds, and car alarms going off in the parking lot will begin anew, reminding us of the eternal cycle of—well, better stop before I go haiku. Happily, obscure playoffs remain.

Obscure Playoff Score of the Week: Appalachian State 33, Troy State 30 (Division I-AA first round). Bonus Obscure Playoff Score: Bloomsburg 38, Northwood 14 (Division II semifinal).

Double Bonus Obscure Playoff Score: Mount Union 59, Ohio Northern 28 (Division III second round).

Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment: Suspended out of respect for human rights violations in the Republic of Chad.

Most Embarrassing Don Ohlmeyer Moment: The idiotic "gotta go to work" segment has reappeared on the opening roll of Monday Night Football. This segment, let the record reflect, was Ohlmeyer's idea.

New York Times Final-Score Score: Once again the Paper of Record goes 0-15 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, bringing the New York Times Final-Score Score to 0-188 for the season. Times predicted: Flaming Thumbtacks 28, Jacksonville 21. Actual: Jax 16, T's 13. Times predicted: Packers 19, Panthers 10. Actual: Panthers 31, Packers 14. Reader Brad Hammill's generic final score—Home Team 20, Visiting Team 14—also whiffs, bringing this item to 0-102 since its inception.

The first New York Times Final-Score Score haiku was received!

Paper of Record  
Zero of 188  
Is half-right a tie?  
—Topher Connors

Reader Animadversion: Kevin Kowalczyk points out that Tampa Bay lost at Chicago despite running a successful fake kick, thus violating TMQ's law, Fake Kick = Victory. One reader even supplied a haiku on this point!

TMQ is wrong  
Tampa Bay faked a punt and  
Still they lost to Bears.  
—Steve Wolfram

But as last week's column pointed out, in that self-same contest the Bucs, fretting about the cold, wore heavy North Face parkas on the sidelines—kicker Martin Gramatica sported an alpine-skier full face mask that barely had slits for his eyes—despite a game time temperature of 37 F, thus violating a TMQ canon, Ridiculous K2 Survival Gear ? Victory. Another reader supplied a haiku on that point!

Temp below 40  
Bucs staff wears balaclavas  
Defeat is certain.  
—Jamie DeVriend

What happens when two Tuesday Morning Quarterback laws clash in the same game? Only the football gods could answer such a question. Let us await a sign.

Another reader protested that when woeful Ryan Leaf flashed an apparent six-gun-shooter gesture in the Bolts-Broncos game, he was actually making the Australian-rules signal for touchdown. TMQ admits he is not fully conversant with Australian gesticulation. But then the Denver players aren't either since many were openly angry about the gesture. More important, it seems even the football gods do not know this since they punished Leaf's hubris by causing his team to build a big lead, then lose anyway. Could it be that U.S. and Australian football have different gods? Maybe there's some cultural diversity thing working here. Again, let us await a sign.

Finally, astute readers pointed out that on TMQ's proprietary "combined efficiency" ratings (combination of offensive and defensive performance), the very worst team was not mentioned. Sorry, I skipped them because they had the bye last week. The most awful combined-efficiency club is the Seattle Seahawks, which rate a pitiful 59 (28th offensive, 31st defensive) on a scale whose worst possible score is 62. This from a team that cleaned house in the off-season because coach Mike Holmgren pronounced that last season's division-winning finish wasn't good enough. Ye gods.

Trivia Challenge: Last week's challenge:

Of the following, identify any inaccurate statement about pro football days of yore:

- A touchdown was worth five points.
- Offensive linemen were eligible receivers.
- Pudge Heffelfinger was the first gentleman ever paid to play football.
- There was a team called the Chicago Bullies.
- Officials had horns, not whistles.
- The Duluth Eskimos immortalized the "fumblerooski" in which the ball is deliberately left on the ground.
- Helmets were optional.
- Roughing the passer was legal.

Most entrants caught the fact that there was never a Chicago Bullies, though few knew there was, in reality, a Columbus Bullies. For that matter, the NFL once had a New York Yankees. Few guessed that helmets were optional as recently as 1943. Über-trivia-meister Mark Longbrake pointed out that Pudge Heffelfinger, who became the first professional football player in 1892, drew \$500 per game—\$8,998 in current dollars, according to the handy Inflation Calculator. Baltimore's Jonathan Ogden, the highest-paid player this year on an actual-take basis according to the NFL Players Association, receives \$1,031,270 per game, or 115 times the real-dollar value of Heffelfinger's pay.

And though many guessed the Duluth Eskimos (actual former franchise) did not invent the fumblerooski, few knew who did. Mastery of the fumblerooski is generally credited to the Nebraska Cornhuskers, who scored a touchdown on this gimmick in the 1984 Orange Bowl with a guard running the ball in. To view the Orange Bowl fumblerooski, [click here](#).

Acting in bipartisan spirit but on a completely arbitrary basis, TMQ awards this trivia challenge to John Giorgis of Tacoma Park, Md. And now this week's Trivia Challenge:

The Thurman Thomas item above mentions 14 recent 1,000-yard seasons by backs weighing less than 200 pounds, crediting eight to Thomas. That leaves six unaccounted for. Name the gentlemen who accomplished them.

Submit your answers via The Fray, slugging them "Trivia Answer (Bribe Included)." And remember to supply your e-mail address in the incredibly remote chance that the Florida legislature, United Nations Security Council, or the Elders of Zion certify you have won. Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## **Gorzon Speaks!**

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Dec. 5, 2000, at 7:05 PM ET

From: Gorzon the Inexplicable, Prime Illuminate of Mithrall and Vizier Totipotent of the Galactic Hegemony

To: Bio-Agent KurWar7733, "Kurt Warner"

Subject: Third-Down Progression Reads

Bio-agent Warner, everything had been going exactly as planned. What in the tentacles of the silicon elders happened in the Carolina game?

Till Sunday, our plan had been flawless. First the star-cruiser arrived at the target world bearing your genome clones from the operations base of the Galactic Hegemony (Devastating Star Clusters Since 50 Million BC®), located in the seemingly "empty" football-shaped sector of Cygnus A. To see how thoroughly our cloaking fields have fooled Earth authorities about the football-shaped sector of Cygnus A, [click here](#). Then you assumed the form of a human athlete and used nano-implant technology to win the Super Bowl and Most Valuable Player trophy. NFL referees check for stick-um and hard casts, but they don't look for biogenic phased-lepton Higgs field projectors, do they?

This year, as your statistics accelerated toward the supernatural, we arranged for you to fake an injury—as if a four-dimensional tesseract construct could be injured by a three-dimensional impact!—so that the defending champions would decline when your backup took the field. Sure enough, St. Louis lost three straight home games with a mere human quarterback, answering any claims your success was "just the Rams system." Starting Sunday, you were to build your legend even further with a miraculous comeback. Instead four INTs. The elders are not pleased.

Meanwhile, football continues to grow in popularity back here in the homeworld. Everyone watches all the games, even the Chiefs-Patriots matchup. We sit on the couch drinking lymph-grog, clapping our flukes, and screaming, "Go for it!" Everything Dennis Miller says is so funny—we always know exactly what he's talking about. The sideline shots of the cheerleaders are aesthetically revolting, of course, but it is heartwarming to know there is one silicon-based life form on Earth. And all the juvenile pupa are slithering around wearing NFL caps—it's the rage. Though they insist on wearing them with the brim forwards—what is it with the young today?

Of course you know some of our other attempts to place bio-agents into key positions in human society have met with mixed success. MonicaLew5588 might have succeeded in toppling the American government if only it had not been for our lack of knowledge of the specifics of human mating rituals. Who would have believed they could do it standing up, let alone conscious? Our operatives, however, have since obtained extensive information about human mating rituals from something called Blockbuster.

And the genomic transformation of AnnKor6622 malfunctioned for reasons our tech pods are trying to determine. Resulting bio-agent "Anna Kournikova" did not, as planned, receive the superior athletic ability that would enable her to dominate tennis as you dominate football. Worse, Anna's physical appearance came out too repulsive for words. I still have the nude photographs we took of her during the mating-rituals orientation session. Nude images of Anna Kournikova are so utterly hideous I just have to get rid of them. Do you suppose anyone on Earth would want these pictures?

Kurt, the Illuminates feel you need work on your progression reads. You had the Rams on the Panthers' 15-yard line midway through the third, ready to start the spectacular comeback but telegraphed the pass to Bruce, allowing an interception run back 88 yards for Carolina. Proehl was open over the middle! As all space aliens know, when the primary receiver is doubled, you've got to come off him quickly. Just leave your occipital synthetic-aperture radar on, and you will always track the position of every player. Leave it on! Don't give us any of that romantic Earth BS that the Force will guide you.

Well, enough for now. The master plan is still in effect: You lead Rams to numerous Super Bowls, acquire national fame, run for the U.S. Senate, and persuade America not to build space-based defenses. Succeed, and "Anna Kournikova" will be yours in her true, 12-tentacled form. Fail, and the penalty is 1,000 years in the boiling ammonia pits of Aldebaran Four. But don't let that make you nervous.

Best Plays of the Week: Best No. 1. They must be reading TMQ because all coaching staffs visiting cold weather cities came out in varsity jackets and baseball caps, a total reversal from overdressing on the cold Sunday two weeks ago. Up at Buffalo, where Miami had never won a game played after Thanksgiving, it was well below freezing and Mammals QB Jay Fiedler jogged onto the field for initial warm-ups in shorts and a long-sleeved T-shirt; his team went on to win by 27. Fiedler's shorts were the single best play of the weekend.

Best No. 2. Holding a 20-3 lead over Indianapolis, the Jets weirdly used four-wide or five-wide formations throughout the second half rather than pound the ball to grind the clock. Yet it worked, Curtis Martin running for 203 yards from spread sets. Good strategy is anything you can walk away from.

Best No. 3. Packer Antonio Freeman's back-of-the-end-zone reception—body sideways out of bounds but toes amazingly kept in—against the Bears joins his falling-down, off-the-helmet, off-the-sternum touchdown against the Vikings to give him two seemingly physically impossible catches in the same season.

Worst Plays of the Week: Worst No. 1. Trailing Pittsburgh 21-20, the Raiders had first down at midfield with 22 seconds left, needing 15 yards for position to attempt the winning field goal. But they did not follow Raider legend Ken Stabler's rule: Throw down the middle in the final seconds because the defense will expect throws to the sideline. Rich Gannon threw three straight toward the sideline (including the final pass, on which he forgot it was fourth down), and the drive fizzled.

Worst No. 2. Trailing 24-0 on the first possession of the second half, the Bills faced fourth and inches at their own 27. They punted, Miami scored on its possession, and the game was over. A team down 24-0 must take chances; fourth and inches isn't much of a chance to take. When coaches signal a punt in situations like this, what they are telling players is that they've already given up and are counting the minutes till they can hit the bar for a nice honeydew-caramel crème de menthe martini. If players quit on a game, reaction is fiercely negative. How come it's OK when coaches quit?

Stats of the Week: Stat No. 1. Denver rookie Mike Anderson, a 27-year-old former Marine who did not play high school football, ran for 251 yards, the fourth best pro total ever.

Stat No. 2. The Browns (Release 2.0) recorded two first downs. Ye gods.

Stalin on Peachtree Street: Coach Dan Reeves benched starting QB Chris Chandler for saying everyone on the 3-11 team needed to work harder, "including the coaching staff." Atlanta proceeded to lose 30-10 to woeful Seattle. Reeves also described the Falcons as "a worker's paradise" and denied reports of starvation among the kulaks.

Fight Song Revise: Fans of the Chesapeake Watershed Region Indigenous Persons sing the team's fight song after each score, though this season they have engaged in the ritual less often than expected. TMQ proposes an updated lyric, which fits the melody:

Hail to the Indigenous Persons.  
Hail, nominal effort.  
Highly overpaid underachievers  
Fight! To shift the blame.

During the Persons' loss to Jersey/A when starting QB Brad Johnson was yanked, Owner/Twerp Daniel Snyder who has openly lobbied for backup Jeff George—Snyder seems unaware there is a reason why George has been cut by numerous teams—jumped up and pumped his fists in the air. Quarterback controversies are bad enough, but a quarterback controversy prompted by the owner? The football gods take note of such things. Compensating virtue: One step closer to the inevitable Snyder public meltdown.

Who-Dats of the Week: Who No. 1. Pittsburgh's defense has been stellar, allowing just 15 PPG despite the Steelers' years of free-agency losses and bad drafts. On the bad draft front, Pittsburgh has spent two consecutive "lottery picks"—No. 1s near the top of the draft—on Troy Edwards and Plaxico Burress, receivers with a combined zero touchdowns. Yet the team's who-dat defense, which starts unknowns such as Kimo von Oelhoffen, consistently excels.

Who No. 2. Denver has run up 1,021 yards of offense in the last two weeks despite average personnel, a backup QB, and the unknown Anderson subbing for Hall of Famer Terrell Davis. The key has been bravura blocking by the team's who-dem OLs such as tackle Lennie Friedman of West Milford, N. J. The Broncos are despised by the rest of the league because they coach blockers to attack the knees of defensive linemen and try to cause injury, forcing defenders to spend their energy protecting themselves. Why officials let Denver get away with this dirty tactic

has never been clear, but it sure works. Additionally, anyone who watches Denver game film sees that the team's OLs are relentless, always moving and looking for someone to block even after the runner has passed them. Compare this to the overpaid, underachieving offensive lines of clubs such as Buffalo and Seattle, whose blockers quit on plays and stand around looking even before the runner reaches the hole.

If Intellectuals Wrote Football Columns: From Søren Kierkegaard's column, "Fear and Tackling:"

From my earliest youth, I have known that I must be an Arizona Cardinals fan. I remember discovering a football annual, hidden from me by my cold and distant father. I read in shock that the Cardinals have had only one playoff victory in 53 years and had lost 112 games in the last decade. My naïve hopes for the future were dashed as I gazed in horrified fixation on Arizona draft choices and player transactions. The Cardinals were atrocious, ill-managed, sluggish, unpopular, and their OLs quit on plays. I knew then and there that I must embrace them.

Now my love for the Cardinals is the mistress of my heart. Each Monday when I look at the newspapers, I can be assured I will find Arizona in last place and read it was clobbered again in embarrassing fashion. What relief to see they even lost to Cincinnati! Whenever I log on to sports Web sites to check NFL statistics, I can be sure Cardinals' players' names will appear only in categories such as "punts" and "sacks allowed": The failure of the team helps me face the pointless despondency of my own wretched existence. Let other cities have winning season after winning season, creating the tantalizing illusion of purpose. Through the Az-Men, I know what life really is. One must literally be a lunatic to follow the Cardinals. It is a destiny I welcome.

Some might say the Cardinals are cursed by fate. No! Their role is a noble beacon of pointlessness. They are the truth in a world of enticing illusions. The very constancy of their despair grants me an anchor in the insanity of this life. The tantalizing winning teams will lead fans on and then crush their spirits at the last, just as illusions of justice or beauty always crush believers. The Cardinals, by contrast, will always be awful. In them my soul finds solace.

Every time I drag myself unworthy to a home Cardinals game, I look up worshipfully at the arches of Sun Devil Stadium, emblazoned with the warning, CAUTION: MAY CONTAIN FOOTBALL-LIKE SUBSTANCE. I enter and cheer wildly as the team fumbles and jumps offside, secure in the knowledge I will not be embarrassed because hardly anyone goes to Cardinals home games. Good seats are always available at the stadium of existential despair! I cry out to the Az-Men in celebration. And then I make a leap: a leap of fake.

Waived Gentlemen of the Week: Waived No. 1. TMQ salutes Chris Carter, who became the second NFL player ever to catch 1,000 tosses and the first waived player ever to do this. Carter, one of the top performers in pro football history, was once released by the Eagles. Some of the

best NFL players have been cut. Next week when the Pro Bowl squads are announced, Tuesday Morning Quarterback plans to pick an All-Waivers Team.

Waived No. 2. Kicker Joe Nedney, who's been cut by two teams this season, nailed three for three Sunday and is now up to 30 of 33 on field-goal attempts in 2000.

Combined Failures of the Week: The Bills and Persons, the top teams for combined efficiency (Persons best at 12, 8th offensive and 4th defensive; Buffalo tied for second at 17, 14th offensive and 3rd defensive), both suffered embarrassing, listless home loses and fell to 7-6. How can these teams be superior in yardage yet on the brink of elimination?

Often when a team does well in yards but falters in the standings, the reason lies in turnovers and field-goal attempts. This seems to explain the Persons, who are average in giveaway/takeaway and whose revolving-door kicker corps has caused three Ls this season with misses in the closing seconds. Additionally, the Persons are burdened by the hyper Napoleon complex of Owner/Twerp Snyder, whose runaway self-importance drags down everyone around him. Surely Snyder will suffer for his ego fit of firing coach Norv Turner with just three games remaining. Danny, why not hold your breath until you turn blue?

The Bills, in contrast, are not only at the top in yardage but plus-eight in giveaway/takeaway and sport a fearless clutch field-goal kicker having a Pro Bowl season. How, then, to explain their woe? Oh ye of little faith in the football gods: Buffalo is being punished for the way it treated Bruce Smith and Thurman Thomas.

Stop Me Before I Blitz Again: The Colts trailed Jersey/B by just 20-17 with four minutes left, Jets ball on the Indianapolis 18, third and eight, down and distance favoring the defense. All the Colts needed was a stop: The Jets kick a field goal, and a touchdown on the final possession will win it for Indianapolis. But it's a blitz! The Colts send a cornerback, and the man he would have covered catches a 16-yard pass to the 2, setting up the icing touchdown.

Push To Activate: An NFL absurdity is the inactive list. Teams have 53 gentlemen, but only 45 may tape up for games plus the third-string quarterback, who can step on the field only if the first two QBs are dragged off injured. This means that each week, six players watch from the sidelines in street clothes (or in ridiculous K2 survival gear). So far as anyone can determine, the sole function of the inactive list is to compel owners to pay players not to perform since inactives get their regular game-day check.

The absurdity of the inactive list dates to previous NFL regimes under which rosters were smaller and coaches were allowed a set number of annual "moves" back and forth from injured reserve. As the NFL season grew to 16 weeks, it became obvious more games would mean more injuries, so more backups would be required. The antediluvian element of the owners' cohort hated larger rosters, however, since this entailed more salaries, just as some owners opposed down-and-distance specialization on the grounds it would cause coaches to want more bodies. Through the decades before the 1990s, several owners insisted 43 or 45 was the "correct" figure for an NFL roster as if biblically given. (College teams have 90-person rosters; for the pros, the correct figure is the maximum the league will fund.) When the "moves" system was discarded in

1991, the antediluvian owner element insisted something had to be done to screw the players enlarging the rosters. The inactive list was invented.

Because of the inactive list, coaches have fewer warm bodies to perform on special teams; this forces starters to play special teams, increasing the frequency of injuries to starters, which shafts the fans. The bizarre status of third-string QBs—dressed but forbidden to play—slows their development into capable quarterbacks (the NFL's single most valuable commodity) and means punters end up holding for placement tries. If reserve QBs were holders, exciting fake kicks would be more common.

Being paid to do nothing may sound like a union idea, but labor hates the inactive rule—even the most marginal athlete wants to get his uniform dirty—and last week, NFL Players Association head Gene Upshaw called for elimination of the inactive list. TMQ agrees: Let all play, unless their limbs are in casts. Free the Inactive Six! The only possible effects of this change would be to reduce injuries and improve games. So the league probably won't do it.

Haiku Corner: Staff and reader verse:

The football gods wax  
Wroth. Bush, Gore distracting from  
What really matters.

—TMQ, 2000

Donovan McNabb  
Has a five-syllable name  
Perfect for haiku.

—Beth Jerome

Pity Dick Jauron  
Bears Shane and Cade throwing bad  
Jim Miller much missed.

—Steve Gozdecki

Fiedler at the helm  
Jay related to Arthur  
Conduct us to scores.

—Chris Lipe

And a limerick:

There once was a Bear named Allen, James  
Who ran, fumbled, cried in the rain.

He was running so well,  
Then it all went to hell.  
Next week he'll probably do it a-gain.

—Markous Snyder

Keep submitting your verse, via "The Fray."

**Pull of the Week:** Finally deciding the San Francisco cap-evasion case, the commissioner docked the team a fifth pick in the 2001 draft and a third in 2002. This leniency once again demonstrates that the Niners are the league's best-connected club politically. In trades, NFL teams discount draft choices to present value by one round per future year: A general manager offering a third-round 2002 pick in trade would receive a fourth-round 2001 pick. Thus the Niners were effectively fined a fourth-round pick (present value of the 2002 third-rounder) and a fifth-round pick for three instances of cap violation while a few months ago the Steelers were fined a greater amount (a 2001 third-round pick) for one single violation. What does Niner management have on Paul Tagliabue, one wonders?

**Quote of the Week:** The Associated Press primary dispatch described the Arizona-Cincinnati contest as "a ragged game befitting the NFL's two worst teams since 1990." Now, your mother taught you that if you can't think of anything nice to say, don't say anything. But considering the Cardinals and Bengals—this was nice!

**Hidden Indicator of the Week:** This is the 80th season of NFL madness, and in that period there have been 10,695 games played in 136 stadiums by 81 teams scoring 408,066 points with 18,301 gentlemen participating. Rounded, the figures show a games-to-stadiums ratio of 79:1, a points-to-players ratio of 22:1, and a teams-to-seasons ratio of an eerie 1:1. These are the sorts of hidden indicators essential to an insider's understanding of the sport. Unfortunately, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has no idea what any of them mean.

### **Running Items Department**

**Obscure College Playoff Scores:** Appalachian State 17, Western Kentucky 14 (Division I-AA playoff). Bloomsburg 58, UC Davis 48 (Division II semifinal). Hardin-Simmons 33, Trinity of Texas 30 (Division III quarterfinal).

**Most Embarrassing Don Ohlmeyer Moment:** Kansas City-New England was the year's first woofier MNF matchup, and the self-mocking opening roll was, in truth, pretty funny. But this tells you the Ohlmeyer-Dennis Miller nexus came into the season expecting to ridicule Monday Night's own product and didn't know how to adjust when most of the games turned out to be fabulous.

**New York Times Final-Score Score:** Once again the Paper of Record goes 0-15 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, bringing the New York Times Final-Score Score to 0-203 for the season. Reader Brad Hammill's generic final score—Home Team 20, Visiting Team 14—also whiffs, bringing this item to 0-117 since inception.

Honored Guest Predictions: Friends, it has happened. The Rochester, N.Y., Democrat and Chronicle, one of the many papers that engages in quixotic attempts to predict exact NFL final scores, in its Friday edition forecast Jets 27, Indianapolis 17, the actual final. (All its other predictions were completely wrong.) Congratulations to the Democrat and Chronicle: Surely this was a team effort in which everyone associated with the paper gave 110 percent.

Reader Animadversions: A reader screen-named Jake protests that TMQ has never done an item on "the complete lack of gay coaches in the NFL." Jake, how do you know there is a complete lack of gay coaches? Jake continues, "There are many gays and lesbians who settle for jobs as hairdressers and ballet dancers when what they really want is to coach in the NFL." Jake finds the situation to be discrimination. Setting aside the cheap shot about how certain teams would play rougher if coached by lesbians, TMQ notes that society tolerates forms of discrimination in sports that it would never allow elsewhere. This will be a subject on an upcoming column.

TMQ Trivia Challenge: TMQ did such a poor job of wording last week's question that a perfect answer was impossible. Here was the question:

An above item mentions 14 recent 1,000-yard seasons by backs weighing less than 200 pounds, crediting eight to Thurman Thomas. That leaves six unaccounted for. Name the gentlemen who accomplished them.

Well, "recent" is pretty vague. Many readers suggested Barry Sanders as key to the answer, but according to The Official Encyclopedia of the NFL, Sanders played at 203 pounds. The six names TMQ was looking for were James Brooks, Warrick Dunn, Charlie Garner, Gaston Green, Napoleon Kaufman, and Erric Pegram. But Tony Dorsett and Joe Morris also qualify, depending on what "recent" means. Abashed, TMQ awards this challenge to Mark Longbrake of Seattle, who sent in both a detailed initial entry and a hand recounted entry.

Here is this week's much better-worded challenge:

A while back, TMQ proposed that 2-0 in overtime would be the ultimate football score. Sadly, this seems improbable in the NCAA overtime format: The team with the ball would have to suffer a 75-yard loss. But though there's never been a 2-0 OT professional game, there was one NFL contest decided by a safety in sudden death. Give the game date, the combatants, the final score—and name the gentleman who recorded the winning deuce.

Submit your entries to The Fray, titling them "Trivia Answer (Well-Worded)." Remember to include your e-mail address in the totally improbable chance that Judge Sanders Sauls declares you the winner.

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## **It's Money Time, Which Has Nothing To Do With Money**

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Dec. 12, 2000, at 7:00 PM ET

It is December, and in the NFL December separates the men from individuals who merely have X and Y chromosome pairs. To the standings, a September W or L carries the same weight as a December W or L. But as the league turns, December results are a thousand times more important. The pressure is on. December games are played when the losers know they are losers and everyone is expecting their loserhood to deepen; when the successful teams know they are successful, but each play counts in the battle for all-important first-round byes; when the clubs poised between reaching the playoffs and dropping to loserhood are so nervous you can practically see their team buses shaking.

Whether you make the postseason bears little relationship to what you earn. Playoff bonuses are relatively small—\$10,000 each to players in the first round. Huge offseason deals often go to gentlemen from crummy teams (they tend to stand out) while those who perform deep into January may find themselves cut by Valentine's Day as clubs deal with the salary cap. (Winning gentlemen tend not to stand out, since their teams play like teams.) Exactly because it's got nothing to do with money, performance in "money time" is what players respect each other, and themselves, for. And now it's money time, when we find out whose has heart and who's a pumped-up pretender.

Teams that turned in money performances over the weekend: Jersey/A, New Orleans, Oakland, St. Louis. Teams that looked nervous as cats: Detroit, Indianapolis, Miami. Teams that looked like Frankenstein had more heart: the Chesapeake Watershed Region Indigenous Persons. Teams that crashed and burned: Buffalo and Pittsburgh. The Steelers were so shaky they lined up for a field-goal attempt when trailing 20-3 in the third and knowing a loss eliminated them; the football gods were offended and brushed the ball aside well before it reached the goal posts. Miami looked so nervous it punted in opposition territory with three minutes left even though it was behind. The Persons looked like they were auditioning for the Cincinnati Bengals taxi squad. Redeeming virtue of the Persons wheeze-out: It proves that money can't buy happiness.

Come next Sunday, most if not all playoff slots will be decided but maneuvering for byes and seeding will continue. Getting into the postseason makes a team's season a success, but seeding is the key to the Super Bowl since the four bye teams win nearly 80 percent of second-round games.

Best Plays of the Week: Best No. 1. Tampa Bay led Miami 16-13 with 2:09 to go and was backed up on its 5. Quarterback Shaun King threw an ill-advised screen to Warrick Dunn, who was surrounded in the end zone. It looked like a sure safety, but Dunn spun out of a tackle and managed to get back onto the field. This 1-yard loss was the consensus play of the day.

Best No. 2. Oakland's third-and-long innovation of lining up five DBs across the field at the first-down marker, rushing just 3 and forcing the offense to throw under, has now been named the "stick" formation because the DBs form their barricade at that yellow stick. The Jets faced third

and 11 from their own 2, the Raiders came out in the stick, and Jersey/B was forced to throw under. Punt, Raiders touchdown on ensuing drive. Why aren't other teams imitating this set?

Best No. 3. For years San Francisco has been making a living on "motion-out," in which a WR, usually Jerry Rice, comes across the formation in motion, then makes a quick lateral turn-out for a short gain that's nearly impossible to stop. The play drives defenders to distraction because they know it's coming, yet all you can do is choke up on the WR and be there when the ball arrives. Sunday against New Orleans, Terrell Owens trotted across for the motion-out. When the DB came up, Jeff Garcia pump-faked, and Owens double-moved to a go route for a 69-yard TD.

Best No. 4. Trailing the Niners 27-24 on the road, the Saints faced fourth and 4 at their own 37 with three minutes left. Yes—they're going for it! Novice QB Aaron Brooks scrambled for the first on a wild broken play, and New Orleans went on to win in the closing seconds. Compare this to Miami which, playing at home and trailing by the same margin with the same amount of time remaining, faced fourth and 6 at the Buccaneer 47. No—it's a punt! Buck-buck-buck-brawck. Tampa players jogged up the tunnel victorious.

Worst Plays of the Week: Worst No. 1. With the score tied at zero in the second quarter, Detroit faced third and goal at the Green Bay 6. QB Charlie Batch had a pass-rusher directly in his face and instead of taking the sack, heave-hoed into double coverage—or, to be precise, into coverage he couldn't see because there was a rusher directly in his face. Result: INT returned to the Packers' 40, Green Bay scores on its drive. Take the sack! Sometimes the best plays a QB makes are incompletions and sacks if they avoid crazy passes that get picked off.

Worst No. 2. Trailing 13-0, the Steelers faced third and 2 on the Giants' 12 with a minute remaining in the second. QB Kordell Stewart faked a pitch right and handed off to Jerome Bettis running left. But when Stewart faked right—there was no one to his right. This phantom fake had no effect on the G-Man defense, which stuffed Bettis for a loss, forcing the Steelers to settle for a field goal.

Worst No. 3. Martay Jenkins of the Arizona (CAUTION: MAY CONTAIN FOOTBALL-LIKE SUBSTANCE) Cardinals became the NFL's all-time leader in kickoff return yards in a season with 1,964. Nice for him, but you can only set records in this category if your team is constantly being kicked off to.

Stats of the Week: Stat No. 1. RB Michael Pitman of these selfsame Cardinals had 11 carries for minus-1 yards.

Stat No. 2. Kansas City turned the ball over on each of its first four possessions.

Stat No. 3. The Bengals had as many punts (nine) as first downs.

Stat No. 4. The Rams ran up 40 points, 508 yards, and 32 first downs. Nice to have things back to normal.

All-Waivers All-Pros: The Pro Bowl teams will be announced Thursday, and they'll be heavy on first-draft-pick, media-hyped types. How good are some of these athletes? Pretty good. But the players TMQ most admires are those who reach a Pro Bowl level despite having been shown the door. Thus the Tuesday Morning Quarterback All-Waivers All-Pro team, composed entirely of gentlemen who have been waived, let go in free agency if their original teams made no serious effort to retain them, released under the old Plan B system, or were "street" free agents who talked their way into tryouts. (Asterisk indicates waived more than once.)

Offense:

OT: Ray Brown,\* San Francisco; Glenn Parker,\* New Jersey/A.

G: Tom Nütten, St. Louis; Randall McDaniel, Tampa Bay.

C: Kevin Mawae, New Jersey/B.

TE: Frank Wycheck, Tennessee.

WR: Chris Carter, Minnesota; Ed McCaffrey, Denver.

RB: Tyrone Wheatley,\* Oakland; Lamar Smith,\* Miami.

FB: Leon Neal,\* Tennessee.

QB: Rich Gannon,\* Oakland.

Defense:

DE: Bruce Smith, the Persons; Eric Hicks, Kansas City.

DT: La'Roi Glover, New Orleans; Ted Washington,\* Buffalo.

ILB: Michael Barrow,\* New Jersey/A; Marvcus Patton,\* Kansas City.

OLB: Keith Mitchell, New Orleans; Eddie Robinson,\* Tennessee.

CB: Eric Allen, Oakland; Terrell Buckley,\* Denver.

S: Rod Woodson,\* Baltimore; Kurt Schulz, Detroit.

K: Steve Christie, Buffalo.

P: Darren Bennett, San Diego.

KR: Desmond Howard,\* Detroit.

ST: Isaac Byrd, Tennessee.

TMQ would gladly stack this team up against the official all-pros. Only at OT, OLB, and CB is this unit weaker than the official all-pros, and in a game the All-Waivers All-Pros might have more motivation.

Notes about the judges' decisions: Both players picked as OTs currently line up as guards but have played tackle. Twice-waived G Corbin Lacina of Minnesota would be welcome while practically the entire Niners OL could make the squad, as this group has allowed the second-least sacks in the league while starting Brown plus Derrick Deese, Dave Fiore, and Scott Gragg, all of whom qualify for All-Waivers. The receivers are strong, but it's a shame to leave off the twice-waived duo of Jimmy Smith and Keenan McCardell of Jax or the discarded Shannon Sharpe of Baltimore. Discarded Charlie Garner would make a fine addition at RB as would the twice-waived Garrison Hearst, if healthy. The DT choice was particularly tough as waived gentlemen Sam Adams of Baltimore and John Parrella of San Diego posted excellent seasons. At LB, the All-Waivers coach would surely want twice-waived Brian Cox of Jersey/B plus once-waived

Carlos Emmons of Philadelphia. Qualifying DBs Victor Green of Jersey/B, Eric Davis of Carolina, and James Hasty of Kansas City would be welcome. Waived CB Deion Sanders of the Persons would assuredly not be welcome as the goal of this team is to win, not to promote marketing concepts.

So many good kickers have been shown the door that the slot is overcrowded: among them Gary Anderson of Minnesota (NFL's all-time leading scorer, waived four times), Matt Stover of Baltimore (this season's leading scorer, released under Plan B), Joe Nedney (30 of 34 in 2000, waived three times), Philadelphia's David Akers (third-leading scorer this season, street free agent). And tabbing Gannon as the quarterback was a wrenching choice since Jeff Garcia and Kurt Warner also qualify for All-Waivers. Garcia's magnificent year—28 TD passes versus nine INTs—is especially impressive considering he calls signals for a young, losing team. It's interesting that with the quarterback being by far the most valuable position in football, three of the top NFL QBs this season are gentlemen nobody wanted.

**Skinny Guys of the Week:** In pelting rain in Miami, Tampa kicker Martin Gramatica hit a 46-yard field goal for the winning points, then Tampa punter Mark Royals stood at the back line of his own end zone with two minutes remaining and boomed a 53-yard punt to preserve the victory.

**Boast of the Week:** Commissioner Paul Tagliabue posted an open letter to NFL fans claiming credit for a "significant decline over the past three years in the number of players charged with criminal offenses."

**If Intellectuals Were Football Columnists:** From Ayn Rand's football column, "The Fumblehead":

Dennis Green stood astride the simulated polymer-type grasslike substance as an immense, superhuman megacolossus. Lesser men were too puny, too trembling, or too ethnically surnamed to comprehend the heights to which he aspired. Masculine, rippling, striding, Dennis Green would mold the Minnesota Vikings into the vehicle of his soaring vision. Destroy and rebuild them every offseason, if that was what it took. Others would laugh, fail to understand. Their derision would prove his genius.

Change quarterbacks every year? No other coach had the courage. But if it brought Dennis Green closer to the realization of his vision, quarterbacks would have to be waived; their destinies scarcely mattered except to the so-called imaginary "God" of the weak-willed losers who deserved their fates. Sean Salisbury, Jim McMahon, Rich Gannon, Warren Moon, Brad Johnson, Randall Cunningham, Jeff George. Use them and toss them aside, this was what great men did with others, and Dennis Green did it to quarterbacks without hesitation because it served his will. His only disappointment was that he failed in his attempt to use Dan Marino and toss him aside; even the greatest must overcome setbacks. The beautiful cheerleaders and glamorous, gorgeous starlets who came to Vikings games drawn by Green's force of will could only wish he would use them and toss them aside as well!

And if his teams are 94-53 during the regular season yet only 3-7 in the playoffs? Lesser men used this against him, claimed it showed he could not win under pressure. They did not understand his vision! They could never understand his vision because these lesser men were short or were ethnically surnamed or were women. Dennis Green did not care if his teams lost in the playoffs; he cared only for his vision and would pursue it despite what was said by sniveling naysayers. Let them arrest him and put him on trial—he would welcome it, welcome the chance to defend himself for all the world! At his trial he would be surrounded by masculine, rippling, striding men. These manly men, who know what they want and will take it from the sniveling, ethnically surnamed doubters of the world, would slowly, purposefully strip off their sweat-soaked garments to reveal their rippling masculinity and bulging, throbbing masculine powers. Bulging and throbbing, these masculine men would force their ...

Note to copydesk: Ayn kinda wanders here into 10,000 words on the sexual prowess of NFL players. There's a readership for this, of course. But could we get her to condense?

Programming Malfunction of the Week: Local CBS and Fox affiliates get to choose which games they show in the 1 p.m. Sunday slot, and many distinguish themselves for a dartboard approach. Of 1 p.m. Sunday Fox-carried games this weekend, the obvious top-billing matchup was 10-3 Miami hosting 8-5 Tampa Bay. So what did Fox affiliate WTTG in the Washington, D.C., area show? Philadelphia at cover-your-eyes 3-11 Cleveland, one of the worst pairings of the year. No amount of clicking of the remote or the cable converter box caused this football bouff to disappear and a real game to take its place. By the middle of the fourth, crowd shots revealed that most Browns faithful had left. But though paying customers in Cleveland didn't want to watch, WTTG assumed the Washington, D.C., area would be riveted to this drama and did not switch to the final moments of the down-to-the-wire Tampa-Miami contest.

The week before, CBS affiliate WUSA of the Washington, D.C., area had a 1 p.m. Sunday choice of any of these four playoff-important matchups of winning teams: Broncos at Saints, Raiders at Steelers, Miami at Bills, or Flaming Thumbtacks at Eagles. It chose to show—nothing.

Has your local affiliate inexplicably aired a woofier while a good game went unshown or aired a Tony Robbins infomercial instead of any game? Submit your complaint via "The Fray" slugging your entry "Local Affiliate Outrage." (Note to viewers in the Cincinnati, Phoenix, and San Diego SMSAs: Airing of games involving your teams does not qualify as a programming outrage though the games themselves may qualify as outrages.)

Harmonic Home-and-Home: The Steelers went to Giants Stadium in the Meadowlands twice this year, to play Jersey/A and Jersey/B. They split the two appearances while scoring 30 points and surrendering 33.

Provisional Quasi-Coach of the Week: For his first practice as momentary short-term interim provisional quasi-coach of the Persons, Terry Robiskie took the field wearing a heavy parka, heavy gloves, and balaclava—though the temperature was 42 F. Thus Robiskie managed to violate the TMQ sideline law, Ridiculous K2 Survival Gear ? Victory, before he had even

stepped onto the sideline! The football gods chortled and showed their displeasure as the Persons were pasted, 32-13, by woeful Dallas with the Cowboys playing their third-string QB. At a press conference after the humiliation, the extremely overpaid Deion Sanders demonstrated deep, abiding respect for his new quasi-coach by repeatedly pronouncing his name "Robinsky."

Great Moments in Management: Moment No. 1. Owner/Twerp Daniel Snyder has fired 80 people since taking control of the Persons. And look how well it's working! Team expenses are the highest in NFL history; performance has steadily declined; fans are livid; numerous extremely overpaid gentlemen barely bothered to go through the motions in the debacle at Dallas. What a leader of men Owner/Twerp Snyder is proving to be! Redeeming virtue: one step closer to inevitable Snyder public meltdown. (For a totally unconvincing defense of Snyder, [click here.](#))

Moment No. 2. After RB Chris Warren played a horrible game in the Dallas defeat by Tampa Bay—he dropped passes, refused to block, and threw a tantrum in the locker room—coach Dave Campo wanted to cut him. Instead, Owner/President/General Manager (actual title) Jerry Jones told Warren that as punishment, he had to sign a long-term contract. When Warren refused, he was waived. As punishment for harming the team, we're offering you a long-term contract. These are the sorts of canny management moves that get a club to 5-9. Then again, being with the Cowboys next year might constitute punishment.

Bruce Smith's Revenge: As they have many times this season, Buffalo outplayed an opponent in yardage, this time holding the third-ranked Colts offense to 237 yards at home, yet still lost. Oh ye of little faith in the football gods: It has been decreed that the Bills must suffer this season as punishment for the way they treated Bruce Smith and Thurman Thomas. Instrument of the celestial retribution? Since the moment in November when Buffalo was 7-4 and star LB Sam Cowart was injured, the team has been outscored 101-36.

Ecological Horror of the Week: While attention has been directed to—what's that Florida controversy again?—biologists in the Sunshine State have been struggling to contain the inadvertently transplanted Asian swamp eel, which is spreading because it has no predators, is resistant to poison, and can reproduce under many conditions owing to the ability of individual swamp eels spontaneously to change gender.

Spontaneous gender change? Ye gods! What if the thing attacks New York City?

The Dumbbells of History: As the Florida Supreme Court was preparing its decision last week, commentators endlessly noted, "The weight of history is on their shoulders." This caused TMQ to wonder, how much exactly does history weigh? (Just Western history? All recorded? Back to cave paintings?) At the gym, I found I could bench-press about 50 years, the weight of the postwar era. But you should see some of these NFL offensive linemen. They can bench the entire Enlightenment and squat-press the Pax Romana.

Haiku Corner: Staff and reader verse, the Doug Lach composition referring to Carolina's victory over the Rams:

He drops back and looks  
 Counts in his head, "One, two, three ..."  
 Then gacccckkkkkkkkkkk! Sees but turf.  
 —TMQ, 2000

Warner's transducers  
 Can't defeat the power of  
 The Nedney Unit.  
 —Doug Lach

Randy Moss, feet down  
 In bounds. Another touchdown!  
 Defender shakes head.  
 —Dean Carlson

Keep submitting your verse via The Fray slugging your entry, "Football Poetry."

Stunt of the Week: On its opening possession, Cleveland used three different players at quarterback.

Hidden Indicator of the Week: This weekend there were no mysterious underlying statistical trends. The best explanation Tuesday Morning Quarterback can propose is that all mysterious statistics have been sucked to Florida.

### **Running Items Department**

Obscure College Playoff Scores: Georgia Southern 27, Delaware 18 (Division I-AA semifinal). (Georgia Southern now 33-6 all-time in I-AA playoffs.) Delta State 63, Bloomsburg 34 (Division II championship). Mount Union 70, Widener 30 (Division III semifinal).

Obscure High-School Feat of the Year: Tyler Ebell of Ventura High in Ventura, Calif., ran for 4,220 yards this season, double Eric Dickerson's all-time NFL season mark of 2,105 yards. Ebell averaged 325 yards rushing per game.

Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment: Suspended out of respect for Dolores Hupplefinger of Vero Beach, Fla., the very first person to say on Nov. 7, "Now how am I supposed to use this thing?"

New York Times Final-Score Score: Once again the Paper of Record goes 0-15 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, bringing the New York Times Final-Score Score to 0-218 for the season. Undeterred by total inability to forecast scores, the Times has recently taken to predicting exact individual player statistics. Before the Giants-Cardinals game, the paper divined that Kerry Collins would throw three TD passes and Michael Strahan would record two sacks. Actual: one Collins TD, zero Strahan sacks. This week the Times predicted two sacks for Bears LB Brian Urlacher. Actual: zero Urlacher sacks. Meanwhile reader Brad Hammill's generic final score—Home Team 20, Visiting Team 14—also whiffs, falling to 0-132 since its inception.

TMQ Trivia Challenge: As the election remains in perpetual sudden death, thoughts turned to overtime, resulting in last week's trivia question, which was:

TMQ once proposed that 2-0 in overtime would be the ultimate football score. Sadly, this seems improbable in the NCAA overtime format: The team with the ball would have to suffer a 75-yard loss. But though there's never been a 2-0 overtime professional game, there was one contest in NFL annals decided by a safety in sudden death. Give the game date, the combatants, the final score—and name the gentleman who recorded the winning deuce.

Several readers correctly identified the game: Vikings 23, Bears 21, Nov. 5, 1989. Several pointed out that this contest was a trivia gold mine: Kicker Rich Karlis accounted for all of the Vikes' regulation scoring with seven field goals, meaning Minnesota rang up 23 points without recording a touchdown.

But the question of who got the winning deuce proved frustrating to readers. Some suggested "no one" was the answer as it was a punt snapped out of the end zone and thus went on the scorer's sheet as a team safety. Matthew Hall of Morristown, N.J., that resplendent football state (combined team records: 19-9), wins this challenge for correctly noting that the safety was notched by LB Mike Merriweather, who blocked the punt out of the end zone. Contemporaneous accounts supplied by Über-trivia-meister Mark Longbrake relate that after Merriweather made the block, then fumbled the ball across the back line trying to recover it for a touchdown, he threw his helmet in anger because he thought he'd blown his chance to end the game, forgetting that a kick blocked out of the end zone is a safety.

Two left-over points about safeties:

- 1) Though there's never been a 2-0 overtime game (we can only dream), there was one NFL contest in which the sole points were a safety: Green Bay 2, Chicago 0, Oct. 16, 1932.
- 2) TMQ has aesthetic objections to the form by which scorekeepers record safeties. When Bruce Smith sacked Trent Green for two earlier this year, the line score read, T. GREEN TACKLED BY B. SMITH IN END ZONE. Why "in end zone?" Where else can you get a safety? Line scores for touchdowns don't read, GEORGE 5 RUN INTO END ZONE. And why do safety line scores say who was tackled? Somebody gets knocked down, blown past, or otherwise outdone on every six, and the name of the embarrassed player is not in the line score: It doesn't say, MOSS BEATS LYGHT FOR 32 PASS FROM CULPEPPER. Line scores for deuces should be lean and simply say, B. SMITH TACKLE.

Here is this week's Trivia Challenge:

Warren Moon is the NFL's all-time leader for recovered fumbles, having fallen on a loose rock 55 times. Unfortunately, they were all his own mistakes: Moon is also the league's all-time leading fumbler, having dropped the rock 160 times. It seems 105 of them got away.

Of the following, which is not an actual record for NFL futility:

Most consecutive games lost, Tampa Bay, 26.

Most consecutive home games lost, Dallas, 14.

Fewest yards gained in a game: -7, Seattle.

Most interceptions in a season: 42, George Blanda, Houston.

Most sacks allowed in a season, Philadelphia, 104.

Most fumbles in a game, 10, San Francisco.

Submit your entries via The Fray titling them "Trivia Answer." And remember to include your e-mail address in the event the Florida State Legislature and Florida Supreme Court issue split decisions on whether you have won.

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

Article URL: <http://www.slate.com/id/95000/>

## **Death to the Local Affiliates!**

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Dec. 19, 2000, at 7:00 PM ET

The playoffs are coming, and here's one good thing about that: Since all NFL playoff games are shown nationally, local affiliates can't screw up the coverage.

Last week's Tuesday Morning Quarterback item on local affiliate screw-ups drew so much reader response only a charity auction of a night handcuffed to Jennifer Lopez would have done better. Fans around the country, it seems, are unanimous in hating their local affiliates.

The problem is that local affiliates have a gift for avoiding the hot matchups and airing clunker games. TMQ lives near Washington, D.C. This Sunday the 4 p.m. CBS doubleheader obvious choice was Indianapolis at Miami, a playoff atmosphere game pitting two winning teams fighting for their division crown. What did the nation's capital see? Ravens at the 3-12 Cardinals, one of the worst pairings of the season.

But don't take my word for it. Reader Abbey Castle of Portland protests that in November, rather than show the top-notch Chiefs-at-Raiders pairing, CBS affiliate KOIN aired the 2-7 Seahawks at the winless Chargers. James Kogutkiewicz writes that "Milwaukee Fox affiliate WITI has perfected the dismal art of broadcasting stomach-churning games between schlubs while highly anticipated pairings of Super Bowl contenders go unaired." Shannon Deible is so mad about a 1999 screw-up as to be still steaming: The Fox affiliate for Seattle scheduled Dallas at the Chesapeake Watershed Region Indigenous Persons, which turned out to be a fabulous 41-35 game won on a 76-yard pass in OT. But when kickoff time rolled around, Seattle viewers saw: Crocodile Dundee II. "Thamus" notes the CBS affiliate in Cincinnati endlessly shows naught but the Bengals and Browns. Sometimes Bengals and Browns games air back-to-back, leading Thamus to philosophize, "AAAAAAAAAAAAHHHHHHH!"

George Merkle protests that in San Antonio, where few think fondly of Dallas, affiliates insist on airing every Cowboys game, despite the 5-10 Dallas record. Recently San Antonio got a Boys tilt instead of the sparkling Rams-Vikings pairing, and the only time the network broke in to show a play from the latter, what it showed was a field goal. Doug Kornreich decries that Savannah, Ga., gets every awful Falcons game rather than the contending teams. Lee Davis of Atlanta boasts his relief that because Falcons tickets don't sell, the home team is blacked out locally, and Atlanta itself gets to see real games while Savannah suffers. Reader "Marked" notes that a week ago, rather than show the important (and Pennsylvania-relevant) Pittsburgh-at-Giants matchup, Philadelphia's Fox affiliate aired: An infomercial for Web TV. That is, a program urging you to escape from the clutches of the very organization afflicting the program on you.

What's going on here? Each week, local affiliates of CBS and Fox pick the game they will air at 1 p.m. Sunday. Fox and CBS alternate games in the 4 p.m. doubleheader slot, and so every other week a local affiliate gets to make a 4 p.m. choice.

Affiliates always show games involving teams from their city. This makes marketing sense even when the home team is a loser, while for winning home teams, ratings are fabulous. During the

week of the ER season premiere, top local ratings in more than a dozen major cities were drawn by home team NFL broadcasts.

But the system breaks down when there is no home team contest to show and local affiliates must pick. You'd think they would look at the standings and select the top pairing. You'd think wrong. Enigmatically, local affiliates often choose matchups that seem "regional" or involve the division of the home team, regardless of whether the game is any damn good. Los Angeles sees the woeful Chargers rather than national pairings of winners. Washington, D.C., sees the inexcusable Cardinals. New York City, the nation's largest TV market and sporting two local teams to confuse programmers, consistently gets the worst nonlocal selection in the country. Because the Jets and Giants both play on most Sundays, often all other action is either blanked out or screwed up. A week ago, "RJT" notes from New York, in the 1 p.m. Sunday slot the Fox affiliate skipped several attractive games to show Turbo: A Power Rangers Movie.

Thus the NFL goes to considerable lengths to establish exciting, winning teams, then denies much of the country the chance to watch them on Sunday. The solution is NFL Sunday Ticket, which for \$159 annually allows viewers to pick anything on the card. Many, many Americans would gladly fork over this sum to be set free from the tyranny of the dart-throwing monkeys who run local affiliate programming.

The catch is that NFL Sunday Ticket is available only using DirecTV, the satellite service that millions can't get. TMQ would dearly love to install DirecTV: He could even bill it to Microsoft! But lovely greenhouse-gas-absorbing trees block his home's view of the southwestern sky, where DBS1, the DirecTV satellite, hangs. Other satellite reception barriers afflict other potential customers. Infuriatingly, the NFL runs advertising for Sunday Ticket during regular broadcasts—using networks to promote what networks cannot carry. At least this assures us the Old Economy media will sell the New Economy media the rope from which they will be hanged.

NFL Sunday Ticket is confined to DirecTV because the league signed an exclusive contract with the satellite company in the distant past (1994) when many analysts thought satellites would long be the sole medium for specialized programming. There were also nutty politics behind the deal. Early in the 1990s, Congress thought that it would be horrible if cable offered pay-per-view sports; charges for specific programming were then somehow viewed as un-American. The NFL assured lawmakers it would not sell games via cable, only via satellite. But now we've all switched to thinking there is nothing better for the economy than paying for content that used to be free: Subscription radio is even coming. No one would object if NFL Sunday Ticket were offered by cable today.

The exclusive deal with DirecTV expires after the 2002 season, at which point NFL Sunday Ticket will flood the market on all carriers and all wavelengths: It'll probably come into your car, if not be projected onto your sunglasses. Until then we remain at the mercy of football-illiterate local affiliates.

**Best Plays of the Week: Best No. 1.** A week ago Warrick Dunn saved Tampa Bay's bacon when he spun out of a tackle in the end zone, avoiding a closing-seconds safety. Last night Dunn once again made the play of the week. Bucs trailing Rams 35-31 with 1:49 remaining and the ball on

the Tampa 35, Dunn took a pitch and was hemmed in for what seemed like a killer loss. Again showing presence of mind, Dunn lateraled the ball back to QB Shaun King, whose 15-yard run combined with a roughing penalty against the visitors moved Tampa into position for its last-second win. This 5-foot-8-inch gentleman Dunn knows what he's doing.

Best No. 2. Indianapolis lined up in a four-wide formation on the Marine Mammals 4. Colts RB Edgerrin James went in motion left, resulting in an empty backfield, which normally ensures pass. But Miami MLB Zach Thomas pulled out to follow James, leaving five Colt OLs across from four Dolphin DLs. QB Peyton Manning ran behind this mismatch for an easy six. Coaches often forget that spread-the-field formations leave the defensive center soft for QB runs.

Best No. 3. Green Bay faced third and goal on the Minnesota 5. Brett Favre pump-faked to the right flat and then lobbed over the middle to an open Ahman Green for six. The guy in the right flat was open, too! It's nice to see the old Favre again, even if the old Favre only shows up once a month now.

Best No. 4. In snow and swirling wind that had already closed the Buffalo airport, New England threw for a meager 44 yards during the first 59:29 of play. But in the final 31 seconds of regulation plus overtime, the P-Men were unstoppable, tossing for 112 yards and pulling out an improbable win. What happened? Field conditions had deteriorated so much that DBs couldn't keep their footing, so the Pats began to run short crossing routes on every play; Buffalo DBs fell down trying to hold assignments as the receivers crossed. The Bills made no adjustments to this adjustment: He who adjusts jogs up the tunnel victorious. Lack of redeeming virtue: The wondrous Doug Flutie, playing his final game in Buffalo for salary cap reasons and perhaps his second-last game for age reasons, was denied a storybook finish in the snow as the Bills fumbled twice at the New England goal line and botched a short FG in OT.

Worst Plays of the Week: Worst No. 1. Trailing 17-7 with six minutes left and facing fourth and one at the Kansas City 48, the Broncos had do-or-die but also one of the league's best power running games. Did they power-rush? Play-fake and go for the home run? No, it's a shaggy-looking 2-yard slant in, incomplete, game over.

Worst No. 2. With Dallas leading Jersey/A 13-0 in the third, G-Man Pete Mitchell caught a short pass, appeared to fumble, then fell on the ball; officials ruled him down before the fumble. Cowboys coach Dave Campo challenged the ruling of no fumble. But the Giants had recovered anyway, meaning they would get the ball in exactly the same place regardless of whether the call was upheld or overturned. The pointless challenge cost the Cowboys a timeout much needed in the endgame of a contest they ultimately lost 17-13.

Stats of the Week: Stat No. 1. Randy Moss and Daunte Culpepper make amazing plays, but the Vikings have allowed 73 points in the last two games.

Stat No. 2. The Bears had more punts (nine) than first downs (eight).

Stat No. 3. The Browns had more penalties (seven) than first downs (six).

Stat No. 4. New England and Buffalo have played three straight overtime games. Finals: 13-10, 16-13, 13-10.

Stat No. 5. The Panthers ran up 30 points despite just 169 yards of offense. They gave up more sack yardage (22) than they gained rushing (11 yards on 15 attempts).

Bane of Resplendent Jersey: Detroit is 4-3 at home but 2-0 at the Meadowlands, having beaten both Jersey/A and Jersey/B there this season.

Three Rivers Stadium Farewell: Thirty years, four championships, only one home losing season. Wow. The concrete chunks will be consecrated rubble.

Jerry Rice Nonfarewell: It looks like Rice has played his final home game for San Francisco, which faces yet another crash on the salary cap. Rice appears determined to show 'em by slogging through one extra year with another team; this would be a mistake. Part of the mystique of the great player is to spend his entire career in the same colors, enduring the good and the bad without ever leaving town because something didn't go exactly his way, the memory of his greatness belonging to one city alone. That is why Dan Marino was so, so right to walk off as exclusively a Dolphin though he could have slogged through in one more season as a Viking. That's why other stars such as Jim Kelly, Anthony Munoz, Phil Simms, and Mike Singletary were so, so right to wave farewell as one-team players though they could have caught on somewhere for a final year.

Pause for a moment to contemplate Rice's achievements. He not only leads the NFL in multiple career categories; what's amazing is the percentage by which he leads. Rice has 20 percent more receptions than the next closest player, Cris Carter; 32 percent more receiving yardage than the next closest player, James Lofton; 34 percent more 100-yard receiving games than the next closest player, Don Maynard; a stunning 44 percent more receiving touchdowns than the next closest player, Carter. In most all-time categories in sports, the leader is slightly above the next player. Rice has practically lapped the field.

What a shame it would be to watch Rice spend a listless, superfluous season shagging down-and-outs for the Panthers or Eagles when he could walk away with his name inexorably synonymous with two words: "Wow" and "Niners." Canton-class receivers Lofton, Art Monk, and Andre Reed tried to prolong their careers with one extra season catching dump passes for strange teams, dreaming they were still 24 years old with the glory still ahead of them. Each looked pitiable at the last. Reed is the most recent example. In his final home game of the 1999 season, Reed became No. 2 all-time in receptions: Rather than wave farewell to thundering cheers as a one-team great, he cursed his own club for telling him the truth, that his moment had run its course, and has spent the 2000 season in embarrassment as a third-string nobody for a strange team. Can you even name the team Reed is on right now? Rice should not go out this way. He has records, three Super Bowl rings, the love of fans and purists alike. No football career has come closer to perfection. But the sun also sets.

Touch Football Script: After the item on the 15-play "script" sequence of calls used by offenses such as Denver and San Francisco, several readers wrote in asking for a script they could use in

the football that applies to their lives, namely touch football. Here, as a public service, is a touch script:

- 1) Any crossing pattern.
- 2) Everybody run a quick out.
- 3) Everybody go deep.
- 4) Any crossing pattern.
- 5) Everybody buttonhook.
- 6) You run a pump and go; everybody else do something on the other side.
- 7) Reverse pass by a WR back to the QB. (Technical note: In touch football, all players are WRs.)
- 8) Any crossing pattern.
- 9) You go deep, and I'll deliberately underthrow it.
- 10) Hook-and-ladder left.
- 11) Quick snap as soon as we get to the line.
- 12) Any crossing pattern.
- 13) Act like you're mad because you're not going to get the ball, then I'll hit you.
- 14) Direct snap to anyone.
- 15) Quarterback draw on three Mississippi.

Repeat as necessary. Stop as necessary to drink microbrewed strawberry-blond winter-wheat-based spiced dark pale holiday ale.

Great Moments in Coaching: A week ago Chicago enjoyed a rare victory, quarterback Shane Matthews throwing a Bears-record 15 straight completions. As his reward he was benched for Cade McNown, who lost Sunday's game while completing nine in total. McNown is 1-8 as a Bears starter, the benched Matthews 2-2. Chicago coach Dick Jauron has changed starting quarterbacks nine times in the past two seasons. And look how well it's working! The Bears are 10-21 during that span.

Great Moments in Management: Moment No. 1. After the Seattle Seahawks won the AFC West last year, Executive Vice President of Football Operations/General Manager and Head Coach (actual title) Mike Holmgren pronounced himself dissatisfied with merely winning the division and declared he would clean house by waiving DT Sam Adams and unloading RB Ahman Green. This season Seattle is 6-9 and was eliminated by Thanksgiving. Adams signed with Baltimore, which became the NFL's No. 1 defense while the Seattle defense plummeted to No. 31, worst in the league. Last week, Adams made the Pro Bowl. Green, shipped to the Packers for a low draft pick, has run for 1,101 yards, including 161 on Sunday.

Moment No. 2. Since Owner/Megalomaniac Dan Snyder's canny firing of head coach Norv Turner with three weeks remaining and the team having a winning record, the Persons have been outscored 56-16 and eliminated from the playoffs. Proximate cause of the firing was the Owner/Megalomaniac's demand that Jeff George start at QB: George has now lost both Snyder-mandated starts, throwing one touchdown versus three INTs. On the day of the Turner firing, Snyder announced to the press that players greeted his decision with a standing ovation. Actually, players later said, there had been stony silence. How exactly did this guy fake his way

through the business world? Redeeming Snyder virtue: By comparison, he makes partner Mort Zuckerman seem stable and emotionally well-developed.

Haiku Corner: Here are reader haiku, the first two on Monday Night Football:

It's not improving.  
Dennis, Eric, Melissa,  
"Miked Up," too. All blah.  
—Kevin Cronin

Why Melissa Stark?  
Why not Robin Roberts? Or,  
Hey, Cokie Roberts!  
—Jenna McKenna

Concussion number  
Nine has shaken Aikman's mind  
White-faced and sidelined.  
—Anonymous

Woodson chops Watters  
Wet field like a slip-and-slide  
Raiders screwed big time.  
—Liam Petrescu

TMQ watches  
All games, claims, "But I have to."  
Curses! Wife outfoxed.  
—Nan Kennelly

That last is from TMQ's actual wife, the very trim and very red-headed Nan Kennelly, who has been foiled this fall on requests for Sunday afternoon chores, family outings, etc., because the column gives me a professional obligation to watch the NFL. Why didn't I think of this years ago? Outfoxed, Nan has taken to grumbling that she could have an affair on Sunday afternoons and I would not notice. To which TMQ replies: affair on Sunday afternoons during NFL season? Not with any real man.

Keep submitting verse via "The Fray" titling entries "Football Poetry."

Why Melissa? Jenna McKenna's haiku asks why MNF viewers see the very blond Melissa Stark as the MNF sideline reporter. Few figures, as it were, have caused more NFL chat this year.

When Don Ohlmeyer took over MNF, with so far as anyone could tell the objective of driving ratings down to their lowest ever (that's what has happened), he unceremoniously booted 46-year-old sideline reporter Leslie Visser and replaced her with 26-year-old Stark. Even the barroom demographic was dismayed, for though Visser is a senior citizen by network standards

for women, her work is well-regarded among s. Rumors swirled that Stark had been hired because she had two talents, if you catch my drift.

Instead it's turned out that: 1) Stark is not an airhead, her sideline reports are fine if run-of-the-mill, and 2) she is also not a bimbo—cute but hardly a bombshell. So if we weren't going to get a sex goddess, why can't we have Visser back? TMQ has received dozens of e-mails from fans convinced ABC is using "body shots" of Stark to emphasize her figure, opening the shot low as if the cameraman were kneeling in an erotic position, then slowing panning upward. TMQ has watched carefully for evidence of "body shots" of Stark and can report: They are being used, but they ain't workin'.

On the looks and bod scale, MNF's other new sideline reporter, Eric Dickerson, has more going than Stark. This surely Q-scores well with female viewers and certain XY individuals. But given that MNF's straight male viewers must still at least slightly outnumber its gay male audience, shouldn't the aesthetic emphasis be on the babes, not the studs?

Which brings us to Robin Roberts, formerly an ESPN football commando and now vanished into hosting Wide World of Sports. Jenna McKenna is wise to speak well of her. Roberts is nonyoung, unexceptional in appearance, and hands-down one of TV's best sportscasters. TMQ and about 48 million guys in barrooms would vote for Roberts any day.

Ridiculous K2 Survival Gear ? Victory: For the Flaming Thumbtacks at Browns (Release 2.0) game, played in snow, Cleveland coach Chris Palmer came out in a heavy parka, mega-gloves, a ski mask, and a fur-collar hood so tightly cinched his eyes were barely visible. Palmer looked like he was preparing to go EVA to fix the Jupiter ship antenna in 2001: A Space Odyssey. Tennessee coach Jeff Fisher wore a turtleneck sweater, a medium-weight jacket, no gloves, and nothing on his head. TMQ doesn't have to tell you who won.

All-Undrafted All-Pros: Last week this column featured its All-Waivers All-Pros. Now that the official Pro Bowl roster is out, TMQ adds an All-Undrafted component. Among the 84 players selected are eight who were never drafted and had to talk their way into tryouts: Darren Bennett (San Diego), Jeff Garcia (San Francisco), Larry Izzo (Miami), Chad Lewis (Philadelphia), Keith Mitchell (New Orleans), Scott Player (Arizona), Rod Smith (Denver), and Kurt Warner (St. Louis). Congratulations to these undaunted gentlemen.

Big Week for Harvard Except ... Harvard grad Matt Birk made the Pro Bowl for Minnesota while Crimson alum Isaiah Kacyvenski intercepted a pass for Seattle. Harvard did much better in the NFL than the Supreme Court.

Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! Leading 24-14 late in the third, Tampa had the Rams facing third and nine, down and distance favoring the defense. It's a blitz! Specifically an actual zone blitz (meaning a DL drops into coverage in the area the blitzer came from), not the "zone blitz!" announcers have begun to cry out whenever they see anyone rush the QB. In this actual zone blitz, 285-pound Bucs DE Chidi Ahanotu ended up covering Marshall Faulk, the league's leading TD scorer, deep to the end zone. Ahanotu almost stayed with him! Only almost. A 27-yard Faulk touchdown catch pulled St. Louis back into the game.

Hidden Indicator of the Week: On Sunday there were six late or overtime field-goal attempts to win or tie. Eerie symmetry: Two were good, two were bad, and two were blocked. This is the kind of hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's understanding of the sport. Unfortunately, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has no idea what it means.

### **Running Items Department**

Obscure College Playoff Scores: Georgia Southern 27, Montana 25 (Division I-AA championship). Mount Union 10, St. John's of Minnesota 7 (Amos Alonzo Stagg Bowl, Division III championship).

Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment: Suspended out of respect for Al Gore, visiting associate lecturer in public affairs, Towson State University.

But with yet another fabulous game last night, MNF is having its best season ever in terms of football and its worst season ever in terms of ratings. This can't possibly be in any way whatsoever related to Miller, can it? Last night as Warrick Dunn ran into the end zone, Miller said, "That's a classic move by Marshall Faulk." Al Michaels quickly covered for him.

New York Times Final-Score Score: Once again the Paper of Record goes 0-15 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, bringing the New York Times Final-Score Score to 0-233 for the season. Reader Brad Hammill's generic final score—Home Team 20, Visiting Team 14—also whiffs, bringing this item to 0-148 since inception.

Reader Animadversions: Vigilant readers caught spelling the WR as "Chris" Carter and calling the Flaming Thumbtacks FB "Leon" Neal. One decorously protested in haiku:

TMQ misnames.  
Carter's Cris should be h-less  
Neal is Lorenzo.  
—"Teminence"

TMQ Trivia Challenge: Last week's question:

Of the following, which is not an actual record for NFL futility:

Most consecutive games lost, Tampa Bay, 26.  
Most consecutive home games lost, Dallas, 14.  
Fewest yards gained in a game, -7, Seattle.  
Most interceptions in a season, 42, George Blanda, Houston.  
Most sacks allowed in a season, Philadelphia, 104.  
Most fumbles in a game, 10, San Francisco.

Many entrants refused to believe that Seattle had spent an entire game going exclusively backward or that the Eagles had surrendered 104 sacks, six and a half per game! True, too true.

Many refused to believe Blanda once threw 42 INTs. Too true, and he did it in a 14-game season, averaging three picks per game. This season's most-picked gentleman, Vinny Testaverde, has 22 INTs through 15 games, an average of 1.5 per game.

Turns out every futility stat is true, too true. Jamie DeVriend of Tampa, Fla., wins by realizing it was a trick question. Now this week's Challenge:

Controversy surrounds the Pro Bowl fullback selection, which often goes not to true fullbacks such as Howard Griffith of Denver but to RBs or H-backs. This year the NFC "fullback" is Mike Alstott of Tampa Bay, strictly a runner in the Bucs offense and a notoriously mediocre blocker. The AFC "fullback" is Richie Anderson of the Jets, who plays almost exclusively as a motion receiver.

But sometimes the slot goes to real FBs whose role is to lead-block where others follow. Once there was a Pro Bowl fullback selected exclusively for blocking: He made it to Hawaii despite not having a single carry during the season. Name this gentleman.

Submit your answers via The Fray slugging them "Trivia Answer." And remember to include your e-mail in case the Supreme Court orders TMQ to stop reading entries and declare you the winner.

P.S.: Tuesday Morning Quarterback will appear on Wednesday morning next week.

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## **The Rabble Demand More Playoff Games!**

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Wednesday, Dec. 27, 2000, at 7:00 PM ET

At last the playoff games begin—and you'd better not blink because there aren't many.

For all the of millions of dollars and billions of words that surround an NFL season—and despite the fact that measured by TV ratings or poll numbers, pro football is by a huge margin America's most popular sport—the league offers a mere 11 postseason games. Playoff contests are inherently far more interesting than the regular season, as well as extremely popular with TV audiences. But there are only 11, count 'em and weep, and just one in prime time: four wild card games this weekend, four divisional round pairings next weekend, two championship games, and the Super Bowl. During the regular season, the airwaves are flooded with meaningless NFL games between crummy teams with losing records. Yet when the playoffs arrive and every game is an attractive, important matchup of winners, suddenly we're on rationing.

The percentage of postseason games in football is notably lower than in other sports. There are 259 annual NFL contests, leaving the 11 postseason matchups at 4 percent of all games. Last year the NBA had 1,264 games of which 75 were playoff pairings, or a 6 percent total. The NHL seems to play its entire regular season just to eliminate the cellar team from each division: Last year the hockey league staged 881 games of which 83 were postseason, a 9 percent fraction. (Major league baseball, it's true, has a relatively low fraction of playoff games, but this is only because the regular-season game total is astronomical.) Hockey and basketball teams with modest or even losing records routinely make the playoffs, but this year four NFL clubs that played respectable 9-7 seasons—the Jets, Lions, Packers, and Steelers—were shut out of the postseason. The NFL's paucity of playoff games further means a team may post an excellent season and be denied a home postseason appearance. Last year Buffalo finished 11-5 and had to open on the road. This year Baltimore achieved a sparkling 12-4 record yet didn't even get a bye and is assured of just one January home game.

Of course football games take longer to prepare for and arrange than contests in other sports. Traditionalists like the fact that each NFL playoff game means so much in part because playoff games are so few, while purists are happy that it's all but statistically impossible for an NFL team with a sub-.500 record to make the postseason. Yet the league could add another playoff weekend, boost interest, sell more seats, and draw more ratings without any dilution in the quality of the tournament. So why hasn't the postseason been expanded? The answer is obvious: The NFL isn't greedy enough!

Postseason tactical note: It's a rule of NFL life that the farther you go into the playoffs, the more important coaching and psychological preparation become. During the regular season, good teams can win with a tossed-together game plan and an average psyche job: At the playoff level every team is good, every detail counts, and if you're not cranked, you might as well stay on the team bus. As the playoffs separate the good coaches from the mere administrators, the men from the individuals who merely have XY chromosome pairs, TMQ will track the game-plan and psyche-up factors.

Postseason math note: Twelve teams enter the playoff tournament, and 11 will finish their year with a loss. Cruel world, eh?

Best Plays of the Week: Best No. 1. On the Panthers one, leading by 10, the Raiders came out in a "jumbo" formation then play-faked to an uncovered Ricky Dudley for the touchdown. RB Tyrone Wheatley ran out his fake so convincingly that three Carolina gentlemen tackled him, one trying to pry out the nonexistent ball.

Best No. 2. With the game tied and 12 seconds in regulation, facing fourth and one on the Detroit 43, Chicago went for it. To the woeful Bears the game meant nothing; the Lions were playing for a postseason appearance, with their home crowd generating military-afterburner levels of noise. Surely the Bears would panic. Instead, Chicago calmly ran the most vanilla of plays, a quick sideline swing to RB James Allen, getting the first and position for kicker Paul Edinger, who hit from 54 on the final play to win it.

Best No. 3. Trailing Jax 10-7 in the fourth and needing a W to secure home-field advantage, Jersey/A faced third and long on the opposition 33. The Jaguars had been blitzing all day with success, and came again. Giants WR Ike Hilliard had been dropping balls all day, but QB Kerry Collins went to him for a spectacular long catch that put the ball in position for the go-ahead touchdown. Going back to a receiver having a bad day is either foolish or inspired; this time it worked. As for Jax, live by the blitz, die by the blitz, eh?

Worst Plays of the Week: Worst No. 1. In a do-or-die road game at Baltimore, Jersey/B held a 14-12 lead and faced second and goal on the Ravens eight with 21 seconds remaining in the half. To that point in the game, Jets QB Vinny Testaverde had thrown 26 times and handed off just 11 times; two of his passes had already resulted in INTs, one with a long return. So what did Jersey/B coaches call? Pass No. 27, a Samuel Morse Special (that is, telegraphed). It was picked off by Chris McAlister and returned 98 yards for the score that swung the game to Baltimore. Live by the pass, die by the pass, eh? Pass Wacky Under Pressure ? Victory.

Worst No. 2. In a do-or-die road game at Baltimore, Jersey/B trailed 27-17 and faced fourth and inches at the Ravens five late in the third. To that point, Testaverde had thrown 43 times and handed off 14 times. He can't possibly pass yet again on such short yardage, can he? Incomplete. Testaverde ended the day throwing 69 times, despite coming into the game as the most-intercepted player in the league. Pass Wacky Under Pressure ? Victory.

Worst No. 3. Score tied in the closing seconds of regulation, Tampa Bay needing a win over Green Bay to take the division title, the Bucs had the ball on the Packers 19, in snow and swirling wind. QB Shaun King knelt to position the ball at the center of the field for the kick—but did so in a way that lost three yards. Martin Gramatica's attempt from 40 barely hooked right but might have been good from 37; the Packers won in OT. Sure it was cold, but Gramatica wore a full-head eye-slit ski mask that made him look like a Jawa from Star Wars. Ridiculous Intergalactic Survival Gear ? Victory.

Stats of the Week: Stat No. 1. There were three touchdowns in the first 57 minutes of the Giants-Jax game and four in the final 187 seconds.

Stat No. 2. Denver had an 87-yard drive on which 66 of the yards resulted from San Francisco penalties.

Stat No. 3. Throwing 20 of 25 for 366 yards, three TDs, and no INTs against the Seahawks, Doug Flutie posted the third game this season that achieved the maximum of 158.3 under the league's cryptic QB rating system. (Kurt Warner and Peyton Manning had the other two 158.3 outings.) Flutie is now 33-14 as a starter for the Bears, Pats, and Bills, giving him the second-best winning percentage of any active QB, trailing only Warner. And still people around the league claim Flutie can't play.

Stat No. 4. Jersey/B lost at Baltimore despite these astounding edges: 542 yards of offense to 142 yards, 22 first downs to 5, 90 total plays to 51. But the Jets also allowed Baltimore an astounding 486 total return yards, including three touchdowns on kick and interception returns.

Stat No. 5. The Vikings get a bye week despite losing their last three straight while surrendering 104 points.

Bartender, Laterals for Everyone! NFL players saw the highlight reels of last week's classy Tampa Dunn-to-King lateral and came into the final week with laterals on the brain. Atlanta lateraled a kickoff return for an extra 30 yards. The Rams lateraled an interception return for a long gain. A Ravens defender so convincingly faked a lateral on an INT runback that it added another 20 yards. And the Bucs themselves converted a two-point try by handing off inside to Warrick Dunn, who reversed to Mike Alstott, who lateraled back to Shaun King.

Mile High Stadium Farewell: Last 30 years: two Super Bowl winners, three other conference championships, 250 consecutive sellouts. Wow. Explain to me again why we're smashing these storied stadiums? Does the executive set need heated skyboxes with waitress service that badly?

Authentic Game Index: TMQ's "combined efficiency" measure crashed as an indicator of who would prevail down the stretch—a post-mortem will appear in next week's column. To divert readers from remembering I proposed a statistical indicator that didn't work particularly well, let me propose another statistical indicator, the Authentic Game Index. Authentic Games are contests between playoff teams and other teams that made the playoffs too. As the postseason begins, this is how the contenders break down based on Authentic Games:

Broncos, 3-1  
 Bucs, 3-1  
 Tennessee, 3-1  
 Rams, 4-2  
 Colts, 2-2  
 Giants, 2-2  
 Raiders, 2-2  
 Miami, 2-3  
 Vikings, 2-3  
 Ravens, 1-2

Eagles, 1-3  
 Saints, 1-4

Note this index shows most teams that reached the playoffs didn't have many pairings against playoff teams, thus inflating their Ws. Only the Dolphins, Saints, and Vikings appeared in five Authentic Games, and the Rams were the sole qualifier playing six. Meanwhile, of those teams stopped at the postseason vestibule with a 9-7 record, all appeared in more games against playoff teams than any club that made the tournament: the Jets, Packers, and Steelers played seven Authentic Games, the Lions eight. At any rate this index predicts good things for the Broncos, Bucs, and Flaming Thumbtacks; despair for the Eagles, Ravens, and Saints.

Olindo, My Lindo: Olindo Mare missed from 28 yards in the fourth as the Marine Mammals almost blew it in New England, then came back to hit the game winner from 49 yards with nine seconds left. This item appears strictly to justify the headline.

ESPN To Call Next Florida Election: Shortly before the season began, ESPN ran no fewer than 15 sets of predictions of winners for the six NFL divisions and six wild-card slots. This was an astonishing exercise in covering every base, as ESPN NFL regulars John Clayton, Greg Garber, Mike Golic, Merrill Hoge, Tom Jackson, Andrea Kremer, Paul Maguire, Mark Malone, Chris Mortensen, Tom Oates, Sean Salisbury, Marty Schottenheimer, Joe Theismann, Solomon Wilcotts, and Pam Ward all made complete forecasts, seeming to guarantee somebody would get it right if only by blind chance. Instead all 15 sets of predictions were wrong. Fifteen people each picking 12 positions offers 180 permutations, and even with this incredible wiggle room, the ESPN meta-forecast whiffed.

If Intellectuals Were Football Columnists: From Karl Marx's column, "The Linebacker Manifesto":

While it may appear that football matches are based on "rules," the underlying structure is economic exploitation. First the reserves and rookies are exploited by veterans, who demand that reserves play on special teams and rookies stand on training tables to sing. In this, the veterans perpetuate destructive social norms by mimicking exploitation they themselves endured. Next, the average, proletarian players are exploited by the stars, who claim for themselves a disproportionate share of the salary cap. Superstars in turn exploit the stars by monopolizing endorsement fees. Everyone exploits the offensive linemen, whose identities are rarely known even to their position coaches. Fans are exploited by media hype to paint their faces and engage in displays of faux-barbarism that rob the working class of dignity. Ticket-buyers are exploited by owners to waste discretionary income on exorbitant concession-stand prices. (Have you tasted the bratwurst at the Vet? I don't recommend it for your life expectancy! And the latte at 3Com Park is all syrup.) Systematic exploitation inevitably drives all players to starvation wages—hmm, I'll have to fudge the \$1 million average salary point—while causing players "voluntarily" to sacrifice their bodies to injuries that doom them to later life as spokesmen for automobile dealerships.

The mythic edifice of football is based on sociological illusions. Fans are manipulated into the belief that home-team victories will provide entertainment (for every happy crowd there is another crowd of angry people ripping up their ticket stubs!) and further lulled into the mytho-poetic deception that a Super Bowl championship will improve civic fortunes of the community. False hopes of collective glory are then methodically dashed. Can it be coincidence that Super Bowl trophies have been monopolized by affluent cities such as Dallas, Denver, San Francisco, and Washington to the exclusion of working-class locations such as Buffalo, Cleveland, and Detroit? (Must fudge the Packers and Steelers somehow; ask Friedrich to work on it.) Dreams of "wait till next year" prevent fans from taking action in the present to alter the conditions that oppress them—or at least to improve draft choices. Football is the microbrew of the masses!

Notice that while the workers (players) are systematically exploited, owners share NFL TV revenues equally among themselves in a socialistic arrangement. For the owners it is, "From each according to his network contract, to each according to his need for private jets and supermodel mistresses!" Why cannot the proletariat join in this arrangement? (Especially, why cannot scruffy writers of manifestos have supermodel mistresses? My need is great!) To revolutionize football, the structure must be smashed in these ways:

- Workers should control the means of production. Therefore players should organize practices, compose game plans using central planning sessions, and change training camp to re-education camp for coaches and owners.
- Passes should be distributed not on the bourgeoisie basis of "who's open" but according to need, with the lower-paid player thrown to first, then the next lowest-paid and so on.
- Workers (players) would stop competing against each other and mutually pledge to concentrate efforts on blitzing and sacking management.
- Intellectuals should call the plays. However, we would be exempt from bourgeois criticism if our calls led to humiliating defeats, mass suffering, etc.
- Referees should be abolished. Players to govern themselves by group consensus.
- All seats priced the same and 50-yard-line positions distributed by lottery. All skyboxes open to the public; anyone may have the Scotch.

Also, in an ideal restructuring, the cheerleaders would want to have sex with the intellectuals.

Linebackers of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but your tape.

TMQ Failed Predictions: Considering the above item on bad ESPN forecasts, it's only fair that Tuesday Morning Quarterback review its own preseason predictions, noting they were plainly labeled as "absolutely guaranteed to be wrong."

TMQ was totally, utterly wrong about the Vikings ("the club has train-wreck potential") and the Giants ("that clucking sound you hear is the chickens coming home to roost"). TMQ was wrongly sanguine about the Seahawks and Panthers, inexplicably forecasting winning years. TMQ was only sorta right about the Saints and Eagles, expecting improvement but not the playoffs, was too pessimistic about Miami and too optimistic about the Colts. TMQ was pretty

much dead-on for every other club: calling every loser; praising Tennessee, Oakland, and Baltimore; warning that Jax was composed of paper Jaguars; foreseeing that the football gods would punish the Bills; and forecasting this about the Chesapeake Watershed Region Indigenous Persons: "Maybe all the money will buy happiness, but let's note about Daniel Snyder what Dorothy Parker once said: 'If you want to know what God thinks of money, just look at the people He gave it to.' "

Haiku Corner: Reader verse:

Miller twists in wind  
Soon cut loose. How many ways  
To say, "Outta here?"  
—David Short

Alstott back early.  
Irrelevant, for Bucs learn  
give Dunn the damn ball.  
—"Kingbad"

TMQ cans script  
Last column had no "ye gods!"  
What next, no haiku?  
—Bob Krasner

Jersey/A in shock.  
Home-field advantage? Oh, for  
God's sake don't blow it.  
—David Short

Nineteen eighty two  
Vikes move into Metrodome  
No Super Bowls since.  
—Matthew Cole

NFC West champs  
Who dat, who dat, who dat say!  
We go one and out.  
—"Realist Saints fan"

Hidden Indicator: Teams playing at home that needed wins for postseason reasons went 4-2, while teams playing on the road that needed wins for postseason reasons went 2-2. This is the kind of hidden indicator that proves—look, you already know it's better to play at home.

## Running Items Department

Obscure College Scores: Check out the Little All-America team from obscure colleges. Best names: Clay Clevenger, Carson-Newman; D.J. Flick, Slippery Rock; Abed Taha, Western Georgia. Best hometown: Kevin Nagle of East Stroudsburg hails from Effort, Pa. This brings Obscure College Scores to a close for the year, since the teams that play from now on are well known. Though there are a few obscure bowls ahead. Gotta love the Humanitarian Bowl, at which teams promote global compassion by hitting each other.

But there's a remaining college point TMQ wants to make: NCAA football has become so money-oriented that most big schools no longer go through the motions of pretending otherwise. When Associate Professor Linda Bensel-Meyers blew the whistle on grade-alterations for University of Tennessee football players last year, the surprise was not that she became a pariah on campus but that she was naive enough to presume grades weren't being altered. Last spring the graduation rate for Division I-A football players sank to 48 percent, the lowest ever. In all NCAA divisions, the only schools that graduated every player were Georgetown, Holy Cross, Lafayette, and Northwestern. And so far as can be seen, big-university regents couldn't care less that their football programs are hoaxes from the academic standpoint.

Collegiate athletic cynicism might be acceptable if it landed players an occupation, but far less than 0.1 percent of NCAA football players ever receive a pro check. Thousands exist on a false dream of NFL careers, encouraged by their college coaching staffs. By the time they wake up, their scholarships are exhausted. Four or five years in college turns out to translate into no diploma and, if they're lucky, a job driving for UPS. No need to add that it is predominantly minority athletes who get shafted in this manner.

Owing to such considerations, many have proposed that pretenses be dropped and college football players simply be paid. TMQ (assisted by TMQ brother Neil, a professor at a Division I-A school) has an alternative solution: a new standard by which, for every one year someone plays or redshirts Division I-A football, he earns another year of scholarship. That way when football eligibility ends and the 22-year-old wakes up to the need to get an education, the chance won't be gone: Four years of real learning will still await.

Some players won't need this option, they will be disciplined enough to perform and study at the same time, getting degrees on schedule. But for the majority of NCAA football players who under the current system never graduate, universities will face a choice. Either pay the cost of keeping ex-players around an extra four years or insist on real education while they play and stop tampering with grades. NCAA schools today have no incentive to educate athletes. The incentive is to take advantage of them, then toss them overboard. Give every I-A player an extra year of full-boat scholarship for every year he plays, and suddenly schools will have an incentive to foster genuine "student athletes."

Most Embarrassing Dennis Miller Moment: Suspended out of respect for Dennis Miller, former MNF farceur. Memo to Disney senior management: Despite Miller's best efforts, MNF still has some ratings left to save. Robin Roberts would look mighty sharp in that booth, and then the show would be about football, not shtick and self-promotion.

New York Times Final-Score Score: The paper of record completes a perfect season, finishing 0-248 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score. Now the pressure is really on, as the playoffs provide a last chance at redemption. Reader Brad Hammill's generic final score—Home Team 20, Visiting Team 14—also whiffs, closing out this item at 0-163 since inception.

Before the season began, the paper of record made a quixotic attempt to predict individual player regular-season performances. Here is a summary of New York Times preseason predictions:

Giants QB Kerry Collins will throw eight interceptions (actual: 13), RB Stephen Davis will carry for 1,800 yards (actual: 1,318), RBs Jamal Anderson and Terrell Davis each will carry for 1,300 yards (actuals: Anderson 1,024, Davis 282), RB Edgerrin James will carry for 1,500 yards (actual: 1,709), Ram RB Trung Canidate will be "one of the defending champion's most valuable players" (actual: six yards rushing). Broncos will win the AFC West (actual: Raiders won it), the Jets will start 0-2 but make the playoffs (actual: Jets started 2-0 and did not make the playoffs), the Panthers will not win their division (correct), the Eagles will make the playoffs (correct), Norv Turner will return to Dallas after the season (undetermined), Giants DE Michael Strahan will record 12 sacks (actual: 9.5), Giants coach Jim Fassel "will get a two-year contract extension after making the playoffs" (actual: made playoffs, no contract news, love that pseudo-precision of predicting exactly how many years the extension would run), Bill Parcells will become head coach of the Dolphins.

Reader Animadversion: Reader Kirill Roschin, an exchange student from Kazakhstan, writes to complain that NFL games "are too long and boring, and most of the time after one game ends, another one starts." Kirill has a point, but if you want to talk long and boring, what about the train from Almaty to Aksu-Dzhabagly, huh? (For rates and availability of guesthouses in Aksu-Dzhabagly—"amazing fresh air is filled with the aroma of blooming grass ... phyto-tea on request"—click here.)

Several protested the statement that NFL Sunday Ticket, which allows the viewer to watch any game, is available only via the mini-dish service DirecTV. Okay, technically you can also get Sunday Ticket using C-band satellite antennas of the type installed at sports bars. A C-band antenna is an enormous radar-sized apparatus that appears designed to watch for starcruisers coming out of hyperspace beyond the outer moons of Saturn. One man per thousand is willing to have a C-band receiver on the house, one woman per million.

Several readers protested the nuance in my statement that San Antonio residents do not feel fondly toward Dallas. They don't, Texans agreed, but they do love the Cowboys, especially San Antonio's Hispanic population. Therefore it makes sense to show Dallas games on San Antonio TV. Speaking of Dallas, its CBS affiliate, KVTU, has an innovative solution to the problem of local affiliate bad choices. KVTU allows viewers to vote via its Web site on which game they'd like to see. Democratizing programming blunders! TMQ strongly approves.

TMQ Trivia Challenge: Last week's question ruminated on the Pro Bowl tendency to take as "fullbacks" players who are really halfbacks:

But sometimes the slot goes to real FBs whose role is to lead-block where others follow. Once there was a Pro Bowl fullback selected exclusively for blocking: He made it to Hawaii despite not having a single carry during the season. Name this gentleman.

Readers suggested such admirable lead-block specialists as Maurice Carthon and Matt Shuey. Some said Daryl "Moose" Johnston, but he ran the ball at least occasionally in each of his Pro Bowl years. Many readers knew the correct answer: Sam Gash, who went to Hawaii for the Bills last year despite not running the ball once and was rewarded for his Pro Bowl effort by being cut in the offseason to save salary cap space. On a completely arbitrary basis, the judges award the challenge to Jason Zimmerman of Brookings, S.D. Reader Topher Connors of Indianapolis added that Gash is "the smallest offensive lineman of the modern era," noting that in 1999, with Gash lead-blocking, the Bills rushing offense ranked eighth, while this year, with the same runners and linemen but no Gash, Buffalo dropped to 17th. Gash is now with Baltimore, whose running game leapt from bottom-quartile in 1999 to fourth in 2000. This season Gash had two carries for two yards.

This week's Trivia Challenge:

Fifteen NFL teams went into the final weekend knowing they were eliminated from the playoffs and their last performance was meaningless. They might as well have forfeited. (Note: For humanitarian reasons, the Cardinals should have started forfeiting in October.) If there ever were an NFL forfeit how, according to league rules, would it appear on the scoreboard?

Submit your answers to "The Fray," titling them "Trivia Answer." And remember to include your e-mail address in the event you win—pending determination by Santa on whether you have been naughty or nice.

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## Forget the Super Bowl, What About the Draft?

By Gregg Easterbrook

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"After sex, all animals are sad." (Post-coitum omne animal tristis est.)  
—Roman saying, second century B.C.

"After the regular season, most fans are sad." (Postseasonum, plerisque NFL fanaticus tristis est.)—TMQ, 2001

It's the playoffs, the whole purpose the NFL exists—the monster contests for which an entire year of maneuvering and hype have prepared us. And already lots of fans are losing interest.

One peculiarity of sports is that the moment the postseason starts, people begin to tune out even though the postseason is the ostensible point of the whole exercise. This happens because most fans are primarily interested in their favorite teams, and the majority of teams are now dark for the year, with more shutting off the lights each weekend. No matter how horribly your favorite team plays during the regular season, there's always next week and the hope of an improved performance. (Technical note: unless you are a fan of the Cardinals.) But once the playoffs start, there is no next week for most teams; the bubble has officially burst. In two weeks we'll be down to the pair of Super Bowl contenders, and though all America and many ships at sea will watch them play, most fans won't care a hoot about the Super Bowl contenders. They'll be wondering about next year for their teams.

Already football sites such as CNN-SI and CBS are running as much offseason speculation as playoff coverage. Already the Sporting News NFL site is prominently promoting draft articles—the draft isn't till April, with the Chargers on the clock—while Sportstalk.com has an entire area devoted to draft speculation, including links to more than 25 mock drafts already running.

Maybe it's modern fast-forward syndrome, but Tuesday Morning Quarterback cannot understand why there is so much focus on what might happen next season when we still haven't figured out what will happen this season. Why should anyone care in January whether the Chargers will take Michael Vick or Deuce McAllister? We can care very, very intensely about such matters later. For now, put away your mock drafts and free agent sheets. Watch the games.

Best Plays of Wildcard Weekend: Best No. 1. Saints coach Jim Haslett letting novice QB Aaron Brooks throw deep despite his lack of playoff experience and an early injury to one of the New Orleans' WRs. Brooks responded with four TD tosses. Journeyman WR Willie Jackson, pressed into service, caught three of them.

Best No. 2. With the score Bucs 3, Eagles 0 and Tampa's ball on its 33 late in the second quarter, on first down Philadelphia coaches called a run blitz—blitzers press the line but do not proceed to the QB. Loss of five. On second down, Philadelphia coaches called a fake run blitz. Loss of four. For third down, see Worst No. 3.

Best No. 3. Jamal Lewis knocking over four Broncos on his game-clinching TD run. Ouch.

**Worst Plays: Worst No. 1.** Trailing New Orleans 17-7 early in the fourth, the Rams had the Saints facing third and long at midfield. It's a blitz! Six gentlemen including a DB cross the line. Brooks threw 49 yards to Jackson for the touchdown that allowed the Saints to pull away.

**Worst No. 2.** Having come back from a 31-7 fourth-quarter deficit to just 31-28 with 2:28 remaining and the Saints quaking in their tape, the Rams onside-kicked rather than kicking away and letting their defense get a stop. Rams coach Mike Martz had so little confidence in his underwhelming defense that he took a 15 percent chance (success rate for expected onsides) rather than put his D on the field for three downs. New Orleans recovered.

**Worst No. 3.** Facing third and 19 on their 24 and leading 3-0 late in the second, Tampa bungled its line call, in which OLs "hand off" blocking assignments to each other. Left tackle Pete Pierson inexplicably turned inward to double-team journeyman DT Hollis Thomas, leaving DE Hugh Douglas, the Eagles' most dangerous rusher, to be blocked by 180-pound RB Warrick Dunn. Sack, fumble, Philadelphia ball. Touchdown three plays later, Eagles take over the game.

**Stats of the Week: Stat No. 1.** Early in the Colts-Mammals game, Jay Fiedler had three completions and three INTs. From that point forward, he was 16 of 23.

**Stat No. 2.** Tampa Bay, plagued all season by conservative offense, attempted just one pass of more than 20 yards until the game was out of hand.

**Stat No. 3.** The first-, second- and third-ranked offenses (Rams, Broncos, Colts) all lost.

**Playoff Coaching Pressure Watch:** This week's example: Colts at Miami. Jim Mora was totally outcoached by Dave Wannstedt. Most consequentially, Wannstedt did not waffle on Fiedler, sticking with him despite the early INTs, never even ordering his backup to throw on the sideline. This sent the message, "We're tough guys, and we tough out our problems," which is exactly what the Dolphins did—outscore Indianapolis 23-3 from the point at which Wannstedt told the offense it was going to be Fiedler, win or lose. Wannstedt also resisted the urge to go pass-wacky with his team behind 14-0 in the third quarter, staying with the running game. Keeping the ball on the ground let the Dolphins keep Peyton Manning off the field and made Manning press when he did get chances. Too many coaches forget the run once behind, simplifying life for the defense. Wannstedt's judgment was vindicated by Lamar Smith's 209-yard day and bull-rush run in OT for the win.

For his part, Mora came south with nothing new in the offensive game plan, just Same Old Same Old, which the Dolphins had already seen twice this season. The Colts defense, which tries to cover its deficiencies by DB-blitzing more than any team in the league, stuck with this tactic though it has consistently backfired, and it backfired Saturday. On nine DB blitzes, the Colts produced just one sack but allowed Miami to convert four first downs, including the pass that put the Marine Mammals into the red zone in overtime, cooking the visitors' goose.

Meanwhile Mora made one of the all-time worst tactical calls. Owing to a Dolphins penalty, he was offered this choice in OT: fourth and two on the Miami 32 or third and seven on the Miami

37. Mora chose fourth down. True, Colts kicker Mike Vanderjagt (isn't that some kind of peppermint-boysenberry-snickerdoodle schnapps?) is long-legged and accurate. But who in his right mind would rather have a 49-yard FG try than a medium-distance third down with a chance to continue the drive? After Vanderjagt honked the attempt, the kicker sat with his head buried in a towel for the remainder of the game, and Mora (now 0-6 postseason) never went over to Vanderjagt to tell him to get his chin up and get himself ready to go back in. Even one player acting like the team is already defeated infects all others. Coaches are supposed to nip that sort of thing in the bud.

Enthusiast of the Week: At the Superdome, a fan came dressed as a devil with icicles on his face. That is: Saints win playoff game, hell freezes over.

Dance of the Week: The Rams' last-minute punt catch blunder deprived viewers of what felt like a buildup to a fabulous finish, but otherwise it sure was nice to see Saints owner Tom Benson do his parasol dance when the gun sounded since in 34 years he had never gotten to dance after a postseason win. The football gods must feel Benson has finally completed his penance for sins in a previous life.

Muff of the Week: When TMQ hears the word muff, his thoughts instantly turn to Jennifer Lopez—just like her dress designer! But what the Rams' Az-Zahir Hakim did to end the St. Louis-New Orleans game was not a fumble, as the announcers declared, but a "muff"—failure to complete a fair catch. The rules difference is that a fumble can be advanced while a muff cannot. This item exists, however, solely to justify the Jennifer Lopez reference.

It's the Bye, Stupid: If your ambitions extend to the Super Bowl, space on the playoff card is not enough: Winning a bye is required. The four bye teams, which get a week off, then open at home, have utterly dominated NFL late-season success since the current playoff format was adopted in 1977. Eighteen of the last 20 Super Bowl contenders have been bye teams while only two clubs that performed on the first weekend while the bye teams rested have ever won the big game—the Raiders in 1980 and the Broncos in 1997. What should we make of this year's bye teams?

Jersey/A: One of the slowest successful teams in recent memory, the Giants dress like a retro '50s club and play like a retro '50s club. But they earned home-field advantage and will stay in the cold, windy Meadowlands for the NFC championship if they win this weekend, and their style of play is suited to harsh weather. Since they've beaten the Eagles eight straight and their following opponent would be either the Vikings or Saints, both dome teams, Jersey/A is sitting on an excellent shot at XXXV. The team's who-dat defense quietly finished fifth—quick, name anyone from the Giants' front seven—while TMQ's Position Coach of the Year is OL meister Jim McNally, who molded a group of low-paid castoffs into one of the league's most effective offensive lines.

Minnesota: The Vikings under Dennis Green have reminded TMQ of the old Nebraska veer-option teams—designed to beat up on lesser foes and compile big victory margins during the regular season, clueless when the postseason comes and the opponents are athletic, too. Yes Randy Moss is supernatural, and Duante Culpepper is both physically gifted and brainy. But this

team finished 28th on defense—Green has never seemed to care much about defense, being interested mainly in having people say "holy cow!" about his offense—and that poor finish came even though the Vikes offense rushed well, keeping opponents' offenses off the field. Green is 3-7 lifetime in the playoffs.

Oakland: "I Was a Teen-age Coach" Jon Gruden (born 1963) has never been in a playoff game, so who knows? The Raiders have talent at every position and one smart cookie in QB Rich Gannon. Despite spending a No. 1 pick on kicker Sebastian Janikowski, the Raiders have still been shaky in this department: Janikowski was just 22 of 32 and remains an accident looking for a place to happen. And the Raiders played a weak schedule, posting only two wins against teams that finished above .500. Detroit had five wins against plus-.500 teams and for its troubles got January off.

Tennessee: The Flaming Thumbtacks have the big four: talent, coaching, focus, and team chemistry. How could the football gods not love this team? The T's wandered in the desert for three years, performing to empty houses in Houston when the move had been announced but the lease wasn't up and to empty houses in Memphis while its Nashville field was being built. Yet the players never complained. Feet-on-the-ground coach Jeff Fisher never panicked about the development of QB Steve McNair or a dozen other young players he has patiently taught how to be stars. And despite the club's success this season, not one loudmouth braggart in the bunch. The T's are the clear favorite of the postseason, and deservedly so. If Tennessee wins the Super Bowl, persistence, hard work, and character—not money or ego—will be rewarded. Wouldn't that be a nice change of pace?

We Also Admire Your Professionalism: Though the kickoff temperature was 57 F, the Dolphins cheerleaders—who rival the Cowboys cheerleaders and the Raiderettes for aesthetic appeal—came out in barely there two-piece numbers. No balaclavas for these babes! TMQ salutes the Miami cheerleaders for giving 110 percent. (To gawk at them, [click here](#).)

Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! The Ravens led 7-0 in the second and had Denver facing third and 15 at midfield. Down and distance favored the defenders. But it's a blitz! Twenty-four-yard completion to the gentleman the blitzing DB would have been covering, bringing the Broncos to life for their first score. Contrapositive proves the rule: Late in the second, Baltimore led 14-3 and had Denver facing third and eight. Regular coverage, Broncos fail to convert. The Ravens didn't DB-blitz again in the game and shut Denver down.

More Rice Resplendent: Jerry Rice may never play in January again. But just as a previous TMQ item detailed the incredible proportions by which this gentleman leads all others in regular season career stats, so too does he lead in playoff numbers. Rice has 38 percent more postseason receiving yards than the next fellow, Michael Irvin; 46 percent more postseason receptions than the No. 2 player, Andre Reed; 58 percent more postseason touchdown catches than the second best, John Stallworth. Wow.

Gorzon Speaks Again!

To: bio-agent KurWar7773, "Kurt Warner."

Form: Gorzon the Inexplicable, First Illuminate of Mithrall.

Bio-agent Warner, I need not tell you how disappointed we are—seven TDs versus 13 INTs since returning from your injury, then leading the Rams to playoff elimination against New Orleans, which had never won in the postseason. Our plans to have you insinuate yourself into human culture as a sports hero are clearly set back. We will have to postpone the invasion of Earth, at least until such time as another of our bio-agents, AlGor8822, reaches a leadership position.

There remains the question of your punishment. Previously, you had been told that if you failed, you would be cast into the boiling ammonia pits of Aldebaran Four. The Illuminates have reconsidered and imposed a much more horrifying retribution. You are to check into a suite at the Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe, where you will be met by bio-agent AnnKor6622, "Anna Kournikova." She will enter the suite not in her true, delightfully sensuous 12-tentacled form but in her repulsive, nauseating human form and immediately disrobe! We condemn you to remain in the resort hotel with a naked Anna Kournikova, looking at her repulsive body and engaging in primitive human mating rites until training camp starts next summer. Frankly, bio-agent Warner, we held a show of tentacles here, and it was unanimous that we'd all prefer a boiling ammonia pit to having to look at Anna Kournikova naked! But such is the price of failure.

Faulk Trade Balance: Marshall Faulk winning the league MVP creates a reason to do the trade balance on the transaction that sent him to the Rams. Indianapolis gave up Faulk before the 1999 draft for what seemed then, and seems now, the shockingly low price of second- and fifth-round picks. But no one outbid St. Louis. For reasons perplexing, general managers then didn't consider Faulk a major asset though he'd already been a Pro Bowl MVP at that point. Indianapolis used the picks to draft LB Mike Peterson (A good player—did you see him cover WR O.J. McDuffie deep on Saturday?) and DE Brad Scioli. With the Rams wearing Super Bowl rings partly owing to Faulk, this makes the transaction appear weak for Indianapolis. But the full trade balance is more complicated.

A few days after dispatching Faulk, the Colts used the fourth pick overall of the 1999 draft to select Edgerrin James—himself an impact player—whom they would not have taken if they'd kept Faulk. Had they kept Faulk, the Colts almost certainly would have traded the pick to New Orleans, where the unhinged Mike Ditka was then offering two high No. 1s and additional choices for the chance to nab Ricky Williams. Suppose Indianapolis had kept Faulk and sent the 1999 fourth overall pick to the Saints for the same package received by the Persons, which traded the 1999 fifth overall pick to Ditka. Instead of James, Peterson, and Scioli, the Colts would have had Faulk, the second selection in the 2000 draft, the 12th pick in the 1999 draft, two No. 3 picks plus four miscellaneous picks, including one they could have used to take Scioli anyway. Based on team needs and who was available when the two high picks came up, the Colts would have taken Jevon Kearse and either Corey Simon or LaVar Arrington and would today have some defense to match their power offense. Instead the Colts exit the playoffs in the first round, their defense unable to hold a 14-point second-half lead against Miami's low-voltage attack.

Combined Efficiency Post-Mortem: TMQ's proprietary combined efficiency indicator crashed down the stretch, predicting the Persons would rebound and the Dolphins falter, the reverse of what happened. Yet the combined efficiency final standings are worth reviewing. The top five teams:

1. Buffalo, 12 (ninth offensive, third defensive).
2. Persons, 15 (11th offensive, fourth defensive).
3. Tennessee, 16 (15th offensive, first defensive).
4. Ravens, 18 (16th offensive, second defensive).
5. Saints, 19 (10th offensive, ninth defensive).

The NFL's two top teams for combined yardage efficiency did not make the playoffs, both stumbling home at 8-8. Buffalo's league-leading finish appears especially perplexing since its 12 final ranking is only somewhat off the figure of 7 (first offensive, sixth defensive) the Rams posted in 1999 when they ran away with the NFL, and turnovers were not the Bills' downfall as the team finished comfortably positive in that department. So how come the Bills and Persons didn't get to play in January? Special teams. Kicking plays determine about 25 percent of points and 35 percent of field position, and on special teams, the Bills and Persons were cover-your-eyes dreadful.

The Persons missed three last-second field goals and allowed three kick return touchdowns, a horror story. In one of his canny moves, Owner/Megalomaniac Daniel Snyder insisted the coaching staff cut return man Brian Mitchell, the NFL's all-time leader in kickoff and punt return yardage, in order to bring in Former Player/Marketing Concept Deion Sanders, over whom Snyder slavered. Mitchell had been scheduled to make \$1.5 million in 2000; Sanders was given \$8.5 million for the season. How did they compare? Mitchell signed with Philadelphia and finished in the top 10 in both kickoff and punt returning. He also had the season's longest run from scrimmage, an 85-yarder. Sanders finished 24th in punt returns with a nonentity 7.4-yard average. At one point Deion was so preoccupied with mugging to the crowd and pointing at himself as the opposition boomed its punt that the ball slammed into his facemask and bounced free for a muff. As the season wound down, the me-me-me-first Sanders blamed his blockers for his poor performance. When someone who makes \$8.5 million fobs off his shortcomings on the unknown, minimum-salary special teamers who block for him—and then isn't reprimanded as Sanders was not—the babies have taken over the sandbox.

As for the Bills, last January they lost in the playoffs to the Flaming Thumbtacks on the last-second Music City Miracle kick run-back. Whether or not this play was legal, from the standpoint of Buffalo's special teams breakdown, it was surely one of the worst single plays in NFL history. The day after, Buffalo special teams coach Bruce DeHaven was fired. DeHaven had screwed up on the Miracle (he failed to warn the coverage team to watch for a trick return though with the clock almost expired it was an obvious trick play situation) but otherwise had coached the Buffalo special teams well, keeping them in the league's top 10 for a decade. The Bills replaced DeHaven with a gentleman who had never coached special teams at any level, pro, college, or high school. The result? Buffalo finished last in punt returns, 30th in kickoff returns, bottom quartile in punt and kickoff coverage and allowed three kick return touchdowns and had five kicks blocked. Firing the man to blame for the Music City Miracle might have made Bills

Head Coach/Beanie Baby Wade Phillips feel better the day he did it, but he cut off the team's nose to spite its face.

Hidden Indicator: When Colts kicker Mike Vanderjagt won a contest in October with a last-second 45-yarder, he boasted, bragged, and preened about how he was automatic with the game on the line. Before the Eagles game, Tampa DT Warren Sapp boasted, bragged, and preened about himself while declaring Philadelphia QB Donovan McNabb "basically a running back"; Keyshawn Johnson boasted that all the Bucs had to do was throw to him. Money-time results? Vanderjagt honked with the game on the line. Sapp recorded three tackles and zero sacks. Johnson dropped a well-thrown pass when Tampa went for broke on fourth down in the fourth quarter. Hidden connection? In each case, the football gods chortled.

### Running Items Department

New York Times Final-Score Score: They were sweating on 43rd Street when Miami entered the Colts red zone in OT because the Times had predicted a final of Dolphins 20, Colts 17, and there it was tied at 17. Had Miami immediately kicked the field goal, the Multicolored Lady would at last have called an exact final score! Instead Dave Wannstedt ordered one more run: TD, scoreboard locks at 23-17. Thus the Paper of Record opens the postseason 0-4 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, bringing the New York Times Final-Score Score to 0-252 for the year. Just seven chances left.

Reader Animadversion: Readers overwhelmingly said they liked the NFL playoff system as is, though reader Max Boot did suggest he would like to see the games played in prime time—Friday, Saturday, Sunday, and Monday nights for the opening weekend—to prevent loss of weekend afternoons. Best supporting reasons given by readers for keeping the playoff field as is:

1. Current format is popular, as evidenced by overwhelming margin among Slate readers.
2. Supply and demand. By limiting the supply of playoff games, the NFL increases demand.
3. The small number of postseason games, coupled with the fact that only 12 of 31 clubs make the tournament, causes the majority of regular season games to have significance in the standings for at least one of the teams, preventing the NFL from turning into the NBA.

TMQ is persuaded by point three. Case closed.

Regarding the item on ESPN's multiple preseason forecasts for the 12 playoff slots, all 15 of which turned out to be wrong, reader Cathy notes it is not correct to say there were 180 possible permutations in the ESPN meta-prediction (15 times 12). Considering that each of 12 slots per 15 guessers might have had 31 team names as entries, Cathy notes, the permutations would have been 15 x 31(!) or 15 times 31 factorial, meaning 31 x 30 x 29 x 28 x 27 x and so on, a figure soaring toward a zillion. One hundred eighty was merely the number of possible selections.

Reader "History Guy" checked TMQ's preseason predictions and noted that it only correctly forecasts the exact final records of three teams: Baltimore at 12-4, Cleveland at 3-13, and Oakland at 12-4. Smelling pure luck, History Guy then asked, what are the odds someone could achieve this forecast via blind chance? The odds are 31 (number of teams) times two (each

record has two positions) times 17! (17 factorial for 17 possible results from 0 to 16) divided by three, which works out to roughly one in 1.2 thousand trillion. So TMQ did better than blind chance. Whew.

Finally, of TMQ's proposal that NCAA football players receive an extra year of scholarship for each year played in order to let them get an education after their pro dreams fail, J. Dragani notes this is the way the Canadian Hockey League functions. Its junior-league system "requires a major junior team to assure a player of one year of paid post-secondary school for each year played in the CHL," Dragani says, so that when a player's pro dream collapses, education awaits. Thus the basic idea of the system has already been favorably tested in Canada—by a commercial enterprise to boot.

TMQ Trivia Challenge: Last week's question:

Fifteen NFL teams went into the final weekend knowing they were eliminated from the playoffs and their last performance was meaningless. They might as well have forfeited. (Note: For humanitarian reasons, the Cardinals should have started forfeiting in October.) If there ever were an NFL forfeit, how, according to league rules, would it appear on the scoreboard?

If there's one trivia item NFL fans appear to know, it is forfeit details: Though no NFL game has been forfeited in the modern era, more than 100 entrants correctly said that according to league rules, a forfeit would appear on scoreboards as a 2-0 final since two is the smallest possible score. Presumably this means a CFL forfeit would be scored 1-0 owing to the rouge, but TMQ couldn't find a forfeit provision in the Canadian rulebook. (The CFL rulebook does, however, specify that players may not wear any "apparel, which, in the judgment of the referee, may endanger or confuse opponents." So just take off that moose costume, No. 76!) The Trivia Challenge is awarded to the only joint/all-chick entry received from Patricia Kavanaugh and Jane Tindall of Chicago.

Here is this week's Trivia Challenge, fiendishly designed to require pondering and flipping of pages in dusty volumes:

One team playing in the divisional round holds an all-time postseason record no club would care to have, and the record could get even worse. Name the team and its undesired place in the history books.

Submit your answers via "The Fray" titling them "Trivia Answer." And be sure to include your e-mail address in the event someone coming back to Washington from the Ford administration names you the winner.

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## **The Vengeance of the Football Gods**

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Jan. 9, 2001, at 6:30 PM ET

Cronus tormented Uranus, Zeus tormented Cronus, Hera tormented Hercules, Paris tormented Hera, Hades tormented Persephone, Aphrodite tormented Helen, and now the football gods have chosen to torment the Tennessee Titans. Oh, why such a bitter fate? "Poor wretches, what misery is this that ye suffer?" (Sophocles, or possibly Bonnie Bernstein from the sideline.)

They are rending garments and gnashing teeth in Nashville today, for the Flaming Thumbtacks—possessors of the league's best record and home-field advantage throughout the playoffs, the clear team to beat in the NFL postseason—honked to the Baltimore Ravens, becoming the sole home team to lose in the playoffs so far.

How could the football gods have allowed this to happen? The T's wandered in the desert seeking a home. They have been humble during success. Their collective head is not swelled. Their opponent, by contrast, was arrogant and showed hubris. The Ravens boasted, bragged, and preened in the week before the game. They called T's RB Eddie George a "baby." Ravens defensive linemen showed up at the stadium dressed in military fatigues. Ravens coach Brian Billick shook his fist at the crowd after his team went ahead 24-10, one of the most unsportsmanlike gestures TMQ has ever observed. Yet Tennessee was humbled, the Ravens crowned, and the outcome was clearly divine intervention. The T's completely dominated play (see Stat No. 5 below), but Baltimore won on two improbable turnover returns that appeared under the direct control of supernatural forces.

There's only one possible explanation. The Tennessee franchise is being punished for changing its name from Oilers to Titans, taking the name of the primordial gods overthrown by the Olympians, led by Zeus at the battle of the Titanomachy. The football gods, we must infer, are descended from the Olympians (obvious sports link) and, offended by the name Titans, staged a second Titanomachy. That's the only explanation TMQ can think of. It surely can't be that the arrogant, thuggish Ravens are the better team.

Mythology note: He whom the gods puff up, the gods destroy. Let's see what happens to Billick and his chief thug, Ray ("Sure I Was There at the Double Murder but Nobody Was Guilty of Anything") Lewis.

Motivational note: The early line for the NFC championship makes the Vikings a one-point favorite at the Meadowlands. Imagine the grin Jersey/A coach Jim Fassel must have broken into when he read that. Nothing could offer a better motivational tool than to be the dog in your own house.

Best Plays of Divisional Weekend: Best No. 1. Leading 17-3 and facing third and one early in the third, Minnesota called a power run. But when QB Daunte Culpepper came to the line and saw the Saints' CBs playing soft, he gave Randy Moss a hand signal that meant run a quick hitch. Moss caught it and brilliantly outran all defenders for the 68-yard touchdown that broke open the game. One reason the play worked so well was that Culpepper didn't bark an audible, which

would have alerted the Saints that he was altering plays based on their alignment—Moss was the only Viking who knew the call was changing to a pass. But boy, did Minnesota ever get away with one. Because the offensive linemen still thought it was a run, they run-blocked, firing across the line rather than retreating to pass-block. When Culpepper released the ball, the entire Viking offensive line was downfield. The play should have been brought back.

Best No. 2. Leading the Eagles 17-3 in the fourth but doing nothing on offense, Jersey/A lined up with two tight ends then split both left. QB Kerry Collins play-faked and then crouch-faked, hiding the ball at his midriff. Both TEs ran posts, one shallow, one deep. The well-coached Philadelphia defense had no idea what it was looking at. Collins completed a 34-yard pass to Pete Mitchell, setting up the Giants field goal that iced the game.

Best No. 3. After Jersey/A tackle Luke Petitgout left the game with an injury, the Eagles expected their opponent to run or roll away from his replacement, unknown OT Mike Rosenthal. When a green replacement enters a game, coaches normally move the action as far as possible in the other direction. Instead the Giants ran straight behind Rosenthal's tail on his first three downs, and the Eagles were so unprepared for this move that the runs generated 33 yards.

Worst Plays of Divisional Weekend: Worst No. 1. Trailing Oakland 20-0 on the first possession of the second half, the Dolphins faced fourth and three at their 39. Dave Wannstedt sent in the kicking team. Why are you punting? Behind 20 points on the road, a team must take chances, and as chances go, fourth and three is not bad. For his faint heart, Wannstedt was punished by the football gods. The punt went 39 yards and was returned 24 yards, meaning the ball ended up about where it would have been anyway if Miami had gone for the first and missed.

Worst No. 2. On the ensuing possession—one of the fun things about football is that guys whose inseam measurements exceed their IQs say "ensuing"—the Raiders faced third and seven on the Marine Mammals' 14, score still 20-0. Miami had to get a stop or its goose was cooked. Tim Brown, Oakland's best receiver, went motion left. Both Miami DBs on that side ignored him, and Brown jogged out into the flat uncovered. (Miami had two DBs named to the Pro Bowl; perhaps there should be a recount.) Brown's unopposed catch put the ball at the 2. Tyrone Wheatley plowed in on the next play, and Raiderettes began calling their agents about sports-bra endorsement contracts for the AFC championship game.

Worst No. 3. On Miami's ensuing ensuing possession, the Dolphins faced fourth and eight on their 40, trailing 27-0, four minutes left in the third. Why are you punting? Punt, game over. The remaining 19 minutes were a tedious formality. At least Wannstedt could have negotiated safe passage back to the airport before announcing his surrender. Was Wannstedt worried that he had to keep the margin of defeat from getting bigger to protect his standing in the BCS? Real men go down in flames, not punting when there's still time for a last gasp.

Stats of Divisional Weekend: Stat No. 1. In its last four consecutive playoff defeats, ending the 1997, 1998, 1999, and 2000 seasons, Miami was outscored 144-13. Ye gods.

Stat No. 2. In three games against the Giants this season, the Eagles were outscored 51-6 in the first half. Ye gods.

Stat No. 3. New Orleans receivers dropped two third-down passes in the first half at Minnesota, when the game was close. Miami receivers dropped three third-down passes in the first half at Oakland, when the game was close. Philadelphia receivers dropped two third-down passes in the first half at Jersey/A, when the game was close. Punt, punt, punt, punt, punt, punt, punt. A third-down drop forcing a punt is in effect a turnover: All three dropsy teams went on to get stomped. New Orleans also dropped two interceptions in the first half, and a dropped INT is in effect a turnover.

Stat No. 4. Tennessee lost to Baltimore despite a 317-134 edge in yardage, a 23-6 edge in first downs, and despite blocking two Ravens kicks, just as Baltimore blocked two T's kicks. The Ravens had more punts (eight) than first downs. But Flaming Thumbtacks kicker Al del Greco missed three of four field-goal attempts, and the Ravens got their two supernatural returns. In two of Baltimore's last three games, the Ravens have allowed the opposition at least twice as many yards and three times as many first downs yet won on returns.

We Also Admire Your Devotion to Duty: Giving nothing away to the Miami Dolphins cheerleaders, who last week wore barely there two-piece numbers despite a kickoff temperature of 57 F, the aesthetically impressive Raiderettes (to gawk at them, [click here](#)) flounced out in two-piece outfits despite it being 58 F at kickoff. The promotional line in the NFL's current playoff commercials is "SHOW ME SOMETHING," and the Raiderettes came through!

Visible Coaches of the Year: TMQ has had his fill of sideline "reaction" shots of coaches. From these all-too-frequent views, we have learned: 1) When something good happens, coaches smile; and 2) when something bad happens, they frown. Many coach reaction shots are such zoom-ins that the information content is mainly cosmetology. TMQ and about 48 million other viewers could do with less of red-faced coaches yelling at the zebras (was there a single call in any game this year that a coach didn't holler about?) and increased camera focus on the cheerleaders, who after all are supposed to be looked at. Viewers never learned of the courage, devotion, and professionalism of the barely clad Raiderettes, for instance, because CBS only showed them flouncing in background shots while we saw close-ups of Jon "I Was a Teen-Age Coach" Gruden's really fascinating snarl perhaps 200 times. On the rare instances the networks do show cheerleaders, it is usually with advertiser logos plastered over them during "bridge" shots out of commercials. Cheerleaders spend months intensively preparing to be looked at. Why don't the networks reward their efforts? Surely not owing to taste.

Covert Coaches of the Year: TMQ heartily seconds the choice of Jim Haslett as Coach of the Year. In his first season, Haslett brought the Saints their best finish in team history, despite numerous injuries and a club left bereft of draft choices by the coming-unglued Faux Coach/Tawdry Pitchman Mike Ditka. (Remember Ditka's line that he traded all the Saints' draft choices so he could spend draft weekend golfing instead of staying up late reviewing player printouts? He meant it.) But the gentlemen Tuesday Morning Quarterback most admires are the coordinators and the position coaches, the unseen wallahs who make football happen. Here are TMQ's Covert Coaches of the Year:

**Defensive Line:** John Mitchell, Steelers. Pittsburgh consistently excels on defense despite a who-dat front. Honestly, can you name a Steelers DL? On draft day, every team's position coaches engage in turf fights over whose subspecialty gets the high selections. Mitchell obtains such great results from unknowns and low draft choices that the front office won't give him high picks to work with.

**Linebackers:** Jim Schwartz, Tennessee. The first-ranked Flaming Thumbtacks' defense has some flashy players (Jevon Kearse, Samari Rolle), but its essence is methodically efficient, well-coached LBs who are almost never caught out of position.

**Secondary:** Steve Shafer, Baltimore. He has the luxury of recent high first-round picks at both corners but gets the most out of them and all his DBs, both on coverage and INT returns. The Ravens' quick-strike interception scores helped keep the team winning during its midseason offensive stall.

**Special Teams:** Joe DeCamillis, Atlanta. The Falcons were awful except on special teams where they covered well, scored three times on returns, blocked kicks, and ran some of the classiest onsides ever. One, against the Rams in a surprise onside situation, worked like this: Of the three Falcons in the area where the onside was directed, two made no attempt to field the ball. Rather they smash-blocked any Rams out of the way so that Falcon No. 3 could fall on the rock unmolested.

**Offensive Line:** Jim McNally, Giants, TMQ Position Coach of the Year. As last week's column detailed, McNally molded low-paid castoffs into an excellent unit. See that silk purse over his shoulder? Used to be a sow's ear.

**Tight Ends:** Keith Rowen, Kansas City. Rarely is a coach hired essentially to work with a single player. This gentleman arrived at the Chiefs two years ago to work with Tony Gonzalez, and Gonzalez has been Pro Bowl since.

**Wide Receivers:** Todd Haley, Jersey/B. Joining the Jets in 1996 at age 29 with no playing or coaching experience, Haley has somehow made himself a capable WR tutor. Jersey/B had the league's sixth-ranked passing attacks despite its WRs being a collection of castoffs and misfits, and all short to boot.

**Running Backs:** Bobby Turner, Denver. Since Turner joined the Broncos in 1995, no NFL team has had more rushing yards. At first that seemed the advent of unknown low draft pick Terrell Davis. But then Davis got hurt, and unknown low draft pick Olandis Gary ran just as well. Then Gary got hurt, and unknown low draft pick Mike Anderson ran just as well. Sense a pattern? Turner relentlessly teaches a one-cut running technique—Denver RBs are allowed just one cut and then must plow forward, forbidden to make a second change of direction until such time as they may be in the secondary. No stutter steps behind the line, no "Look ma, I'm dancing." One-cut running works like an amulet. Why do so many teams let their RBs dance?

**QB:** Alex Wood, Minnesota. Yes, Daunte Culpepper is gifted, but it's been shown that gifted QBs can be turned into towers of compressed sawdust by bad coaching. Wood, a former head coach at James Madison, will be a head coach again.

**Offensive Coordinator:** Marty Mornhinweg, San Francisco. Football pundits shrug that the Niners consistently have great offense "because of their system." If it were just a matter of plugging in a system, everybody would have great offense. Mornhinweg is the guy who runs the Niners' system, and if he had been born Marty Monday or anything pronounceable, he'd be famous. Head coaching vacancy, please.

**Defensive Coordinator:** Ted Cottrell, Buffalo. Last season the Bills were the No. 1-ranked defense, then they lost Bruce Smith and three other starters to free agency. This year five more starters went down with season-ending injuries, including star Sam Cowart. Yet the Bills defense still finished third overall, a spectacular achievement considering the personnel losses. Cottrell draws no notice from the networks because his defense plays a cerebral style based on position, analysis, and discipline, not the blitzing, taunting, and preening sort of defense exulted by the media. Cottrell is also unrecognized because the sports press doesn't know what to make of—or how to pigeonhole—a black guy whose primary approach to the game is intellectual. Head coaching vacancy, please.

**Covert Coach Notes:** Kansas City has a coach exclusively for "nickel packages," and the Packers have no fewer than three gentlemen who coach "quality control."

**We're All Professionals Here:** The Giants and Eagles were a combined four of 28 on third-down conversions. On a broken play, Minnesota guard Corbin Lacina was flagged for offensive pass interference.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!** Leading Miami 10-0 in the second quarter, Oakland faced second and eight on its 18. Down and distance favored the well-regarded Dolphin defense. It's a blitz! Six gentlemen rush, and a dinky safety-valve pass becomes a 32-yard gain keying the drive that allowed Oakland to pull away.

Blitzing does sometimes work, much as TMQ hates to admit it. Robert Tate's game-clinching INT late in the third at Minneapolis came on a six-man blitz. But note the next item.

**Incredible Insider Tip:** Weak defenses often try to cover their deficiencies by DB-blitzing, and it almost always backfires. Indy fell on its sword with DB blitzes at Miami in the wild card round. Minnesota sent DBs repeatedly against the Saints. The Vikes were never burned by their own blitzes, but the target was a novice QB playing in his eighth career start. Jersey/A is the sole NFL team that has consistently come out ahead this season by using DB blitzes. This means that if the Vikings try their DB blitzing in the Meadowlands, they will be running the ploy against a team that regularly sees it in practice. Giants coaches will be thinking along briar-patch lines—please throw those DBs at us.

**Playoff Pressure Coaching Performance Watch:** Losing players get outplayed, and losing coaches get outcoached. Form held this weekend.

In the Vikings-Saints matchup, Jim Haslett played seven or eight "in the box," committing his defense to stopping the Minnesota running game. That worked but allowed the Vikings to hit devastating big-play passes. As the contest got out of hand, Haslett lost his focus by engaging in pointless duels of sideline yakking with Vike Cris Carter. Ah well, any Cajun told before the season that Haslett would take the team to 11-7 and the divisional round would have praised Dieu.

In the Miami-Oakland matchup, Dave Wannstedt had a good game plan—come out throwing when everyone expected the power run—but saw it fail because of dropped passes and the dreadful Jay Fielder first-series INT that the Raiders ran back 90 yards for six.

In the Tennessee-Baltimore matchup, Jeff Fisher, a TMQ favorite, had two weeks to come up with something original on offense to counter the powerful Ravens defense and instead ran exactly what he's run all year, Eddie George plus dink-dunk short passes. The Thumbtacks had just one pass attempt of more than 20 yards until the game was out of hand, the same stat as too conservative Tampa Bay in its first-round loss. Because there was no deep threat, Ravens DBs choked up on receivers while Ravens coaches could put seven or eight in the box against Eddie George runs. Once Tennessee got behind by 14 in the fourth, its limited attack was so exposed that at one point, QB Steve McNair threw short safety-valve passes to George on six of nine snaps. One was the game's backbreaker, the ball that bounced out of George's hands and into Lewis' for the TD return that clinched the contest. Mitigating factor: The T's had so many WR injuries that during the fourth quarter, they were lining up rookie TE Erron Kinney as a wideout.

Coaching was about equal in the Eagles-Giants matchup, where Philadelphia's Andy Reid did what he could considering he had advanced to the quarterfinal round with essentially no one at the skill positions. Giants coaches neutralized Eagles QB Donovan McNabb by having a "spy" LB mirror his every move, preventing McNabb from scrambling. "Spy" defenses usually mean someone will be open downfield, but then the Eagles advanced to the quarterfinal round with essentially no one at the skill positions. Reid, who has been a gambler this year—he opened the season with an onside kick—went weak-kneed against the G-People. Trailing 10-0 and facing fourth and inches on the Giants' 39, Reid ordered a punt. Yumpin' yimminy.

Travel Agent Blunder of the Week: West Coast teams playing on the East Coast, and vice versa, are at a disadvantage owing to jet lag. The countermeasure is to arrive two days before the game, rather than the day prior. The Dolphins did not leave until late Friday morning, Miami time, for their Saturday afternoon contest in Oakland. The team landed barely 24 hours before kickoff following a six-hour flight, just shy of the longest possible within the contiguous states. The Dolphins proceeded to play as if jet-lagged.

Hardest Workin' Man in Sports Business: All NFL Web sites and tout sheets promise incredible exclusive insider dope, but usually what they print is recycled from USA Today. If you want actual fresh info, watch for anything bylined by Len Pasquarelli at the CBS Sports site. Pasquarelli is the hardest workin' man in football journalism, and all his prodigious output is available free. (I have no idea how the New Economy is supposed to work, either.) He always has correct details of contracts when others are engaged in wild speculation. In December,

Pasquarelli noted on a Friday that Persons QB Jeff George had finally had his inevitable childish fit, screaming at quasiprovisional coach Terry Robiskie that he (George) could have him fired. It took until Monday for the Washington papers to notice this story, and then only with Pravda-esque wording that Robiskie had denied "published reports" of a scream-fest. Two weeks ago, Pasquarelli reported that Head Coach/Beanie Baby Wade Phillips of the Bills would be dismissed while the AP and others were reporting that Phillips was secure. Late Sunday night Pasquarelli posted the details of the firing while most sports services were still watching the Giants-Eagles game. (ESPN had it Sunday night, too.) TMQ doesn't know, but Pasquarelli appears to fit the Saturday Night Live caricature of the Internet guy who never leaves his room, just works the computer and the phone. Boy, is he good at it.

Helmet Instructions: TMQ's previous item on the true wording of NFL helmet disclaimers got enough mail that, as a public service, here are the actual instructions printed inside each helmet liner:

Insert head. Obey coach. Never "lead with your helmet" during tackling, unless you wish to receive an increased salary. Always "see what you hit," and always hit everything you see. Continue every play until such time as you hear the whistle or notice that everyone has left the stadium. Give 110 percent. (Note: If not presently giving 110 percent, ask trainer to tighten the screws in your frontal lobes.) When game completed, remove helmet. Repeat sequence until you are waived for a younger, less expensive player.

Hidden Indicator of the Week: Baltimore and Jersey/A, both winners Sunday, scored just one offensive touchdown between them but ran up four touchdowns on kick and interception returns. This is the sort of hidden indicator essential to an insider's understanding of the game, and in this case Tuesday Morning Quarterback knows what it means: It's better to be lucky than good.

### **Running Items Department**

New York Times Final-Score Score: The Paper of Record goes 0-4 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, bringing the New York Times Final-Score Score to 0-256 for the season. Just three chances left.

Reader Animadversion: Several readers objected that the Colts-Miami wild card contest invalidated the TMQ law, Fake Kick = Victory, because Indianapolis was defeated despite faking a field-goal attempt. Ah, but the deception must be successful. (This qualifier appears in the case history of the law.) Any team, even the Bengals, can run a failed fake. The Colts' fake resulted in a tackle for a loss.

Many readers objected to a previous objection, from last week's Reader Animadversion, in which reader Cathy protested that TMQ had incorrectly calculated the permutations of 15 people at ESPN predicting each of the 12 playoff slots. TMQ said two weeks ago that the number was 180. Using factorials, Cathy came up with almost a zillion permutations, bearing in mind that dictionaries define zillion not as "one line in the federal budget" but rather "an extremely large, indefinite number."

But oh, don't cross mathematics types. Reader "johnshade1" sent in a record-setting 621-word "Fray" entry calculating the ESPN permutations by  $[(5*6*5)*(13*12*11/3!)]*[(5*5*5)*(12*11*10/3!)]$  and arriving at 1.2 billion. Reader Milt Eisner proffered this calculation,  $6 * 5^5 * C(12,3) * C(13,3)$ , yielding precisely 1,179,750,000 permutations. TMQ takes your word for it. ESPN had 1,179,750,000 chances and still whiffed.

"Statistics Nerd" and others objected to the follow-up item in which TMQ used factorials to calculate his own odds of having correctly predicted the final records of three NFL teams as "one in 1.2 thousand trillion." Statistics Nerd countered with this formula for guessing records of the 31 teams,  $(1/17)^C \times (16/17)^{(31-C)} \times 31! / (C! \times (31-C)!)$ , and derived slightly better odds, namely one in six. Now, TMQ lives near Washington, D.C., where in Congressional budget debates, the numbers "six" and "1.2 thousand trillion" are not considered significantly different. Anyway, my factorial self-calculation was supposed to be a joke. I deliberately generated an impossibly huge figure. I have learned my lesson—joke about Cindy Crawford in leather, not about mathematics.

TMQ Trivia Challenge: Last week's question:

One team playing in the divisional round holds an all-time postseason record no club would care to have, and the record could get even worse. Name the team and its undesired place in the history books.

Several readers suggested the Baltimore Ravens, who, as the Cleveland Browns (Release 1.0), possessed the unenviable record of the most consecutive postseason road defeats and stood to worsen the record at Tennessee. But although the Ravens once were the Browns, officially they aren't anymore. The Browns (Release 2.0) are now the Browns, according to an elaborate records-swapping deal worked out when the Browns (Release 1.0) moved. The Ravens are officially a new franchise, even though they came from Cleveland and brought all the Browns (Release 1.0) players with them. Got that?

Many readers locked in on the Minnesota Vikings, who join Buffalo in having lost four Super Bowls and who are alive for the chance to have the mark all to themselves at five losses. But the question referred to an unenviable record already held by one club alone. That record also belongs to the Vikings, with 22 total postseason defeats. The Challenge goes to Tom Scocco of Baltimore, first with the correct answer.

This week's Challenge:

Which of the following is not an actual modern era postseason record:

- Fewest yards rushing, minus 4: Detroit vs. Green Bay, 1994.
- Fewest pass completions, three: Miami vs. Oakland, 1973.
- Most career fumbles, 16: Warren Moon.
- Most career interceptions, 28: Jim Kelly.
- Worst passing percentage, 19 percent (five of 27): Bucs vs. Rams, 1979.
- Most total turnovers per game, 14: Oilers (nine) vs. Steelers (five), 1978.

Submit your answers via The Fray, titling them Trivia Answer. And include your e-mail address in case you win the 50,000 Microsoft stock options. Wait, sorry, the Federal Reserve has just informed me that owing to market conditions, the prize has been changed to having your name in next week's column.

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## **The Men Are Separated From the XYs**

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Jan. 16, 2001, at 7:00 PM ET

All season long, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has said the Vikings are a Potemkin team designed to roll up big margins on the second echelon but waiting to be exposed in a pressure game. TMQ has also been saying Minnesota headman Dennis Green, to quote an earlier column, has the Walter Mitty quality of showing you can be an NFL coach without having the slightest idea what you're doing. Thus Sunday's obliteration of Minnesota by the Giants for the NFC title was Exactly What I Predicted!\*

(\*Note: all TMQ predictions guaranteed to be valid except when not valid.)

All season long, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has said Baltimore is an irresistible steamroller of a team, plus dignified and sportsmanlike, while warning that Oakland is a papier-mâché club that is sure to crumple under pressure. Thus Sunday's stomping of the Raiders by the Ravens for the AFC title was Exactly What I Predicted!\*

(\*Actually, I never wrote any of the above about Oakland and Baltimore. I was just hoping you wouldn't go back and check.)

Ye gods, did Sunday ever separate the men, both players and coaches, from the individuals who merely have XY chromosome pairs. Let's start with the Jersey/A-Minnesota matchup.

Absolutely everyone, including every Giants fan, expected the Jersey/A game plan to be based on power running. Instead the home team came out throwing—five times on the first six plays, two for touchdowns. The Vikings had prepared a run-stuffing defensive game plan, with seven or eight in the box and the corners soft. How did Minnesota adjust when Jersey/A threw instead? No reaction whatsoever. Minnesota stayed in its run-oriented defensive set as Giants QB Kerry Collins tossed the ball up and down the field, breaking his team's postseason passing-yards record in the second quarter. The corker came when the Giants took possession on their own 23, leading 27-0, 3:31 remaining in the first half. Despite spending the previous 26:29 being pummeled by the pass, the Vikings lined up in a run defense. Collins proceeded to throw on nine of 11 plays of the drive, tossing for a touchdown with 19 seconds left and an out-of-body-experience 34-0 halftime lead over the favored Vikings.

Why didn't Dennis Green order his defense to start playing the pass? Because Green—lifetime 4-8 in the playoffs, every year coming up with a new justification why regular season success is what "really" matters—stayed home in Minneapolis to work on the wording of press releases. That's certainly the way it seemed. When the Giants jumped to a 14-0 lead after their first two possessions, heads began to sag on the Viking sideline. Green should have called his charges together and pumped them up, reminded them there was an entire game to go. Instead he took no action, staring off into space. It's the championship—don't just stand there, do something! Trailing 24-0 in the second quarter, the Vikes faced fourth and inches on their 34. Green sent in the punting unit! TMQ could not believe his eyes. You're down 24, it's the championship, you must take some chances, and you will never see a better chance than fourth and inches. When

players quit on a game, as many Vikings did Sunday, they are denounced, as many Vikings were Monday in the nation's sports pages. How come when coaches quit on a game, as Green did by ordering that punt, they aren't denounced?

Wait, Green just was denounced here.

As for Oakland-Baltimore, TMQ notes it was the second straight playoff contest in which a Ravens defender knocked the opposition QB off the field with a blatant late, dirty hit that was not flagged by the refs. Against Tennessee, Ray Lewis got away with a hit that was both late and helmet-to-helmet, putting Steve McNair on the sideline. No yellow. Against Oakland, Tony Siragusa got away with a hit that was both late and the "pile-driver" move, specifically forbidden by NFL rules, putting Rich Gannon on the sideline. No yellow. Both QBs were ineffective on their returns. How is Baltimore getting away with these cheap shots? See TMQ's speculation in Reader Animadversions.

But beyond the league's coddling of Baltimore's dirty play, Oakland has mainly itself to blame. The Raiders dropped two touchdown passes. They ran the Single Worst Play of the NFL season. (See below.) With extra time off at the bye and with an easy victory a week ago over the Dolphins that allowed the Raiders to rest their starters in the fourth quarter (while the Ravens were getting hammered until the final play at Tennessee), Oakland nevertheless appeared unprepared while Baltimore was ready. TMQ lays this at the feet of Jon "I Was a Teen-Aged Coach" Gruden, who lost the postseason psyche match to Brian Billick by a wide margin.

Ah well, at least all this leaves a nice narrative for the Super Bowl. Namely, Good vs. Evil: the plucky, underrated Giants versus the boastful, dirty-playing Ravens.

Best Plays of the Championships: Best No. 1. After scoring on their opening possession, Jersey/A recovered a fumbled kickoff at the Minnesota 18. The Giants went straight to the end zone, sending FB Greg Comella, who hadn't scored all year, into the right corner where he caught the pass for six.

Best No. 2. Leading 17-0 in the second with the ball on their 44, the G-Men were holding a nice hand but might have gone conservative—Collins' last deep pass had been picked off. Nine of 10 coaches would have started pounding the ball. Instead Jersey/A OC Sean Payton called a deep "shot" route for WR Ron Dixon, who caught it for 43 yards, setting up the touchdown that made it 24-0 and turned the game into a runaway.

Best No. 3. Last week, TMQ noted that when Jersey/A tackle Luke Petitgout went out injured and known reserve Mike Rosenthal came in, Giants coaches did not move the action away from him, as the Eagles clearly expected, but ran three straight plays right behind his tail for 33 yards. Sunday, Jersey/A tackle Lomas Brown went out injured and Rosenthal subbed. Giants coaches did not move the action away from him, as the Vikings clearly expected, but immediately ran a play behind his tail for 17 yards.

Worst Plays of the Championships: Worst No. 1. With the game scoreless in the second quarter, Oakland had Baltimore pinned on its 4, facing third and 18. Down and distance strongly favored

Raider defenders. All they needed was to play straight coverage and get a stop—NFL teams converted less than 10 percent of third and 15 or more this season—and the punt would give them excellent field position. Surely Oakland would line up in The Stick, its innovative, consistently effective long-yardage defense that rushes just three but places an impenetrable barrier of five DBs at the first-down stick. Surely the Raiders wouldn't blitz. Surely their coaches couldn't be that stupid.

No, no! Five gentlemen cross the line. The Ravens have called a quick slant, every team's standard anti-blitz play. The ball zings to TE Shannon Sharpe in the short middle—exactly where Raiders MLB Greg Biekert would have been if he hadn't blitzed. Inexplicably the Raider safeties have choked up, not played off as one should on a blitz to backstop any breakaway. Safety Marquez Pope, with a clean shot at Sharpe, jumps out of his way as if the runner were radioactive. Sharpe gets a nice downfield block, and he's headed to the house, 96 yards, longest completion in postseason history. For the Ravens, magnifico. For the Raiders, the Single Worst Play of the NFL season.

Worst No. 2. Trailing 10-0 on the first possession of the second half, the Raiders faced third and goal at the Baltimore 7. Get a touchdown, and an energized home crowd might make things dicey for the visitors. Rich Gannon hit Randy Jordan on both hands in the end zone, and he dropped the ball as if it were a live ferret. Oakland had to settle for 10-3 rather than 10-7.

Worst No. 3. On the key snap of their fourth quarter comeback attempt, Raiders sub QB Bobby Hoying hit Andre Rison—who a few weeks ago was boasting and preening about being better than Jerry Rice—on the numbers at the Ravens' 1, and Rison dropped the ball as if it were made of depleted uranium.

Stats of the Championships: Stat No. 1. Plodding G-Man QB Kerry Collins out-threw flashy, hyped Viking QB Daunte Culpepper by 381 yards to 78 yards and five TDs to zero. The Vikings were outgained by 404 yards, including by a total of 352 yards in the decisive first half. Ye gods!

Stat No. 2. The two championship winners outscored the two losers by a combined 57-3. Yumpin' yimminy!

Stat No. 3. Oakland scored just three points. The last time the team appeared in an AFC championship game in 1991, it was also held to three points. Jiminy cricket!

Stat No. 4. Minnesota has now honked the NFC championship game twice in the last three years. Holy cats and little fishes!

Stat No. 5. The Ravens are Super Bowl-bound despite being just 12 of 44 on third down conversions in the playoffs. Aye carumba!

Pro Bowl Recount, Please: Pro Bowl OT Korey Stringer of the Vikings gave up sacks on consecutive snaps. On Baltimore's killer pass to Shannon Sharpe, Raiders Pro Bowl CB Charles Woodson had 70 yards in which to make up five yards and catch Sharpe from behind. Woodson, who boasts and brags about his speed, not only failed to catch him—Sharpe is a tight end—but

visibly gave up at about the Raiders' 30. (You never give up on breakaways; the runner might stumble.) Early in the fourth when there was still a chance, after Oakland stopped the Ravens on third and long, Woodson strutted over to a Baltimore player, engaged in a pointless yakking duel, and then shoved the player in front of an official. The flag for this moment of moronic self-indulgence gave Baltimore a first down. It's a measure of how the Oakland coaching staff gave up on the game that Woodson was not pulled from the field and screamed at. Oakland coaches watched this fiasco passively.

**Sod of the Week:** There wasn't a blinding blizzard in Jersey, as the Giants faithful had hoped, but the grungy Meadowlands sod was at its worst ever, which slowed the dome-based Vikings as much as snow might have. Bills kicker Steve Christie said after playing on the surface earlier in the year, "It's so much like sand that all you need is an umbrella, and you could have a picnic."

**Travel Agent Success of the Week:** Unlike the Dolphins, who waited until the last conceivable instant to fly to Oakland and then played jet-lagged, the Ravens flew out two days before the game, adjusted their body clocks, and played fresh. Maybe the Dolphins booked their tickets on Priceline.com.

**Siesta of the Week:** One of TMQ's unhappy realizations when this column began was that it would be necessary to stay awake during games rather than spending Sunday afternoons in a pleasing stupor. Thanks to the Giants' 41-0 lead, however, the fourth quarter of the NFC championship was nap time.

**Poor Sport of the Week:** After the Giants' blowout, Viking WR Randy Moss denounced his teammates as unmotivated. Moss himself had just two catches for 18 yards, and in the second quarter he pulled up on a pass he might have caught in order to avoid being hit by a safety. Instead, the Giants intercepted. After the blowout, Moss declared himself qualified for the Super Bowl but his teammates unworthy, adding that Sunday's embarrassment "must say something about us." What you mean us, paleface? Playing poorly and then putting the blame on others says something about you.

**Information Economy Detail of the Week:** Giants QB Kerry Collins received the game plan for the NFC championship by fax.

**New Jersey Resplendent:** America's glorious football state is now a combined 23-11 on the season, with Jersey/A playing for the crown. For all the hype the media have pumped out in recent years about Florida being the new apex of football, TMQ doesn't notice many Sunshine State teams booking flights to XXXV.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!** Last week's column warned that the Vikings were covering defensive deficiencies by DB-blitzing but that this would backfire if tried in the Meadowlands. The G-People, TMQ noted, are the sole team in the league that has come out ahead by DB-blitzing this year, and as a result their offense sees the tactic often in practice and, Br'er Rabbit-like, wants to be DB-blitzed. What happened? In the decisive first half, Minnesota DB-blitzed three times. Each time the Giants completed long-yardage passes for the first down, one setting

up a touchdown. The Giants also DB-blitzed three times, resulting in two incompletions and a fumble recovery.

Cover of the Week: The Giants beat the spread by 43 points.

Tears of the Week: Dick Vermeil, who cried at last year's Rams press conference to announce he was "retiring" from coaching, cried at this week's Chiefs press conference to announce his inevitable "surprise" comeback. All these tears seem to work; Kansas City gave him \$3.3 million per year. Maybe everybody should cry at press conferences.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback continues to be annoyed by the practice of players and coaches announcing they are retiring when what they really mean is that they will no longer play or coach, not that they will enter true retirement—a life of shuffleboard on cruises, etc. There's got to be another verb for what happens when players and coaches depart from sports but go on to other careers. TMQ suggests they say they are "expatriating."

Maybe QBs Should Block for Tackles: Check the All-Pro team voting, and what jumps out is that the offensive tackles are almost all high draft choices (11 of 13 receiving votes were first-round picks, seven "lottery" selections at or near the top of the draft) while only three of the six quarterbacks were No. 1s, with two never drafted at all. So general managers, use your first-rounders on OTs, and pick up QBs off waivers. Low draft picks also dominated the safety and center positions.

TMQ's Never Last More Than Two: Here is an actual disclaimer from the Viagra ad in the January Atlantic Monthly: "You should call a doctor immediately if you have an erection that lasts more than four hours." Call a doctor? In this situation, call the Miami Dolphins cheerleaders!

More Proof of Oliver Stone's Grasp of Reality: Eagles RB Darnell Autry, a drama major at Northwestern, took two years off from the NFL to try to break into the movies. Autry was rejected at a casting call for the Oliver Stone football film *Any Given Sunday*, told he did not look enough like an NFL player.

Haiku Corner: Benedictions for clubs. Of the last pair, the first was submitted to "The Fray" as a lament for the Jets' playoff elimination loss to the Ravens, the second submitted by another reader in answer.

Patriot season ends  
Drew, tired, heads home head down  
Hits one last sack: bed.  
—Scott Braly

Afflicted all year  
By lethal Keyshawn virus,  
Bucs at last succumb.  
—"Teminence"

A dream year indeed!  
Saints year calls for TMQ  
Verbatim: Ye Gods!  
—James Maumus

Just emerging from  
Stupor. How did Jersey/B  
Lose to Baltimore?  
—Stephen Power

Here is the reason:  
The Vinny we know and love  
Hit DBs in stride.  
—Brodie Jarrell

Harmonic Haiku Stat of the Year: Reader Peter Hesse, in a Fray entry instantly opened because it was headlined "Pics of Cindy Crawford and Jessica Alba Naked," pointed out a fun weirdness—all Monday Night Football games this season were won by the home team, except for the three games involving the Chesapeake Watershed Region Indigenous Persons, who lost both times they appeared at home on Monday night and won the only time they appeared on the road. Hesse summed this finding,

Home teams win every  
Monday Night game except when  
The Persons perform.

Hidden Indicator: Small example of poor Vikings preparation: When the Giants lined up in a "trips" on their fourth play, setting three receivers left, Minnesota DBs looked terribly confused and gave up a 46-yard TD pass. The Vikings hadn't played the Giants since December 1999, when the G-Man offense was conservative and predictable. Minnesota seemed to assume nothing had changed. But anyone who's watched Giants film this year knows they have loosened up, including by using trips formations on several occasions.

Small examples of poor Oakland preparation: Facing third and inches in the second, game scoreless, the Raiders came out in a heavy-jumbo set—three tight ends, everyone clustered in—and ran straight up the middle. Anyone who has watched Baltimore film knows no team has successfully run heavy-jumbo against the Ravens this season. Loss of yardage, punt, Baltimore scores on its possession. (On a third and inches in the fourth, the Raiders went spread and converted.) Twice in the first half, the Raiders bollixed line calls so badly that the left OT—key protector of the QB—turned inside to double-team someone, leaving a small Raiders RB alone to block a blitzing LB. Both blown line calls led to sacks, including one in which Rich Gannon aggravated an existing shoulder injury.

What these hidden indicators show is that while you might be able to get away with halfhearted preparation during the regular season and still post a winning record, in the playoffs, he who does not pay attention to every detail does not jog up the tunnel victorious.

### **Running Items Department**

New York Times Final-Score Score: The Paper of Record goes 0-2 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, bringing the New York Times Final-Score Score to 0-258 for the season. The pressure is really on now—just one last chance at redemption.

Staff at the Multicolored Lady may be somewhat assuaged to learn that Sporting News assembled a panel of eight gentlemen described as "football experts"—not just sportswriters, experts—to predict exact final scores of the championship round. Needless to say, the SN experts went 0-16. Title inflation note: Being an "expert" sounds like you would get an intern. Therefore TMQ would like Microsoft to declare him an "expert."

Reader Animadversion: Regarding TMQ's transparently prurient item that used the Rams' game-killing punt muff against New Orleans as a cheap way to get references to Jennifer Lopez and muff into the same sentence, reader Michael Zalar wrote, "I put the terms 'Jennifer Lopez' and 'muff' into a search engine and came up with 2,270 matches. Surprisingly, none of them seemed to concern football."

Several readers objected to my calling Ray Lewis the "chief thug" of the Baltimore Ravens and suggesting the football world has been too eager to forget the January 2000 double killing at which he was present. First, on the "thug" point, why was there no flag when Lewis put an obvious late hit on Steve McNair in the Ravens-Titans game? Well, refs can make random mistakes. But TMQ suspects the refs are intimidated by the Ravens because they know the chief Raven is a thug and they know that the league doesn't care. At minimum, Lewis stood by and watched as two people were being killed. Excellent player, sure, but one who is violent, seeks to intimidate, associates with violent low-lives and has had troubles with the law, which is pretty much the definition of thug.

As to what happened in the legal case, many readers seem to believe (and the NFL strongly wants people to believe) Lewis was found innocent. Not exactly. Murder charges against him were dropped in return for his pleading guilty to obstruction of justice. Obstruction of justice is not a mortal sin like murder, but it pulls up short of innocence.

Here is what happened "in the light most favorable" to Lewis, as lawyers say, based on his own statements in court. Lewis went out gallivanting with two friends, one of whom had been boasting about fighting knives he had just bought. The friends got into an argument with two men they met near a nightclub, and fisticuffs began. The friends killed the two men using the knives. Lewis did not participate directly but stood by watching without doing anything to prevent the killings, not even yelling for help. Lewis then fled with the friends, leaving the two bodies in the street, and when caught denied everything to police.

An Atlanta jury acquitted Lewis' friends on the grounds they were acting in self-defense, though the two dead men were unarmed and the evidence that the friends' lives were endangered was debatable. (The friends said the dead men started the fight, an unknown since the victims could not give their version. Generally, when someone else strikes first, juries tolerate escalation in self-defense.) As to why, if it was legitimate self-defense, Lewis and the friends fled and lied, it's understandable that someone who has just been present at a fight to the death might in the immediate aftermath be disorientated and act irrationally. But your head should clear the next day. It took Lewis weeks to come clean.

The league and media reaction to all this has bordered on bizarre. From the moment the Lewis charges were announced, the Ravens seemed more concerned with the salary-cap and draft-day strategy ramifications of a conviction than with whether one of their employees had abetted murder. From the moment Lewis pleaded to the lesser charge, the media have gone out of their way not just to praise his play but to hold him up as some kind of hero for "courage" in resuming his sports career. Though physically taxing, what happens on the football field is artificial and unrelated to true courage. True courage would be stepping in to stop the fight. And who wouldn't resume a career that pays \$4.7 million annually?

Perhaps it is fair to say that Lewis was guilty mainly of bad judgment for associating with the wrong kind of people. But a large, powerful man who stands by and does nothing while people are killed and then lies about it isn't a hero in any universe TMQ wants to live in. After the Titans-Ravens game, the New York Times ran a laudatory article headlined, "Ray Lewis Triumphs After a Trying Year." It's been a pretty trying year for the dead guys, too.

TMQ Trivia Challenge: Last week's question:

Which of the following is not an actual modern era postseason record:

- Fewest yards rushing, minus-4: Detroit vs. Green Bay, 1994.
- Fewest pass completions, three: Miami vs. Oakland, 1973.
- Most career fumbles, 16: Warren Moon.
- Most career interceptions, 28: Jim Kelly.
- Worst passing percentage, 19 percent (five of 27): Bucs vs. Rams, 1979.
- Most total turnovers per game, 14: Oilers (nine) vs. Steelers (five), 1978.

Many readers, recalling a previous trick question Trivia Challenge that asked which of numerous records was not actual when in fact they were all actual, assumed TMQ couldn't possibly be going back to the well again and so scoured the record books for the phony one, proposing many fanciful answers. But hey, in football, aren't you supposed to keep running the same play until they stop you? This was indeed the same trick: All the records cited are actual. The Challenge goes to Michael Christian of Ann Arbor, Mich., who defied the odds and asserted they were all correct.

Reader Paul Decker noted that while it's true the Marine Mammals only had three completions in the 1973 AFC championship game against Oakland, it happened in the process of a 27-10 Miami victory dominated by Larry Csonka runs. Decker adds that the Dolphins went on to beat

Minnesota in the Super Bowl that year with only six pass completions but a rushing attack that ground out 196 yards. Jamie DeVriend noted that depending on the definition of "modern," the record for passing futility might fall to the Eagles, who completed only two passes in the 1948 championship game against the Chicago (CAUTION: DID CONTAIN FOOTBALL-LIKE SUBSTANCE) Cardinals, won by Philadelphia 7-0 in a snowstorm. Jamie—entire faculty departments exist to argue over the definition of the word modern!

Here is this week's Trivia Challenge:

With the season almost wound down, the football-addicted are advised to spend the winter months reading great works of philosophy and theology. Or they can stoop to watching the new XFL, which promises to be to the NFL what Fox's Thong Babe Island is to PBS' The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer.

The last attempt to establish a competitor to the NFL was the USFL, which folded its tent and stole off into the desert in 1986. To agents this league was known as the Useful because it triggered salary bidding wars. Despite the long-ago demise of the Useful, three former USFL players performed in the NFL this season. Name these gentlemen.

Submit your answers via The Fray, titling them something clever like Trivia Answer. And be sure to include your e-mail address in case you win the prize, which is a day helping position models for the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue. Wait, sorry, owing to Bush administration attempts to create a recession in the swimwear market, the prize has just been changed to having your name in next week's column.

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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## **It's a Zone Blitz on a Double Reverse, and They've Got Athleticism!**

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Tuesday, Jan. 23, 2001, at 6:45 PM ET

Sunday in the Super Bowl, millions of Americans will hear it seemingly millions of times: "He's wide open!" You will hear this whether he's wide open or not, since receivers described by announcers as wide open! are often tackled as they catch the ball. To announcers there seem two possible states for a receiver, covered or wide open! Greg Gumbel and Phil Simms of CBS, who have the call for the Super Bowl, are particularly bad on this verbal tic. During the Dolphins-Raiders playoff game, TMQ counted them shouting "wide open!" seven times in the first quarter alone.

Watch a game in person, and you'll see that receivers are almost never wide open! They're either man-covered with a slight edge on their pursuer or free for an instant in the seam of a zone, with hostile individuals bearing down on them. The wide open receiver occurs occasionally when there's a blown coverage. Announcers endlessly say wide open! both for hyperventilation and because they aren't taking in the full field. Rather, they're concentrating on the little TV-sized tetragon where the ball is—an edited perspective that artificially exaggerates the distance between receiver and defender. NFL passing attacks seek a slight footrace edge (in man coverage) or rapid delivery to anyone who finds a seam (in zone coverage). Even good offenses are lucky if, once a game, a receiver isn't covered at all. But in the announcer's world, every third pass goes to someone wide open!

Other annoying announcer tics

- "It's a double reverse!" To TMQ's knowledge no actual double reverse was run in the NFL this season—a play in which there's a handoff in one direction, then a second handoff coming the other way, then a third handoff back to the original direction. NFL defenders are so fast that in the time it takes a double reverse to develop, players from games held the previous week will have closed on the ball carrier. What announcers call a "double reverse" is usually a reverse, and what announcers call a "reverse" is usually an end-around. A reverse requires a RB to take the ball going one way, then hand off to a WR coming back the other way. To eliminate the risk of a fumble when the running back makes a handoff, NFL teams now usually fake up the middle and have the QB perform the handoff to whoever's coming around. True, defensive players yell "REVERSE!" when they see this action, but only because it is cumbersome to yell "END-AROUND!" Announcers should use correct terminology.
- "He's giving 110 percent." TMQ would like to have the extra 10 percent from all those gentlemen who give more than is physically possible.
- "He's got athleticism." This phrase appears to mean "he is athletic" or perhaps refers to a disease.
- "Right now somebody needs to step up and make a play." Somebody always needs to make a play.
- "This is a bad time for a turnover." Precisely when is a good time?

- "He's taking it to another level." This appears to mean "he's playing better," if it means anything.
- "It's a zone blitz!" Terminology for the zone blitz is unsettled, but even so, announcers seriously overuse this phrase. Blitzing used to be premised on the idea that DBs would play tight man coverage to prevent the quick slants that are the standard blitz countermeasure. The drawback was the chance of giving up a long bomb. In a zone-blitz scheme, the DBs play zone, shutting off long passes but conceding the short completion while one unexpected player, usually a DL, drops off into slant coverage to create uncertainty in the quarterback's mind about whether it is safe to unload the ball. True, there's no simple way to say that. But we've reached the point that announcers cry "zone blitz!" anytime they see a LB cross the line. Many plays that announcers call a zone blitz actually have the customary four rushers and thus aren't blitzes at all, but zone-switching in which a LB rushes and a DL takes his coverage assignment, the goal being to create confusion among blockers. In the Giants-Vikings championship game, John Madden yelled "zone blitz!" once when only three rushed.

TMQ further objects to the "he could have \_\_\_\_\_" construction, as in, "If no one had tackled him, he could have gone all the way!" Many players who "could have gone all the way" have little chance of gaining more than 10 yards if you view the entire field, not the TV-tetragon which makes them appear to be alone. In the Vikings-Saints playoff game, as an interception clanged through the hands of New Orleans DB Alex Molden, announcer Dick Stockton shrieked, "If he'd caught that, he could have gone all the way!" Actually, as Molden made his break on the ball, he was headed out of bounds. He would have been fortunate to keep both feet in.

As you watch this Sunday's Super Bowl, TMQ suggests you keep a running tally of how many players are wide open, show athleticism, take it to another level, and could have done things.

Save the Best for Last: One interior drama of the Super Bowl is that in most cases the winner is the team that plays its best game of the year in the season's final contest. The Rams got their rings last January by the length of a football after playing what was clearly not their best game. But the Broncos had their best game of the year when winning the two previous Super Bowls. Almost every winner in the last decade or so (Dallas, Niners, Packers, Persons) saved its best game for last.

This is one of the factors that make coaching, psyche-up, and game plan far more important for the Super Bowl than for other games. Of the 68 teams that have taken the field in the 34 Super Bowls so far, 18 of them—26 percent—failed to score a touchdown. Though conference champions, they were pounded by someone better psyched and better prepared. The much-commented-upon frequency of Super Bowl blowouts is not, in most cases, caused by lack of talent by the losers but by poor preparation and the exposure of the losers' coaching. Great coaches spend the year building up to the Super Bowl as their team's best game. Average coaches treat the Super Bowl as "just another game," which is a formula for defeat.

And what of the teams that have their best game the week before the numeral event? Think of Atlanta, which two years ago played its best game of the season when it defeated Minnesota on the road in the NFC championship game, then went to the Super Bowl and honked. Think of

Buffalo, which a decade ago beat the Raiders 51-3 in the AFC championship game, then went to Super Bowl against the Giants and dropped passes, missed tackles, and hooted the winning field goal. This consideration doesn't seem to bode well for Jersey/A since the Giants clearly played their best game of the year in the NFC title win against the Vikings. Then again, the Ravens clearly played their best game of the year the previous week against the Flaming Thumbtacks. Best-game reasoning therefore suggests that XXXV will go down to the wire.

**Their Wrists Stung for Several Seconds:** Last week's TMQ discussed how the Ravens got away with late, dirty hits on quarterbacks in two consecutive playoff games, knocking the QBs off the field and greatly enhancing the Ravens' chance of advancing. The NFL has now fined Ray Lewis \$7,500 for his late hit on Titan Steve McNair and Tony Siragusa \$10,000 for his late hit on Raider Rich Gannon. This must have caused open laughter in the Ravens' locker room. Not only are the sums meaningless compared to the players' pay (\$4.7 million for Lewis this season, about \$1.5 million for Siragusa), they're meaningless compared to playoff bonuses. Each Baltimore player got an extra \$34,500 for winning the Titans game. Each will get an extra \$34,500 to \$58,000, depending on the Super Bowl outcome, for beating the Raiders. These bonuses are supplied by the league, which will soon be sending large checks to Lewis and Siragusa while expecting small checks in return.

**Travel Agent Note of the Week:** Everyone is pointing out that the last time Jersey/A appeared in the Super Bowl, in 1991, was also the last time the game was played in Tampa. A more meaningful harmonic: 10 years ago the Giants' flight for Tampa departed Sunday while the Bills did not board their plane till late Monday. History now repeats. The Giants arrived in Tampa on Sunday while the Ravens did not land until Monday afternoon. In 1991, the Giants were better prepared in game plan and execution. Extra time at the scene helped. This year, Jersey/A has the advantage of one additional practice day in Tampa. Will history repeat on the field?

**Hall of Fame Politics:** Saturday the NFL announces this year's gentlemen to be "enshrined" in the Hall of Fame in Canton, Ohio. Making Canton is the apex of a football career, and the company there is pretty darned good. But the selection process is infuriatingly political. So let's have a look at Hall of Fame politics.

**First, fundamental injustices of the Hall:** In it are more quarterbacks and running backs (39) than offensive linemen (24), even though the typical team plays twice as many offensive linemen as running backs and quarterbacks combined. Canton also has just one kicker (Jan Stenerud), no punters (not even Ray Guy), and no special teams players. Kickers, punters, and special teams players determine about a third of what happens in football, but like OLs, they're not glamorous. Last year the Hall's selection committee did not choose a full allotment of players (there's no rule, but up to seven annually is the tradition; in 2000, five were selected), overlooking Ron Yary, one of the best offensive tackles ever. The slots went to Howie Long, Ronnie Lott, and Joe Montana—deserving, but all glamour players—plus Dan Rooney in the management category and LB Dave Wilcox in the old-timer category. Just another of the many years in which the working class of football was overlooked to emphasize the glamorous.

But then why should this be a surprise since it's the media doing the picking? Purists rue the day it was decided to hand Hall of Fame selections to a media panel, a task force composed of one

sportswriter from each of the 31 NFL cities plus an extra from New Jersey (two teams) and six at-large writers. Most selectors are from print media—the few broadcast figures are from local affiliates, none of them the network booth types who carry themselves as NFL insiders. Having journalists do the picking does sometimes lead to fun: The Hall committee tabbed Al Davis in the management category partly to tweak the league front office, which intensely despises him. But having the choices made by the media assures that most selections will be glamour players, not worker bees.

As for politics, the longest-running Hall debate concerns Lynn Swann, who's been a finalist a record 14 times. Swann was a gloried player and made two of the sweetest Super Bowl catches ever, but his career total for receptions doesn't even put him in the top 100 all-time. Oft injured, Swann just didn't play enough to have a Hall of Fame career. His repeated presence as a finalist stems from the fact that his Super Bowl catches are on every highlight reel and that Swann is a good-natured person who's made many friends while working for ABC Sports. But his protracted candidacy dilutes support for former teammate John Stallworth, who has a better argument—30th in all-time receiving yards and second all-time in postseason touchdowns.

Canton selection depends heavily on lobbying—someone on the committee has to take up a player's cause and promote him. This who-you-know factor helps explain why the well-connected Howie Long was admitted in his second year of eligibility while these older greats have yet to be finalists: Roger Craig, Joe DeLamielleure, L.C. Greenwood, Joe Jacoby, Ed "Too Tall" Jones, Mike Kenn, Drew Pearson, Jake Scott, and Ken Stabler.

Then there's the matter of retirement timing. Players become eligible five years after their last game, coaches one year after, and owners and managers at any time. Bill Parcells, who's already "retired" from coaching twice, made a big point of announcing two weeks ago that he was "leaving" football, hoping this would encourage selectors to vote him in immediately—he's a first-time finalist, based on "retiring" last year when he left the Jets' sideline—so that he can later take yet another coaching job and become the first Hall of Fame member ever to be an active coach. Parcells possesses keen self-advancement instincts; he knows if he says anything about coaching again, his Canton eligibility must be tabled.

Jim Kelly took Hall timing into account when he hung it up four years ago, though several teams offered him deals to keep playing. Kelly is a likely but not certain Canton man—high on the all-time passer lists and tied with Terry Bradshaw for the best QB starting record in conference championships, but he lost four straight Super Bowls despite premium teammates, and he played poorly in two. Kelly realized that by retiring when he did, he would have windows—2002 and 2003—when the only pressing QB competition is Phil Simms. After that, John Elway, Dan Marino, and Steve Young enter the Canton pipeline and will monopolize the QB slots. So Kelly clipped a year off his career to improve his Hall odds by becoming eligible before the bigger names. It was a savvy move.

Which brings us to the Buffalo Bills problem. Already the Bills have two of the 15 finalists this year, coach Marv Levy and owner Ralph Wilson Jr. Kelly becomes eligible next year along with Kent Hull, one of the best centers ever. Steve Tasker, who many think will be the first special-teamer in the Hall, comes up the following year. Andre Reed, Bruce Smith, and Thurman

Thomas won't be far behind. Also out there are James Lofton, who bounced around but whose career peak was in Buffalo, and Cornelius Bennett, whom some consider Canton-class. Bruce Smith, Thurman Thomas, and Ralph Wilson are locks, and the rest have strong cases. Conceivably, Canton could end up with as many Bills from an 0-4 Super Bowl team as it has from the 4-0 Steelers club of the 1970s.

Levy is a case in point. He's 10th all-time in coaching wins and universally regarded as someone who truly believed sportsmanship means more than victory. So you'd think Levy would be a shoo-in, to say nothing of the fact that the Hall of Fame isn't exactly sagging under the weight of its Jewish members. Levy's Super Bowl losses alone should be no barrier. Bud Grant, the only other coach to lose four, already has been admitted to the Canton club.

But there's a nagging feeling even among Levy admirers that he didn't just lose those Super Bowls, he blew them. On the point that the farther you go in the playoffs, the more important game plans and coaching psychology become, Levy faltered badly. His game plans were notoriously generic, causing him to be seriously out-game-planned in Super Bowls against the Giants and Chesapeake Watershed Region Indigenous Persons. The week of all four numeral events, Levy held light, no-pads walk-throughs while the opposition was hitting in practice and getting into an ill temper. Purists found Levy's nonchalant approach to Super Bowl preparation inexplicable. And he never imposed Super Bowl week curfews, saying that as adults his players could be trusted to be in bed.

But most NFL players aren't adults. They are prolonged adolescents with trebled testosterone levels and pockets stuffed with too many C-notes. During Super Bowl week, celebrity chasers and groupies flock to the site city and are a huge temptation on the club scene. For its big games, the Bills were plagued by a player element that was out to all hours—LB Darryl Talley got into a bar fight at 3 a.m. a few nights before one Super Bowl—and performed hungover as a result. (Worried about Tampa's notoriously uninhibited strip clubs, which TMQ views as essential to protecting our sacred First Amendment freedoms, Giants coach Jim Fassel welcomed his players to the Super Bowl city by reading them the details of the local lap-dancing ordinance!) Considering how stacked the early-'90s Bills were, the roster at one point boasting a stunning 16 Pro Bowl players, or three-quarters of the starters, a volunteer from the audience should have been able to win at least one Super Bowl coaching that team.

Still, because he's an admirable person, Levy's Canton chance is strong. The Bill thrown overboard may be Andre Reed. Reed has a fabulous story—from a tiny Division III school (Kutztown State), he became the No. 3 receiver all-time despite playing for a bad-weather team with a run-oriented offense. Yet clouds hang over him. Reed threw his helmet in one Super Bowl, costing his team a critical field goal. Reed shoved an official late in a 1999 playoff contest against Miami, costing Buffalo a touchdown in a game lost by seven. On both occasions Reed was the victim of bad calls, but Hall of Fame players do not act like babies after bad calls. Since the Bills advised Reed to retire, he has taken to denouncing them regularly, even to making the petty rant that if admitted to Canton he wants to wear the burgundy of the Persons, for whom he caught 10 passes, rather than the blue of Buffalo, for whom he caught 941. Reed is known to be a Web enthusiast—Andre, if you read this, there is still time to convince the world you are not a jerk. But that chance won't last forever.

Here are TMQ's proposed solutions to the dilemmas of Hall politics:

- 1) Affirmation action for OLs. Beginning next year, Canton should "enshrine" nothing but offensive linemen until such time as OLs representation is proportional to OL numbers in the lineup.
- 2) All Buffalo candidacies should be tabled until 2007, the likely year of Bruce Smith's first eligibility, at which point Canton would hold a Bills-only selection. For that year the Hall would accept Buffalo players exclusively, as many as the selectors can stand, and get it over with.

Failed Prediction Watch: There were many preseason predictions about who would meet in the Super Bowl. Unfortunately for the sources, TMQ wrote them down:

- MSNBC predicted Indianapolis would win the Super Bowl. The Colts were eliminated in the first round.
- Pro Football Weekly predicted Bucs over Colts. Both clubs will be watching from the comfort of home.
- Sports Illustrated also said Bucs over Colts. Not-even-close prediction by Paul Zimmerman, member, Hall of Fame Selection Committee.
- The Washington Post predicted the championship games would pit the Persons against Tampa and Indianapolis against Tennessee. None made the championship round. Not-even-close prediction by Michael Wilbon, member, Hall of Fame Selection Committee.
- Seeking to improve its odds, CBS Sportsline offered four dueling Super Bowl predictions: Rams over Colts, Raiders over Rams, Persons over Broncos, Colts over Bucs. None of the six teams in the CBS multiple prophecy made the Super Bowl.
- Seeking to improve its odds, the New York Times also offered four dueling Super Bowl predictions: Bucs over Colts, Colts over Bucs, Ravens over Bucs, Thumbtacks over Persons. Of the six clubs in the Times' multiple prophecy, one did actually make the game.
- As part of its meta-forecast (see TMQ's earlier item), ESPN ran no fewer than 15 dueling Super Bowl predictions. They were: Colts over Rams (ESPN plurality, predicted four times), Tennessee over Persons (predicted three times), Tennessee over Bucs (predicted twice), Rams over Colts, Bucs over Jax, Tennessee over Rams, Colts over Persons, Bucs over Colts, Persons over Ravens. ESPN finished 1-for-30, taking 30 chances at predicting clubs in the Super Bowl and getting just one correct, the lone pick of Baltimore.
- Tuesday Morning Quarterback Failed Prediction of the Year: The Sporting News picked the Detroit Lions to win the Super Bowl. Detroit did not make the playoffs.

Waived Super Bowl Starters: A few weeks ago, this column offered its All-Waivers All-Pros. As the Giants and Ravens prepare to meet in the Super Bowl, both led by QBs who were ridden out of town on a rail by their previous teams, let's note the Waived Super Bowl Starters:

Baltimore: Sam Adams, Trent Dilfer, Sam Gash, Qadry Ismail, Kyle Richardson, Shannon Sharpe, Tony Siragusa, Matt Stover, Harry Swayne, and Rod Woodson. Jersey/A: Michael

Barrow, Lomas Brown, Kerry Collins, Brad Daluiso, Glenn Parker, Christian Peter, and Dave Thomas. Seventeen of the Super Bowl starters (first teams plus kickers) have been dropped by somebody who considered them no good or washed up.

Victory Speech of the Week: On his final day in office, President Clinton acknowledged that he "knowingly gave evasive and misleading answers" but for goodness sake did not lie! It is reassuring to know that the independent counsel office spent five years and \$55 million in taxpayer money to obtain from Clinton two sheets of paper covered with weasel wording. At least the weasels are happy, and they're an important constituency!

### Running Items Department

Obscure College Nicknames: TMQ promised an item on obscure team nicknames. Here are the best:

- The Blue Hose of Presbyterian College. Refers not to melancholy courtesans, but leggings.
- The Blue Hens of Delaware University. How do you cheer up a blue hen? Readers are invited to make suggestions.
- The Banana Slugs of the University of California-Santa Cruz. Yes it's real. See the proof here. Fans chant, "Go, Slugs!"
- The Anteaters of the University of California-Irvine. No word on pregame meals.
- The Gorillas of Pittsburg (Kan.) State, "Home of the Nation's Only Gorillas." Check out the Gorilla logo. Pitt State men's teams became Gorillas in 1925. The women's squads voted in 1989 to adopt the name as well, abandoning their former appellation, Gussies. Missing their chance to become the Hussies!
- The Fighting Artichokes of Scottsdale Community College. Man, you don't want to get into a beef with a Fighting Artichoke.
- The Ichabods of Washburn University. See "Ichabods Fall to Gorillas," on a press release on the recent Pitt State-Washburn game.
- The Geoducks ("gooey-ducks") of Evergreen State. Geoducks, actually clams, are obscure and repulsive to boot. The school, in pastoral Olympia, Wash., is the epicenter of Ultimate Frisbee competition. Sadly, Ultimate Frisbee is not yet an NCAA sport. Buy an Evergreen Geoduck Frisbee here.

All colleges are missing their chance to adopt TMQ's preferred nickname set: The men's teams would be the Tarzans, and the women's teams would be the Janes. You know who the mascot would be, and the science department could conduct genetic engineering experiments on him. I think a lot of student athletes would feel pretty good about taking the field with a 40-foot-high, glowing chimpanzee rooting them on.

Then there is the question of whether any college actually has the delicious nickname Fighting Quakers. Several schools, including Earlham, Guilford, and the University of Pennsylvania, have teams commonly known as the Fighting Quakers, but sadly, Quakers is the official name in each case. (Check out Guilford's menacing who-you-lookin'-at Quaker logo.) So far as TMQ could determine, Eastern High School of East Lansing, Mich., is the only place of learning whose

athletes are formally named the Fighting Quakers, according to the school sports history. Finally, what does Friends University of Wichita call its teams? Sadly they are the Falcons, not the Fighting Friends.

New York Times Final-Score Score: The Paper of Record, 0-258 in its quixotic attempt to predict an exact final score, awaits Super Bowl XXXV and its last chance at redemption. Times persons might find solace in the ongoing multitude of bad predictions, including the fact that CBS Sportsline, using something called the Harmon Index—which boasts, "Jim Harmon and his staff are the only forecasters who predict exact scores and chart every college and pro team"—forecast Minnesota and Oakland to win the championship games, the reverse of what actually happened. Jim Harmon and his staff do nothing all day long but predict football scores? Is this a great country or what! More Times comfort may reside in the fact that of the seven "football experts" who have been predicting the playoffs for the Sporting News, none is above .500 going into Super Bowl weekend.

Several readers, only some with e-mail addresses ending "nytimes.com," have written in to suppose that since a few Times guesses have been close—the Multicolored Lady prophesied Steelers 23, Raiders 20 and the actual was Steelers 21, Raiders 20—TMQ is not granting enough credit. Since the numbers being predicted fall into a small band, close guesses should happen. Let's consider the probability of forecasting an exact final NFL score.

Suppose I gave you a week's card with team names covered and asked you to fill in score predictions, not even knowing the teams' identities. You would not forecast finals of 55-49 or 4-0. You would pick in the plausible range. You would predict no scores higher than 39 since finals this high are rare even when strong teams play weak ones: Only about 3 percent of NFL outcomes exceed 39 points. You would not predict the impossible final score of 1—although TMQ believes the Canadian singleton rule should be adopted in the NFL. And you would not predict final scores that are possible but rare, these being 2, 4, 5, 8, 11, 15, and 18. Only 3 percent of final scores are these "outliers."

This leaves 31 numbers in the selection band. So your odds of guessing a final score working entirely at random, not even knowing who the teams are, come to roughly 1-in-31 (plausible numbers on the left side of the score) times 1-in-31 (plausible numbers on the right side), or 1-in-961. Factor back the off chance that the final will be one of the rare numbers, and the result is rough odds of somewhat more than 1-in-1,000 of randomly predicting an exact final score. Impossible, then? Hardly. A fundamental of statistics is that the unlikely happens all the time. Things far more improbable than 1-in-1,000 occur daily. Otherwise no one would ever win a lottery, nor would George W. Bush ever utter a grammatically correct sentence.

Now put back into the calculation the fact that sportswriters aren't picking at random; they have access to incredible insider information such as Jason Sehorn's brand of ankle wrap and the percentage of fair-caught punts on grass versus turf. According to a proprietary algorithm developed by TMQ, the incredible insider information possessed by sportswriters should double their likelihood of predicting an exact final score.

Thus if pure random guesswork lends 1-in-1,000 odds, the professional sportswriter has a 1-in-500 chance to predict correctly. Given that there are 259 NFL games per season, these probabilities suggest that the New York Times should call an exact final score once every two years. Good luck next season, 43rd Street.

Addendum: Reader Dennis Doughty looked at NFL results for the 2000 regular season and found 71 percent of games had unique final scores. "The most popular scores," Doughty reports, "were Home Team 27, Visiting Team 24 and Home Team 16, Visiting Team 13, both of which happened a whopping four times." So Times, next season endlessly predict finals of 27-24 and 16-13. Your odds should improve. And in Friday's edition with your last shot at predicting a score this year, TMQ suggests that, given a matchup of two defensive teams, the Times should forecast a Super Bowl final of XVI to XIII.

TMQ Trivia Challenge: In recognition of the looming XFL, last week's Challenge was:

The last attempt to establish a competitor to the NFL was the USFL, which folded its tent and stole off into the desert in 1986. To agents this league was known as the Useful because it triggered salary bidding wars. Despite the long-ago demise of the Useful, three former USFL players performed in the NFL this season. Name these gentlemen.

Many guesses included Warren Moon, whose salad days were in the CFL, not the USFL. Answer: Doug Flutie (then of the geographically accurately named New Jersey Generals, now Buffalo Bills), Sean Landeta (then Philadelphia Stars, now Philadelphia Eagles), and Reggie White (then Memphis Showboats, now Carolina Panthers). This challenge goes to Daryle LaMonica of North Massapequa, N.Y., who notes that he is "not related to the famous Daryle LaMonica, unless you are a super model or want to buy an autograph."

And now the final TMQ Trivia Challenge—totally, utterly impossible to solve using search engines:

To answer an earlier Trivia Challenge, you had to know that Charles Haley possesses the most Super Bowl rings (five), Cornelius Bennett the most appearances without a ring (five), and Mike Lodish the most total Super Bowl appearances (six).

Then there are those unhappy fellows who tape up for the Super Bowl but spend the entire game on the sidelines. Several share the dubious distinction of dressing for three Super Bowls but not participating in a single play. Name any one of these gentlemen.

Submit your answers via "The Fray," titling them Super Bowl Trivia Answer. And be sure to include your e-mail address in the event the Senate Judiciary Committee wishes to question you about the circumstances of your victory.

TMQ Season Finale! Next week's column will appear on Monday, the day after the Super Bowl. Read it to find out:

- Will the Giants go pass-wacky?

- Will the Ravens get away with murder?
- Will Kurt Warner's homeworld invade Earth?
- Will Jennifer take it off, take it all off?
- Who will commit the Single Worst Play of Super Bowl XXXV?

Don't miss Monday's incredible season finale of Tuesday Morning Quarterback!  
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## **The Football Gods Taunt Man, Media**

By Gregg Easterbrook

Posted Monday, Jan. 29, 2001, at 11:30 PM ET

The gods did this to us in the Peloponnesian War, too—pitted an arrogant, cold-blooded team with a great defense (Sparta) against a virtuous underdog representing all that is good (Athens). The gods wanted to know if virtue could triumph, and they found out when Alcibiades of Athens went pass-wacky by staging the disastrous siege of Syracuse, setting in motion the fall of the city of philosophers and its disappearance from the stage of world history. Malevolent Sparta prevailed and was praised by the cowering as the gods chortled at the fate the mortals had brought upon themselves.

Anyway that's what TMQ was thinking, analogy-wise, during last night's Super Bowl.

Baltimore won so decisively there is no doubt it is the best team, and it honored Super Bowl lore by saving its best game for last. Yet the Ravens are also the NFL's Sparta, malicious and reeking hubris, and it was shameful to behold CBS and the rest of the sports world supplicating before them last night, pretending not to know what Sparta is like at heart. Using the Ravens as their vehicle, the football gods toyed with humankind, and humankind responded poorly—especially mediakind. Now we can only take solace that he whom the gods puff up, the gods destroy.

Oh, and the game? Aye caramba, Baltimore has a good defense, and aye caramba, did it ever win the coaching-prep battle.

Example No. 1: The Ravens, who rarely blitz, came out blitzing, sending men on 10 occasions while the game was still contested, causing five incompletions and a sack while giving up only one long gain. Meanwhile Jersey/A, the only team in the league to come out ahead by consistent blitzing this season, blitzed only twice while the game was contested, allowing the mistake-prone Trent Dilfer plenty of time to unload the ball.

Example No. 2: Considering that the Ravens are so hard to run against, the Giants needed an aerial game plan. But they went pass-wacky, coming out with the deep-strike, down-the-field stuff that had worked so well in the NFC title game against the weak Vikings DBs. The Ravens, however, are not the Vikings. To make matters worse, Jersey/A had bad field position in the first quarter. Attempting deep strikes from bad field position got the Giants off on the wrong foot and allowed the Ravens, after a series of three-and-outs and punt exchanges, to start a drive in Jersey/A territory and score the early TD that rattled the Giants' nerves. The one form of passing that has given the Ravens trouble this year has been quick rhythm throws from spread sets (Remember the Baltimore-Jersey/B game?), yet this wasn't in the Giants' game plan. G-Men coaches seemed to believe that one fabulous game against Minnesota had converted them into Air New Jersey. Baltimore studied the Giants-Minnesota tape carefully, and there was no element of surprise when Jersey/A tried the same trick two games in succession.

Best Plays of the Super Bowl: Best No. 1. With the game scoreless, Baltimore came out in a slot right and went deep for a TD to total unknown Brandon Stokley, who had 11 catches in the

regular season. Going deep to the least-expected target on the field is an old college-level trick. The Giants acted liked they'd never seen it. It helped that Stokley was being covered by Tawdry Pitchman/Relentless Self-Promoter/Spare-Time CB Jason Sehorn (see below).

Best No. 2. Late in the second, leading 7-0, Baltimore faced third and two deep in its territory. The G-Men held all their timeouts and had a chance for excellent field position. Giants DB Dave Thomas lined up directly on top of journeyman Ravens WR Qadry Ismail, practically begging Dilfer to throw deep to him. He did, for a 44-yard gain that set up a field goal.

Worst Plays of the Super Bowl: Worst No.1. With Baltimore leading 7-0, Giants QB Kerry Collins had time to set up and hit Ike Hilliard open down the middle for at least a 40-yard gain and perhaps a touchdown. Collins sailed the ball beyond his reach.

Worst No.2. Driving to the Baltimore 29 with a minute left in the half and trailing 10-0, the G-Men would have liked a TD but had to get a field goal. On first down, Collins threw a heave-ho into double coverage, INT.

Worst Zebra Play of the Super Bowl: Baltimore leading 7-0, Jessie Armstead intercepted a Dilfer screen pass and ran it back for a touchdown that would have knotted the score and given the Ravens something to be nervous about. The zebras flagged Jersey/A DT Keith Hamilton for contact with RB Jamal Lewis, the intended screen target, and the play was called back. Hamilton did hit Lewis, but pass interference is legal behind the line of scrimmage. The refs first signaled pass interference, then changed the call to defensive holding—a shaky, marginal flag given the contact and the best single thing to happen to the Ravens in the game.

Single Worst Play of the Super Bowl: Baltimore 10, Giants 0 late in the third, ball on the G-Men's 44. Kerry Collins hits Ravens DB Duane Starks in stride, and he took it back for the TD that turned the game into a runaway. The consecutive kickoff TDs on the next two plays were fun to watch, but it was the Starks' INT runback that determined this game's fate. Starks "jumped the route," breaking toward Collins when he saw Giants WR Amani Toomer stop. Purists can debate which was worse, the pass or Toomer standing and watching it happen rather than trying to break up the INT.

Toast, With Jam: Jason Sehorn, endlessly coddled by Jersey/A management, played one of the worst games in Super Bowl history. Sehorn gave up a 38-yard TD pass to third-stringer Stokley while also letting marginal WR Pat Johnson get behind him for what could have been two more long TDs, one Johnson dropped and another that Dilfer overthrew. Sehorn, who sometimes skips practice to make media and endorsement appearances, leading up to the Super Bowl was busy filming a Charles Schwab commercial and talking to anyone with a camera about his "spontaneous" stunt of proposing to "surprised" TV babe Angie Harmon on the Jay Leno Show. Less than an hour after the final gun sounded at Tampa, Sehorn was already dressed in a trendy double-breasted suit with his hair looking quite styled, telling a cluster of TV types, "We should have come out and played better." What you mean we, paleface?

Stats of the Super Bowl: Stat No. 1. In four playoff games, Baltimore outscored its opponents by a combined 95-23, yielding just one offensive touchdown. Jiminy cricket.

Stat No. 2. The Giants ran just three plays in Ravens territory and were held to 36 yards of offense in the second half. Their total of punts (11) and turnovers (5) exceeded their first downs (11). Yumpin' jiminy.

Stat No. 3. Jersey/A averaged 2 yards per pass attempt, with four INTs. It averaged 4.1 yards per rush attempt, with no rushing fumbles. And yet the G-Men called 39 passes and 16 rushes, this pass-over-rush ratio holding long before the game was out of reach.

Stat No. 4. The Ravens scored seven touchdowns on kick or interception returns in their final five games.

Stat No. 5. The Ravens won the Super Bowl despite being 15 of 50 on third-down conversions in the playoffs and averaging just 225 yards of offense.

Super Bowl Moment Beyond Satire: As Norman Schwarzkopf and Gulf War veterans looked on, Greg Gumbel proclaimed to 200 million people, "And now the National Anthem, produced by Rickey Minor."

Super Bowl Moments of CBS Shame: Shame No.1. During the primary broadcast, 6 p.m. to 11 p.m. EST, CBS mentions of Ray Lewis' involvement in a double killing: zero. CBS comments praising Lewis: TMQ stopped counting at 28. Including, gushing to him as he was awarded the MVP, "Who would have thought that from Super Bowl night last year you would come to this?" Super Bowl night last year was when Lewis, by his own admission, watched two helpless men being killed, did nothing, and then lied about it. Not that any viewer would have known that from the CBS coverage.

Shame No. 2. After Lewis (three total tackles) was voted MVP by a groveling media panel, he was described in a gushing post-game schlurp by Gumbel as "a truly grateful person." You'd be grateful, too, if you'd been involved in a double killing, escaped punishment, and then been lavished with adoration by the national press. Yes, Lewis is a tremendous linebacker, but that does not mean dozens of major publications, plus CBS—once the network of high standards and now seemingly determined to win the race to the bottom—should be holding up to kids for praise someone society ought to view with disdain. (Lewis played in the Super Bowl on probation for obstruction of justice, not that any viewer would have known from the CBS coverage.) TMQ can think of only one word to describe the sports media's knee-pads approach to Lewis this week, and it rhymes with "door."

TMQ's Super Bowl MVP: Ravens defensive tackle Sam Adams, who shut down the middle while chipping off blockers so that Ray Lewis could make the flashy plays and three tackles that the media swooned over. Adams had one of the best seasons of any NFL performer and selflessly executed the Baltimore defensive scheme, which calls for him to tie up OLs so that linebackers can run to the ball uncontested. If only Adams had been at a murder and lied about it, he, too, might get media adoration.

Expect a Defense Budget Increase: Both the B2 bomber and the Air Force Thunderbirds exhibition team flew over the stadium.

Maryland Resplendent: For all the hype about Florida and California ruling contemporary football, these sunny states of halter tops, blackouts, and recounts ended the NFL season a combined 40-52 while the Northeastern Yankee domains of Maryland, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania finished 1-2-3 in TMQ's state rankings, a combined 50-29, and took the Super Bowl crown. The final state rankings:

Maryland: 24-12, .667  
 New Jersey: 23-12, .657  
 Pennsylvania: 21-13, .617  
 Missouri: 17-16, .515  
 All single-team states (New York, etc.): 104-110, .486  
 Florida: 20-22, .476  
 California: 20-30, .400  
 Ohio, cradle of football: 7-25, .219

The Football Gods Chortled: Showing the kind of loyalty and concern for the team for which he is famous, Deion Sanders announced he would attend the Cincinnati Reds' camp, suspending his football training and, if he makes it back to the majors, missing the first half of the NFL season. Apparently that canny businessman, Owner/Megalomaniac Dan Snyder of the Chesapeake Watershed Region Indigenous Persons, handed Deion an \$8 million bonus last June without getting a clause in the deal barring him from keeping the cash and jumping back to baseball.

Gorzon's Last Memo:

From: Gorzon the Inexplicable, First Illuminate of Mithrall  
 To: Bio-operative TMQ4499, "Gregg Easterbrook"

The Galactic Hegemony (Devastating Star Clusters Since 50 Million BC©) has finished its evaluation of this column. Mainly, we are disturbed that you have consistently revealed that our bio-agent KurWar7733, "Kurt Warner," was sent to Earth to ingratiate himself into human culture as a sports hero as part of preparation for an invasion. Revealing this information could have spoiled our entire attack plan! Fortunately, it appears the Earth authorities do not believe anything they read in Slate.

Originally, the signal to begin the invasion was to have been the final gun sounding on Super Bowl XXXV. "Kurt Warner," whom we assumed would repeat as MVP, would have been on network television being interviewed at that time and was programmed to have used his celebrity to reassure the public, "Ignore those lights you see in the sky! Everything is fine!" Then the Rams got eliminated in the wild-card round. As I told our fleet commanders, we'll just have to "wait till next year." Our attack cruisers remain on station behind Mars and will continue to cause any U.S. probes sent that way to "mysteriously" fail. The invasion will be rescheduled depending on results in upcoming NFL seasons. Because I'm sentimental, I would like to put the

utter annihilation of Earth on hold until the Bills win a Super Bowl. But I doubt we can wait that long.

Additionally, agent TMQ4499, the Hegemony (Not Your Father's Intergalactic Conspiracy!®) finds your column has contained too little on subjects of interest to alien civilizations, such as repair of sidereal phased-boson transducer arrays, and far too much about Cindy Crawford, Jennifer Lopez, and the assets of certain cheerleaders. Seriously, how can you gawk at such repulsive organisms? I checked out the Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders on your recommendation and practically lost my lunch! It's a good thing I had swallowed that live throcmort hours earlier, and it was already down to my fourth rumen. You consider these babes? Where are their tentacles, where is the vestigial proboscis that gives a real babe her va-va-voooooom? Although I do like the fact that, if you click on the boobs of any cheerleader at the Dallas site, it opens a little personality profile that includes her favorite color, ideal date, and "my last meal would be \_\_\_\_\_." Now there's a real Texas question. But to think that human males actually fantasize about engaging in primitive mating rituals with such top-heavy organisms! It's almost as crazy as being obsessed with football.

Overall, though, the Galactic Hegemony (Did Somebody Say Invasion?™) is pleased with your column, especially its documentation of the inherent faults of defensive-back blitzing. That's the sort of thing the big media conglomerates just won't report! The Illuminates have decided to confer a reward fitting to your efforts. You are instructed to check into a suite at the Hyatt Regency Lake Tahoe. Our bio-agent AnnKour6622, "Anna Kournikova," will meet you there and immediately disrobe! You may then engage in unlimited mating rituals. But rather than appear in the repulsive human female form she has taken as part of the Earth infiltration project, as your extraspecial reward, "Anna Kournikova" will appear to you exclusively in her true, delightfully sensuous 12-tentacled form. Her vestigial proboscis will be yours to do with as you wish!

Have a great offseason.

Licensing Fees Left on Two! Next season the league will require quarterbacks to change the standard snap cadence from "Hut! Hut!" to "Hype! Hype!"

Plans To Clone Dan Snyder Are on Hold Until It Can Be Determined Whether He Is Human: The NFL imbedded tiny strands of genetically engineered DNA into Super Bowl game balls so that they can be positively identified, increasing the income the league earns by selling the balls to collectors. Isn't it interesting that the NFL will go to any length to make sure we know precisely which ball was used on which play but insists it hasn't the slightest way of knowing what happened at the Ray Lewis murders?

Last Dan Snyder Item: The Owner/Megalomaniac has now fired 90 coaches and front-office and management personnel in less than two years since taking over the Persons, including firing many of his own hires. Dan Synder Feat of the Year: giving that \$8 million to the fading, underperforming Sanders at a time when no other team had even made Sanders an offer, let alone dangled bags of money. Snyder declared Sanders "the ultimate weapon." Deion unilaterally disarmed.

Last Cardinals Item: In the run-up to the 2000 season, the Arizona (CAUTION: MAY CONTAIN FOOTBALL-LIKE SUBSTANCE) Cardinals said without irony that center Mike Gruttadauria was their "big name" free-agent signing. Twelve letters—not bad. This offseason, if you're shopping for big names, how about Obafemi Ayanbadejo (Ravens), Tshimanga Biakabutuka (Carolina), Blake Brockermeier (Bears), Brody Heffner-Liddiard (Dolphins), or Alshermond Singleton (Bucs)?

Lions, Dolphins To Clash at Mike Kinsley Field: With PSI Net in financial trouble, the company may relinquish its identification rights to PSI Net Stadium, the Ravens' ballpark, putting the name of this structure back onto the market. Pro Player Stadium, where the Dolphins perform, already has its name for sale because the Pro Player apparel line went out of business; apparently millions for a stadium affiliation wasn't such a canny deal promotion-wise. The TWA Dome, where the Rams play, is now named after a bankrupt airline about to be swallowed by a competitor. Debate continues in Denver regarding whether to apply the storied title Mile High Stadium to the team's new field or to sell a naming right in order to pay back some of the public expense of construction.

TMQ suggests all these arenas be christened Your Trademark Here Stadium. Porticos would be set up with Times Square-style electronic message boards that could change stadium names at a moment's notice. Naming rights could then be auctioned on a weekly basis, maximizing revenue and allowing sponsors to tailor their image-making.

Why, after all, should a big corporation spend lavishly to have its name on a stadium in the week the Ravens are playing the Chargers or some other woofers? But when the next Tennessee at St. Louis game is held, the Fortune 500 might compete briskly to have the week's stadium name tie-in. Hollywood might rent ballpark names to tie in to movie openings: Greg Gumbel could say, "CBS welcomes you to the Broncos-Raiders game here at Lethal Bimbo Three: The Swimsuit Conspiracy, Now Opening Everywhere Stadium." Stadium name futures could be traded, or sold at deep discount for unwanted weeks, allowing small-money players into the action: "Fox welcomes you to the Chargers-Seahawks game here at the National Compulsive Yawn Awareness Foundation Stadium." TMQ would buy naming rights for the next Bengals at Cardinals game so that for one Sunday, the field could officially be known as Cover Your Eyes Stadium.

Final Haiku Corner:

Strong men shudder as  
Weak souls quake: Dilfer. Collins.  
Super Bowl QBs.  
—Eddie Scott

TMQ's Offseason Points: While NFL stadium attendance is the best ever, ratings for television—a more important source of revenue—are shaky. As we head into the free agency period and players begin to jump teams like genetically engineered burgers jump off the griddle at your favorite fast food joint, Tuesday Morning Quarterback would like to make two points:

First, free agency has hurt the quality of the game by encouraging players to engage in "look-ma-I'm-dancing" behavior with their next contract in mind while discouraging team cohesion and selfless play in the interest of the team. Watch NFL film closely this year, and the one thing that jumps out is the decline in OL play on most teams. Offensive line coordination is subtle and hard to see, but the OL requires the most teamwork of any football unit, and this builds with time. Free agency now shuffles lines so often—four of Tampa's five OL starters were new this year—that clumsy play is now the norm rather than the exception. The same phenomenon can be seen at other positions: good athletes not together long enough to learn to play cohesively. Though individual NFL games are often still fabulous, overall the quality of the product is declining, so naturally consumers (viewers) are buying less of it.

Next, how great do you suppose television-series ratings would be if actors constantly jumped from show to show? If Dennis Franz jumped from NYPD Blue to Spin City, and to top it off kept playing the same character? You'd turn on Spin City, and Heather Locklear would be, first, fully clothed—and what's the point of that—and second, listening to a glum Detective Sipowicz speak in a monotone about how freak accidents and rare diseases have recently killed everyone he has ever met. The next week you'd turn on Star Trek: Voyager, and Captain Janeway would be talking to Tim Allen, who would be playing not an alien emissary from the Galactic Hegemony (When You Wish Upon a Star, Invasions Come True™) but his Home Improvement character, belt and all.

Basically that is what happens when athletes constantly change teams: They disorient you by showing up in other places, doing exactly what they used to do somewhere else. Free agency hasn't even necessarily helped bad franchises (if it please the court, Exhibits A and B, the Cincinnati Bengals and Los Angeles Clippers, and your Honor, I rest my case); it's just made the top teams approximately interchangeable along a three-to-five year time axis. Major league baseball has already gotten to the point at which it's so hard to figure out who is playing for whom that the sport could give up on team structure entirely and reconstitute as a rotisserie league where all players are unaffiliated individuals competing exclusively for stats. Endless altering of who's in which uniform suggests that neither what the athlete did at the old team nor does now at the new one means much except for his own income, and reduced interest should not come as a huge surprise.

(Bad television notes: To create an all-purpose NYPD Blue line of dialogue, simply put the phrases "jammed up," "on the job," and "the House" into any sentence in any order. To write an instant Voyager episode, use this generic plot: While the shuttlecraft crashes on an away mission staged for no reason other than to necessitate a rescue, the holodeck inadvertently takes over the ship. Seven of Nine denies her feelings. The Doctor programs himself with yet another "cute" human trait. To save the day, Janeway and Tuvok must crawl through a series of tunnels and push some buttons really fast.)

Canton Update: TMQ salutes the selection committee for giving three of this year's seven slots to offensive linemen, the most OLs ever chosen. But that still leaves the NFL Hall of Fame with 39 running backs and quarterbacks compared to 27 OLs, though teams typically play twice as many offensive linemen as RBs and QBs combined. More OL affirmative action is required.

Team Name Change Proposal: Since the Texans don't start playing till 2002, there is still time to change their name to the Rolling Blackouts.

Ultimate Hidden Indicator: Teams that were leading on the final play won 100 percent of their games. This is the kind of hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's—oh, forget it.

### **Running Items Department**

Final New York Times Final-Score Score: Seeking to improve its odds, the Times ran dueling Super Bowl predictions—Giants over Ravens and Ravens over Giants. Since these were the only possible outcomes, the Multicolored Lady pretty much covered its bases. But both quixotic attempts to predict the final score were wrong, bringing the final New York Times Final-Score Score to 0-260 for the year, a perfect season!

Times sportswriter Mike Freeman can take solace in having in August picked the Ravens to win the trophy, along with ESPN commentator Joe Theismann, the only other big-media commentator who called the Ravens in preseason. Though TMQ in August presciently described the Ravens as "a destiny team." All right, I'm leaving out words to create the appearance of prescience: Actually I wrote, "Baltimore feels in some way like a destiny team."

Other Final Failed Predictions: The Sporting News' panel of seven gentlemen whom the magazine identifies as "football experts" made quixotic attempts to predict the exact final score of the Super Bowl, and all were wrong. The Sporting News also asked 35 celebrities, from Dan Rather to model Cindy Margolis, to predict the exact final score, and all were wrong—0-35, though all 35 predictions focused on the same game! One of the celebrities, Monica Lewinsky, identified by the Sporting News as "a former White House intern" (oh, you mean that Monica Lewinsky) said she liked Jersey/A because of Jason Sehorn. Maybe the Giants will start taking locker room interns; TMQ bets the players could see their way clear to that. Margolis, identified by the Sporting News as "the most downloaded woman on the Web," picked the Ravens but was wrong about the final. Whether Margolis really ought to be the most-electronically-gawked-at babe in known world history you must judge for yourself. TMQ is not sold since tricorder readings suggest the presence of a silicon-based life form. TMQ does like Cindy's Web store, though, which offers an "autographed headshot" for \$10 and a "limited edition" bikini pose for \$49.95. (Limited, surely, to the number that can be sold.)

Most Embarrassing Disney Senior Management Moment: The Don Ohlmeyer-Dennis Miller fiasco drove Monday Night Football ratings to the lowest level ever, despite a run of fabulous games. Using canny business acumen, Disney just renewed the pair for another year. The announcement contained some blather about how MNF viewers need time to get used to Miller. That should be easy since there are fewer of them every week!

Reader Animadversion: Relative to college team nicknames, TMQ asked of the University of Delaware, how do you cheer up a Blue Hen? Drew Ames suggested, "Goose her." Bob Krasner replied in haiku:

For cheering Blue Hens  
I have found that food works best  
But not an omelet.

Several readers noted that by being the Blue Hens, Delaware is one of the few schools with a female nickname image. This caused Mark Nelson to ask, "Are Delaware women's teams called the Lady Blue Hens?" The University of South Carolina, whose men's teams are the Gamecocks, bravely continues to call its women's teams the Lady Gamecocks, despite the extremely common ellipsis of that designation. To top it off, the school's mascot is named Cocky. TMQ assumes Cocky is intended to be male, but, this being the 21st century, who knows who's under that costume and what she may be wearing for recreational purposes? Check Cocky out here.

On the topic of disinformation, TMQ has often wondered whether made-up sports stats acquire lives of their own. When you hear TV announcers say that a team has just set the record for most consecutive quarters without a screen left, how do you have any idea whether it's true? As a test, last week's TMQ contained a line of disinformation. Did you catch it? "Of the 68 teams to have taken the field in the 34 Super Bowls so far, 18 of them—26 percent—failed to score a touchdown." Actually only one Super Bowl team failed to score a touchdown, Miami in 1972. (Eighteen Super Bowl teams did fail to record a passing TD; I based the phony stat on a real one for quasi-credibility.) Last week's column generated hundreds of e-mails but just two readers, Brodie Jarrell and "Mark," called TMQ on the plant: Gentlemen, if you had been the supervisors of Aldrich Ames, Cold War history might have been different. The plan is to watch and see if this disinformation acquires a life of its own and shows up in future Super Bowl writing.

On TMQ's complaint about announcers screaming "wide open!" far more often than justified, reader Ray Lynch wrote, "I guess you don't watch many Cincinnati Bengals games. At least two receivers are wide open! on every play."

For the item on college nicknames, several readers questioned why TMQ passed on the obvious opportunity to get the Beavers of Oregon—or Beaver College, for that matter—into the same sentence as the name of some mega-babe sex goddess. Now do I seem like the kind of writer who would stoop so low for a prurient cheap shot appealing solely to the salacious instincts of readers? Of course! But I didn't think of it at the time. Reader "Mr. Fabulous" points out that Whittier College, a Quaker school, calls its teams the Poets because, apparently, the school feels that relative to a Quaker, a Poet is menacing. Mr. Fabulous suggests instead the Whittier Nixons, which sounds truly menacing. Academic schedule note: On July 16, Beaver College will change its name to Arcadia University in order to end a generation of bad jokes. No word on whether Jennifer Lopez will be the final commencement speaker.

Regarding TMQ's complaint that announcers say "double reverse" to describe plays that are actually single reverses, reader "Meriadoc" notes that pundits say politicians have committed a "flip-flop" when actually they mean a flip. A flip-flop, Meriadoc points out, would bring you back to your original position. Then you could be accused of consistency!

Finally, reader Bill Brueggeman writes to note that Cheetah was a monkey, not a chimpanzee. TMQ apologizes to all lower primates, lower primates being the column's core audience.

Final TMQ Trivia Challenge: Last week's Challenge:

Several NFL players share the dubious distinction of dressing for three Super Bowls but not participating in a single play. Name any one of these gentlemen.

Many readers knew that Jason Garrett, who held the clipboard three times for the Cowboys at the Super Bowl without ever getting his uniform dirty, would be headed to Tampa as the Giants' third quarterback, giving him his fourth chance to dress for the big dance but not play—the record, so far as TMQ can determine. Other readers noted that Gale Gilbert dressed for two Super Bowls for the Bills without playing, then taped up and did not play for the Chargers in their Super Bowl appearance. Bob Berry, the Vikings' third QB during their Super Bowl run in the 1970s, also achieved the dubious distinction of three big dance dress-ups without a snap. There may have been others, too, but since they were offensive linemen or special teams players, everyone has utterly forgotten them, even members of their own families. Of the many correct answers, this Challenge is awarded on a completely arbitrary basis to Jeff Varty of Calgary, Alberta.

Frostback wins an NFL contest? Aye caramba. Things are getting out of hand. It must be time to end this mad TMQ experiment. And so ...

TMQ Sign-Off: As this column folds its tent and steals into the desert, Tuesday Morning Quarterback advises you to use the offseason to read great works of philosophy and theology. Exercise regularly. Give generously. Join a faith-based community service organization. Meditate. Get in touch with the spiritual themes in your life. Improve your diet: The USDA recommends four servings daily of fresh fruits or vegetables, three servings of complex carbohydrates, two servings of dairy or meat, and no more than one serving of fats or sweets. Take long walks and appreciate the glories of nature. Stop and smell the flowers or, if you are a Texan, the oil refineries. Spend more time with your family or, if you are Jesse Jackson, with your families.

Do all these things during the offseason, and then you can feel morally superior when you plunk yourself in front of the television on Sunday afternoons next fall to eat caramel-ranch-'n'-asiago-sprayed genetically engineered Tostitos, drink dark-light blueberry-pineapple half-pale microbrewed ale, and scream, "Go for it!"

Plus take some life advice from TMQ: Resist the urge to blitz. Chances are the down and distance are in your favor. And don't wear ridiculous K2 survival gear, unless you are actually headed to K2.

As the winter months drag on and you glance down at your edition of the Summa Theologica and realize you have only made it to page 249—eo modo tradere secundum quod congruit ad eruditionem incipientium, arrggghhhh, was he drinking dark-light half-pale ale when he wrote this?—just bear something in mind. The 2001 NFL season kicks off, and all the hype, absurdity, and ritualized time-wasting begins anew, in but 217 days.

Ye gods.

Gregg Easterbrook is the author, most recently, of *The Progress Paradox: How Life Gets Better While People Feel Worse*.

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