



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## Dumbledore returns, plus cheerleaders from the future travel backward in time to save Star Trek!

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

(Aug. 10, 2004) -- Thank goodness it's about to end -- that long, lonely NFL offseason will conclude, and the nutty artificial universe of pro football resumes. Not a moment too soon! All the madness, the hype, the ill-tempered gentlemen slamming into each other, the scantily attired cheer-babes. I don't know about you, but I can't wait.

In a moment, my annual review of offseason highlights -- actually, lowlights. But first, a Tuesday Morning Quarterback public-policy proposal: uniform amnesty. All NFL teams that have adopted garish new color schemes or monochrome looks, TMQ is proclaiming an amnesty. Return to your old uniforms, and no questions asked.

For my money, the Bills, Bolts, Broncos, Cowboys, Falcons, Giants, Jets, Patriots, Seahawks and Titans went downhill with their uniform alterations; only the Bucs, Eagles and Rams look better in their revisionist duds than those that came before.

The Cowboys: What, exactly, was wrong with preserving the look that won all those Super Bowls?

The Giants: They switched to gray as an accent color, now there's a color that really pops, and made themselves the slowest-looking team in the league.

The Seahawks: They look like they just fell into a pot of finger paints

Tennessee: The old Oiler jerseys were sleek and glistening, the new shoulder-pads-squares thing makes Titans' players appear to be sewing mannequins escaped from a couturière.

The Falcons: Their unis are now so busy, the players look like walking computer screensavers.

The Broncos: Sure orange and blue was weird, but it was also bold, and if it was good enough for Floyd Little, it's good enough for me.

The Bills: How could a team abandon red, white and American flag blue? Which, not to put too fine a point on it, is the single-most successful color scheme in world history.

Please, NFL teams, return to your old uniforms. You can bring the new ones to the league headquarters loading dock and abandon them there. You won't have to give your names.

Not only are uniforms now in constant flux -- the Bengals and Falcons seem to have new uniforms every other year -- it is astonishing to think that with 32 NFL teams, not one uses red, white and American flag blue. Jersey/A officially calls its color scheme "blue, red and white," but when I look at G-Men I see a lot of gray. Officially, the Texans' colors are "Deep Steel Blue, Battle Red and Liberty White," but the latter looks like Copy Paper White to me, and the blue is Bridge Abutment Blue.

Then there is the annoying new practice of special-occasion monochrome outfits. In recent years, for individual games the Bengals and Jax have gone all-black, the Browns and Dolphins all-orange, the Falcons all-red, the Eagles and Jets all-green, and the Bills have shown a monochrome of their dismal new color, Nineteenth Century Rusting Russian Dreadnaught Aft Bulkhead Cyanic. The Ravens announced they will wear all-black on Nov. 7, when they host Cleveland. If the Browns go all-orange, it would be the Tootsie Roll Bowl.

On an exclusive basis, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has learned that when the Green Bay Packers host Dallas on Oct. 24, they will take the field in the NFL's first all-yellow uniform. See accompanying photo of Brett Favre modeling the Pack's tradition-smashing all-yellow look. Remember, this is a TMQ exclusive.

The only hope is uniform amnesty. Please, everyone go back to how you looked in 1975 -- no questions asked!

In other football news, last night at the Hall of Fame game, Joe Gibbs became the first Canton-crowned coach to prowl the sidelines since George Halas. Fans of the Potomac Drainage Basin Indigenous Persons are both excited and nervous: excited because Gibbs' track record is so impressive, nervous because if he can't pull the Persons out of their tailspin, who can? Last year, when Steve Spurrier was moping on the Persons' sideline, TMQ called him Dobby the Elf, after the sniveling, miserable creature of the Harry Potter books. Gibbs will be Professor Dumbledore, after the Potter saga's all-seeing good wizard.

There are many positives in Gibbs' record, but the one that jumps out is his 16-5 postseason mark. That's the best of any NFL coach in history who had at least 10 postseason appearances. Tom Landry was 20-16 in the playoffs, Don Shula 19-17, Chuck Noll 16-8, Bill Parcells 11-7, Marv Levy 11-8, Bill Walsh 10-4, Vince Lombardi 9-1. Landry and Shula must be admired for their sheer number of playoff appearances, as must Lombardi for going 10 times and losing just once. But overall, for Gibbs to make 21 playoff games and win 16 is simply spectacular -- in fact, TMQ considers it the single-greatest accomplishment by an NFL coach.

And now for the annual TMQ review of offseason lowlights.

### **At Last We Know What Kind of Martini Goes With Pancakes**

Vermont Spirits began marketing an "ultra premium" vodka made entirely from maple syrup.

### **Your Code Name Is Snowman. The Exchange Will Be in the Park at Sunset. On the Microdot Will Be Plans for a New Toy Steam Locomotive With Realistic Sound.**

Lionel was ordered to pay \$41 million for industrial espionage of -- model trains. A federal court found that Lionel stole design specifications from Mike's Train House, which makes really fabulous toy trains.

### **Just Sell, Baby**

The Oakland Raiders, who finished 4-12, sold more licensed merchandise than the Super Bowl champion Patriots.

### **They Can Be Observed in Their Native Habitat in Stadiums**

Scientist Katerina Harvati of New York University found evidence that Neanderthals were not the ancestors of Homo sapiens. The NFL will need to handle this discovery delicately, as Neanderthals are an important part of the fan base.

### **Asked What He Thought of the Two-Deep Zone, Kerry Issued a Terse "No Comment"**

Ted Koppel interviewed John Kerry at the Pro Football Hall of Fame. TMQ was disappointed that Koppel did not ask, "If elected, will you mandate the run on third-and-short? Will you form a bipartisan consensus for an outdoor Super Bowl in a cold-weather city?"

### **Asked Who His Favorite Football Team Is, the President Tersely Replied, "My Favorite Team Is At an Undisclosed Location"**

George W. Bush paid a call at the Cleveland Browns training camp. TMQ was disappointed that when Bush tossed the ball around with Browns players, quarterback Jeff Garcia didn't ask, "Um, would you block for me?"

### **Female Fans Demand Justice in Beach Volleyball**

At the Olympics, all red-blooded Americans will be rooting for the barely-clothed beach volleyball aces Misty May and Kerri Walsh. But bear in mind: By Olympics tradition, May and Walsh are overdressed, since the original Olympics were held in the nude. Tuesday Morning Quarterback cannot help but observe that while the women on the beach volleyball tour perform in microscopic bikinis that could be mailed

First Class -- since they only weigh a couple ounces -- the men cavort in knee-length baggy shorts. As a traditionalist, it's fine with me that the battle of the bods is unequal so long as the women show the most, upholding tradition! But now that we're in the third millennia, is it really fair to female and nontraditional male viewers that the men don't match the women in wearing as little as legally possible? Ancient Greek sports promoters would have insisted on it.

### **How Many Signs of the Decline of Western Civilization Can You Find in This Item?**

The scenic city of Soap Lake, Wash., announced a project to build a 10-story-tall lava lamp. Note: I am being charitable by assuming Soap Lake is scenic; don't sue me if you go there and it's a pit. The project announcement says, "Soap Lake has always been a healing and art community, and the lava lamp is soothing, calming, healing and an art icon." Here is a vision of the gigantic lava lamp at sunset -- sunset on a world other than Earth, apparently. Promoters hope the 1.5 million per year who visit nearby Grand Coulee Dam will detour to Soap Lake to see the gigantic lava lamp. One-and-half million tourists per year come to look at a dam?

### **Eagles to Sell Formula for Vet Playing Surface as Tank Armor**

Veterans Stadium in Philadelphia was demolished. During the demolition, wrecking balls bounced off the playing surface, while jackhammers, pile drivers and dynamite had no effect. Classified Air Force technology had to be used to destroy the surface.

### **International Mega-Babe Update**

China Daily described the new Miss Universe, Jennifer Hawkins of Australia, as "a statuesque 180-centimeter blonde." The London Evening Standard described tennis phenom/bombshell Maria Sharapova as "a luscious six foot, nine stone." Now TMQ daydreams of a 180-centimeter, nine-stone mega-babe! Note to NFL.com editors: have just provided a perfectly legitimate international multicultural excuse for cheesecake shots of Hawkins or Sharapova.

### **But What Have You Done for Us Lately?**

Tim Brown was cut by Oakland, for whom he had caught only 1,070 passes. Hey, Tim -- what about that one you dropped in 1996, huh? Ruben Brown was cut by the Bills mere weeks after making his eighth consecutive Pro Bowl for Buffalo. Troy Hambrick was cut by Dallas, the Cowboys' official web site explaining he had rushed for "just 972 yards last season." Just 972 yards! In 2003, 13 NFL teams had no player who ran for as much.

### **Ambitious New Deficit-Reduction Plan: White House Online Store to Market Lincoln Bedroom Sheets**

The White House unveiled a Web chat room. Here, from the president's website, is a chat session with Walter Scheib, the White House chef, who reveals that when he was a child, he eat exactly the same thing for lunch each day: three hot dogs. Here, Treasury Secretary John Snow tries to impress Mary from Denver with the size of his office.

### **Oh Ye of Little Victories**

Jim Caviezel, who played the lead in The Passion of the Christ, is the brother-in-law of Scott Linehan, offensive coordinator of the Minnesota Vikings. Bob Sansevere of the St. Paul Pioneer Press asked the actor what he thought about to make himself appear in agony during filming of the crucifixion scene. "When I was on the cross, I was thinking about the Minnesota Vikings," Caviezel said. "Whenever they lose, it just rips your heart out."

### **Next Season -- "Law and Order: Parking Attendant"**

NBC announced a fourth Law and Order series, Law and Order: Trial by Jury. Four Law and Order shows running simultaneously -- can there really be that many laws left to break? Maybe there could be a few

more spinoffs:

"Law and Order: Head Linesman." In the American sports system, there are the defenders who grab the jerseys and the zebras who throw the flags. This is their story.

"Law and Order: Grammar Police." Imagine the chaos when they raid NFL.com headquarters!

"Law and Order: Recycling Squad." Who mixed the paperboard with the glossy stock? Jimmy Smits and Jenna Elfman won't rest until they know.

"Law and Order: Political Promises Unit." Elite investigators track politicians' campaign promises, then compare them to actual behavior in office. Programming note: series ends when the entire United States Congress is behind bars after third episode.

### **On Fourth-and-1/16th of An Inch, Kevin Gilbride Called a Pass**

The NFL and game-maker THQ announced a football video game, including NFL teams and real rosters, that can be played on a cell phone. The Wall Street Journal headline: IT'S FOURTH-AND-1/16TH OF AN INCH.

### **"You Have the Power to Turn Back the Clock 1,000 Years. But You've Got to Believe You Can Turn Back the Clock 1,000 Years!"**

The Pittsburgh Post-Gazette reported that the top-selling author in Iran is Anthony Robbins.

### **Mega-Babe Event of the Year**

The Philadelphia Eagles cheerleaders traveled to Florida to meet the Miami Dolphins cheerleaders, who rival the Eagles cheerleaders for the lead in aesthetic appeal, at what was billed as the Battle on the Beach. The combined squads played bikini beach volleyball and competed in relay races. Why wasn't this broadcast on pay-per-view?

Go here on the Eagles web site and click "photo gallery" to gawk at no fewer than 78 pictures of the Florida event. Some photos are credited to Eagles broadcast representative Dave Spadaro. Imagine the assignment meeting: "Dave, you can either stay home and write about Terrell Owens' compression shorts, or go to South Florida and hang around on the beach taking pictures of dozens of gorgeous women who are practically naked. Which is it?" Note from the photos that the Eagles and Dolphins both have official team bikinis. In the case of the cutting-edge Eagles, the cheerleaders' Vera-Wang-designed swimsuits are triangle tops with Rivera-cut bottoms -- pretty much the least a woman can wear in public without getting arrested.

TMQ has long cleaved to the beach theory of babe-ness, which holds that proximity to beaches explains why California and Florida produce such a high percentage of the world's critical supply of mega-babes. A couple decades ago, this theory was strained by the Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders, and the theory is strained today by the Eagles cheerleaders and by the high-aesthetic-appeal Denver Broncos cheerleaders. An exception for Texas, maybe; Texas women have a certain renown. An exception for Colorado, sure; it's that healthy outdoorsy lifestyle. But an exception for Pennsylvania? How is it that Pennsylvania matches Florida in a contest of babe-ness, when Florida has all the great beaches? Sign of beach-envy: The Eagles cheerleaders were in Florida in order to shoot this year's lingerie calendar on the sands of Delray Beach.

Note: Many, many readers, including Timothy Levison, alerted TMQ of the Battle on the Beach. This means that even during the offseason, when Tim and others were supposed to be working, they were instead gawking at the Dolphins' and Eagles' cheer-babe sites. Glad you had your priorities in order!

### **Sample It With Coq au Vin, Mexican Style**

The high-end whisky maker Glenlivet introduced a "French oak finish" Scotch aged in casks fashioned of wood from the cognac-producing region of France. That is, a whisky made in Scotland designed to taste French. As part of this column's continuing coverage of French oak, in the offseason I received this haiku from reader Adam Shani, a winemaker in Israel, regarding the underclassmen in the first round of the

NFL draft:

Draftees are too young!  
Try this means of aging them  
18 months French oak.

-- Adam Shani, Israel

### **Ross and Rachel Getting Back Together Was That Easy to See Coming?**

On the morning of the final episode of Friends, the DVD of the show, available for pre-order, had 32 reader reviews on Amazon.com -- though the episode had not yet aired.

### **But Then, Jennifer Aniston Is a Lot Better Looking**

More people watched the series finale of Friends than voted for George W. Bush.

### **Though "Repeatedly Fired By Donald Trump" Is a Plus on His Resume**

Kwame Jackson, runner-up on The Apprentice, was fired as a Miss Universe judge after he waved to some contestants in a hotel lobby. That's right; not after he received unmarked bills in an envelope, after he waved. "His interaction with the delegates, albeit unintentional, is strictly prohibited," Paula Shugart, president of the Donald Trump co-owned pageant, said. Now, if several friendly beauty queens waved at you in a hotel lobby, would you: (a) wave back (b) signal your room number by flashing Morse code or (c) pretend you do not see friendly beauty queens? To Miss Universe officials, (c) is the correct answer.

### **Next Is Socialist Economics Adventure Land, Where Your Possessions Are Seized and Redistributed As You Ride the Ferris Wheel**

Dinosaur Adventure Land, a theme park based on the creationist theory that the Earth was formed only a few thousand years ago, opened in Pensacola, Fla. Those wishing to know more about the theory can attend Creation Boot Camp.

### **Originally the 81 British Students Planned to Strip at Dinosaur Adventure Land, But Management Nixed the Idea**

Eighty-one British college students staged the largest-ever naked roller coaster ride, clamoring onto the Nemesis Inferno at Thorpe Park in Surrey in the buff. The stiff-upper-lip BBC quoted Judy Booker of Bath saying, "I have got two phobias, the fear of roller coasters and taking my clothes off in public, so that gets two things in one go." Judy, does this mean that someone who fears snakes and fire should run into a burning reptile house?

### **Approach With Extreme Caution. Suspect May Be Armed With Challenge Grants**

Herbert Alexrod, who fled the country after being charged with tax fraud in connection with donations to the New Jersey Symphony Orchestra, was arrested in Germany. News accounts described him as a "fugitive philanthropist."

### **In Chapter Six, Rommel Fouls Out**

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar published a book about World War II.

### **If "The Bachelor" Had Ended In a Tie, Would It Have Gone Into Sudden-Kiss Overtime?**

Jersey/A backup quarterback Jesse Palmer, star of this winter's The Bachelor, chose 22-year-old law student Jessica Bowlin over Tara Huckleby, whose occupation is "general contractor." Not long after pledging their love on national television, Palmer and Bowlin broke up, though declaring they had shared

"an incredible romantic journey." After she discarded Palmer, Bowlin became friends with Huckeby, and they ran together in a charity marathon. Promoting the show, ABC described Palmer as a "top backup quarterback" -- not just any old backup quarterback, a top backup quarterback.

Palmer started *The Bachelor* with 25 incredibly attractive women pleading for his attention, which TMQ viewed as a totally authentic re-creation of my own dating career. At least -- that's how I remember it.

### Trades of the Year

The Los Angeles Clippers traded the No. 2 pick in the NBA draft, plus a player, to Charlotte for the No. 4 pick. Got that? They gave up a player in order to move down. Phoenix traded a No. 1 pick in exchange for Charlotte's agreement to take a player from the Suns during the expansion draft. Got that? They gave up a No. 1 and a player in return for nothing. New Jersey sent its No. 1 pick to Portland for Eddie Gill, whom the Nets immediately waived. This wasn't a blown trade: The Nets made the agreement planning to release Gill.

What's going on here is the NBA guaranteed contract. Almost all NBA contracts are guaranteed, and when you've got an overpaid, underperforming player moldering on the salary cap with a guaranteed contract, the only fix is to find someone who will take him in trade, placing his numbers on the new team's books. But if you want some other team to haul away your trash in salary-cap terms, you've got to make it worth that team's while. So Phoenix and the Clippers gave up something to get nothing -- nothing being preferable to having bad players with guaranteed contract. New Jersey gave up something for nothing in order to avoid having to sign a No. 1 choice and become stuck with another guaranteed contract.

Why this matters to football is that fully guaranteed contracts are unknown in the NFL, and let's pray it stays that way. Fans, including TMQ, get upset when the lack of contract guarantees means accomplished NFL veterans are released during salary-cap purges. But always bear in mind, the cold-blooded this-is-business aspect of the non-guaranteed NFL contract is a central reason NFL games are consistently high-quality -- players know every down matters to whether they keep their jobs. Over in the NBA, many games are monotonous exhibitions of me-first strutting because gentlemen with guaranteed contracts are paid the same regardless of how poorly or selfishly they perform. Oh ye football gods, don't ever let the guaranteed contract come to the NFL.

### Offseason Football-Like-Substance Highlights

In arenafootball2 action, the San Diego Riptide defeated the Hawaii Islanders 91-77 in a game that featured 24 touchdowns. Over in the Arena League -- its little cousin can't afford capital letters -- the San Jose SaberCats bested the Arizona Rattlers 69-62 to win the championship. This contest offered 19 touchdowns, 78 pass plays, five rushing plays and a 7-yard kickoff return for a touchdown by Chuck Reed. The Saber Cats, the most successful Arena League franchise in wins and at the gate, owe some of their good fortune to propitiating the football gods with scantily attired cheer-babes. San Jose SaberKitten Erin Smith is a dean's-list student majoring in sociology; maybe she can do her thesis on why crowds for California sports events never show up until the middle of the first quarter. San Jose cheerleader Jaclyne Siino once was a cheerleader for the Oakland Raiders, and this summer entered the Contra Costa County Police Academy. Jaclyne, cuff me!

### Women's Football-Like Substance Highlights

In the National Women's Football Association, the Columbus Comets defeated the Indiana Thunder, 90-0, while the Oklahoma City Lightning beat the Denton Stampede, 80-0. Maybe parity isn't such a bad idea after all! Note: TMQ has been unable to find box scores of NWFA games or even the result of this year's championship. If any readers know where to locate same, or have attended women's football games and have observations to offer, fill me in using [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Tuesday Morning Quarterback just loves the names of NWFA teams, which hark back to the glory days of the 1920s football team names. Those included the Columbus Panhandles, the St. Paul Ideals, the Racine Cardinals -- named not after the city but a street in Chicago -- and the greatest football team name ever, the Providence Steam Roller. Today's NWFA names include the classic-sounding Wisconsin Riveters, the Tennessee Venom (surely Al Gore's favorite team), the Gulf Coast Herricanes (york, york), the Massachusetts Mutiny (they never

listen to the coach!) and TMQ's favorite, the Erie Illusion. Former Bengals star Ickey Woods coaches the latest NWFA expansion club, the Cincinnati Sizzle. Considering Snoop Dogg, shouldn't that be the Cincinnati Izzle?

NWFA games have a somewhat ad-hoc quality. Check the schedule, where the Southwest Michigan Jags won by forfeit under the notation, "officials failed to show." But women's football seems worth following - as TMQ has said, surely someday a woman will play in the NFL, though TMQ hopes never to meet that woman.

### **Yes, Management Does Matter**

The Detroit Pistons won the NBA championship with three of the five players in the starting lineup being gentlemen recently traded away by the Washington Wizards. The Whizzies had Richard Hamilton, Ben Wallace and Rasheed Wallace, and unloaded all three; there is no one left on the Washington roster obtained in these canny trades. So never doubt that management decisions do matter in sports. Had Wizards' management simply done nothing at all, holding on to Wallace, Wallace and Hamilton -- then pairing them with Michael Jordan! -- Washington might now be celebrating its NBA championship. Instead the Whizzies finished 25-57, then sat home watching players the team had gotten rid of win a title elsewhere.

### **Ancient Peruvians Highly Civilized, Researchers Find**

Scientists in Peru discovered remains of the oldest known industrial-sized brewery, which as long as 1,600 years ago produced thousands of liters of chicha, a spicy intoxicant similar to beer.

### **So If You Want to Have a Really Wild Night in Singapore, Chew Gum While Reading Cosmo**

Singapore ended its ban on chewing gum, and also decided to allow Cosmopolitan magazine on newsracks. Gum can only be sold by pharmacists, however, who must record the names of buyers. During the last decade, prostitution has been legal in Singapore, while possession of chewing gum has been a crime: Former prime minister Lee Kuan Yew detested gum because wads were found on Singapore's famously spotless streets. As for Cosmo, it was banned for advocating certain sexual practices that bring pleasure to women. Maybe Lee Kuan Yew worried that the legal prostitutes would subscribe to Cosmo and find out what they were missing.

### **More Reasons to Elope**

The Wall Street Journal quoted "cake designer Ron Ben-Israel", who makes wedding cakes that start at \$1,500. Here's one of his cakes, which appears to be a pile of expensive shoeboxes. The typical American wedding -- not a well-off family's wedding but the typical American wedding -- now costs \$22,000, the paper reported.

### **Why Offensive Linemen Should Be Treated Like Sled Dogs**

In summer 2003, the Official Wife of TMQ and I took the family to Alaska where, among other things, we did the sled-dog tour run by the Seavey family, longtime entrants in the Iditarod. The sled-dog ride, which the family uses to keep their animals in shape during the warm months, is certainly the thing to do when you are in Seward, Ala. Then this winter, Mitch Seavey won the 2004 Iditarod. It was his 11th try - - so Buffalo Bills and Minnesota Vikings, don't give up!

Sled dogs are smaller than you'd think and quite lean, yet eight of them could pull a heavy metal sled on which reposed eight donut-chomping Americans who outweighed the dogs at least six to one. The kennel area where dozens of dogs were kept, each chained to a small hut, was a sight. Beholding trainers approach to hitch up a sled, the dogs became frenzied, madly and barking leaping into the air: each as if to cry, "Choose me!" The chosen dogs wagged their tails in delight, while the passed-over canines whined pitifully. The moment they were hitched to the sled the dogs began straining forward, anxious to start. Apparently a problem for Iditarod mushers is that it's hard to get the teams to stop -- even exhausted and hungry in subzero weather, sled dogs want to keep pushing onward.

Watching these dogs straining and jumping and begging to be allowed to pull heavy weights made me think -- this is how offensive linemen should be treated! Keep them chained to individual huts, so they don't fight each other. Have them spend hours hitched to a sled. Make them jump and beg to get into a game. Above all, don't feed them until they have hit somebody.

### **Nice Little Computer You've Got There. Too Bad If Anything Should Happen to It**

MSN began running pop-up ads for a service that defeats pop-up ads.

### **NFL Experiments with Robot Zebras: Test Model Cries, "Home Run!"**

New York City began installing its first no-motorman, computer-driven subway cars. "Before you have robots run our subways, I'd like to see them get the P.A. system working," New York councilman John Liu said. Councilman, check out the guys in the booths, automatons are already infiltrating the system! But Liu has a point -- in the New York subways the lighting is bad, the turnstiles jam, announcements are incomprehensible, but now we're supposed to trust that the computers driving the trains are totally flawless. There's an old joke where a machine voice reassures, "Nothing can go wrong. Click, can go wrong. Click, can go wrong. Click..."

### **Nothing Can Go Wrong. Click, Can Go Wrong ...**

A Pentagon-sponsored contest, offering a \$1 million prize for the first self-guided robot vehicle to travel a Mohave Desert course, ended with most super-high-tech entrants crashing within view of the starting line. Sandstorm, a \$3 million prototype backed by defense contractor Boeing, slammed into the very first obstacle and caught fire. A robot vehicle designed by high-tech firm Ensco immediately rolled onto its side and began leaking fuel. ("Ensco makes the world a safer place through engineering, science and advanced technology," its website proclaims -- if you really want to be safe, stay clear of Ensco products.) A robot built by Virginia Tech engineering students went haywire and never left the gate. "Axion Racing's converted Jeep Grand Cherokee wandered in circles, its steering wheel moving side to side and the horn sounding pitifully," Kimberly Edds of the Washington Post reported from the scene. Read this accounting prepared by the Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency, which sponsored the contest. One high-tech robot vehicle "ran into some wire and got completely tangled in it" after less than half a mile. Another monument to technology "hit a wall in the start area and was removed from the course."

My favorite is the description of what happened to this enormous high-tech robot built by Ohio State University engineers: "Several times the vehicle sensed bushes, backed up and corrected itself. At mile 1.2, it was unable to proceed further." The super-advanced robot failed because it sensed -- bushes. Maybe there are Chi-coms hiding in those bushes! The farthest any vehicle got was seven miles of a planned 142-mile course; eight of the 15 entrants could not traverse even one mile. In the classic government-contracting spirit of rewarding failure, DARPA has doubled the prize for a new competition next year.

### **TMQ Still Stands for Tuesday Morning Quarterback, But the Marketing Department Is Looking Into It**

The American Automobile Association changed its name to AAA, following the American Association of Retired Persons, whose name is now simply AARP, and Kentucky Fried Chicken, whose name is now simply KFC. These names aren't acronyms: that is, terms formed from the first letters of a series of words. (Radar, for example, is an acronym from the phrase "radio detecting and ranging.") These names aren't abbreviations either. KFC no longer stands for Kentucky Fried Chicken -- the word "fried" does not even appear in KFC's own official description of itself. These names are now just strings of letters that represent nothing, like calling a car model the SLX.

The idea that AARP and KFC and AAA are now named after nothing is not what bothers TMQ. What bothers me is that corporate marketers believe the public is too stupid to remember the words "American Automobile Association."

### **Arthur Andersen Certified That Denver Had \$26 Billion in Cap Space**

In April, the Broncos were just \$287,000 under the salary cap.

### **A White House Source Whom We'll Call "George W." Said That ...**

George W. Bush held a deep background session with reporters, then announced it.

### **More Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization No. 1**

Bob Dylan made his first appearance as a celebrity pitchman, and the product he endorsed was Victoria's Secret. Does he, um, use this product? In the Vicky's ad, a gorgeous young woman wearing nothing but high heels, bra, panties and a pair of wings makes goo-goo eyes at the dilapidated Dylan, who now looks like a minor character from Buffy the Vampire Slayer. Apparently when in the mood, today's modern woman dons wings.

### **More Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization No. 2**

CBS premiered and then quickly cancelled Century City, a science-fiction show about lawyers of the future. TMQ watched an episode just to see if someone would holler, "Raise shields! Fire lawsuits!"

### **More Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization No. 3**

Assassins, a musical about people who have murdered U.S. presidents, opened on Broadway. Wicked, which tells the Wizard of Oz story from the point of view of the witches, won the most Tony Award nominations. All this came not long after the big Broadway hit was The Producers, a show about singing, dancing Nazis. At least The Producers had the dignity to make fun of singing, dancing Nazis; Assassins treats the murderers of presidents as sympathetic characters, if somewhat misguided. Keeping with these trends, what's next for Broadway?

"Yo, Bennie." The sensitive personal side of the misunderstood Benedict Arnold.

"Saturday Night at the Gulag." Starvation, torture, hard labor in the Siberian wasteland -- but those Gulag prisoners could rock! "'Rent' meets Solzhenitsyn:" the New York Post.

"Song of the Executioner's Song." Musical version of the life of sensitive, artistic murderer Gary Gilmore. He was traumatized as a child when an art teacher criticized one of his drawings, so he's really not to blame for those storekeepers he tied up and shot through the head.

"The Only Good Indian." A zany, madcap, hilarious comic retelling of the Trail of Tears, with sight gags and burlesque. Variety says: "Makes The Producers seem tasteful."

"Let's Twist!" The Oliver Twist story told from the point of view of Fagin, master of the orphanage. So a bunch of whining boys want gruel, what have they ever done to deserve it? If they want to eat, they should steal more! Starring Donald Trump in his first Broadway role.

More Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization No. 4

NBC announced a reality series based on selecting models for the Sports Illustrated swimsuit issue. This is shocking exploitation, and what time did you say it will be on?

### **More Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization No. 5**

ESPN broadcasted the National Scrabble Championship.

### **More Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization No. 6**

The National Scrabble Championship on ESPN was popular!

### **Scandal Erupted When a Holstein Took Payments from a Booster**

After the University of Connecticut became the first school to win the men's and women's basketball championships in the same year, this New York Times story celebrated how athletics helped the school shed its "cow college" reputation. What TMQ wants to know is, did the cows graduate, or just use up their eligibility and leave?

### **One Carry Every 19 Years Sounds Like a Modern NFL Fullback**

Check while you still can the career chart of all-but-officially retired Bruce Smith -- 19 years of rushing stats are required to list his one career carry for zero yards.

### **Health Is Important, But Think of Those Who Passed Up the Dessert Tray on the Titanic**

Gerontology researcher Roy Walford, the scientist responsible for the theory that deliberate under-eating significantly increases lifespan, died at the age of 79. According to an obituary, "For the last 30 years of his life, Walford adhered to a diet of about 1,600 calories a day, far below the 2,000 to 2,800 calories recommended for men his age." Though 5-foot-9, the researcher kept his weight at just 130 pounds. TMQ notes his passing with sadness, but 30 years of forcing himself to go hungry bought Walford exactly one more year than current American life expectancy.

### **Health Is Important, But Don't Injure Yourself Working Out**

Ray Wilson, who devised the Lifecycle exercise bike and started the California Family Fitness chain, put his California home on sale for \$6 million. Wilson told the Wall Street Journal he was selling in order to move to Hawaii, where swimming in the warm ocean waters would benefit his bad back. So the fitness guru has a bad back -- maybe from years of using a Lifecycle.

### **They're Picking Up Good Vibrations**

Thousands of vibrating football enthusiasts attended the 10th annual Super Bowl of Electric Football in Deerfield, Ill. That is, the event was attended by thousands of enthusiasts of vibrating football. The attendees were not themselves vibrating, in most cases.

The Super Bowl of Electric Football was won by Edgar Downs of Gary, Ind., playing as the Rams, who defeated Ron Bell of New Orleans, playing as the Dolphins. The game went into overtime and featured "one of the few punts in electric football history," noted Plugged In, the "official newsletter of electric football". Don't settle for an unofficial newsletter!

A while back a small company, Miggle Toys, began manufacturing the vibrating football sets with little men on plastic bases that Boomers remember from childhood. Electric football has since caught on again, while the product has gone upscale. Buyers can now get any NFL team in home or road jerseys, plus many NCAA Division I-A teams. There's a handsome wood table to set the game on, a set of stands with working tiny floodlights that enable players to simulate a Monday night game. (Presumably, a miniature blimp circling the field completes the look.) You can even buy tiny sideline figurines -- a scowling owner, a distressed coach, an airhead reporter and, of course, miniature cheerleaders.

Note: Overtimes at the Super Bowl of Electric Football are settled by giving each team one play from midfield and awarding the game to whichever gains the most yardage. Bell's Dolphins went first and, in highly realistic fashion, ran the Ricky Williams figurine into the line, gain of six. Downs' Rams, in highly realistic fashion, heave-hoed deep, long completion and the victory. It seems even the miniature Ricky Williams retired early!

### **This Week's Star Trek Complaint**

It was touch-and-go, but Star Trek Enterprise was renewed, keeping the dilithium crystals of the serial glowing. This means This Week's Star Trek Complaint is renewed a new season, and that was key, considering the beloved TMQ item New York Times Final-Score Score ends its four-year run as the Times has tragically stopped predicting final scores. But the rescue of Star Trek also means Tuesday Morning Quarterback must face the Trek aficionados who poured over last year's columns and amassed complaints about the complaints. In fact, TMQ received deeply felt grievances from Mike Sussman, the producer of Star Trek Enterprise, who raised shields and fired phasers on several points.

One of TMQ's grumbles was, "Captain Archer of the current show is presented as having extensive contacts with the Klingons, yet when Captain Kirk first meets a Klingon on the planet Orgonia, 100 years

later in the original Star Trek episodes, he declares that Starfleet fears the Klingons because it knows almost nothing about them." Sussman looked up the script of the 1967 episode in question, "Errand of Mercy," and found that Kirk did indeed have knowledge of the Klingons, telling the governing council of Organia, "The Klingons are a military dictatorship. War is their way of life. I have seen what the Klingons do to planets like yours." Okay, my bad.

Next, TMQ complained that Mr. Data of the Star Trek Next Generation serial was described as "the first living android," while in the Kirk episodes, set a century earlier, Starfleet encountered living androids built by the ominous Dr. Korby. Sussman pointed out that Data was described as "the first Soong-type android," referring to his creator, the benevolent Dr. Soong. It seems Soong-type androids are significantly advanced over outdated Korby-class models. Among other advancements, the Soong-type android, though machine, is able to age. In Star Trek theatrical movies made in the 1990s, Data has a paunch and facial wrinkles, whereas in the TV episodes made in the 1980s, he looks young!

Further, TMQ complained, "In the most recent Star Trek theatrical movie, Nemesis, Katherine Janeway appears as an aging admiral giving instructions to Captain Picard. Yet in Star Trek Voyager, the 1990s serial, Janeway was described as receiving her commission when Picard retired." Sussman raced to Stardate records (surely in his PDA, unless he carries a Tricorder) and replied, "This just isn't true. Janeway's first mission aboard Voyager took place in the year 2371, Stardate 48315.6, which was less than 12 months after the final episode of the Picard serial, ending in the year 2370, or Stardate 47988.1. Picard was not retired at this point -- he was still in command of the Enterprise-D, until Troi crashed the ship a few months later in the movie Generations. As for the 'aging' Admiral Janeway in Nemesis, the character was only two years older than the last time we saw her in the final episode of Voyager ."

So Janeway became a captain, was lost on the opposite side of the galaxy for seven seasons (a Federation vessel stranded on the wrong side of the galaxy was the premise of Voyager), then was two years older when promoted to admiral -- meaning Picard was still in command of his ship nine years after his series was cancelled? Man, Picard must have a good agent.

Sussman also protested TMQ's statement, "Recent Star Trek shows and movies have boggled time-line continuity all the way back to the very first Star Trek episode, Gene Roddenberry's original 1966 pilot, 'The Menagerie.' In the pilot, it's the year 2250 and the Enterprise goes to the planet Talos IV to rescue survivors of a scientific expedition. The first thing Enterprise crew members tell the marooned scientists is that the light-speed barrier has been broken, meaning they will get back to Earth fast. Yet in the 1996 Star Trek theatrical movie First Contact, which features the evil Borg time-traveling back to the year 2063 with the noble Picard in pursuit, we're told the light-speed barrier was broken in 2063, almost two centuries earlier."

Sussman looked up the dialogue from the pilot that started it all. It turns out the line in question was spoken by Jose Tyler, navigator of the Enterprise. In the pilot, Enterprise was run by not by Kirk and Spock but Captain Christopher Pike and the fearsome woman Number One. When NBC bought the series, Kirk and Spock replaced Pike and Number One -- network executives felt the public was ready for an alien with no emotions, but not for a woman with power -- while Tyler was replaced by Sulu. Anyway, when Tyler addressed the survivors of Talos IV, he said nothing about warp speed. What he said was, "You won't believe how fast you'll get back. The time barrier's been broken!"

So if the time barrier was broken in 2250, then the Borg and Picard used this knowledge to travel back to 2063 and change history; nothing that's happened on Star Trek since 2063 needs to make sense. As anyone who thinks about time-travel paradoxes rapidly concludes, if temporal travel were possible, there would never be a correct "timeline," with reality endlessly in flux. Time travel altering history explains away any conundrum in Star Trek continuity; once there's time travel, there is no continuity.

That reality is not endlessly in flux is one of the arguments that there is no time travel -- unless reality is endlessly in flux, but we're so disoriented by time alterations that we don't know. For instance, suddenly Al Gore is in the White House and everyone acts like he's been president all along; the talk shows are obsessed with his controversial decision to invade Belgium, seize its banned chocolate and shut down its tennis training centers. Nobody would remember there had been a George W. Bush presidency, so how would we know the timeline had been altered? Maybe the Buffalo Bills and Minnesota Vikings have won the Super Bowl repeatedly, but always sinister Giants and Steelers fans from the future alter the timeline. (It sure did look like an invisible force was pushing that Scott Norwood field-goal attempt away

from the uprights.) One day at work you are surrounded by other miserable drones in Dilbert cubicles; the next day everything's the same except you are surrounded by scantily attired mega-babes, because NFL cheerleaders from the future have come back into the past to alter history. But because you have no memory of the previous reality, you never appreciate your good fortune.

If there were time machines, Star Trek producers from the future would come back to warn Mike Sussman that small quirks in the current story line will have huge unintended consequences that plague the future holographic show, Star Trek: the Nth Generation.

I and the Official Kids of TMQ will watch the new season of Star Trek Enterprise and hope readers watch too, if only to keep This Week's Star Trek Complaint alive. Rumor is that in the first new episode, Earth is attacked by gigantic cicadas from outer space that appear once every 17,000 years.

### **Romeo, Oh Romeo, Didst Thou Bring the New Aunt Jemima Low-Carb?**

The Chicago Shakespeare Theater inked a sponsorship deal with Quaker Oats, which markets Cap'n Crunch, Aunt Jemima and Rice-a-Roni, and is a unit of Pepsico. Methinks twill be heard upon yon battlement:

What a piece of work is man!  
How noble in reason, how infinite in faculties!  
How tasty, like the San Francisco Treat.

Weary, stale, flat and unprofitable  
seem to me all the uses of this world  
Except the time I spendeth eating Cap'n Crunch!

Tomorrow and tomorrow and tomorrow  
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day  
And wouldn't a cold Pepsi Vanilla taste good right now?

### **One Big Happy Family**

A few years ago, when the Cincinnati Bengals and tailback Corey Dillon were engaged in a contract dispute, the team posted an article on its web site disparaging Dillon's ability as a runner. This offseason, Dillon demanded a trade. The team posted an article on its web site detailing Dillon's insults against Bengals' players and coaches. The article -- remember, on the team's own web site -- says Dillon called Cincinnati's Pro Bowl tackle Willie Anderson "a bum" and said the team was "out of control." The Bengals' web site quoted Anderson as countering, "Hey, he could have called me fat."

### **Clang! Clang! Clang! No. 1**

The New Jersey Nets missed 51 of 70 shots, shooting 27 percent, in losing to the Detroit Pistons. In a show of solidarity, two games later Detroit missed 54 of 76 shots, shooting 29 percent, in losing to New Jersey.

### **Clang! Clang! Clang! No. 2**

In a playoff meeting, the Pacers and Pistons combined to miss 101 shots, more than two missed shots per minute.

### **Clang! Clang! Clang! No. 3**

In the Spurs' series-ending sixth-game loss to the Lakers, starters Tim Duncan, Tony Parker, Bruce Bowen, Hedo Turkoglu and Rasha Nesterovic combined to miss all 12 three-point attempts they launched.

### **My Name Is Byte, James Byte**

Pierce Brosnan, Judi Dench, Heidi Klum and others provided voices for the animated versions of themselves in "Everything or Nothing," the new James Bond video game. Unfortunately, no matter how you use the joystick, you can't make the Klum character take off her clothes.

### **NYPD Blue Is Filmed in L.A., So It's a Wash**

The New Yorker magazine acknowledged that its "Letter from California" feature is written in Brooklyn.

### **Fans Complained They Were Forced to Listen to the Complaints**

Giants players complained they were being forced to work out, while Tim Couch complained he was being forced not to work out.

### **Next Week**

It's preseason for me too -- I'm using vanilla jokes intended to confuse scouts from other sports web sites. Next week it's TMQ's AFC preview, plus exclusive photographs of Dolphins cheerleaders playing bikini beach Yahtzee.



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## TMQ's AFC preview, plus the mysterious mystical law of 1,000 plays

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season and also appear on NFL Network, providing commentary Tuesday nights on NFL Total Access. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is currently out at bookstores now.)*

(Aug. 17, 2004) -- Every day is one step closer to the single most important thing in all of the observable universe -- NFL opening weekend and the resumption of real games that count. (Wait, that's two things.) As the blessed moment, Sept. 9, draws nigh, bear in mind the number 1,000. That's how many times you will see your favorite team snap the ball during the coming regular season. Last season the Panthers ran 1,008 plays, the Raiders had 987 plays, the Seahawks ran 1,017 plays, the Cowboys snapped 975 times, the Chiefs snapped 1,003 times, the Packers had 999 snaps. Good team or bad, everybody in the NFL was within a standard pollster's margin of error of 1,000 plays.

Is 1,000 a mystical number in football, or is there some "power law" that dictates that NFL teams must run 1,000 plays per season? Research shows that the typical mammal heart beats about two billion times in a typical lifetime. Small mammals with short lifespans tend to have much faster heartbeats than large mammals with longer life expectancy, such as members of genus Homo. Are small-mammal lifespans short because their hearts beat so fast, or are the hearts beating fast in order to squeeze the required number into a short life? Not even the football gods may be able to answer that one. But a "power law" seems to control the beating of hearts, and perhaps one controls snaps in NFL games, too.

Okay, I realize NFL games have nothing to do with heartbeats. But it sounded pretty cosmic, didn't it? Better stop before I go haiku! No wait, it's too late:

Thumpa, thumpa thump:  
Our hearts beat faster on each  
of 1,000 plays.  
-- TMQ, 2004

So savor each of those 1,000 plays by your favorite team. Like everything else in life, the whole business is surprisingly short.

Now, the Tuesday Morning Quarterback AFC preview.

### Baltimore

Since arriving in Charm City in 1996, at quarterback the Ravens have started Tony Banks, Jeff Blake, Kyle Boller, Stoney Case, Randall Cunningham, Trent Dilfer, Elvis Grbac, Jim Harbaugh, Scott Mitchell, Chris Redman, Vinny Testaverde, Anthony Wright and Eric Zeier. Thirteen starters in eight seasons -- honk if you'd played quarterback for the Baltimore Ravens! Brian Billick is supposed to be an offensive genius, yet can't keep a quarterback on the field. Only one of 13 starters worked out, Dilfer, who brought home a Super Bowl ring. Billick immediately got rid of the guy.

Verily, the football gods have other issues with the Ravens. Last January, Baltimore entered the postseason with the top-rated running game in the NFL and the last-rated passing game. Playing at home against the Titans, Baltimore coaches called 39 passing plays and 16 rushing plays -- trying to do what the team does not do well, while keeping the ball away from Jamal Lewis, who'd just completed a

2,066-yard season. Baltimore's pass-wacky performance was not because the Ravens were forced to play catch-up. The largest lead in what ended as a three-point Tennessee victory was seven points; until their final possession with 29 seconds remaining, the Ravens could have called anything from their playbook. Yet Baltimore coaches kept signaling in passes, including 16 attempts in the fourth quarter versus a mere four rushes. So the league's best rushing team abandons the run in the playoffs -- at home in a cold-weather outdoor game! Verily, the football gods may punish the Ravens this season for such an affront. As the football gods have prophesied, "Dance with the one what brung you."

Ravens fun draft fact No. 1: keep an eye on fifth pick Roderick Green, a linebacker from Central Missouri. After various machinations, Green is the guy the Ravens ended up with for dropping their complaint in the Terrell Owens matter. It would be highly amusing if Green had a better year than Owens.

Ravens fun draft fact No. 2: why has Baltimore shifted its top pick, defensive tackle Dwan Edwards of Oregon State, to defensive end? Because at 315 pounds, he's considered too small to play defensive tackle in today's NFL!

Ravens puzzler: why is Jim Fassel working as an assistant at Baltimore rather than fly-fishing in Montana for a year? Fassel's separation agreement with Jersey/A was such that he gets \$2 million this fall whether he works or not. Why not relax, put your feet up, watch games, read Thich Nhat Hanh, eat genetically engineered mango-asiago corn chips and wait for the phone to ring after the inevitable next putsch of head coaches?

## Buffalo

In the middle of the 2002 season, the Bills' offense and defense crossed each other going in opposite directions. To that point, the Buffalo offense was the hottest in the league; it proceeded to play poorly in the second half of 2002, and in 2003 crumbled to the lowest-scoring AFC team. In seven games last season the Bills' offense failed to record a touchdown, putting up a grand total of three points in its final two outings. Meanwhile the defense rose from weak at the beginning of 2002 to second-ranked in 2003. And considering how awful the Bills' offense was -- repeated listless three-and-outs, sending the defenders back onto the field -- the defensive finish is all the more impressive.

So what happened to the two units? The defense gradually improved by adding better players and abandoning the gambling "46" look that the former coach, the tastefully named Gregg Williams, stuck with too long. Now the Bills field a conservative, position-oriented defense, and TMQ believes conservative defenses are best. And though sports pundits groused that big-deal acquisition Lawyer Milloy did not post an interception, Buffalo finished second against the pass, which Milloy might possibly have had something to do with. Ten defensive starters return from 2003 and the new guy is the very polished Troy Vincent, so this unit may show cohesion rare in the waive-a-rama era of the salary cap.

Over on the offensive side, the football gods spent the last season and a half punishing the Bills for what this column calls The Preposterous Punt. Buffalo playing New England in 2002 in a monster game, trailing by 10 points at home in the third quarter, facing fourth and two on the Patriots' 32, the tastefully named Gregg Williams ordered -- a punt. To the moment of The Preposterous Punt, Buffalo was 5-3 and its offense hot; since that moment, the club has been 9-15 and its offense stone cold. The football gods have exacted vengeance for this mincing fraidy-cat call.

Now the tastefully named Gregg Williams has been replaced with the serious-pun-potential Mike Mularkey. Since gentlemen who have never been head coaches usually fare poorly in their first season, Buffalo fans are likely to face yet another season of rending of garments and gnashing of teeth. The new authority figure with most potential to elevate the Bills' fortunes is not Mularkey but Jim McNally, who takes over the offensive line. McNally worked wonders with undrafted who-dat OLs at Jersey/A. In Buffalo he inherits a unit of highly drafted, overpaid under-performers who last year allowed a league-high 51 sacks.

Fun fact No. 1: the Bills have gone 43 straight games, almost three full seasons, without an interception by one of their safeties.

Fun fact No. 2: Searching high and low for a replacement for Jim Kelly -- or, as the Smothers Brothers

used to say, "We searched high, we searched low, and we searched when we felt normal" -- Buffalo has invested four recent number-one draft picks in quarterbacks in the Rob Johnson, Drew Bledsoe and J. P. Losman deals. Somebody better look good behind center.

### **Put Down the Fish. Step Away from the Fish. Keep Your Hands Where I Can See Them.**

Maryland game officials declared an amnesty on the snakehead , giving citizens two months to turn in any of the fish or its eggs, no questions asked. Possession of a snakehead becomes illegal in the state in September.

### **Cleveland**

Want to know what's wrong with the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1)? Check February's AFC Pro Bowl squad and count the number of Browns on it -- zero. Cleveland has but one gentleman on its roster who has played in a Pro Bowl, Jeff Garcia, but he went for San Francisco. No one on the current Tootsie Rolls team has attended the Pro Bowl as a Brown. That's, um, real bad.

Consistent poor drafting is one reason for Cleveland's lack of talent. The current iteration of the Browns began with the first pick in the 1999 draft, plus numerous bonus selections. All three of the new club's initial high draft picks -- Tim Couch, Kevin Johnson and Rahim Abdullah -- are departed, the team with nothing to show for them. Next the Browns used the first-overall pick of 2000 on Courtney Brown, an average player; the following two selections, Chris Samuels and LaVar Arrington, were instant Pro Bowlers. Two high No. 1 picks were spent on DLs Brown and Gerald Warren, yet Cleveland's defensive line may be the worst in the league: not even the football gods understand how a line can be so excruciatingly bad, and so lacking in esprit, as to surrender 500 yards in one season to one back, which the Browns' line did last year in two meetings against the Ravens' Jamal Lewis. (Cleveland fans might protest, "Hey, our linebackers are really bad, too.")

This year the Browns invested a high No. 1 and a high No. 2 in Kellen Winslow Jr., and so far all they've gotten from him is trouble. The bad-drafting bottom line is that Cleveland has one of the least talented rosters in the NFL. Take a look -- Tuesday Morning Quarterback counts only a handful of gentlemen who could start for any of last year's playoff teams. And not an impact player in the bunch, pending the unknown of Winslow. Unlike fellow Florida college coach Steve Spurrier, who seemed weirdly disengaged when he jumped to the NFL and wilted in the heat, Butch Davis is giving it all he's got in Cleveland. But Davis' intensity and Cleveland's impressive fan energy are offset by a pedestrian roster.

Browns, call us back when you get some players.

### **TMQ Has Always Liked Tall Women**

There's an uproar over U.S. Olympic higher-jumper Amy Acuff posing nude for this month's Playboy, while several women from the U.S. Olympic team, including the luscious swimmer Amanda Beard, posed about one percent shy of naked for the "lad's mag" FHM.

Isn't it progress that men gawk at strong, fit women? New York Times sportswriter Diana Nyad makes the case for the buff, physically powerful, scantily attired female athlete as the new 21st century paragon of sex appeal. But as usual, equal-time beefcake is in short supply. So far as I could determine, only the Australian art photography publication Black + White asked male Olympians, including ultra-hunk swimmer Michael Klim, to stand before the camera without clothes. Meanwhile WNBA MVP Lauren Jackson, an Australian playing for her nation's basketball team at Athens, called her nude photo session for Black + White "a positive for women in sports" (sorry, that's a link to the interview, not the pictures). Jackson, who is 6-foot-5, may be the tallest woman ever to pose for pinups. From now on if anyone grumbles about the cheesecake pictures in TMQ, I plan to reply that they are "a positive for women in sports."

### **Cincinnati**

After just missing the postseason last year, the team is an early favorite to win -- wait, am I writing

about the Cincinnati Bengals?

The Los Angeles Clippers must be nervous, because if the Bengals play well again this season, the Clippers will take over sole possession of last place for worst franchise in sports. And there are reasons to think the Bengals will play well. Last year's effort went down to the final drive; Marvin Lewis was 8-8, a sterling performance by rookie-coach standards; Corey Dillon is gone; people are taking Cincinnati seriously, which is news right there.

Still, TMQ needs to be convinced. The Bengals had one of the NFL's frailest defenses last season, which showed when it counted. Cincinnati gave up 118 points while going 1-3 in December, and couldn't stop the anemic Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1) at home on the final regular-season Sunday, with a playoff berth on the line. Cleveland ran for 264 yards that day. When you give up beaucoup running yards at home with the playoffs at stake, your fans roaring at military-afterburner decibels and your opponent long since eliminated, this is, technically speaking, not very good.

The Cincinnati offense was decent in 2003, but in the offseason Lewis decreed that Carson Palmer would replace Jon Kitna as quarterback. Kitna's been the butt of a lot of cheap jokes (certainly none by me!), yet in 2003 finished as the ninth-rated passer -- higher-rated than Tom Brady and Donovan McNabb, to name a couple gentlemen who are pretty good. Kitna threw 11 more touchdowns than interceptions, a major positive. Now he sits for the megabucks former first-overall draft choice. Maybe Palmer will shine, but history says he is likely to struggle as most quarterbacks do in their first season as starter. Lewis faces a classic coach's choice -- should he play Kitna, who's lightly regarded yet doing fine, or Palmer, who's a boy wonder but has no experience? If the boy wonder gets Cincinnati into a hole by losing a couple early, it could be yet another fruitless season by the banks of the Ohio River. Note: Cincinnati management promised to bring the fans "big name players," and now offers T.J. Houshmandzadeh.

### **Ridiculous Disclaimer Watch**

TMQ detests ridiculous movie disclaimers. The disclaimer for Van Helsing warned of "non-stop creature action violence." Is "creature action violence" somehow different from "violence?" The disclaimer for Man on Fire warned of "strong violence." Is "strong violence" somehow different from "violence?" The disclaimer for Spiderman 2 warned of "action violence." Is "action violence" somehow different from "violence?" The disclaimer for Shrek 2 warned of "crude humor." Wouldn't it be nice to encounter a movie that warns of sophisticated humor? As numerous readers including Alicia Rendert of La Jolla, Calif., pointed out, disclaimers for a romantic comedy, Raising Helen, warned of "thematic issues." Warning that a movie has a theme, Rendert noted, is like warning that it's about a subject. But Alicia, these days Hollywood needs to warn when a movie is about a subject! Most current flicks are just random car chases, breasts and explosions. TMQ's favorite: disclaimers for Mean Girls warned of "some teen partying." Teen partying -- oh, so it's a horror movie!

### **Denver**

Clinton Portis is gone, but the sports-nut world assumes the Broncos will simply suit up a back, any back, and chalk up another thousand-yard rusher. The trouble is that offensive line coach Alex Gibbs is gone too, though his replacement, Rick Dennison, is a Gibbs acolyte. Everybody notices that in recent seasons the Broncos have consistently gotten big performances from low-draft-choice backs; overlooked but equally important is that Denver has consistently gotten excellent offensive line play from undersized who-dat gentlemen. This year's projected Denver starting offensive line averages 296 pounds, surely the only OL unit in the league that's less than 300 pounds on average.

Gibbs notoriously coached Denver blockers to try to injure defensive linemen by diving at their knees and the backs of their legs. This technique made Broncos' offensive linemen proficient, though bringing fines to gentlemen such as Dan Neil, fined \$53,000 by the NFL in 2001 for attempt-to-injure blocking techniques. Mike Shanahan has protested that the occurrence of injuries to defensive linemen playing the Broncos is no higher than occurrence of injuries to defensive linemen playing other teams. But this misses the point: the Gibbs technique works because opponents must devote attention to defending their bodies, making them less effective. Defensive linemen don't stand there waiting for Broncos' blockers to dive at their knees -- that is, they're not like stuntmen in kickboxing movies, who cooperate with the people attacking them. Ninety-nine percent of what happens in movie fight scenes would be impossible if stuntmen being attacked by the kung-fu star or by James Bond didn't actively cooperate by flipping

themselves over, flying backwards when hit and so on. Unlike movie stuntmen, defensive linemen don't cooperate with the Denver line's attacks on their knees and ankles, but the moves they make to protect themselves cause the defensive front to be less effective as run-stoppers. That's why the Alex Gibbs blocking system works.

While Gibbs is gone, Bobby Turner remains as running-backs chieftain. Turner is the least-known great NFL assistant coach; he's the mad genius of rushing success. In the decade since Turner joined the Broncos, the team has produced star back after star back -- Terrell Davis, Mike Anderson, Olandis Gary, Portis -- while running up the second-most total rushing yards in NFL history in a 10-year period. Turner is the key: he preaches a "one cut" running system that forbids look-ma-I'm-dancing stuff. Denver runners are coached to make one fast cut, then head upfield at maximum speed, no further changes of direction, no claiming you were scanning the field for a lane, just make one cut then get as far as you can before someone knocks you down. This sensible system is incredibly effective. Around the NFL, people deride the Broncos' rushing success by saying that the yards are just "the result of the Denver system." Right -- so why doesn't everybody use the Denver one-cut running system?

Broncos note: Denver quietly had the fourth-best defense last season. Now be honest, how many Broncos' defensive starters can you name from memory? Who is the right corner for this unit? Who are the tackles? What position does Jashon Sykes play? (Cheat by looking here .) To this effective defense, Denver in the offseason added Champ Bailey, John Lynch and first draft pick D.J. Williams.

Fun fact: Denver's first win this season will be the 100th career victory for Shanahan, who, like Bill Belichick, was fired from his previous head-coaching job and widely proclaimed a failure.

## Houston

What in the Sam Hill happened to the Texans' defense? In 2002, the Houston defense was 16th-ranked - - not bad considering the team's awful offense meant the defense was on the field too much. The 2002 defense played several monster games, including a late-season 24-6 Houston victory at Pittsburgh, a playoff club that year, in which the Texans' defense scored twice. But in 2003, the Houston defense placed itself at a right angle to everything (quick, who gets this Heinlein reference?), finishing 31st-ranked, five times giving up 30 or more points, allowing 125 points in the fourth quarter. And Texans coach Dom Capers preaches defense. Of course, the Houston offense was horrible too, also finishing 31st overall. A major improvement from its 2002 finish of 32nd! So perhaps the sustained cover-your-eyes awfulness of the Houston offense finally wore out the Houston defense.

Considering how bad Houston was on both sides of the ball -- 31st-ranked offensively and defensively, outgained by an average of 111 yards per game -- the hand of the occult seems present in the fact that this club managed to win five times. The mystery deepens: Houston beat Super Bowl entrant Carolina, took Super Bowl winner New England to overtime and ended its season with close defeats to Indianapolis and Tennessee, both playoff-bound. How did this team accomplish anything, considering its defense was terrible, its offense was terrible and it had no kick-return game to boot?

Winning five again may represent a challenge. The team gained little in free agency, other than managing to acquire salary-cap problems, despite starting off with a blank cap two years ago. Plus, the Texans are handicapped by what are among the most boring uniforms in pro sports. Those blah uniforms make the Texans look slow, perhaps make them feel slow. Considering that the color scheme of red, white and American flag blue is currently not in use in the NFL, why not switch to it, Houston? Red, white and flag blue is, not to put too fine a point on it, the single most successful color scheme in world history.

Fun fact: David Carr wears his wedding ring while playing. When TMQ coaches in a county flag football, the refs require players to remove all jewelry. Sounds smart. How does Carr get away with this? So far as TMQ knows, Carr is the first NFL gentleman since Miami punter Reggie Roby -- who in the 1980s inexplicably wore a watch on the field -- allowed to flash an accessory that has nothing to do with football.

**The Big Bang Was So Loud, You Could Have Heard It Even If You Had Been Watching a Vikings Game in the Metrodome at the Time**

Gazing up at the night sky to ponder the magnitude of the cosmos, I sometimes think to myself: Do black holes come in other colors? How loud was the Big Bang? Comes now word that Mark Whittle, an astronomer at the University of Virginia, estimates that the initial "anisotropies" (ripples) in the Big Bang that caused the galaxies to form had about the same impact on space as 110-decible sound does on air. You can listen to Whittle's simulation of the sound of the Big Bang here .

## Indianapolis

Published estimates say the Colts have the NFL's lowest total annual revenues, around \$115 million, compared to around \$215 million for the top team, the Potomac Drainage Basin Indigenous Persons. This stems mainly from Indianapolis playing in a smallish stadium that wants for club seats and boxes: see more on this dynamic at the San Diego item below. Yet the team with the league's lowest annual revenues just handed out the NFL's largest-ever bonus, \$34 million to Peyton Manning. It's scary enough when a player takes up a big percentage of a team's salary cap, but the cap is an artificial threshold designed to insure competition. Manning will take up almost a third of the Colts' revenues this year. And you wonder why Indianapolis owner James Irsay is so worried about getting a new stadium with modern luxu touches. Mark Gaughan of the Buffalo News has estimated that a new stadium increases a team's annual revenues by about \$30 million, mostly from club-seat and corporate-box premiums. Almost two-thirds of the NFL's teams play in stadiums built in the last dozen years, and enjoy a revenue edge over clubs playing in old stadia. Nowhere is the problem more keenly felt than Indianapolis, where a gigantic copy of Manning's bonus check should be hung over the main entrance to the RCA Dome. To reach the Super Bowl, the Lucky Charms need more talent at several positions, especially cornerback. Financial reality makes more talent unlikely.

Meanwhile, though Manning got the minkey off his back in January with a couple of postseason wins, the minkey remains on the back of Tony Dungy, who for his career is 76-52 in the regular season and 4-6 in the playoffs.

Fun fact: Manning's bonus was \$34,040,000. Would it have been a deal-breaker if the Colts had drawn the line at \$34,035,000? Maybe the extra \$40,000 paid for the armored cars to carry the loot to Peyton's bank.

## Jacksonville

Megabucks free-agent defensive end Hugh Douglas was terrible in 2003 -- just three sacks, scant effort against the run. But why should the team have expected anything else, when Douglas was terrible for Philadelphia the year before, too? Check the tape of the Eagles-Bucs NFC championship game, final contest Douglas played for Philadelphia, and see if you can find this gentleman anywhere near the ball. Lately Jacksonville coaches have been telling the sports media that Douglas is showing a better attitude than last year -- he couldn't show a worse attitude. The sooner Jax cuts its losses on Douglas, the better. But aside from the underwhelming performance of Douglas, other signs for Jax are favorable. The Jaguars finished a modest 5-11, but by December of last season were a team nobody wanted to play. The Jax defense quietly rose to sixth overall, the offense quietly rose to 12th, and Byron Leftwich looked much more poised than the typical rookie quarterback. (TMQ's favorite Leftwich fact: once, in college, he threw for 447 yards in the first half.) Jacksonville has talent jelling at most positions, and may be a club nobody wants to play throughout 2004.

This season the football gods will finally stop punishing Jacksonville for the most disastrous event in team history, its 62-7 win over Miami in the 2000 playoffs. After that contest many Jax players bragged and boasted about how they were the greatest, and the football gods have mandated that only one team per season may boast and only at one moment, when the clock hits double-zeros at the Super Bowl. Recall that Jax's 62-7 playoff win was followed a week later by Jax honking the AFC championship game at home -- the vengeance of the football gods began immediately, and has lasted these four years. But four years is punishment enough. The most disastrous event in Jax history, that 62-7 win, may be forgotten this season by a playoff run.

Marketing note: Jacksonville has lots of single-game tickets left for all home dates , making blackout-lifting unlikely. I was you, Jax fans, I'd buy me a few of them ducats, as there is a good chance this team will play a significant year.

Cognomen note: TMQ may continue to call this team the Typos, since their occasional all-black monochrome uniforms look like a copy-editing error.

### **Jersey/B**

It's pretty hard not to win a game until mid-October and then make anything of your season. The Jets lost the first four in 2003, followed by a bye week: their initial victory did not come until October 12. By the first Sunday of November, they were 2-6 and their season over. Jets faithful can take some consolation in the fact that the team did not fold, continuing to play hard. In the second-to-last week of the season, with no playoff hopes, the Jets nearly beat eventual Super Bowl champion Flying Elvii. That game ended New England 21, Jersey/B 16 with the Jets having the ball at midfield with a chance to win until Chad Pennington threw an interception with 45 seconds left.

The Jets' blah 2003 has been blamed on the injury that kept Pennington sidelined early, but TMQ doesn't see it that way. Jersey/B was 2-4 with Vinny Testaverde playing, 4-6 with Pennington playing -- not much difference. Pennington came into 2003 having thrown 24 touchdowns and six interceptions in his career, a fabulous mark; then last year threw 13 touchdowns and 12 interceptions, including five picks in the late loss to New England. Maybe the injury hampered him, or maybe the Jets had mediocre personnel and not many receivers open.

Remember, going into the 2003 campaign, Jersey/B essentially traded Laveranues Coles and a first-round draft pick for the underwhelming DT Dewayne Robertson. This gentlemen had just 35 tackles and often comfortably watched from the sidelines, while Coles caught for 1,204 yards at the Potomac Drainage Basin Indigenous Persons, more than any Jets' receiver. The Jersey/B braintrust's decision to surrender Coles, a hot player in his prime, plus a first draft choice for an unknown quantity in Robertson was in effect a decision to honk the 2003 season. Will it turn out to have been a decision to honk the 2004 season as well? It might unless Robertson gets a lot better fast.

Front office update: this year Jersey/B has a CEO, a president, an executive vice president, three senior vice presidents, six vice presidents and eight others with "director" or "senior" in their titles. Hint to Jets opponents: call trick plays in the second quarter. In 2003, Jersey/B outscored its opponents in the first, third and fourth quarters, but was outscored by a whopping 130-48 in the second.

### **If a Woman Is Glossed, That Makes It Sound Like She Just Went Through a Car Wash**

Here's the latest from the mystery body potions front. For women, the high-end lotions chain Origins now offers Body Gloss. TMQ would like to examine a mega-babe with a glossed body, as long as the stuff isn't polyurethane-based.

For the ever-increasing demographic of metrosexuals, Unilever now sells Axe , which "boosts young men's confidence and attraction through the combination of a distinctive masculine fragrance and long-lasting deodorant protection." TMQ tried Axe and found that women did not chase me down the street. Whoops, the fine print: Axe only promises to boost young men's attractiveness. Axe comes in six scents; TMQ's favorite is "Voodoo," a word which pretty much sums up the whole product category. The company advises men to apply Axe to "all the hot spots" yet simultaneously warns the spray is "not for intimate use."

### **Kansas City**

The Chiefs had an incredible seven return touchdowns last season, 63 touchdowns in total and 5,910 yards of offense at an average of 5.9 yards per play. Then, in the playoffs, they scored 31 points in their opening game at home, and lost! It's pretty hard to score 31 points at home and lose, unless you have what TMQ calls the league's 33rd-ranked defense. (See, there are only 32 -- oh, never mind.) The Kansas City defense made every team it met look like the Kansas City offense. Imbalance happens, but usually to bad teams. For example, in 2002 Minnesota was second in offense, 27th in defense; this added up to six wins for the Vikings. Rarely in NFL history has a club not only made the postseason but won a first-round bye despite being truly bad on one side of the ball. Last year the Chiefs did that, and the result was another first-round at-home Kansas City playoff exit.

Yet in the offseason the Chiefs made no all-out push to improve on defense. Kansas City's defensive free-agent signings boiled down to the underwhelming Lionel Dalton, who will be joining his fourth club in as many seasons: perhaps there was a reason the previous three employers did not retain his services. The Chiefs were among the league leaders in offseason cap space, so might have made plays for defenders, but instead stood pat. Only two of the Chiefs' first four draft choices were used on defenders, with a second-round pick expended on a tight end who's not even projected to start, given that Kansas City already has the league's best tight end in Tony Gonzalez. The Chiefs were 30th in rushing defense, allowed 59 percent of opponents' passes to be completed, surrendered a league-worst 5.2 yards per running play -- and did essentially nothing to improve defensive personnel. The football gods have promised an investigation.

Warning sign about that potent offense: the No. 2 quarterback, Todd Collins, has 22 pass attempts in the last six seasons.

## Miami

For a decade, Richmond Webb protected the blind side of Miami quarterbacks. No team in the NFL worried less about its quarterback's keister than the Marine Mammals. But three years ago Webb departed, and Miami has yet to deal with that reality. A succession of who-dats have lined up at Webb's spot; all have been, let's just say, they've been present! Since Webb left the Dolphins have invested vast sums, in bonuses and draft picks, in running backs, receivers and quarterbacks, but on the current depth chart the LT position remains manned by sophomore Wade Smith. Dwight Freeney did everything but pull Smith's pants down in last season's painful Mammals' loss to the Colts.

So while sports touts everywhere obsess about Ricky Williams "retiring" -- we need a new verb for what happens when a 27-year-old decides to stop chasing a ball -- TMQ worries about the Dolphins' offensive line. It's been ignored too long, under the lulling illusion that the great Richmond Webb is still minding the store. This offseason Miami signed Jeno James of the Panthers, a fine player. The club invested first and fourth-round picks in Vernon Carey. Yet the Dolphins let go tackle Todd Wade, center Tim Ruddy and guard Jamie Nails from 2003, leaving three positions unmanned. On paper the right tackle is now John St. Clair, who has 16 starts in four seasons. The Miami offensive line could now be declared a disaster area, eligible for federal aid -- maybe Gov. Jeb Bush could work disaster aide for the Dolphins' line into the Hurricane Charley aid package. Chatter to your heart's content about Ricky Williams. Offensive line is the issue with this team, and year after year since Webb departed, it has been sloughed off as a concern.

On the plus side, as of this season Miami has a general manager; Dave Wannstedt is just the coach, not trying to do the management side as well. Coaches should coach, general managers should run the front office and scream into telephones at agents. Note how the Seattle Seahawks jumped upward last season when Mike Holmgren stopped trying to be general manager for ego reasons and concentrated on coaching. Having Wannstedt, a solid coach, concentrate on coaching can only aid the Marine Mammals' fortunes. Then there's the quarterback thing. TMQ loves Jay Fiedler, who is 36-17 as a starter -- a better percentage than Brett Favre. Yes, Fiedler has injury problems, but otherwise Tuesday Morning Quarterback finds it hard to understand why his field presence isn't admired.

Fun Dolphins fact: Since 1999, Miami is 40-18 until December, 10-12 afterward. People say this is because the Dolphins cannot play in cold weather. TMQ thinks it's because when cold weather comes, the high-aesthetic-appeal Miami cheer-babes cannot flounce around half-clad, and therefore the football gods stop smiling on the Dolphins. But note that this year, the Marine Mammals get their Buffalo and New England road trips out of the way in October. Three of the team's last five games at home. Cold-weather-induced tailspin seems less of a threat to Miami than in many a moon.

## New England

So the Patriots keep rounding up undrafted free agents and waiver-wire gents to mold into Super Bowl starters. This can't go on, can it? Can it? In the offseason the Flying Elvii lost Damien Woody, who in 2003 won the coveted longest award in sports, the TMQ NFL Non-QB Non-RB MVP. They also lost Mike Compton, a sturdy offensive line starter. Then, having a bonanza of extra draft picks, New England invested none of them in blockers. The Patriots signed guard Bob Hallen from San Diego, the league's worst team. This just can't work, can it? New England has got to end up with a bad offensive line, doesn't it?

TMQ prediction: the Patriots will once again have the best offensive line in the league. During the 2003 playoffs, the New England offensive line did not allow a single sack, the stat TMQ thought was the central fact of the Patriots' second title in three years. Yet that line started two undrafted who-dats, Russ Hochstein and Tom Ashworth. Both return. This, you see, is the key to the Patriots' success. While other teams throw millions at high draft picks and megabucks celebrity stars, New England works hard to hang on to unknowns.

New England under Bill Belichick has done a consistently superb job of getting maximum performance from minimum players. But can even Belichick handle Corey Dillon? Trading for this media-circus player is a break from the Flying Elvii formula. The gentlemen not only constantly denounces his own teammates; in the last game of the 2003 season, as the Bengals were getting knocked out of the playoffs in the final seconds of a close loss at home, Dillon danced on the sidelines and mugged to the crowd as if celebrating. You'd think no one in his right mind would let Corey Dillon anywhere near a team grounded in unselfishness and chemistry, as Belichick's Patriots are. It's almost as if Belichick is testing himself by bringing in exactly the kind of me-first player who could spoil what the Patriots have built.

Flying Elvii fun fact No. 1: in addition to that must-be-a-misprint 14-game winning streak, New England enters the 2004 season having scored on its opening possession the last five straight times.

Flying Elvii fun fact No. 2: New England is also riding a streak of eight straight overtime wins, best-ever in the NFL. What isn't New England on a streak of?

Flying Elvii fun fact No. 3: The Patriots have three No. 1 draft choices at tight end.

Flying Elvii fun fact No. 4: Bill Belichick went to high school with presidential brother Jeb Bush. The place was Phillips Academy, one of the snottiest boarding schools in the world. Current tuition and board is \$30,100 a year.

### **Will Army Market Throwback Uniforms From the Spanish-American War?**

As part of the general uniform-changing trend that TMQ dislikes, even the United States Army decided to switch garb. The new Army Combat Uniform replaces the old pair of desert-tan or green-foliage fatigues with a single uniform based on a "digital print" of light grays and greens. Maybe the Army is doing the same thing that sports teams do when they change unis -- forcing the fans to buy a new set! Those guys who do paintball on weekends, fantasizing about being Green Berets, will now have to ditch their outdated foliage fatigues and buy the Army Combat Uniform. True fans will want to own both the home and away versions.

The new standard uniform includes a black beret and a "matching patrol cap to be worn at the commander's discretion." Changing the beret color was as controversial within the Army as it was when the Bengals went to those all-stripe helmets, since black berets once were reserved for special forces. The new shoes do not require shining: What's that going to do to a 1,000 old military movies where the drill sergeant screams about the shine on boots? The new uniforms include "knee pouch for internal knee-pad inserts," which is more important than it sounds, plus a "three-slot pen pocket on bottom of sleeve" and "forward-tilted cargo pockets," which sounds like the Army now has the world's first technologically advanced pocket.

### **Oakland**

Multiple players waived, retired or lost as free agents; new coaches, new 3-4 on defense, eight-to-10 new starters plus a quarterback controversy -- there's been some turmoil here. But then, the Raiders are 4-13 since the moment they took the field in Super Bowl XXXVII. Before that moment, they were riding a 13-5 streak. Things went from real good to real bad, which can happen when you have aging players, a predictable pass-wacky offense, and coaches and players arguing in public.

Now the Raiders have discarded many aging players from 2003, but let's bear in mind that the new arrivals, such as Ted Washington and Warren Sapp, are not exactly wondering what to wear to the high-school prom. And though the new coach, Norv Turner, is well-regarded, during his stay with the Potomac Drainage Basin Indigenous Persons, there was a stretch in which the team wasn't winning, tensions were

high and players and coaches were arguing in public. Sound familiar? Maybe this makes Turner the perfect fit for the Raiders' program!

Raiders question to ponder: Ticonderoga-class defensive tackle Washington may be among the best DTs ever, but TMQ suspects he will have a hard time getting a hearing regarding admission to Canton because he has changed teams so often -- San Francisco, Denver, Buffalo, Chicago, New England and now Oakland. Hall of Fame electors dislike players who jump from team to team without loyalty -- and the electors should dislike such players. What's with Washington changing uniforms yet again anyway? A few months ago, he won his first Super Bowl ring with New England, then almost immediately stormed off for only marginally better dollars in Oakland.

Third millennium note: Raiders chief executive Amy Trask, second on the masthead after Al Davis, is the highest-ranking woman in NFL team management who's not an owner or related to an owner.

### **Pittsburgh**

TMQ is pleased that Jerome Bettis took a pay cut in order to finish his career with the Steelers. The football gods -- and the Hall of Fame electors -- smile on those who remain loyal to their cities. Bettis was traded from St. Louis to Pittsburgh, but players have no control over trades. In the aspect of his career that he could control, Bettis has chosen to stay put, and he has chosen well. Otherwise, the Pittsburgh running game: Ye gods!

Three years ago, the Steelers were first in the league in rushing. In 2002, they were still a solid ninth. In 2003, Pittsburgh fell to second-to-last running the ball, besting only feeble Detroit. Much of the time, the Steelers barely tried to run, rushing on just 46 percent of their downs. But then, if you're averaging only 3.3 yards per carry, why bother? Nobody on the Steelers played well in 2003. The team had only six wins, three of those coming over Arizona, Oakland and San Diego, the league's worst teams. So when nobody's playing well, it's no surprise that the running game is not going well. Still, the decline of Pittsburgh's rushing attack has been a sight to behold, or to avoid beholding. Precious little was done about this problem in the offseason. The team signed Duce Staley but no offensive linemen, and waited till the third round before drafting a blocker. Staley is a tough guy who plays with emotion, but you won't find him in the list of last season's top 30 rushers. As a full-year starter in 2002, he averaged only 3.8 yards per carry, despite running behind Philadelphia's solid offensive line. TMQ sees Staley as a back on the downward slope of his career: It's hard to imagine he will be the answer to Pittsburgh's problems rushing the ball. (There, Duce, I just reverse-jinxed you.)

Bonus Steelers political dilemma: No NFL team has ever performed in a stadium named after a major-party candidate for the White House. Technically, Heinz Field is named for the company, not for Teresa Heinz Kerry, and technically, First Lady contenders are not on the ballot, but given the prominence John Kerry's wife has taken as a campaigner, there's going to be no escaping the Heinz Field issue until Nov. 2. To create equal time, Reliant Field in Houston could temporarily be re-named Laura Coliseum. Alternatively, Pittsburgh's stadium could temporarily adopt a nonpartisan name such as what TMQ calls the place anyway, Ketchup Field.

### **Rare TMQ Preseason Game Item**

In the Panthers-Panthers collision, a punt hit a zebra, then rolled to a stop at the Panthers' 2. Officials spotted the ball at the 2. Then they huddled and, after looking at the replay, decided to place the ball at the 20. That is, the officials overturned a call involving the officials! So naturally, Carolina challenged the call. Huddling further and staring into the replay viewer, the referee reversed -- reversing the overturning of a decision about the officials! -- and moved the ball back to the 2. The football gods chortled.

### **San Diego**

Twice in three years, San Diego has traded away the No. 1 choice in the draft, surrendering the chance to acquire the most sought-after college quarterback. This is presented by sportstalk types as crazed bungling, but may be fiscal reality. Quarterbacks chosen first overall command huge paychecks: This isn't an obstacle for Jersey/A, with auto-sellout at one of the league's biggest stadiums, or Atlanta, with

a well-to-do owner who has committed himself to spending freely to win a Super Bowl. But with a non-soldout field and an unsettled stadium future, the Chargers must be cautious with cash. They've just spent freely to insure that running back LaDainian Tomlinson is around long-term. Could they have afforded a first-overall quarterback in the same year?

San Diego has one of the league's weakest local revenue streams. NFL teams split television income equally, and pool basic gate receipts -- this revenue sharing is a leading reason pro football is bedrock-solid on the field and financially. (In contrast to baseball, where the few richest teams outspend the rest combined and the league is constantly in some form of disarray.) But NFL revenue-sharing has a loophole, which is that luxury-box income, club-seat fees and miscellaneous marketing proceeds are kept by individual clubs. This gives an edge in cash flow to teams like Jersey/A, which has strong club-seat and luxury-box income, or Dallas, which does well in stadium marketing deals. San Diego ranks low in local revenue, owing to below-average club seats and luxury boxes at Qualcomm. Add these things up, and signing Michael Vick or Eli Manning would have been more of a fiscal-reality challenge for the Chargers than for the Falcons or Giants. And fiscal reality is, well, reality.

Now throw in that the San Diego salary cap is a mess. The Bolts are being assessed \$22 million in amortization penalties this year -- about a quarter of their salary cap -- for players no longer with the team. Many Chargers personnel moves have been puzzling, to put it charitably. For instance, San Diego will bear a cap penalty of \$8.7 million this season for waiving defensive lineman Marcellus Wiley, who's pretty good. Why was Wiley, one of the few Bolts players who can be described as "pretty good," released when cutting him hurt the team both on the field and in salary-cap calculations? Only the football gods can answer this question. In 2004, San Diego will carry a higher cap charge for Wiley than will Dallas, but it's Dallas the gentleman will start for. And this turn of events was the Chargers' idea! Between San Diego's low local-revenue stream and its salary-cap problems, there was a method in the apparent madness of the Bolts' two trade-aways of the first overall pick. But the first time this cost San Diego the most exciting young player in the NFL -- Vick. How much damage will be done this time? Bolts note: Four of this team's offensive linemen departed as free agents. The team's not-for-the-faint-of-heart depth chart lists as the No. 1 left tackle a gentleman who hasn't started a game since 2001. TMQ will be rooting for this gent, Leander Jordan, as he hails from my favorite obscure college, Indiana of Pennsylvania.

Sponsorship note: The Chargers rehearse at The Home Depot National Training Center in Carson, Calif.

### **Her Next Project: Men's Boxers Made From Poison Ivy**

Alex Dear, a textile-design student at De Montfort University in Leicester, United Kingdom, has found a way to make lingerie out of nettles. Here, she models one of her creations. Nettles are weeds. According to the American Heritage Dictionary, "any of numerous plants of the genus *Urtica*, having toothed leaves, unisexual apetalous flowers and stinging hairs that cause skin irritation on contact." Skin irritation on contact -- the ideal substance for underwear! Dear launched her project as part of the school's attempt to find commercial uses for weeds. Point TMQ appreciates: This story created a perfectly legitimate reason for the staid BBC to run pictures of an attractive young woman in lingerie.

### **Tennessee**

The future is now for the Flaming Thumbtacks, who have endured two consecutive cap-crash offseasons and are already more than \$20 million over the projected 2005 salary cap, meaning a third roster purge looms. This team had better win in 2004 because in 2005, the Titans may be taking volunteers from the audience. Consider Tennessee's defensive line. Two years ago, it was the deepest in the league. Then, in the 2003 cap crash, John Thornton left; in the 2004 crash, Jevon Kearse and Robaire Smith left. The Titans ended up drafting five defensive linemen, just to have bodies to fill out the line. And what are the odds defensive end Kevin Carter will be around in 2005? Not good, given the amount of cap space he eats up. For years, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has liked the Tennessee team. It's a traditionalist mix of power defense and power running, a coach who's around for the long haul -- everyone still thinks of Jeff Fisher as young, but only Bill Cowher exceeds him in longevity with the same team -- plus a period of wandering. The football gods ought to approve of the wandering, right? Gods are supposed to reward that sort of thing. Last year, the Flaming Thumbtacks added an efficient passing attack. Tennessee was quietly fifth overall in passing yards per game.

Yet somehow the Titans keep getting stopped just short. With the self-destruct of Adelphia, the Titans stadium currently has no name; TMQ thinks it should be christened Mount Nebo Field. From Mount Nebo was Moses, after his wandering, allowed to glimpse the Promised Land, then forbidden to enter. For years, the Titans have come close enough to see football's promised land but not been allowed to enter. If they don't get in this season, following the next roster purge they may be on Mount Nebo for some time.

Eddie George analysis: The team and player were arguing about a bonus, and history teaches that money arguments lead to bitterness. Maybe the Titans broke a promise about George's bonus; TMQ has no idea. Nevertheless, George was foolish to jump to Dallas for only somewhat more cash. At this point in his career, George should have had his mind focused on Canton. Abandoning Tennessee over money will diminish George's prospects with the Hall of Fame electors, who add bonus points to the candidacies of gentlemen who spend their entire careers loyal to the same team. Because George has a borderline Hall of Fame case, he was foolish to toss away the loyalty bonus.

George enters the season 17th all-time in NFL yards gained, and since there are 24 modern-era running backs already in Canton, you'd think this would mean a good chance for him. But George's lifetime yards-per-carry average is only 3.7, worst of the top 20 backs all-time. Last season, the overall NFL average for all backs was 4.0 yard per carry, so how can George be considered a great runner when his career yards per career doesn't even rise to the league average? Paul Zimmerman of Sports Illustrated has written that he opposes the Hall of Fame candidacy of Art Monk because Monk's statistical career boils down to "900 8-yard hooks." When the time comes, electors may say approximately the same about George -- that durability and playing in a power-rushing attack enabled him to carry the ball a lot, but mainly he just dove forward, compiling a large number of below-average runs. George should have stayed in Tennessee, appeasing the football gods by a display of loyalty, and earning bonus points to cash when his name comes up for Canton.

### **Next Week**

TMQ's NFC preview, plus exclusive surveillance photos of elite police commando teams seizing illegal fish.

fight song:

Hail to the Wahnata Hail, victory! Braves on the warpath Fight for old DC!

Here's my other 2004 argument. With so many NFL teams changing colors in order to get fans to buy all-new replica jerseys, just think Redskins, if you changed your name to the Washington Wahnata, fans would have to buy *all new everything*. New replica jerseys, new hats, new stadium blankets -- the possibilities are endless! And you'd have a *perfectly legitimate excuse* for forcing the fans to buy all-new everything, namely the entirely admirable desire to respect America's indigenous heritage. So what do you say?

Now TMQ's NFC preview.

## ARIZONA

Okay, the Cards have two playoff victories in the last 71 years -- maybe a shakeup is in order. Dennis Green didn't wait long, cutting Pete Kendall, one of Arizona's few well-regarded veterans, plus benching three recent No. 1 picks, Wendell Bryant, Calvin Pace and L.J. Shelton. And the previous management handed Shelton a megabucks contract extension just a couple months before Green took command.

The Cards' new lineup features an attack led by Anquan Boldin (temporarily injured) and Larry Fitzgerald, and these gentlemen are likely to get open. But will the ball arrive? Quite a bit is riding on Green's declaration that Josh McCown is the man at quarterback, considering the new coach passed on Philip Rivers and Ben Roethlisberger in the draft. Sure, McCown looked sharp at the end of last season. But this gentleman has a total of three career starts, and all came last December. McCown didn't trot on the field 'till the Cardinals were 3-10 and not being taken seriously by opponents. McCown went 1-2 in his starts and absorbed 23 sacks, which is pretty seriously awful. (Starting the other 13 games, Jeff Blake took 19 sacks.)

Green reached the playoffs eight of 10 years at Minnesota, which is impressive. But he never advanced to a Super Bowl and often wheezed out in the postseason early. Like accomplished regular-season coaches who fizzled in the postseason, such as Tony Dungy, Marv Levy and Jim Mora Sr., Green seemed to lack that extra gear.

In the January 2001 NFC Championship Game between Minnesota and Jersey/A, Green put on one of the worst sideline performances yours truly has ever witnessed. Falling behind early, Green seemed to shrug, doing nothing when several of his stars -- notably Randy Moss -- quit on the game. Late in the second quarter, trailing 24-0 and facing fourth-and-inches on his own 34, Green *sent in the punting unit*. TMQ could not believe his eyes. You're down 24 points, it's the championship, there is no next week, you must take some chances and you will never see a better chance than fourth-and-inches. TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook ... while it was still the second quarter! Green might as well have left the stadium at that point and gone to get a blueberry almond martini.

TMQ's law of the playoffs holds that the farther a team advances, the more coaching matters -- game plans and psyche-ups becoming progressively rise in importance. In the regular season, Green performs well. In the playoffs, Green has always wilted. Now we shall see how he performs with a franchise-sized rehab project.

**Fun money fact:** For years the Cardinals have led the NFL in unused cap space because no self-respecting player wants to sign with Arizona. So it's a positive omen that Green has already really driven down the Cardinals' cap space.

**Fun fan fact:** Perennially last in attendance, the Cards played before an average home crowd of 36,070 last season. Sun Devil Stadium has a capacity of 73,014, meaning that at Arizona home games, on average there were more empty chairs than occupied ones. Here is a live cam shot of construction of Arizona's new stadium, which will seat 63,000 and whose architecture "takes its cue from the barrel cactus." Let's hope not the seat design!



## TMQ's NFC preview, plus Hail to the Wohnata!

**By Gregg Easterbrook**  
**Special to NFL.com**

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season and also appear on NFL Network, providing commentary Tuesday nights on NFL Total Access. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is currently out at bookstores now.)*

(Aug. 24, 2004) -- Readers of this column know that TMQ calls the team of our nation's capital the Potomac Drainage Basin Indigenous Persons. Both ends of the official name bother me. As to the Washington part, the club practices in Virginia and performs in Maryland. And which of these, precisely, is Washington? But the real objection is, of course, to Redskins. And by tradition, each preseason TMQ makes new arguments against the use of Redskins as a sports team name.

At this point everyone accepts that the word itself is insulting. Redskin: "A disparaging term for Native Americans" according to the *American Heritage Dictionary*. Teams named Braves or Chiefs seem okay, as these are terms of respect. And teams named Indians fall into a gray area, since while the historical misnomer of people from North America being called Indian drives everyone crazy, most grammarians allow this term for proper use. Redskins, on the other hand -- not a lot of gray area there.

Also at this point everyone accepts that Redskins fans and the Redskins organization do not wish to disparage anyone. To the fans and the organization, Redskins is just a long-established name that evokes a storied team lore. Redskins fans and management don't want to give offense, only to maintain a tradition. And a popular tradition: Surely the Redskins have Native American fans who love the team and scream "Go Redskins!" at the tops of their lungs when it's fourth-and-1. Yet the Redskins could still keep their colors and honor their storied lore if they simply adopted a new name -- and most people would admire them for doing so.

Here are this year's two new arguments against the Washington Redskin name:

My first argument is that more cool Indian name alternatives are becoming available. In the past, I've proposed that if the Redskins changed their name to some zoomy indigenous language word. This would both bring the franchise widespread praise and make for cool cutting-edge marketing. Past proposals included the Washington Cho Nee (Cho Nee means "large people" in Apache). Another was the Washington Dzeel (in Navajo, Dzeel is the kind of strength that comes from courage).

Now Laura Redish, director of Native Languages of the Americas -- its website provides an incredible wealth of detail on tribal languages, from the famous ones like Navajo to Oto-Manguan -- has polled her members to come up with more cool-sounding Native American alternative team names. Note before we proceed: Redish reports she is a huge Steelers fan. Cool names proposed by her members include:

- Washington Idini -- Apache for "like thunder"
- Washington Jepziwok -- Chippewa for "great athletes"
- Washington Matwesaso -- Nanticoke for "courageous," and a relevant choice because the Nanticokes were the dominant tribe of the Potomac region
- Washington Wohnata -- Lakota Sioux for "they are champions"

Let's see, Washington Jepziwok and Washington Matwesaso are pretty hard to pronounce. Washington Idini sounds like a computer virus. But Washington Wohnata -- they are champions! That's a very cool team name and has wonderful inherent meaning. "Wohnata" would take a bit of getting used to, but is no harder off the tongue than commonly spoken team names like Knickerbocker. It even works in the

**Cover-your-eyes double:** Cards defenders allowed a stunning 46.2 percent third-down conversions in 2003, meaning you were just shy of *likely* to get a first down against the Arizona defense. The Cardinals' offense scored 225 points, lowest in the league.

## ATLANTA

Let's see, the Falcons were 3-1 with Michael-Mike Vick and 2-10 without him. What could that mean? Could the CIA figure it out? Don't answer that! Could the new national intelligence czar proposed by the 9/11 Commission figure it out? Not only did the return of Vick cause the Falcons to go 3-1 in December, but two of those wins were monster victories. Atlanta beat eventual NFC champion Carolina and beat defending Super Bowl champion City of Tampa on the Bucs' home field in a game that knocked the defending champs from the playoffs. That's none too shabby.

**Note:** Already there is someone in U.S. government with authority over other intelligence agencies and with the title Director of Central Intelligence. Now George W. Bush says he supports the 9/11 Commission's recommendation of placing another person above that person. Perhaps the new official could be called the Director of the Director of Central Intelligence.

Were it not for the Vick factor, you'd think the Falcons a hopeless case. In 2003 they were out-gained by an average 109 yards per game, second-worst figure in the league, and outscored 222-106 in the second half of contests. Statistically this team was dreadful -- 29th in offense, last in defense. And with the exception of Vick's return, personnel really has not changed that much.

All the coaches are different, though, and the most significant addition may be OL coach Alex Gibbs, arriving from Denver. As last week's column noted, Gibbs instructs offensive linemen to try to injure defenders by diving at their knees and the backs of their legs. This tactic may be unsportsmanlike, but for a decade in Denver it led to effective a strong running game. Asked by Peter King of *Sports Illustrated* whether he approves of Gibbs' technique, new Falcons head coach Jim Mora replied, "I love it. Alex has a certain type of player he likes. They can be smaller and more maneuverable guys, but they have to be quick and smart, and they have to be able to cut-block." It's possible to cut-block legally, but in the Gibbs system, the term is code for trying to harm the other guy's legs. Look out Atlanta opponents.

**Front-office note:** The Falcons have a CEO, a president, three executive vice presidents, four vice presidents, an assistant general manager, a controller and 10 people with the title director.

## Naked Olympic Mega-Babe Update

Luscious U.S. Olympian Haley Cope, who holds a world's record in the women's 50-meter backstroke, told the *Washington Post* she enjoyed posing nude for *Playboy* because the magazine is "tasteful." By the standards of 2004, *Playboy* actually *is* tasteful -- that must be why its circulation is slipping! Cope further told the *New York Daily News*, "I'm a freak -- I vote Republican, I worship Martha Stewart and I don't mind being naked." Imagine if the presidential contenders tried to use this in campaign ads. George W. Bush's side would run ads by Naked Olympic Swimmers for Truth, while John Kerry's campaign would run ads claiming swimming-test records from the president's National Guard days have mysteriously vanished.

## CAROLINA

Man did this team finish strong -- six straight wins followed by a Super Bowl loss on the final play. When winning-streak New England faced winning-streak Carolina in the ultimate event, there was no doubt last year was a season when the two best teams met in the Super Bowl. The Panthers had a fabulous year despite a low-voltage offense, and had they not made the tactical error of unnecessarily going for two after scoring to make it 21-16 early in the fourth quarter, Carolina might have left the arena with the crown. The details are here. John Fox, the league's hottest coach, in 2002 took over a team that had finished 1-15. Since that moment the Panthers are 21-15 with a Super Bowl appearance. None too shabby.

Still there are worries, and they start with the Carolina offensive line. The Panthers lost three Super Bowl

OL starters to free agency, then saw one of the replacements announce a surprise retirement due to injury. The depth chart is not reassuring: The right tackle has started only 17 times in a nine-year journeyman's career; the right guard has one career start; the left guard spent most of last season injured. Ay caramba.

**Fun fact:** Tailback Stephen Davis, let go by the Persons before the 2003 season began, ran for 1,759 yards last year. The entire Persons' team rushed for 1,653 yards. Davis was cut because former Persons' coach Steve Spurrier wanted to pass more. One of TMQ's favorite moments of last season came when Spurrier's charges and the Panthers met: Davis rushed for 153 yards, the Persons passed for 124 yards.

## CHICAGO

Neil Easterbrook, an Official Brother of TMQ and a professor of literature at the seriously purple Texas Christian University, has a theory that far more outcomes of NFL games are determined by random bounces than players, coaches or sportscasters care to admit. Professors are required to have theories for everything: A hungry professor would say, "I have a theory about the social role of the tuna salad submarine..." NFL players and coaches, the Official Brother thinks, want to believe game outcomes are determined by incredibly complex webs of strategy, preparation, exertion and talent. When really a lot of outcomes hinge on whether a rolling ball randomly bounces toward Team A or Team B.

The Chicago Daxiongmao ("bear" in Mandarin) is evident of this theory. From 1997 to 2001, the Bears were a dejected 19-45 and eliminated annually by Thanksgiving. Suddenly in 2002 they were 13-3 and hosting a playoff collision, though coaches and personnel had changed little. Since kickoff for that game, the Bears have fallen back to 11-22. How did Chicago go from consistently bad, to monster team for a season, to consistently bad again? In 2002, the ball bounced in the Bears' direction: Whenever there was a big play that might have gone one way or the other, it went toward Chicago. Think of that phase when Bears' safety Mike Brown was for a moment the most dangerous man in football, twice winning games on long last-second turnover returns. That year the ball bounced toward Chicago; in all other recent years, except 2002, the ball has not bounced the Bears' way, while Brown has returned to looking mortal. So the Bears' fate has been determined not talent or tactic or even by the football gods, simply by bounces.

Well, but here at NFL.com we pretend we know what we are talking about -- the training film says, "When in doubt, pretend you know what you are talking about" -- so I'll have to throw in a little more analysis. Chicago's struggles also link to years of the league's most predictable offense. There was a phase of several seasons when practically every Daxiongmao play seemed designed to go sideways (sweeps, short hitches), and this was not a carefully guarded secret. Then last season, the Bears struggled with the end of the Kordell Stewart quarterback experiment, and that wasn't pretty either. Neither was indecision amongst Stewart, Chris Chandler and Rex Grossman as the starter. Indecision at quarterback has been a recent Chicago theme: Chandler, Jim Miller, Shane Mathews, Cade McNown, Rick Mirer. Until the team makes a long-term commitment to a signal-caller -- presumably Grossman -- and plays an up-tempo offense, the ball will keep bouncing the around way.

**Fun fact:** Ruben Brown is the oldest Bear, and he's only 32.

## DALLAS

'Boys fans are still rending their garments and gnashing their teeth over the mysterious draft-day decision: With Dallas badly needing a tailback, and the top back of the draft, Stephen Jackson, unexpectedly available when the Cowboys' turn came, Bill Parcells traded away his first-round choice in order to bank Buffalo's 2005 No. 1. The only logical explanation TMQ can offer is that Parcells is gambling Buffalo will have an awful year, and the 2005 Bills' No. 1 will come near the top of the draft. If this happens -- and if either free-agent Eddie George or tailback Julius Jones, also acquired in the trade, plays well -- Parcells will look like a genius, and the sports pundits who slammed him will claim in retrospect that they knew it all along.

Last year Dallas quietly finished first in defense, a reason its low-voltage offense was sufficient to make the playoffs. Why did Dallas' excellent defense get little press? Because the Cowboys play the conservative position-oriented scheme this column extols, not the wild blitzing style that announcers and sports talk radio praise. Consider that Dallas was first overall in defense, but 22nd in sacks. Not a

coincidence! Top defensive teams often don't do well in sacks: their focus is on preventing first downs, rather than creating spectacular losses. On the flip side, suspect defenses may have good sack numbers, but only because they gamble too much. Last year the Giants were second in sacks recorded but had only the 20th-rated defense.

Any day Tuesday Morning Quarterback would take a defense that stops first downs but gets few sacks over a defense that gets sacks but allows big gains. Often the best of all defensive plays, to purists if not to sportscasters, is the clang of an incomplete pass striking the ground. In 2003, the 'Boys were No. 1 in completion defense, allowing only 48.6 percent of opponent's passes caught -- the sole NFL defense, in this short-pass-wacky era, to stop more than half of throws. (**Amazing fact:** in 2003, 13 NFL defenses allowed 60 percent or more completions.)

Considering how stout the defense is, all the Cowboys need is for their offense to rise to the level of average in order for Dallas to become a championship caliber team. But rising to the level of average may be a challenge -- Dallas scored only 17 total points in consecutive season-ending defeats against New Orleans and Carolina. Blocking was often listless despite the Dallas faithful claiming the team has two offensive linemen, Larry Allen and Flozell Adams, who are Canton quality. Receivers were mediocre, despite huge allotments of draft choices and money to this position. This year's plan of combining Keyshawn Johnson, Terry Glenn and Antonio Bryant at receiver -- let's call them the "Me First Three" -- does not feel to TMQ like the solution. And now all that time invested in Quincy Carter comes to naught.

**Running back note No. 1:** In a succession of late-Sunday draft swaps, the Cowboys traded down their fifth-round pick for three seventh-round choices and tailback back Darian Barnes, who has zero career carries. This shows the Jimmie Johnson spirit of aimless draft-pick swapping lives on in Dallas. If your stockbroker made so many inconclusive minor trades, he's be convicted of churning.

**Running back note No. 2:** When the 'Boys waived tailback Troy Hambrick this winter, the team went so far as to say on its own website that Hambrick was expendable because he "not only rush[ed] for just 972 yards last season, but average[ed] just 3.5 yards per carry." Later, Dallas made a megabucks move to sign Eddie George, who last season rushed for 1,031 yards and averaged 3.3 yards per carry. Can anyone tell me what the difference is between Hambrick's numbers and George's?

**Football gods note:** Heading in for a score that would make it Carolina 26, Dallas 9 with 7:42 remaining in the fourth quarter of January's wild-card game, Quincy Carter strutted and "showed the ball" to nearby Panthers. Taunting is bad enough when you're way ahead, but when you taunt an opponent who's clobbering you, the skies darken and lightning flashes as the football gods show their displeasure. For Carter, the skies darkened before he could trot on the field for Dallas again. From playoff starter to waiver wire without taking another snap. Oh ye mortals, trifle not with the football gods.

**Carter replacement note:** Now Vinny Testaverde is under center. He has experience, but also the most lifetime losses -- 106 -- of any active NFL quarterback.

## DETROIT

When Matt Millen took over the Lions, the team had just finished a 9-7 year in which it missed the playoffs only by virtue of an improbable 54-yard field goal that beat Detroit on the final play of the final game in the regular season. Millen promised to turn the team around. Boy, did he ever. Since that day, the Lions are 10-38. Detroit had attended the playoffs six of the 10 years before Millen arrived and suffered only two losing seasons in that span. In Millen's three years, the Lions have consistently been eliminated by Thanksgiving, if not by Halloween. He sure turned the team around all right! What a relief the Ford family, which owns the Lions, didn't put Millen in charge of Ford Motors. Perhaps he would have decided to turn the car company around by resuming production of the Edsel.

Is the phase of Millen-linked futility finally about to end? Some touts think so. An accomplished coach, Steve Mariucci, has taken the reigns. Flashy young skill players (Joey Harrington, Charles Rogers, Roy Williams, Kevin Jones) have been collected. The offensive line is now joined by Damien Woody, who in 2003 won the coveted longest award in sports, the TMQ NFL Non-QB Non-RB MVP. Fernando Bryant and Brock Marion, two effective defensive backs, also arrived in the offseason. Still, the Lions were cover-

your-eyes awful in 2003. The Detroit offense was the worst in the league statistically, while the defense was in the bottom third. Harrington has looked shaky, finishing 2003 with a 63.9 passer rating -- among regular starters, only Kordell Stewart did worse. Maybe the Lions are in an up cycle, but there will be an arduous climb involved just getting back to average.

At least Detroit propitiated the football gods by not changing that lovely Honolulu Blue. The Lions' uniforms number among the NFL's classiest, and the recent tweak -- thin black piping -- TMQ can live with. Plus, the football gods should be impressed with the new Ford Field, whose old-fashioned look and college-town atmosphere are both terrific.

**Note:** TMQ calls this team the Detroit Peugeots ( check their logo). I've never understood why a team based in Detroit, owned by the Ford family and now playing at Ford Field has a logo that looks like the Peugeot logo. Comes now word that Peugeot is considering returning to the American market -- the company withdrew from the United States in 1991 after having several successive sales years about as successful as the Lions under Millen. Peugeots of the time were totally unreliable, like the Lions' offense.

**Lions fun fact:** Wayne Fontes is both the all-time winningest and losingest coach in Detroit annals.

### **Reader Animadversion Special:**

Since the preseason refuses to end, next week's column will include a one-time Reader's Revenge section with extended commentary from readers. Anyone whose observations make the column will be able to consider himself or herself a published sports critic. So got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com), including your name and hometown for mention in the column.

### **GREEN BAY**

TMQ just loves everything about this franchise -- the winning tradition, the tiny town, the public ownership, Brett Favre, the local beers (barkeep, make mine a Stevens Point ), a town that has just 100,000 people yet a stadium of 72,569 is always sold out and 64,000 names are on the season ticket waiting list, that the Packers have not changed their uniforms, that the Green Bay faithful have the simple common sense to wear plastic cheese on their heads. Here's another reason TMQ loves the Green Bay Packers -- when they renovated Lambeau Field they didn't change the name to Kraft Cheez-Whiz Field at Lambeau or something awful like that, and they added 376 women's restrooms, making Lambeau one of the few football stadiums in the country designed so that female fans don't have to stand in line at the lav. One of the few, in fact, designed to assume female fans. If TMQ were arriving on this Earth aboard an alien starcruiser, after checking out the NFL, I'd pick the Packers as my team to love.

Because the Packers have so many noble aspects, the football gods often smile on them. When lowly Arizona's Nathan Poole caught the last-second fourth-down touchdown pass that improbably beat Minnesota and put Green Bay into the playoffs, and this was announced at Lambeau as the Packers were wrapping up a game and assuming they'd missed the playoffs and would be going fishing, the crowd outburst that followed was among the most electric moments ever in sports. Man, I wish I'd been there. The football gods would only do a favor like that for the Packers, methinks.

This team has question marks entering 2004: The Joe Johnson/Jamal Reynolds fiasco at defensive end, the Mike McKenzie controversy, inexperience in the interior of the offensive line. But the Packers still have Brett Favre, and to twist an old Norman Chad line, you could blindfold Favre and drop him out of an airplane, and he'd throw a touchdown pass before his parachute opened. What TMQ doesn't like about the current Green Bay setup is that Mike Sherman continues to be both coach and general manager. The track record on this arrangement is unimpressive -- consider how Seattle improved last season after a general manager was hired and Mike Holmgren concentrated on coaching. Sherman has been issuing public demarches about McKenzie and his contract, and coaches should never be involved in that sort of thing. Coaches should coach. Let the player negotiations be handled by somebody who specializes in screaming into the telephone at agents.

**Green Bay love note:** 60,216 people turned out for the Packers' annual summer inter-squad scrimmage. Yumpin' yiminy.

**Green Bay civic panic note:** My facetious item asserting the Packers would add to monochrome madness by debuting an all-yellow uniform led to a four-alarm alert in cheesehead country. Just so you know how to decode the column, all items introduced as a "TMQ exclusive" are made up. That's how I get my exclusives -- I make them up. The reason I'm the only writer who has a "TMQ exclusive" is because the item isn't true. Anyway, reader Don F. of Towson, Md., notes that the Packers have already gone all-yellow: "The Pack did it years ago. I saw them wearing all-yellow at the Polo Grounds in 1952. They won 17-0." Don is a true Green Bay fan -- it's 52 years later, and he still remembers the final score!

### **Another Cheap, Flimsy Excuse for a Miss Universe Cheesecake Picture**

The new Miss Universe, Jennifer Hawkins of Australia, reports that one of her hobbies is "watching football with my father." Presumably she means Aussie rules football. Try clicking "close up" on her video tab -- Miss Universe bats her baby blues while fielding such challenging questions as, "What do people eat in Australia?"

When demonstrators picketed the Miss Universe main event in Quito, Ecuador, Miss Norway, Katherine Sorland, told *The Associated Press*, "We are a bunch of girls having fun, and this is a positive thing." That's what I kept trying to convince women of in college!

**Note:** TMQ was in Quito a few years ago, and mostly what I saw was a bunch of Ecuadorians in poverty. Check Miss Norway's eyes -- can we be sure she is of this world?

### **JERSEY/A**

Officially the Giants surrendered first-, third- and fifth-round draft choices to exchange Phillip Rivers for Eli Manning. But actually Jersey/A gave up first-, second-, third- and fifth-round picks. Why? According to published reports, moments before the Rivers-Manning deal, Cleveland offered to trade its first-round pick, No. 7 overall, plus its second-rounder for Jersey/A's fourth overall position. Had the Giants made the exchange, it's likely they still could have drafted Rivers with the seventh overall selection and then, presumably still made the deal with San Diego, coming out ahead by a second-round pick. Cleveland wanted gentlemen other than Rivers in the fourth slot -- the fifth and sixth slots were held by teams not looking for quarterbacks. It is possible another club might have traded into the fifth or sixth slots to draft Rivers, but then the Giants could have selected Ben Roethlisberger seventh.

So here's the full extent of the trade: To get Manning, Jersey/A gave up either Rivers or Roethlisberger, plus first-, second-, third- and fifth-round picks. That's quite a package. Manning better make the Pro Bowl. Tuesday Morning Quarterback can't help but think that the rage of hometown draftniks attending the draft -- boos shook the Garden as the Giants were on the clock -- pressured team officials to act in haste on the Manning transaction. So if the Manning trade ends up being a fiasco, blame the fans!

**Giants fan-rage note:** G-Persons faithful chanted "Jim must go" last season, yet Fassel was 60-56-1 with Jersey/A. Demand the firing of a winning coach? Oh ye mortals, trifle not with the football gods.

**Memo to Eli:** For humanitarian reasons, TMQ suggests you not look at the Jersey/A depth chart. The offensive line is a mélange of who-dats, plus a gentleman let go by Cleveland, which itself did not exactly have an irresistible force up front in 2003. The Giants' poor 2003 showing was largely a function of a broken down offensive line. When Kerry Collins was in shotgun formation, often it seemed defenders were beating the snap to the backfield. If the line is bad again, Kurt Warner and the boy wonder will to take turns getting knocked on their keisters.

**Fun fact:** In the last four seasons, Tiki Barber has fumbled 35 times -- one fumble every 38 touches. By way of comparison, through his career, Emmitt Smith has fumbled once every 82 touches.

### **Water Boy to Become "Rehydration Services Manager":**

Yesterday new federal rules went into effect that may disqualify millions of workers from overtime pay, partly by expanding the definition of who is "management." In recent years, several large corporate

chains have started saying "everyone here is a manager," ostensibly to sound enlightened but actually hoping to disqualify workers from overtime. As of yesterday, that ruse went nationwide.

How soon until everyone in the NFL becomes a manager? Though NFL athletes are extremely well paid, in terms of economic structure, the players are labor and the coaches are management. If players were re-classified as managers, perhaps teams could avoid paying them for postseason appearances by arguing that managerial personnel must work until their duties are accomplished. Cornerbacks could be renamed Jersey Engragment Managers. Offensive tackles could be renamed Unwanted Guest Managers. The guys on special teams? Wedge Bust Managers.

## MINNESOTA

What can you say about a team that led the league in offense and was plus-11 in turnovers, yet failed to make the playoffs? The Vikings' defense was second tier, allowing 353 points, more than any team that qualified for the postseason. And there was that awful midseason span in which Minnesota lost on consecutive weeks to San Diego and Oakland, which finished as the two worst teams of 2003. Still, Minnesota also had a high number of what TMQ calls "authentic" wins, beating four teams that made the postseason: Green Bay, Denver, Seattle and Kansas City. The Vikes beat these four by a combined 65 points!

But there was that little matter of everyone on the Vikings squad, including the coaching staff, taking the day off on that "easy" season-ending contest at lowly Arizona that would have put the Vikes into the playoffs. Once Minnesota got ahead 17-6 early in the fourth quarter, you could see Vikings players and coaches laughing and clowning around on the sidelines, as if the playoff spot was already won. Never smile until the clock shows all zeros. As the Vikes laughed and clowned around on the Arizona sideline, the football gods took offense, and sharpened a few lightning bolts.

TMQ thinks what's wrong with the Vikings is the obvious -- Randy Moss. Sure he's scary good, but for six years now the Minnesota program has been structured around getting Moss his stats and stroking his puerile ego. This hasn't added up to a championship, has it? As the men's Olympic basketball Nightmare Team is proving in Athens, winning comes from playing *as a team*. From selfishness comes only stats. In six years no one at Minnesota has stood up to the runaway selfishness of Randy Moss. Until someone does, this franchise is goin' nowhere. And here's a thought: If some mature, grown-up type actually did stand up to Moss with a little tough love, he might benefit from it.

**Shocking cheer-babe news:** For years the Vikings have quietly offered the most delicious cheerleader pictures that any NFL team posted on its website with full-length in-studio bikini poses. As TMQ has pointed out, you'd think it would be too cold in Minnesota for bikinis, but you'd think wrong -- [click here](#) and search for the name Maren. Sadly, this year the Vikings are posting restrained fashion-apparel photos of their cheer-babes. Talk about misplaced priorities!

## TMQ, Grammar Snob

In the new Microsoft slogan -- "Your potential inspires us to create software to help you reach it" -- the antecedent of "it" is "software." So your potential inspires us to create software to help you reach software. This slogan must have gone through the Microsoft Word grammar-checker tool! Then again, the line does pretty much sum up Microsoft sales strategy.

## NEW ORLEANS

The team should have some defensive line, considering it now boasts three recent No. 1 draft picks (Charles Grant, Jonathan Sullivan and Will Smith), plus Saints' franchise player Darren Howard. But bear in mind, three of these four gentlemen were present last season and New Orleans finished 27th against the run. Not much of a return on investment.

TMQ calls this franchise the Boy Scouts -- check their logo -- and much of last season the Saints played like Boy Scouts by politely stepping aside. True, the New Orleans season ended on an up note, a defeat of Dallas. But that was the Saints' only victory in 2003 over a team that made the playoffs. While the sports-nut world fixates on the December collapses of the Miami Dolphins, the Saints have gotten

holiday-month disintegration down to an art form. In 2001, the Saints entered the final month of the season a promising 7-5, then lost the final four straight. In 2002, the Saints broke out 6-1 then lost six of the remaining nine. Last year the Boy Scouts came into December a promising 7-5 and lost three of their final four. Under Jim Haslett, New Orleans has a winning record in the first half of the season and a losing record in the second half. And it is the second half of every NFL season when the men are separated from the individuals who merely have XY chromosome pairs.

Of course, last year New Orleans brought fate upon itself by tempting the football gods. It was in a mid-December 45-7 victory over the woeful Giants that Saints receiver Joe Horn pulled the cell phone from the goal post and danced on the field, daring the football gods to smite him down. Just as bad, many members of the New Orleans team strutted and boasted after this victory, though it had come over a totally dispirited second-echelon team. To that point, New Orleans was 8-6 and was a strong shot at the playoffs, but the football gods do not abide rodomontade. The following week the Saints scored their improbable field-length last-second multiple-lateral touchdown, then missed the PAT with time expired and were eliminated from the postseason. The football gods chortled.

**Ricky Williams bottom line:** The Saints got two No. 1s from Miami for Williams, using one on Charles Grant and packaging the other with one of their own No. 1s to draft Jonathan Sullivan. Now bear in mind that New Orleans gave two No. 1s, two third-round picks, plus fourth-, fifth-, sixth- and seventh-round choices to get Williams initially. This means that in order to end up with Grant and Sullivan, the Saints surrendered three first-round picks, two third-round picks and four other selections. Yet the team's defensive line is still soft. Ay caramba.

**Saints fun fact No. 1:** The team's official colors are black, white and "old gold."

**Saints fun fact No. 2:** Fullback Sam Gash made the Pro Bowl from Buffalo's 1999 playoff team and was immediately cut. The following season, Gash started for Baltimore its Super Bowl win and was immediately cut. He later returned to the Ravens, who made the playoffs last season with Gash in the lineup, and in February he was released again. New Orleans proceeded to sign Gash, but cut him on the eve of training camp. Saints, you've got it all wrong! First Sam Gash has a good year, *then* you cut him.

### **Clang! Clang! Clang! (Repeat 65 Times)**

So far at the Olympics the men's basketball Nightmare Team has missed 65 of 86 three-point attempts. NBA-style one-on-one threes aren't working against the sort of zones that international-rules teams play -- passing is the key to beating an international-rules zone. But the Nightmare Team doesn't care about what works; its members only care about hoisting up threes the instant they touch the ball.

According to the official definition of the Games of the XXVIII Olympiad, "Basketball is a game played by two teams ." Would somebody please tell the United States men the "team" part? Whenever they take the court, basketball becomes a game played by one team against five guys who care only for their own stats and shoe contracts. It's as if they are experimenting with an all-new basketball format: Five on one on one on one on one on one.

## **PHILADELPHIA**

"Philadelphia finished free agency with a near league-high in unspent salary-cap space -- which could have been used for the extra players that might put the team into the Super Bowl, but will instead be, what, donated to charity?" For *four straight years* TMQ has been running exactly those words, verbatim, as its preseason comment for the Eagles. Finally the words are no longer true!

When Frank Layden was general manager of the Utah Jazz during the heyday of Karl Malone and John Stockton, each time his team would get door-lined just short of the NBA championship, he would make a wistful comment about how he regretted having a pair of great players and never going out in free agency to find the help that would allow them to win a title. Every time TMQ heard his, I thought: "You numbskull, go sign some help!" I've been thinking the same about the Eagles for four years. For four straight years, Philadelphia has had an almost-Super roster and lots of unspent cap space. Now this offseason the Eagles paid freely to acquire Jevon Kearse and Terrell Owens. Finally, help arrives.

Though Kearsse and Owens represent an infusion of impact players, bear in mind the Eagles lost both starting corners and both starting guards from last season. Bear in mind that in two home playoff games, Philadelphia surrendered 365 yards rushing. And despite spending liberally on Kearsse and Owens, Philadelphia continues to stand among league leaders in unused cap space. The few million that might have been invested for more help may by January 2005 be the source of Layden-like regret.

Here's the other thing I have said, quoting myself, in my Philadelphia preview for four consecutive years: "The Eagles' biggest problem was no depth behind RB Duce Staley. He went down hurt and the offense became McNabb 24/7. Yet the Eagles acquired no RB help." And once again the Eagles acquired no running back. With Duce Staley departed, the plan was to count on oft-injured Correll Buckhalter and fragile Brian Westbrook. Buckhalter's already out for the year. Dorsey Levens arrived, but he's 34 years old and averaged 2.9 yards per carry last season. Are the Eagles seriously thinking they can make a Super Bowl run with Reno Mahe at tailback?

Last year the lack of a premier running back manifested in the Eagles' tendency to go pass-wacky in pressure situations. On opening day, facing the defending Super Bowl champion Bucs, with the game scoreless at home, Philadelphia had first-and-goal on the City of Tampa 1-yard line and threw incomplete on three of four downs, coming away empty-handed. Why not just pound up the middle four times? Then in their final game of the year, at home in the NFC Championship Game against the Panthers, Philadelphia went pass-wacky when the run was advised. For example, on third-and-3 at the Carolina 11 trailing 14-3 with 5:22 remaining. A field goal and the Eagles are within a touchdown and a deuce; any rushing gain sets up a stadium-rocking fourth-down try. Instead it was pass, an interception and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

One reason the Eagles throw too much is that they are among the NFL's few remaining West Coast offense teams. Philadelphia passed 54 percent of the time last season versus, say, Miami throwing 48 percent of the time. But a more basic reason for the Eagles' pass-wacky approach is lack of studs at running back. Nothing was done about this problem in the offseason. It's not an auspicious sign.

**Ineffective pass-wacky offense note:** In opening and closing the 2003 season at home, the Eagles scored a combined total of 3 points.

**Scouting note to Jersey/A, which plays the Eagles on opening day 2004:** Philadelphia has run fake kicks in three consecutive season openers.

**Near-naked-women fact:** TMQ just loves that when you go to the Eagles' official homepage and mouse over "cheerleaders" in the left column, you get a tab that says "lingerie calendar." When the Eagles picked their pep squad for the upcoming season, the team's announcement was headlined "2004 Cheerleader Squad Unveiled!!" The two exclamation points were the original, and new cheerleaders, get used to the "unveiled" part.

## POTOMAC DRAINAGE BASIN INDIGENOUS PERSONS

The future must be now for the Persons, whose offseason spending spree engaged an all-but-assured cap crash in two seasons, plus next year's No. 2 draft pick is already spent. In the euphoria over the return of Joe Gibbs, the Persons signed players to contracts with an announced combined value of \$302 million -- almost four times the current salary cap. Needless to say the official value of NFL contracts is usually fictional; most of that \$302 million will never be paid. But there are plenty of real obligations there to create a cap crash. Better enjoy it while you can, Persons' faithful.

And why did Gibbs trade a third-round draft pick for Mark Brunell, knowing Jax would waive Brunell within days anyway? Yes, the trade assured that Brunell would come to the Persons, but if it was Brunell's desire to play for Gibbs -- as it was -- once waived the gentleman could have signed with the Persons of his own volition. Within a short time of his return, Gibbs had traded a young impact player (Champ Bailey), plus second- and third-round picks, for players in hot water with their present employers. This may prove to have been an early stumble, based on Gibbs being out of the game since the salary cap arrived and ushered in the era of waive-a-rama. In Gibbs' day, if you wanted a player from another club, the only thing to do was trade for him. Today, just wait five minutes and he'll be waived.

Also, Gibbs may not yet appreciate the value of non-first-round draft picks in the salary-cap era. While trading has declined in significance, middle and low-round draft picks have risen in significance because they supply reasonably decent players at cap-friendly wages. Today, for every star on the roster, there must be five undrafted free agents who earn the league minimum. For every starter who just got a big bonus, there must be a third-round pick that got a modest bonus. A decade ago, sixth- or seventh-round choices usually didn't make NFL rosters. Now they almost always do, because they play for the league minimum and balance out the salary cap. As early as next winter, Gibbs may find his roster top heavy in cap terms, and already 2005 draft picks have been expended. Thus, the future must be now.

Otherwise, Jiminy Cricket is it ever nice to see Gibbs, Joe Bugel and Don Breaux standing on the sidelines for the Persons just like in the old days. And where were Bugel and Breaux until Gibbs called them back -- in cryo-suspension somewhere?

**Fun Persons fact:** News reports say tailback Clinton Portis bought teammate Ifeanyi Ohaleté a car in order to persuade him to give up jersey No. 26, which Portis wanted. Last week, Ohaleté was waived; he's now with Arizona. TMQ hopes the title paperwork on that car was complete! Also, this makes Portis the latest in a series of NFL stars to pay lesser-known teammates to surrender a desired set of digits, which causes TMQ to wonder, how long until there is futures trading in NFL jersey numbers?

**Fun Persons marketing fact:** Tapping into civic euphoria over the Gibbs return, the team added almost 5,000 seats to Fed Ex Field, including about 1,000 new seats in the all-important luxury box category. (NFL teams share general gate receipts, but keep club-seat and luxury-box revenue.) With 91,665 chairs, Fed Ex is now notably larger than any other stadium in the NFL. If all the new seats sell, the team will realize around \$6 million annually in ticket income, plus concession revenue. In other words, Dumbledore will have paid his own considerable salary. Coach, next time demand a percentage of the gross!

## SAN FRANCISCO

It was Montana to Rice, then Young to Rice, then Garcia to Owens. This year it will be Rattay to Lloyd. Yea, verily, the Niners will be testing the sports theory of Pliny the Younger, a Roman orator born in the year 62. Surely you know the sports theory of Pliny the Younger! Well, for those few who might not, here's a quick refresher. After observing a late first-century chariot race, Pliny wrote, "In fact it is the racing colors the crowd cares about, and if the colors were to be exchanged in midcourse during a race they would transfer their favor and enthusiasm, and rapidly desert the famous drivers and horses whose names they shout." Isn't this exactly what's going on in San Francisco? Is the crowd cheering for "the colors" -- the uniforms of the Niners, the city and lore they represent -- or was the crowd cheering for the "famous drivers and horses," meaning the great players now departed? Soon we'll know.

And to think San Francisco waived Jerry Rice, the greatest player in franchise history and possibly the greatest player in football history in order to placate the ego of Terrell Owens. This gentleman repaid the favor by throwing fits and demanding to be traded, and now he is gone. So rather than enjoy four more years of the dignified Jerry Rice, possibly the greatest player in football history, the Niners' throng got three more years of the insufferable Terrell Owens. Now Owens is departed and it's official that San Francisco blundered by favoring him over Rice. The football gods may punish the Niners this year for abandoning such a great player.

But then who hasn't San Francisco abandoned? The great players are gone, Bill Walsh is gone, the West Coast offense is gone, the old management and ownership team are gone, even that wonderful stadium name -- Candlestick Park -- is gone. The Niners' depth chart is a who-dat wonderland. The team's likely starting receivers, Brandon Lloyd and Cedrick Wilson, in 2003 had a combined 608 yards, which is usually the kind of number produced by single third-option slot guy. Last year the Niners were not that far from a playoff team -- the fifth-ranked offense and 13th-ranked defense. They were plagued by five losses by a field goal or less. But with Derrick Deese, Jeff Garcia, Garrison Hearst, Owens, Ron Stone, Jason Webster and others purged for cap reasons in the offseason, it is hard to imagine San Francisco mounting any challenge this year.

**Finance note:** Len Pasquarelli of ESPN.com has estimated that a third of this year's San Francisco salary cap, about \$27 million, will be taken up by back-debt charges for players released in the offseason. San Francisco, for instance, will be charged \$10 million for not having Garcia, while Cleveland will be charged

\$2 million for having him. Half a dozen or more jettisoned Niners will start for other teams, yet it cost San Francisco more in cap terms. This is a cap meltdown of the first order.

**Bookworm note:** the quotation from Pliny the Younger can be found in the new book *Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer* by Warren St. John, which is about fan mania generally and University of Alabama football boosters specifically. *Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer* is a fabulous read and an absolute must-have for any thinking football fan. I'll be saying more about the book in an upcoming column.

## ST. LOUIS RAMS

Sports touts feel burned by the Rams. First they came from nowhere to win a Super Bowl, and critics always love the act that comes out of nowhere. Then they looked to become a dynasty team, returning to the Super Bowl and barely losing to the even-more-lovable Pats. Going into the 2002, many touts proclaimed Les Mouflons the class of the NFL -- and they proceeded to lose their first five, not recording a win until October 13th. So going into 2003, touts wrote the Rams off. They proceeded to finish 12-5, including a run of 10-1, and departed with an overtime playoff loss to eventual NFC champion Carolina. All this is to say, St. Louis keeps defying expectations in both directions. They are great when the team is predicted to be bad and bad when predicted to be great. Touts don't like this -- it interferes with the illusion that sportswriters and on-air bobbleheads have some incredible insider knowledge that enables them to predict events. Actually nobody has the slightest idea what's going to happen, and the Rams are the best recent proof of that.

So what to make of Les Mouflons for 2004? TMQ doesn't have the slightest idea.

**St. Louis note:** TMQ's single favorite play of the 2003 season involved the Rams. In their first meeting with the Niners, on third and long, San Francisco dropped *two* defensive linemen into coverage on a zone rush. Marc Bulger became so flustered he just stood there and ended up sacked.

## SEATTLE

Mike Holmgren is viewed in Seattle as a mega-genius -- not like that loser Dennis Erickson, the previous boss, who was cashiered. Yet Holmgren is 41-41 for the 'Hawks, his predecessor Erickson was 31-33. What, exactly, is the meaningful difference between these records? Holmgren-versus-Erickson seems an example of the power of celebrity. Holmgren is a coaching luminary, so when he goes .500, this is seen as great accomplishment. Erickson is not a coaching luminary, so when he goes .484, this is seen as colossal fiasco. Of course Holmgren has won NFL playoff games and Erickson has never done that. But in five seasons of trying, Holmgren has not won a postseason game in Seattle. It's hard to remember the last time anyone won a postseason game in Seattle. Answer? Chuck Knox, 20 years ago.

Seattle had an impressive statistical season in 2003, breaking the 400-point barrier. Then Seattle took the Packers to overtime in the playoffs at Green Bay, where the visitors have prevailed only once in the postseason during the Holocene Epoch, and that was another impressive feat. But the Blue Men Group had only won victory over a team that made the playoffs, defeating St. Louis early when Les Mouflons were struggling. If Seattle wants to take the next step, it has to win some authentic games.

**Blue Men Group note:** TMQ thinks the new uniforms make the team look like it just fell into a pot of finger paints. Officially the colors are Seahawks Blue, Seahawks Navy and Seahawks Bright Green. Water at the stadium is Seahawks Transparent.

**Sked quirk:** Between last year's regular season, January's postseason and this summer's preseason, Seattle has played three games in Green Bay in eight months.

**Note:** TMQ will be rooting for the Seattle offensive line, coached by the tastefully named Gregg Smith.

## Globalization Takes the Work Out of Protesting

Street demonstrators in Venezuela, where the longstanding custom is to bang pots and pans together to make noise, have begun to carry boom boxes with a CD, "El Cacerolazo," that consists of nothing but the

sound of pots and pans banging. It's easier to play the CD than actually bang pots and pans.

Should there be a CD that consists of nothing but the sound of people stomping feet? Then NFL fans at games could play that on third downs and wouldn't actually have to stand and engage in the exhausting stomping of feet.

## TAMPA

Yea, verily, as TMQ hath recounted, the defending champion Bucs tempted the football gods with excessive boasting and paid the price. City of Tampa was nowhere near as bad as you think last season - the team finished fifth defensively and 10th offensively, which normally are playoff-bound numbers. But the football gods were angry at the Bucs for hubris, and whenever there was a critical bounce of the ball, it went the other guy's way. Tampa lost seven games by eight points or less, including painful overtime field-goal losses to Carolina and Indianapolis. Losing to Atlanta at home in the season's penultimate game, which the Bucs entered still alive at 7-7, Tampa scored to pull within two with 28 seconds remaining only to see the deuce conversion attempt smote down by the football gods.

So considering Tampa won the Super Bowl after 2002 and really wasn't that bad in 2003, why was there a total offseason housecleaning? Half a dozen starters were forced to walk the plank, including Warren Sapp, the best player in the history of the franchise. Twenty-three free agents were signed -- most by any team this year -- though with a few exceptions, the new arrivals are gentlemen their previous employers did not invite back. Just 18 months after triumph in the Super Bowl, the Tampa starting lineup bears only passing resemblance to the championship team; just six or seven players still the same. City of Tampa couldn't keep a Super Bowl winning group together for even 18 months? Ye gods.

Plus, now the club has a quarterback controversy. Brad Johnson has been a winner, efficient -- 140 touchdowns versus 95 interceptions -- and dull whenever he's played. Fans always want him replaced with someone flashy. Yes, he had four picks in that season-collapsing loss to the Falcons, but all the Bucs were floundering that day. All Johnson did was win the Super Bowl! Plus, he's 58-37 as a starter, which is none too shabby. The Potomac Drainage Basin Indigenous Persons came to regret giving up on Johnson because he's not flashy. Tampa might resist the same urge.

**Demography note:** Last week, Jon "I Was A Teenaged Coach" Gruden turned 41 years of age. Finally he will stop getting carded at Hooters!

## Next Week

Why NFL contracts should be listed under "fiction" on the bestseller lists, plus the new annual Revenge of the Readers. Offer your comments at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com), including your name and hometown for mention in the column.



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## The Revenge of the Readers, plus Yahtzee comes to the 2008 Olympics

**By Gregg Easterbrook**  
*Special to NFL.com*

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season and also appear on NFL Network, providing commentary Tuesday nights on NFL Total Access. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Aug. 31, 2004) -- In 2001, Drew Bledsoe signed a "10-year, \$103 million" contract described in the sports press as the biggest in football history. The "10-year, \$103 million" agreement lasted three years and paid \$24 million. Maybe the contract was hundreds of pages long -- making the document itself the biggest in NFL history! This winter, Bledsoe consented to tear up the "10-year" contract, replacing it with what is officially a "three-year, \$18.5 million" deal but which assures him only of one season and about \$9 million. So the "10-year, \$103 million" pact has downsized to four years and \$33 million, which is still an awfully good stipend for tossing a ball, but about a third of what was originally treated as a mega-blockbuster.

Recently Peyton Manning took the spotlight by inking a "seven-year, \$98 million" deal, though the agreement is only solid for about four years and \$56 million -- plenty heady enough. In 2008 of this contract, a cap-collapsing \$11.8 million salary is due; by then Manning will either have renegotiated, or the Colts will have no choice but to waive him. TMQ would not be hugely surprised if Manning's "seven-year" contract is redone in two years, if not next year.

Welcome to the world of NFL player contracts, where the actual value is often much less than announced value. Actual value may be ample -- most NFL players are well-paid -- yet the fictional values dominates news.

This offseason, Jevon Kearse signed a "six-year, \$68 million" deal with Philadelphia that assures him of three years and \$23 million. At Dallas, Keyshawn Johnson signed a "four-year, \$20 million" contract that assures him of two years and about \$8 million. At Oakland, Kerry Collins autographed a "three-year, \$16.8 million" deal that is solid only for one year and about \$6 million. Mark Brunell of Washington signed a "seven-year, \$43 million" contract that only assures him of two years and \$8 million. Jake Delhomme of Carolina signed a "five-year, \$38 million" agreement likely to run two years and pay about \$12 million, then be reworked. In what may be a record-setter for the inflated-total form, Ian Gold of Tampa signed a "five-year, \$30 million" contract that only assures him of one year and about \$2 million.

Maybe all NFL contract totals should be stated in quotation marks.

What's going on is that the paper value of NFL contracts is often inflated with out-years payments the player never sees. The bonuses a player actually pockets around the signing period, plus salary in the first one or two years, are concrete. Anything else is speculation, as most NFL contract provisions are not guaranteed.

In 2002, for instance, Jeremiah Trotter signed a "seven-year, \$36 million" contract with Washington; he played two years, received about \$10 million -- heady enough -- then was waived. The "seven-year, \$49 million" contract recently signed by Terrell Owens includes a non-guaranteed \$7.5 million bonus in 2006, when the gentleman will be 33 years old. Assuming he's still with Philadelphia in 2006, Owens will either renegotiate or be given cab fare to the airport. Warren Sapp just signed with the Raiders for "seven years and \$36 million," though the roughly \$8 million he receives this season is all Sapp can be sure of. Seven years from now, Sapp will be 38 years old and not lining up at tackle; surely he will be

comfortably seated in a broadcast booth, wearing a garish color-coordinated jacket. On paper, Steve McNair holds one of the biggest contracts in NFL history, but the deal calls for a \$50 million non-guaranteed bonus in 2006 when McNair will be 33 years old. The clause might as well call for a \$50 billion bonus!

Older players aren't the only ones receiving contracts with illusory totals. This summer, rookie Larry Fitzgerald of Arizona signed a "six-year, \$60 million" agreement that includes escalators he will never see, such as an \$11 million incentive payment in 2009. Long before 2009 rolls around, Fitzgerald will have reworked his deal or been waived.

Teams may benefit from contracts they know will be torn up because the longer a deal runs on paper, the more years to spread out cap charges for bonuses. Improbable future payments can also cause a deal to pass muster under the obscure "Sanders rule," which governs some big-deal contracts. But public relations is as much a factor in fictional numbers. Teams agree to improbable payments down the road in order to flatter the player by making it seem he's won a gasp-inducing windfall. Such terms also allow the agent to claim he negotiated an ultra-blockbuster agreement. Agents recruit new clients partly by talking up the blockbuster agreements they've inked for existing clients: When teams cooperate in this make-believe, they do the agent a small favor, which helps maintain good relations between agents and general managers. Everyone politely ignores that down the road, the player either renegotiates or is released. And while agents call press conferences to unveil incredible blockbuster contracts, they don't invite in cameras a couple years later to announce their clients renegotiated.

You'd think by this point it would be obvious that many NFL contract totals are illusions -- but then, you'd think a lot of things. This offseason, Ty Law became furious at the Patriots when the team asked for a surprisingly modest giveback from the "seven-year, \$49 million" agreement he signed five years ago. Law seemed to believe he'd actually get all the money! LaVar Arrington of Washington has been steaming about a non-guaranteed \$6.5 million bonus that supposedly is missing from the "eight-year, \$85 million" contract he signed in 2003. TMQ has no idea whether the bonus is missing, but most likely it makes no difference. The bonus was scheduled for 2006 -- by then Arrington's deal will have cap-collapsing weight, and he will either have renegotiated or been waived anyway.

Yet when LaDainian Tomlinson signed a "six-year, \$60 million" agreement a few weeks ago with San Diego, sportscasters gushed over the number -- biggest in history for a running back! -- though LT/2 is assured of only two years and about \$22 million. That ought to be heady enough! But calling the deal a \$60 million blockbuster made for a better story. Players and agents, it seems, aren't the only ones who like pretending contracts are bigger than they really are. Often the press joins the party because bigger numbers are, by definition, more attention-grabbing.

In other NFL news, last week the Bengals clobbered the defending champion Patriots 31-3, then this week were clobbered 37-10 by Atlanta. So will Cincinnati be good or bad? Neither score gives any clue. As TMQ declares annually, "Preseason success has nothing to do with what happens once the light goes on, and can backfire by making teams overconfident." Consider that in the 2002 preseason, novice NFL coach Steve Spurrier celebrated wildly after his charges beat San Francisco 38-7 in a meaningless exhibition; once the regular season began, Spurrier's team got flattened. In the 2003 preseason, after Washington beat Baltimore 24-3 in a meaningless exhibition, Spurrier boasted, "It seems like our offense can score every time we touch the ball." In the regular season, Spurrier's offense finished 22nd: It seemed like the Redskins could punt every time they touched the ball. Preseason games tell nothing about what will happen once the light comes on. Do not invite the wrath of the football gods by attaching significance to the preseason scoreboard.

In other sports news, considering the difference in size and musculature between men and women, it seems hard to imagine a women's football team will ever be able to take on a men's squad. See more on the fledgling women's football leagues below. But if the Olympics are any indication, it won't be long until WNBA teams can beat NBA teams! This really must be the 21st -- oh, never mind.

And now TMQ's new annual Reader's Revenge feature, interrupted by the usual asides and non-sequiturs. By the hammer of Grabthar, the readers are avenged!

Michael Cross of Houston thought it was iniquitous for me to criticize the Texans' 2003 season without mentioning how many gentlemen were on injured reserve. He offers this incredible haiku triptych:

TMQ unfair  
to beloved Houston Moo Cows!  
Much gnashing of teeth.

Offense: Hurt Carr means  
two starts for rookie Ragone;  
just three points skews stats.

Defense: Seventeen  
players on injured reserve  
was most in the league.  
-- *Michael Cross, Houston*

In my lament of the monochrome uniform, I said the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1) had gone all-orange. Phil Wittmer replied, "Since the alternative uniform insanity began, the Browns have worn orange pants with white jerseys, orange pants with brown jerseys, and white pants with orange jerseys. They have never completed the helmet-jersey-pants trifecta of orange. Browns fans are traditionalists! We'd never stand for our team taking part in the garish monochromatic craze. Most of us aren't even happy about the orange jerseys. Opinion is split on the orange pants. They at least have a basis in Browns' uniform history." He haikuizes,

All orange for the Browns?  
We've avoided a logo;  
We'll avoid this too.  
-- *Phil Wittmer, Dayton, Ohio*

Alison Mundy of San Diego was among numerous readers to point out that I forgot the Bolts on my list of teams that have shown egregious monochrome looks. On recent occasion, the Chargers have gone all-navy. Of course, San Diego is a Navy town. A year or two ago, as yours truly stood on Coronado Island watching the *John C. Stennis* ease out of San Diego harbor, I reflected that the city of San Diego might be the third- or fourth-ranked military power in the world. For a laid-back California beach town, San Diego is pretty heavily armed. But all-navy as a uniform look doesn't cut it. Bring back those beautiful Bolts powder blues!

Cindy Joslin of Oshkosh, Wis., asked why the Patriots are the Flying Elvii to this column. Check their helmets: Last year, after a learned debate, readers decided "Elvii" was the plural of "Elvis." Other cryptic TMQ cognomen? The Rams are Les Mouflons because the mouflon is a Corsican sheep whose males have curved horns. (Mouflon ewes in their native habitat go, *le baaaa, le baaaa.*) The Niners are the Squared Sevens because 49 is the square of seven. The Flaming Thumbtacks -- check Tennessee's helmet. The Marine Mammals -- dolphins are not fish. The Blue Men Group -- Seattle players might as well paint their faces blue to complete their new look. I say City of Tampa Buccaneers because Tampa Bay is a body of water while Tampa is the city; Green Bay is the city, so no complaint there. The Pittsburgh Hypocycloids -- those do-dads on the helmet are "the plane locus of a point fixed on a circle that rolls on the inside circumference of a fixed circle," or, hypocycloids. The Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1) bear that name because the Browns (Release 1.0) are now the Ravens, who in turn to me are the Nevermores. Jersey/A and Jersey/B are self-explanatory. The Moo Cows, Lucky Charms and Long Johns you can guess. The Persons and Daxiongmao -- see below. And I'm always interested in reader proposals for the teams that lack TMQ cognomen.

### Equal-Time Beefcake Comes to Miami

Female and nontraditional male fans will be delighted to learn that the just-out Dolphins' 2005 swimsuit calendar, in addition to the requisite pin-ups of delicious cheer-babes "wearing beautiful Brazilian-style swimsuits that display their athletic physiques", includes pictures of shirtless players, such as Junior Seau and the male-model-esque Jason Taylor. Last year the Steelers, who don't have cheerleaders, became the first NFL team to offer a players' calendar of revealing poses. Now Miami becomes the first NFL team to combine cheesecake and beefcake in one convenient package. TMQ senses a trend.

Note No. 1. The critical public-policy development of the new Dolphins' swimsuit calendar was pointed

out by David Cheng of Albany, N.Y., and numerous other readers who apparently were surfing NFL cheer-babe web pages when they should have been working. Glad your priorities are in order, David!

Note No. 2. Strangely, Pittsburgh doesn't list the players' beefcake calendar in the "for ladies" section of its team store. The ladies section does, however, offer a Steelers-logo garter for those romantic wine-and-candlelight dinners during night games.

Chris Elwood of Baltimore lamented the waive-a-rama of the cap era, noting, "I am a Ravens fan and have the following jerseys in my closet -- Jermaine Lewis, Rod Woodson, Ray Lewis and Jamie Sharper." Only one remains with the team, the rest sal-cap casualties. Elwood proposes that the cap not apply to players on the team that originally drafted them. The current overall team cap would be replaced with a new, much lower cap applicable only to those arriving from other clubs; teams could pay any amount to retain their original draft picks. This is not a proposal that the NFL adopt the "Larry Bird exception," which waived the NBA cap for any gent already on a team: Elwood would waive the cap only for those drafted by the same team. The Elwood Plan would keep fan favorites where they belong while still preserving competition since teams could spend without restriction only on those players they originally drafted, and the draft is already structured to help weak teams over strong ones. Elwood may be on to something.

Kevin Hendryx of Austin, Texas, a Bears fan, protested TMQ calling Dave Wannstedt a "solid" coach. Wannstedt was 41-57 at Chicago, Hendryx points out, and his Bears often folded in December, though the onset of cold weather was not an excuse there as in Miami. Kevin, in calling Wannstedt a solid coach, all I meant was that he is neither liquid, gaseous nor plasma.

Liz Bartelt, a student at the University of California at Berkeley, agreed with TMQ that it is puzzling that 1.5 million people per year visit Grand Coulee Dam in Washington state. Her geology class stopped there on a field trip and "I can't remember anything remotely interesting about it," she reports. More appealing was "the giant milk bottle in Spokane."

Ryan Boyle of Arlington, Va., complained that I failed to credit the Raiders for keeping their uniforms exactly the same. He haikuizes,

The deficit will  
be paid before AI changes  
the Silver and Black  
-- Ryan Boyle, Arlington, Va.

Apropos my item on the American Automobile Association becoming AAA and Kentucky Fried Chicken becoming KFC -- these names no longer stand for anything, officially they are now just letters -- Greg Jacobs of Woodberry Forest, Va., noted that the letters SAT no longer stand for anything, either. Jacobs reports that he is a physics consultant for the College Board, the organization that sponsors the SAT, and "at recent consultant training it was explained to us in no uncertain terms that SAT is now a name, not an abbreviation." What bothers TMQ is the College Board's apparent assumption that the public is too stupid to remember the words Scholastic Aptitude Test. Jacobs muses, "Perhaps, having seen SAT scores, the College Board has good reason for confidence in public stupidity."

Note: Initially SAT stood for Scholastic Aptitude Test, which in 1990 was changed to Scholastic Assessment Test. But "assessment test" sounds like the kind of phrase that should not be written by people who stand in judgment of other's intellectual prowess. In 1994, the College Board announced that SAT no longer stands for anything. Like so much else on the college scene!

Apropos TMQ's contention that Joe Gibbs' 16-5 postseason record is more impressive than Vince Lombardi's 9-1 mark, Samir Bhakta of Mount Laurel, N.J., argued for Lombardi. He notes the Green Bay master was 5-1 in the old NFL Championship Games, whereas Gibbs was 3-1 in the modern NFC championship, which is the closest comparison. "Gibbs' wins are very impressive, but not as good as Lombardi's record," Bhakta thinks.

Alice Rudolph of Wilmette, Ill., pointed out that the item about sled dogs in Seward, Alaska, referred on second reference to "Seward, Ala." She notes, "I bet that hot and sticky Alabama weather would slow the

sled dogs down."

### Plus, Grant Wood Painted "American Gothic" to Protest Baldness

With "The Scream" stolen from a Norwegian museum, news coverage has been full of declarations the painting depicts modern angst or existential dread. But researchers believe Edvard Munch painted "The Scream" to reflect his distress over the global blood-red sunsets that followed the 1883 detonation of the enormous Krakatau volcano in Indonesia. Munch wasn't protesting man's inhumanity to man, he was complaining about the view! It's enough to make you scream.

On the question of whether the Bengals or Clippers have been the worst franchise in recent major team sports, Jentry Thomason of Baton Rouge, La., asserted this distinction should go to the Saints. It took the New Orleans franchise 20 years to record its first winning season, Thomason notes: even the Bucs, butt of many 1970s jokes, had a winning season by their fourth year. TMQ calls this squad the Boy Scouts, owing to the similarity of its fleur-de-lis to that of Baden-Powell's. Here, Steve Prestegard of Ripon, Wis., images what the team would look like if it adopted Scouts-uniform colors.

Kristi Terbrack of Chicago pointed out that Daxiongmao, which TMQ sometimes calls the Bears, does not mean "bear" in Mandarin. Only the "xiong" part of the word, she explained, means bear. An almost spooky number of readers knew that Daxiongmao does not mean bear. The word translates as "big bear cat," and usually means panda. But the Bears play like Pandas! Justin Lusk, who's lived in China for two years and reports that the only NFL game he has seen was the Panthers-Patriots Super Bowl, suggested I start calling the team the Chicago Mingdingxiong -- "bears whose outcomes are decided by fate." Mr. Data, make it so!

Dan Maloney of Buffalo, N.Y., argued that I should give the Bills a break about the team abandoning red, white and flag blue -- not to put too fine a point on it, but the single most successful color scheme in world history. Check out United States Olympic duds, Maloney noted: many were red, white and a gloomy shade of Bridge Abutment Blue, rather than flag blue. No descendant of Betsy Ross designed this year's Olympic look. It continues to amaze TMQ that there is now no NFL team that uses red, white and flag blue as its colors. Who *is* still using red, white and American flag blue as its colors? John Burns of Calgary, Alberta, provided the answer: the Montreal Canadians!

### Nightmare Team Update

After a match with the U.S. men and their brilliant tactical approach of playing five on one on one on one on one on one, Spanish coach Mario Pesquera complained that international refs had been intimidated into allowing NBA-style traveling. In international-rules competition, whistles still sound if you take multiple steps without dribbling, whereas in the NBA this is now legal, if not encouraged. Here's what you would have to do to get called for traveling in today's NBA. Allen Iverson would, say, run the length of the floor without dribbling. Then, still carrying the ball, he would go to the locker room, shower, call a travel agent, drive to the airport and board a plane for Puerto Vallarta. After Iverson landed at Puerto Vallarta and entered the customs and immigration line, the referees back at the game would finally give in and call traveling. At which point the coach would explode and scream "WHAT!!!!!"

Mention of Australian Jennifer Hawkins, the new Miss Universe, brought a deluge of comments from down under. Aussie readers noted that when Hawkins says she is a football fan, she's referring to rugby, not Australian-rules football. In most of the world football means soccer, in Australia it means rugby. Hawkins was once a cheerleader for her hometown Newcastle Knights rugby squad, Richard Nash of Sydney pointed out; here is the current Knights pep squad. Stan McKeon of Launceston, Tasmania, reports that when the Hunter Pirates, a new basketball club in Newcastle, held cheerleader tryouts, the team *rejected* Jennifer Hawkins. "The basketball gods rained down misery on the Pirates and gave them a 2-31 season debut season," Mckeon notes. Here are the women who bested Miss Universe; here is Miss Universe ; you be the judge. (Okay, maybe Jennifer Hawkins can't dance, even so an exception was in order.) Robert Ewing of Canberra reported that American-rules football is rising in popularity in Australia. There's already a local team called the Raiders: he suggests that if Al Davis gets wanderlust again, Canberra would welcome him. Tim Botting of Auckland, New Zealand, reported that American-rules football is also catching on there -- he says hello to Auckland's Carlton X American-rules team.

## TMQ Preseason Note

During the preseason, I wear a red shirt whenever writing this column -- it means NFL.com editors are not allowed to hit my prose. Once the regular season starts, editors come at me from all directions with exotic blitzes and unorthodox grammatical objections.

Brian Conboy of Newton, Mass., proposed that the Metrodome, not Randy Moss' ego, is the real problem of the Vikings. By playing in a dome, Minnesota sacrifices the late-season weather advantage it would otherwise hold over visitors. Imagine, he notes, if the Falcons-at-Vikings NFC championship game had been outdoors: does anyone believe Atlanta could have pulled the upset outdoors in Minnesota in January?

Ted Atchley III of Charleston, S.C., noted that TMQ said City of Tampa last season was "nowhere near as bad as you think" because the Bucs lost seven games by eight points or less. "A large number of games are decided by eight points or less," Atchley noted. "Last season the Raiders lost seven by eight or less. The Chargers lost five by eight or less." These teams, losers of multiple close outcomes, were the NFL's cellar-dwellers. One reason NFL games are so exciting is that most are contested through the fourth quarter: a single touchdown in football can have a huge impact on the outcome, just as single goal in soccer (that is, football) can.

TMQ has been pounding the table that it's ridiculous to have tenths of seconds on game clocks in team sports, since "the second is the smallest unit of time that human beings can perceive." James Keidel of the University of Wisconsin at Madison protests that studies have found *Homo sapiens* can perceive "gaps as small as 2 milliseconds in bursts of broadband noise. Some studies have claimed even lower thresholds, on the order of 0.25 milliseconds. Further, one of the fundamental tenets of psychophysics is Weber's Law, which states that the detectable difference between two magnitudes is proportional to the magnitudes themselves; e.g., humans can tell the difference between 1 oz. and 2 oz. but not between 100 lbs. and 100 lbs., 1 oz." Wait, at the University of Wisconsin they are teaching "psychophysics?"

## At the Next Olympics, Shirtless Ultra-Hunks Will Dance During Time-Outs for Bikini Beach Yahtzee

TMQ joins the many who feel delight that Israel won its first-ever Olympic gold medal -- but the medal was in *windsurfing*. On an *exclusive* basis, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has learned these new events will be included in 2008 for the Olympiad at Beijing:

- Hot dog eating.
- Multitasking. Competitors must use a laptop, PDA and cell phone while driving an SUV through a simulated urban environment without hitting spectators.
- Fly-fish tying.
- Bikini beach Yahtzee.
- NASCAR racing.
- French waiter's racing.
- Cannonball diving -- largest splash wins.
- Survivor. Merges reality TV and the Olympics; this is inevitable anyway. Since the 2008 Olympics are in China, the contest will be "Survivor: Mongolia" with cute babes in halter tops riding the steppes.
- Parking. Competitors must find a legal parking space.
- Team whiffle ball.
- Ultimate Frisbee. (Wait, this actually should be an Olympic sport.)
- Curling. (Wait, this actually is an Olympic sport.)
- EA Madden NFL 2008 versus ESPN NFL 2K9. Games include new 2008 NFL rules, such as the five-yard "charles zone" intended to encourage passing. (Defensive backs can no longer "chuck," they can only "charles," defined as jumping out of the receiver's way.) Click here to listen to the *sound track* of ESPN NFL 2K5.
- Synchronized pogo sticking.
- The modern icosathlon. Competitors must run a 100 meter, run a marathon, swim a mile, high-jump, long-jump, pole-vault, bodysurf, go dirt-biking, get a tattoo, complete a rollerblade somersault, find a snipe, roast a marshmallow without burning it, play "Simon Says," upgrade a computer without losing data, power nap, get a date online, obtain a refund without a receipt,

express irony under multiple circumstances, write a business plan and explain the difference between a 401(k) and the Keogh. "Icosa" is the Greek prefix meaning 20.

- Three-legged races: sprint, relay and hurdles.
- Paintball.

John Watson of Fayetteville, N.C., writes, "If you are going to persist in naming NFL coaches after Harry Potter characters, then you must certainly appreciate the resemblance of Andy Reid to Uncle Dursley."

Lynn Schlatter of Shreveport, La., a Lions fan, reports that not only is she a political liberal who's nuts about football, she belongs to the Society of Friends. Lynn, don't they, um, frown on slamming into people? Schlatter haikuizes,

Not just liberal,  
but Quaker too. Says "Sorry!"  
right after "Kill 'em!"  
-- Lynn Schlatter, Shreveport, La.

Note: this causes Tuesday Morning Quarterback to wonder, how many other liberal female NFL fans are out there? Let me know at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com).

Many readers weighed in on my request for opinions about the fledgling women's football leagues. Samantha Rapoport, who works at NFL headquarters in New York for the management council and also plays quarterback for the Montreal Blitz, began by explaining there are three women's leagues: the IWFL, the NWFA and the WPFL. Gina Linville, who played for the Shoals Smashers of Muscle Shoals, Ala., noted that lop-sided games were a problem -- but then, women's football is a brand-new idea, and most players receive at best token pay. Dave Elliott of Neb., pointed out that this season the Denton Stampede were outscored 0-531 and the Wisconsin Riveters outscored 0-437. The 2004 NWFA championship was a mismatch too, Detroit Demolition 52, Oklahoma City Lightning 0 -- though it's not like there have been no lop-sided Super Bowls. Quality of officiating has also been a problem. National Women's Football Association founder Catherine Masters just named a commissioner, and one of his priorities is to "ensure that officials understand the rules and present themselves professionally."

Then again, this year's IWFL championship was a close, tense contest in which the Sacramento Sirens beat the New York Sharks 29-27. John Heaton of Leesburg, Va., writes that "I've attended two DC Divas games and enjoyed myself both times." The Divas and the Baltimore Burn already have a regional rivalry: Heaton says Burn-Divas games are exciting events. Jeff Kennedy of Louisville reports he attended the NWFA championship and was glad he went; the event included "a very low Super Bowl-like flyover of geese, perhaps not scheduled." As Samantha Rapoport notes, women now attempting to play organized football had no Pop Warner background, no high school or college experience: "Most of us were not taught the fundamentals of tackle football until our early 20s." Here, check out the Montreal Blitz roster in French. The most experienced player, Jacynthe Crochetiere, has been at it three seasons. Inevitably the early attempts at women's football will be, let's say, uneven. But then if you read the history of what eventually became the National Football League, in the 1920s play was, let's say, uneven.

### Acting Presidential No. 1

At a campaign stop in Green Bay, John Kerry ran a few plays with the West High School varsity football team, and fumbled. "The fact that he fumbled shows he has the necessary qualifications for the presidency," a campaign spokesman told TMQ on an *exclusive* basis.

### Acting Presidential No. 2

At a campaign stop in Kansas City, George W. Bush tossed the ball with the Chiefs. Reader Greg Hardy of Gainesville, Fla., noted news reports that when Chiefs players crushed around Bush for autographs, one thrust out for him to sign -- a copy of the 9-11 Commission report.

Marjorie Tapscott of Dallas was among many who noted that Vikings coach Mike Tice declared he wanted defensive tackle Chris Hovan to report to camp "in the range of 297-302 pounds," not the 305 pounds

Hovan carried last year. This Bridget-Jones-like weight specificity seems pretty compulsive, considering 302 is 0.9836 percent less than 305. And okay, guys, admit you don't get the Bridget Jones reference.

Ed Peterson of Las Vegas noted that Kristen Gauvin of the Patriots, who was TMQ's Cheerleader of the Super Bowl from the winning team, is absent from this year's Flying Elvii pep squad. Peterson flagged me about this in July, which means that even during offseason, he was expending valuable time patrolling cheer-babe web sites. Glad to see you have your priorities in order, Ed!

Another missing celebrated cheerleader, David Sandoval of Santa Fe, N.M., pointed out, is Kelly T. of Philadelphia. For two years she graced the Eagles' cutting-edge lingerie calendar and for two years TMQ joked that I could link to her picture but not show it "for thong-based reasons." Kelly T., you see, had this habit of wearing naught but a thong -- tasteful thongs, mind you. Perhaps other duties made it impossible for her to wave pom-poms this year, as readers may remember Kelly T. had an engineering degree from Penn State.

### **It's Like Playing an Ad for Bose Speakers Over an AM Transistor Radio**

During the Virginia Tech-USC collision on ESPN, the network did an in-game promotion in which a sideline reporter spoke of the glories of football on high-definition television, while standing in front of a high-definition monitor and extolling its great picture. But you could only appreciate the great picture if you already had HDTV, in which case you don't need to be sold on high definition. If you didn't already have HDTV, the great picture on the monitor was being broadcast through your regular television and looked exactly like a regular TV picture.

Klaus Lange of Duisburg, Germany, asked why Packers News called me "an irreverent columnist". Klaus, at least they didn't called me an irrelevant columnist!

Many readers protested TMQ's statement that in letting go Warren Sapp, the Bucs kissed goodbye the greatest player in their annals. A typical comment, in haiku:

Warren Sapp top Buc?  
Wait till he gets to Canton!  
Selmon still the best.  
-- Jeff Noto, Charlotte, N.C.

Lee Roy Selmon was superb, but never propelled his team to the Super Bowl, as Sapp did. And while Sapp sometimes can be hard to take, he's hard to take in a positive way -- he demands that others around him excel, and that was a positive influence on Tampa's rise. If I were choosing up sides and could pick either gentleman at their peaks, I'd pick Sapp.

Lance Salyers of Dayton, Ohio, protests that a signed player who refuses to report to camp is not simply doing the reverse of the team that cuts a veteran who's under contract, as sportstalk radio sometimes maintains. Cutting a highly paid player is usually done to improve the chances the team will win, by spreading out cap space; when a player under contract demands more, this concentrates cap space and decreases the chance the team will win, Salyers notes. Then there's that little matter of signing your name to a contract promising to play: it's breaking your promise when you don't report, isn't it, Keenan McCardell?

Kathi Heath of Cedar Rapids, Iowa, has had enough with the fad for flying-out-of-bounds-nick-the-pylon touchdowns, during which the ball enters the end zone for a microsecond, if at all. "Scrap the 'break the plane' rule and require runners to touch the end zone with at least one body part to score," Heath proposes. She haikuizes,

Waves ball near end zone,  
Touchdown! But did anyone  
see the ball go in?  
-- Kathi Heath, Cedar Rapids, Iowa

Anil Reddy of Carrboro, N.C., says networks zoom on the ball too much, not showing the rest of the field. Attend a football game in person and you can see the relationship of the defensive backfield to the receivers, appreciate line play: watch on TV and usually you are confined to the little tetragon where the ball is. Reddy laments that the Steve Smith long touchdown catch in last year's NFC championship overtime was the most important play in Panthers' history, and though "we repeatedly saw ultra-zoom-in replays of Smith receiving the pass and jetting to the end zone, I still have no clue how he got so open." Reddy haikuizes,

Show us more than ball!  
Overabundance of zoom:  
Widen lens view, please.  
*Anil Reddy, Carrboro, N.C.*

Dennis Reichhold, who works at the Brookhaven National Laboratory, noted TMQ spent much of last season saying Mike Vanderjagt should deliberately honk an unimportant kick, just to break his streak of consecutive field goals -- otherwise he would be sure to miss a big kick in the postseason. "You'll rue the day you didn't miss," I kept saying. Reichhold notes that Vanderjagt proceeded to miss the figgie that would have tied the Pro Bowl on the final play, handing victory to the NFC; why, he and many readers asked, have I not claimed this as proof of my prophecy? Because the Pro Bowl is an exhibition game. The Colts played three playoff contests last season, and as it happened, Vanderjagt was never asked to attempt a pressure kick. He will take his record streak of 41 straight field goals into 2004. My advice remains -- Vanderjagt should honk an unimportant kick early to get the streak over with, or by the football gods, is sure to miss a game-winner.

Mike Coupland of Leeds, England, notes that on the opening page of NFL.com, the Eagles are the sole team whose logo does not face to the east. This, he thinks, has jinxed the team in some manner and caused its string of NFC championship losses. And maybe all the numbers of Eagles' jerseys add up to a prime number being broadcast from an alien starcruiser!

Tuesday Morning Quarterback praised reader Don Frese of Towson, Maryland, for not only knowing that Green Bay wore an all-yellow uniform for a game at the Polo Grounds in 1952 but for knowing the score was 17-0. I wrote, "Frese is a true Green Bay fan -- it's 52 years later, and he still remembers the final score!" Turns out the exact was 17-3, a correction many readers including Frese wrote in about. It's 52 years later and *lots* of people remember the final score.

### More Beach Envy

Noting that beaches have something to do with the world's critical supply of mega-babes, two weeks ago TMQ speculated this is why the Philadelphia Eagles Cheerleaders shot their 2005 lingerie calendar on a beach in Florida. Now reader Erik George notes that the high-aesthetic-appeal Broncos Cheerleaders, who traditionally shoot their swimsuit calendars in healthful outdoorsy Colorado, this year for the first time went to a beach. Here, watch a Broncos' video of the swimsuit photo session in Puerto Vallarta. There are no mountains visible in the backdrops! Oh, the horror. Meanwhile a reader goes haiku on the Eagles' cheerleader beach link:

No beach in Philly?  
Jersey Shore is not too far:  
Beach theory holds true.  
-- *Christopher Pajewski, Lyndhurst, N.J.*

Many readers including Michael Gendron of Brampton West, Ontario, wrote to protest TMQ including Marv Levy on a list of coaches who excelled in the regular season but sputtered in the playoffs. He notes that Levy won two Grey Cups in the CFL and was, of course, the sole NFL coach ever to prowl the sidelines muttering about the officials in four straight Super Bowls. In haiku,

Marv Levy: winner.  
Four Super Bowls in a row  
count for something, no?  
-- *Michael Gendron, Brampton West, Ontario*

TMQ has always admired Levy, one of the few accomplished coaches who really believes sportsmanship matters more than victory. If you could have any famous NFL coach to your house for dinner, you would do well to choose Levy: he's a warm human being in a profession where many of the successful are cold at heart. But Levy's admirable qualities may have held him back from Super Bowl triumph, as the farther you go in the playoffs, the more important game plans and psych-ups become. In that environment, win-at-all-cost types tend to prevail.

Levy won four AFC championships, but consider the incredible talent he had in the Jim Kelly-Bruce Smith-Thurman Thomas years -- 17 players from that era made the Pro Bowl, and several will make Canton. During the Kelly-Smith winning run, Levy's teams were 97-47 or .674 in the regular season but fell to 11-8 or .579 in the postseason. Through the regular season in 1990s, Levy was 14-2 against NFC East, during his Super Bowl appearances in the same period, Levy was 0-4 against the same division. At the Super Bowl pressure-cooker, that extra level of total determination seemed missing. Levy did not enforce Super Bowl curfews, for instance, relying on his players' good judgment not to go out and party; many went out and partied, and it showed on game day. During the regular season, Levy consistently beat Bill Parcells, Joe Gibbs and Jimmy Johnson: at the Super Bowl, when game plans and psych-up tactics mean more, he was blanked by these three. In the regular season, Levy was king; in the postseason, one of the princes.

Dallas Powell, a captain in the United States Army and stationed in South Korea, notes that the new Army desert fatigues "are our 'away' uniforms, since few units don them except in or en route to the desert." He also notes that the new black berets worn by all Army soldiers were borrowed from the Rangers, not from special forces as TMQ said.

### How Long Until a Seven-Word Sound Bite Seems Long?

Last week CBS Radio interviewed TMQ's pal Michael O'Hanlon, a military-affairs analyst for the Brookings Institution. Surely O'Hanlon spoke eloquently and in rich detail. But here's what CBS Radio actually quoted him saying on the air: "In the end, people will be people." A seven-word sound bite! Plus why wasn't this interview balanced by quoting someone who thinks that in the end, people are not people?

Josh Newton of Bangor, Maine, was among many to point out that in *Oliver Twist*, Fagin was the chief of the thieves, not the director of the orphanage. The orphanage was run by Mr. Bumble.

Allan Bourdus of Gibsonian, Pa., a Carnegie Mellon grad, protested TMQ's calling the Sandstorm robot vehicle a Boeing project. Boeing was just a sponsor, Bourdus noted: Sandstorm is an endeavor of the Carnegie Mellon Robotics Institute Red Team, whose mission includes "galvanizing new visions for the role of robotics in the world and igniting the growth of a nascent industry." Observe that Sandstorm looks like a mega-SUV with no driver: not exactly a heartwarming thought. Go here to view Sandstorm in operation, including video of its conk-out at the Pentagon-sponsored robot race. The vehicle has since driven 150 miles autonomously, Bourdus says.

A reader from England reports that he works for a large, faceless multinational where his chief duties are "carrying big folders from one building to another." With time to kill, he went back and re-read the entire corpus of Tuesday Morning Quarterback from last season -- which, bear in mind, came to about 210,000 words, or the length of two standard books. Mike, you were using your time wisely! He offers these haiku, last name removed lest supervisors figure out who he is:

No work to do so  
large corporation paid me  
To read TMQ!

Now all old columns  
I have read several times.  
Been a long summer.  
-- Mike, Portsmouth, England

Finally many readers lauded the return of Tuesday Morning Quarterback itself, as a column and as a sign autumn draws nigh. Two, in haiku:

TMQ returns!

Sweltering heat on notice:  
summer's demise near.

--Paul Heinlein, Portland, Ore.

Harvest moon rising,  
the posting of TMQ:

Two work hours wasted.

-- Mario Escamilla, Cypress, Calif.

## **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

### **Obscure College Score of the Week.**

Indiana of Pennsylvania 27, Millersville 19. The Trojans weren't the only ones returning to action Saturday -- TMQ's favorite obscure college, Indiana of Pennsylvania, won at George P. Miller Stadium in Indiana, Pa., as Mike Jemison ran for 224 yards. Millersville University, Pa., offers an on-campus ropes course challenge complete with "personal inventory," which corporate groups may book at \$50 per person.

NFL games are the sport's pinnacle, but Tuesday Morning Quarterback loves the human-scale versions of football: high-school and small-college contests. At a small college football game you can show up at the last minute and get a parking space, pay just \$12 -- actual cost of a reserved seat at Indiana of Pennsylvania games this year, except for homecoming against Shippensburg, when it's \$13 -- and sit close enough to the action to hear coaches on the sidelines saying things like, "Get in there number 49, and what's your name again?" TMQ finds it reassuring that long after you and I have departed this mortal coil, every Saturday all across the nation, plastic-clad combatants will be slamming into each other as autumn leaves fall, guys try to get girls' phone numbers and car alarms go off in the parking lot.

### **Potomac Drainage Basin Retirement Announcement**

Having restated last week my objections to the Redskins name, I think the time has come for me to retire my alternative, the Potomac Drainage Basin Indigenous Persons. I've been using this line for four years and pretty much pushed the joke to its logical conclusion. (Originally I called them the Chesapeake Watershed Region Indigenous Persons, but cartographically adept readers noted the Chesapeake watershed extends almost to Utica, N.Y., enfolding most of the Baltimore Ravens' viewing area.) So, in honor of the Joe Gibbs return, I will resume calling this squad the Washington Redskins. Though as I sometimes use alternating cognomen -- Les Mouflons for the Rams, for example -- I may on occasion call the team the Potomac Nanticokes. The Nanticokes were the dominant tribe of the Potomac region when Europeans arrived there.

Indian team name sidelight: See this recent decision by the federal 7th Circuit Court of Appeals concerning the University of Illinois' use of Chief Illiniwek as a sports figure. Legally the case turns on the "Pickering/Connick test," and of course you know what that is, right? The court decision cites cool college sports nicknames such as the University of Evansville Purple Aces. It contain important statistics, including that the most common college sports nickname is Eagles (56 schools), followed by Bulldogs (40) and Wildcats (33). Golden is the most common nickname adjective, with 15 colleges being Golden Eagles, others Golden Seals or Golden Suns. What team would want to be the Yellow Suns, anyway? But the really interesting part of the decision is that its author, federal appellate judge Terry Evans, is a serious Packers fan who attends games and once tried on a cheesehead in the gift shop of the Green Bay Hall of Fame at Lambeau Field. Judge Evans, you have your priorities in order! (Here is the "authentic" cheesehead as sold by the Packers for \$17.95. Accept no inauthentic cheeseheads!)

TMQ knows about Judge Evans' love for the Packers because an Official Brother of TMQ, Frank Easterbrook, is also a judge on the 7th Circuit Court of Appeals. See the How Appealing federal-courts blog for an interview in which Frank declares that, in order to maintain judicial impartiality, he roots equally for the Chicago Bears, Green Bay Packers and Indianapolis Colts, the three NFL teams under his jurisdiction. (The 7th Circuit has federal appellate jurisdiction over Illinois, Indiana and Wisconsin.) The How Appealing blog also provides a link to a *Legal Affairs* magazine article that inadvertently identified yours truly as a federal judge. Surely this means *Sports Illustrated* will inadvertently identify Frank as a

football columnist!

### **Reader Animadversion**

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com), including your name and hometown for mention in the column. Challenge: find the Looney Tunes reference hidden in the column. (The formal TMQ Challenge returns next week.)

### **Beefcake Alert!**

This being the third millennium, it seems inevitable many NFL teams will follow the Dolphins by marketing sexy pictures of players, just as many already market sexy pictures of cheerleaders. So Tuesday Morning Quarterback calls on NFL publicity directors and news-media directors -- if you've got tasteful beefcake shots of players and you'd like to see them run alongside TMQ, email me at the above. The Official Wife of TMQ will review candidate photos for artistic merit, muscle tone and so on. She'll decide what runs.

### **Next Week**

*Still* America's only all-haiku NFL season predictions.



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## All-haiku NFL predictions, plus the Revenge of the Chicks!

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season and also appear on NFL Network, providing commentary Tuesday nights on NFL Total Access. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Sept. 7, 2004) -- It's time for the annual Tuesday Morning Quarterback all-haiku NFL predictions -- *still* America's only all-haiku NFL predictions! But first a point about the final, merciful end of the preseason. Every summer, every NFL coach promises the same thing about his offense: We're going to establish the run. When will coaches admit the truth that for most teams, the plan is to panic and go pass-wacky by the end of the first quarter? And every summer, every NFL coach promises the same thing about his defense: We're going to be really aggressive. No coach ever says we're going to drop back into coverage and see what happens. It would be really nice to hear an NFL coach say in preseason, "We'll be conservative on defense and try to get incomplete passes."

And now to the haiku. Matsuo Basho, the first haiku master, wrote in 1679:

On a withered branch,  
a crow has now alighted.  
Nightfall in autumn.  
-- Basho, 1679

Tuesday Morning Quarterback realized the form could be adopted to football, and wrote in 2000:

On Brett Favre's helmet  
beer falls, and the cup crumples.  
Sideline in autumn.  
-- TMQ, 2000

In 2001, *All Things Considered*, the National Public Radio show, had me read some TMQ haiku on the air, making yours truly the first person in world history to recite football poetry before a national audience. NPR even said I had "pretty much locked up the genre of humorous football poetry." You can still listen to the segment here. That year I also published a small book of football haiku, which you can still buy here, and which was produced in art-house style with really nice black-and-white photographs of 1920s leather-helmet football. (Sales pitch: this book makes a great gift for the football enthusiast in your life, who at this point might be female; see below.) And I started a tradition of annually writing a haiku prediction for each NFL team. *Still* America's only all-haiku NFL predictions!

The haiku predictions follow, interrupted by the usual non-sequiturs. The forecasts are surely to be completely wrong, of course, just like the other NFL season predictions you're reading this week. This column's motto is, All Predictions Wrong or Your Money Back. Get it? See, NFL.com is free, so if by chance one of my predictions actually was correct you would receive -- oh, never mind.

### AFC EAST

Two rings in three years  
without one sure Canton man:  
N.E. Patriots.  
**Forecast finish: 12-4**

Highly aesthetic  
cheer-babes, ugly offseason.  
Miami Dolphins.

**Forecast finish: 8-8**

Drew? Lamb to slaughter:  
league's most overpaid OL.  
The Buffalo Bills.

**Forecast finish: 5-11**

Headed back to New  
York; end of Hackensack Joe.  
The Jersey/B Jets.

**Forecast finish: 5-11**

### The Preseason Injury Curse

It's been brutal in training camp and preseason -- David Boston, Kyle Turley, N.D. Kalu, and many others are already out for the year. Strange thought: Severe injuries are about to decline. Tuesday Morning Quarterback believes, though can't prove with statistics, that severe injuries are more common, per practice and per game, in training camp and preseason than once the regular season begins. Yours truly always breathes a sigh of relief when the teams get out of camp and preseason without an injury rash, because I think there's actually less chance of severe injuries in the full-tilt environment of the games that count. Somehow in training camp and the exhibition contests, we lose the gentlemen who weren't in proper shape, who had a physical problem to be exposed or who were fated, by the football gods, to suffer injury. Plus there's the preseason problem of some players going all-out while others do not -- it's a bad mix. Now that the real contests are upon us, TMQ expects fewer blown ACLs, at least compared to the number of practices and games.

### NFL in Iran Update

TMQ tracks the game choices of Middle East TV, the private satellite company that beams programming including the NFL to Iran, Turkey and other parts of the Middle East. Opening day, Iran will see Titans at Dolphins followed by Giants at Eagles. Reader Natan Tamari of Karmiel, Israel, a Cincinnati fan, writes to note that he watches the NFL on Middle East TV too. Natan, this year some Bengals' games might actually be shown!

### NFC EAST

Thrice stopped at the door:  
Super Bowl must have bouncers.  
The Philly Eagles.

**Forecast finish: 12-4**

Parcells in second  
year and still hasn't quit yet!  
The Dallas Cowboys.

**Forecast finish: 11-5**

Dumbledore returns:  
Team sure needs a magic wand.  
Washington Redskins.

**Forecast finish: 8-8**

When coach in *good* mood:  
"You #@%\$#\* your #\*\$%@ in your "%#\*!!!!!"  
Jersey/A Giants.

**Forecast finish: 4-12**

## Tuesday Morning Quarterback Thought for the Day

No team ranked in the top 10 offensively made last year's Super Bowl. Two top-10 defensive teams did, however.

## Thong-Based Update

Last week TMQ mourned the departure from the Eagles Cheerleaders squad of Kelly T., who for two years has graced the team's cutting-edge lingerie calendar wearing perhaps one ounce more than nothing, and whose picture yours truly said I could link to but not show "for thong-based reasons." The spirit of Kelly T. lives on! Many readers, including Rich Herbe of New Jersey, hailed the new lingerie calendar's photo of Eagles' cheer-babe Janet, who majored in liberal studies at West Chester University - another liberal female football enthusiast, see more below. Janet's calendar photo is one I could link to but not show for the same reason the column could never show Kelly T. The Eagles' team bio for Janet is here, as is a link to her calendar photo.

## AFC NORTH

Have Jamal Lewis.  
Playoff game plan: Hey, let's pass!  
Bal-a-mer Ravens.

**Forecast finish: 10-6**

Can players take the  
pressure? This year, expected  
to win! The Bengals.

**Forecast finish: 9-7**

Running game mired in  
ketchup; need 57  
new plays. The Steelers.

**Forecast finish: 5-11**

Maybe UPS  
trucks could carry ball. Are Brown!  
Cleveland Tootsie Rolls.

**Forecast finish: 5-11**

## More Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization

The new Mercedes SLK roadster has a neck warmer -- vents that blow hot air onto your neck through the headrests, so you can drive with the top down but not experience any chill. Wait, isn't that what your ascot is for?

## Fictional Contract Update No. 1

In 2003, Hugh Douglas left Philadelphia and signed a "five-year, \$27 million" contract with Jacksonville. This contract lasted one year and paid about \$6.5 million -- heady enough -- then Douglas was cut. Now he's re-signed with Philadelphia, and likely to receive about \$1 million this year, pending incentives. As noted by many readers including Daniel Kuhn of Brockport, N.Y., this leaves Douglas holding less money over two years than he would have received had he simply stayed in Philadelphia and accepted an Eagles' offer that he called insulting.

## Fictional Contract Update No. 2

Chad Pennington signed a "seven-year, \$64 million" contract widely described as the "biggest in the history of the Jets." Maybe the contract is printed on posterboard, making it physically the biggest! According to the *New York Times*, it appears Pennington is only assured of about two years and \$20

million -- heady enough.

### Too-Real Contract Update

Because NBA and MLB rosters are smaller than NFL rosters, contracts in these sports often exceed NFL contracts even though pro football is by a huge margin the most successful sport financially. Thus, read it and weep when you learn that Adonal Foyle, a who-dat for the Golden State Warriors, recently signed a six-year, \$40 million contract. Note that I do not put those numbers in quotes: NBA contracts are guaranteed, so the gentleman will see every penny. Foyle is a career benchwarmer, last season averaging an all-but-invisible 3.0 points per game. Yet Foyle and other barely known NBA and MLB players are likely to make more in years to come than Chad Pennington, glamour-boy quarterback for an NFL team in New York (which, for NFL purposes, is located in New Jersey), more than LaDainian Tomlinson, more than other marquee NFL stars. Read it and weep.

### NFC NORTH

Moss volunteers to  
block and run decoy routes. Not!  
Minnesota Vikes.

**Forecast finish: 12-4**

Do football gods wear  
cheeseheads made of yellow clouds?  
The Green Bay Packers.

**Forecast finish: 10-6**

Production cuts at  
auto plants, Lions' offense.  
The Detroit Peugeots.

**Forecast finish: 6-10**

It's Lovie-dovey  
on sidelines; on field, might not  
be pretty. The Bears.

**Forecast finish: 4-12**

### New Cognomen Announcement

Last week TMQ noted one fan's speculation that the Eagles keep losing the NFC championship because theirs is the sole NFL logo that faces from right to left. All others face left to right or are symmetrical: Check the NFL.com home page. Does this jinx Philadelphia in some mystic way? "And maybe all the numbers of Eagles' jerseys add up to a prime number being broadcast from an alien starcruiser," I snickered. Drew Rogers of Raleigh, N.C., went to the Eagles' roster on the day the column was published, totaled the jersey numbers (50 and 52 were assigned twice at that point, as Philadelphia had yet to make its first big cut), and found "jersey numbers added up to 4,013, which is a prime number. Maybe it's time to start scanning the skies for that starcruiser." Here is today's Eagles' roster sorted by jersey number. One wonders what numerology is buried within.

Adam Taxim then suggested TMQ should call the team the Philadelphia Nesharim. The word means eagles in Hebrew, and Hebrew faces right to left, just like the mysterious Eagles' logo. The Philadelphia Nesharim -- Mr. Data, make it so!

Nesharim logo  
uniquely goes right to left,  
like words in Torah.  
-- Adam Taxim, Ross Valley, Pa.

### Our Father, Who Art In Cyberspace --

According to this article on the ecumenical website Beliefnet, some U.S. Christians, Hindus and Sikhs have begun using the Internet to hire agencies in India to perform sacraments or spoken rituals for them or for loved ones. That's right -- this is outsourcing prayer.

#### AFC SOUTH

Sal cap heavier  
than an offensive lineman.  
Tennessee Titans.

**Forecast finish: 11-5**

Peyton back, but will  
his bonus block and tackle?  
Indy Lucky Charms.

**Forecast finish: 10-6**

62-7  
win triggered losing spiral;  
now done? The Jax Jags.

**Forecast finish: 9-7**

Incumbent Texan  
Dub-ya touts record; Texans  
sure can't. The Moo Cows.

**Forecast finish: 5-11**

#### Get Your *New York Times*, Now Delivered in Plain Brown Wrapper

For the second time in three years, the august *New York Times* -- that's the august paper, not an August issue -- has run a front-page article on the vital public-policy issue of trends in Las Vegas strippers. A 2001 page-one piece waxed sentimental about how the traditional Vegas topless showgirl, who tottered on six-inch strap-up heels beneath the weight of an enormous feathered headdress, has been supplanted by a new generation of dancers who wear nothing whatsoever. Best twist: Vegas women should dance naked because it's *good for their health!* The old ultra-heels and headdresses caused orthopedic pain, whereas dancing nude is comfortable and natural.

This year's *New York Times* page-one Vegas exotic-dancers article -- look it up in the *Times* archive for the fun of typing "wiggle naked" and "dominatrix," the keywords that find the article, into the Gray Lady search engine -- explains that exotic dancers are moving en masse to Vegas from south Florida, traditionally a stronghold of jiggle, because Vegas tips are better. Reporter Sarah Kershaw interviewed strippers who told her they like the pay but think men are ridiculous to spend large amounts to gawk at women's bodies. Well, of course it's ridiculous. But if all ridiculous activities came to a halt, the United States economy would collapse overnight.

Note: TMQ certainly isn't complaining that the *New York Times* keeps giving page-one space to Las Vegas exotic dancers, a more pleasant topic to read about than most world news. But just imagine the assignment meeting: "Okay, I need someone to go to Berserkistan and get shot at by the 14 feuding rebel factions, I need a six-part series on revenue-bond funding for infrastructure renewal and I need a volunteer to stay in an expensive hotel in Vegas and spend the week gawking at dozens of gorgeous naked women. Who wants what?"

#### NFC SOUTH

Have league's hottest coach.  
But John, next time go for one!  
Carolina Cats.

**Forecast finish: 12-4**

Mike Vick goes one on  
11; NBA or  
NFL? Falcons.

**Forecast finish: 9-7**

Win Super Bowl, then  
make stars walk the plank. Karma  
not good. Tampa Bucs.

**Forecast finish: 8-8**

One playoff win in  
team history. Let's rest on  
our laurels! The Saints.

**Forecast finish: 6-10**

### Bookworm Update

With the real thing finally upon us there are three football companion volumes I recommend. The first is the *2004 NFL Record & Fact Book*, the league's official reference. Crammed with results, stats and game summaries, it's the book anyone at the level of moderate football aficionado or above should have at hand all season. Starting records of active quarterbacks? Most safeties, career, by an NFL player? It's all here, plus an excellent chronology of the early game. Having the *NFL Record & Fact Book* handy makes you seem far better informed than you really are -- it's certainly a secret to my success.

The similar *Pro Football Guide*, published by Sporting News Press, also lets you settle arguments about stats or results very quickly. Most NFC extra points in 2003? Found it in 10 seconds. The *NFL Record & Fact Book* and *Pro Football Guide* have similar content, but features and organizational plans are different. I keep both at my desk. Having these books around makes you feel like you've got the press guides to every team.

Then there's *Pro Football Forecast 2004*. This volume has a lot of fantasy material, and yours truly does not do fantasy leagues -- I find the actual NFL unrealistic enough as is -- so I can't evaluate that. But *Pro Football Forecast 2004* has some of the most original analytical football writing this side of, well, Tuesday Morning Quarterback. And the reason is that this year, many contributions to the volume are by Aaron Schatz, Michael David Smith and the rest of the staff of FootballOutsiders, which is by a huge margin the web's best independent football site.

Check, for example, Schatz's analysis of the Dolphins, out in print well before the Ricky Williams surprise retirement. Schatz broke down all backs who had run for 370 or more carries in a season; Williams had 392 in 2003. Almost every back who carried 370 or more times in one year, Schatz found, encountered woeful misfortune the next season. Presenting the breakdown of fates of year-after-370-carries backs, he prophesied, "That is not a list that should inspire confidence in Dolphins' fans." *Pro Football Forecast 2004* also has an incredibly insightful analysis of the one single, discrete coaching decision -- really, it's amazingly basic -- that New England did more often than any other NFL team last year. What was it? You'll have to buy the book to find out. (Note to Aaron: That should guarantee 31 sales, one to every other NFL team.)

Amazon will deliver any of these volumes to your home for less than 20 bucks, and they will enhance your appreciation of what you see on TV. Or you could simply buy them from your local independent bookseller -- that's still legal! Find your local independent using Booksense.

Interesting prediction by FootballOutsiders.com -- the Rams' defense will go downhill. Why? Schatz writes, "In 2003, St. Louis' defense caused 24 fumbles and recovered 19 of them. Minnesota's defense caused 21 fumbles and recovered six of them. Getting the ball loose is a skill, but being the last one to jump on it is basically random, and this random difference between lost and kept fumbles sometimes decides who wins and who loses." At St. Louis, Lovie Smith, then the defensive coordinator, preached that the team could improve its fumble recovery rate by crowding around the ballcarrier. But Schatz believes fumble recoveries are randomly distributed, and so the Rams' defense looked better than it was in 2003 owing to good luck, while bad luck made the Vikings' defense look worse than it was.

**AFC WEST**

Helmets say, "Insert  
running back. Gain thousand yards."  
The Denver Broncos.

**Forecast finish: 12-4**

It's 38 to  
31 at the half. The  
Kansas City Chiefs.  
**Forecast finish: 10-6**

New Al Davis plan:  
Sue opponents during game.  
The Oakland Raiders.  
**Forecast finish: 8-8**

Keep trading first pick:  
Formula for more first picks.  
S.D. Lightning Bolts.  
**Forecast finish: 2-14**

**Evidence of Baseball Gods**

Reader Justin Kahrl of Sacramento, Calif., points out that last week's humiliation of the Yankees -- a 22-0 loss to Cleveland, worst major-league baseball blowout in a century - did not occur in a vacuum. The week before, the Yankees had run up the score on the Blue Jays, winning 18-6 while keeping their starters in for the ninth inning, rather than clearing the bench. The next day, the baseball gods even warned the Yankees, causing the skies to darken and lightning to knock out power at Toronto's Sky Dome. But the Yankees did not get the message. Thus did the baseball gods send the 22-0 thrashing to put the Yankees in their place, and yes, in that game Cleveland cleared its bench. Oh ye mortals, trifle not with the baseball gods.

Maybe the Yankees should switch to women's softball. Then their defeat would have been 7-0 after five innings under the international "mercy rule." Note -- have just provided an almost effortless, perfectly legitimate excuse for a babe shot of Olympic softball bombshell Jennie Finch, whose personal web site is here. She reports that at age 12, she was throwing at 59 miles per hour.

**NFC WEST**

"We will take the ball,  
and win." Boast after, Matt, not  
before. The Seahawks.  
**Forecast finish: 10-6**

Warner has returned  
to homeworld; Rams return to  
average? Les Mouflons.  
**Forecast finish: 9-7**

Big question not will  
Cards win -- but will there be a  
sellout? AZ Cards.  
**Forecast finish: 5-11**

Cut Rice, best ever,  
to appease Terrell, who left.  
Ye gods. The Niners.

**Forecast finish: 4-12****The Revenge of the Chicks**

Last week, TMQ ran a haiku from a reader who reported that she is a politically liberal female who goes nuts for NFL games. Politics don't really have anything to do with football, but surely it would be assumed that liberal women would be the least likely large demographic to hoot and holler for the NFL, so I wondered, are there other liberal female football fans out there? The answer is, in capital letters, YES! My mailbox was swamped with messages from left-leaning women who outed themselves as NFL lovers. Think of all those liberal women -- for years living a secret life, misunderstood by society, ashamed to admire their throbbing innermost desire. Namely, to scream "go for it!" on fourth-and-1. Among the many, many who outed themselves:

Betsy Ames, a computer systems administrator at Vanderbilt University, wrote, "I got interested watching football with my dad back in the 60s and grew up to be a feminist who figured I could do whatever the guys were doing, including like football. In college, I had a guy break up with me because I knew more about football than he did. Too bad for him. One of the high points of my life was going to the NFC divisional playoff game in Atlanta in 1980 and watching the Cowboys beat the Falcons 30-27. I am married to a guy who is a lifelong Patriots fan and is also a political liberal. All of my five kids are liberal and all like football -- one son is a Bills fan, one is a Giants fan, one son and one daughter are Titans fans. One daughter hasn't made up her mind yet. Thanksgiving at our house is loud."

Lisa Aug of Waddy, Ky., reports she is "liberal back 10 generations," a serious Packers fan and since 1997 has held stock in the Packers, the sole publicly owned NFL franchise. Joanna Faust, who calls herself "as liberal as they come," reports she is "a lifelong Giants fan, daughter of a Cowboys-fan father and a Bucs-fan mother and sister of a Redskins fanatic."

Rebecca Seidel of Newtown, Conn., an artist, sent TMQ this incredible haiku triptych last Tuesday, first big cutdown day for NFL teams. She's a woman, she's an artist, and she was *sitting in her studio wondering who the Patriots would waive: Are you serious?*  
But of course, you can be sure  
smart girls love football.

As I was painting  
today I wondered on who  
would be cut at four.

Artist and woman,  
I cheer for Flying Elvii  
Every gameday.  
-- Rebecca Seidel, Newtown, Conn.

Deb Brown, who lives in heavily armed San Diego, reports that she is a political liberal and a big Vikings fan. "I also am a big fan of beefcake, so please tell your wife to hurry," she notes. The Official Wife of TMQ has been tasked to review potential beefcake photos for the column. Pamela Ballard of Chicago reports that she is a blond liberal football fan who backs the Bears; merely the thought of this combination must have Windy City male hearts pumping. Kristin Armstrong of Monterey, Calif., who's been in the Navy for a decade, reports that she is a liberal woman football fan who backs the Eagles. "Don't worry, I never read Tuesday Morning Quarterback on government time at work," she notes. Jennifer Phan of Houston says she's a liberal football nut and adds, "My husband and I are anti-stereotypical: He has no interest in televised sports, while I cannot be prided from the television on Sundays during football season."

Wendy Jobling of Brown University, anticipating the email deluge, writes, "I'm yet another political liberal woman who loves football. I'm in a PhD program for molecular biology and am passionate about the Patriots. Scientists love sports too!" Jennifer Chandler of Kitchner, Ontario, Canada, notes, "My Tuesdays are not very productive at work because I spend most of it reading your column. I am also a female, liberal, Canadian rabid football fan." Female, liberal, Canadian, rabid - now there's a demographic.

Julia Nuttall of Reno, Nev., joins the crowd noting, "I like opera, mystery novels, foreign films and

History Channel. But when that new Tostitos commercial comes on -- the one where the bride bursts in on the groom and his buddies huddled around the television and says, 'Great, the game's on' -- my husband looks at me endearingly and says, 'That's so you.' Yeah. It is."

Elizabeth Wilson of Medford, Mass., who reports that she is a Unitarian -- "can't get much more liberal than that" -- says she gets so emotionally involved in the Patriots that she becomes upset about Pats' preseason games. Even TMQ would draw the line there. Cheryl Williams says she is a liberal living in a mainly conservative suburb of Memphis, Tenn., and that she roots for the Rams and Panthers. She adds, "I read *The Progress Paradox* and loved it." Cheryl, you have your priorities in order.

Kim Bell of Westtown, N.Y., reports she is a "second-generation tree-hugger with a passion for the Persons," TMQ's now-retired cognomen for the Redskins. Anne Lacy, a conservation ecologist at a sandhill cranes facility in Wisconsin, adds herself to the list and notes that she drinks Point beer (which TMQ incorrectly called Stevens Point beer) while rooting for the Packers.

Ann Riggs of Nashua, N.H., is a "progressive-to-liberal, social-justice oriented" woman who goes nuts rooting for the Packers. She notes, "The difference between middle-aged female football fans like yours truly and new, young female fans is that we would like to *adopt* the likes of Brett Favre and Tom Brady, not go out with them."

Lesley Bingham of Conway, Ark., reports that she's a liberal and that "When my husband and I were newly wed, he ran into the living room in a panic one afternoon because he heard me screaming. He asked what was wrong and I started describing a play gone bad by a bumbling player of Miami, one of my loves. His eyes glazed over and he uttered the fateful words, 'Oh, it's just football.' I gasped aloud at his lack of understanding. Had I made a mistake in choosing this otherwise great guy? In the past 10 years, he's come to understand that football rules the house from August to the Pro Bowl." Lesley, you even watch the Pro Bowl -- a true addict. She adds, "I'm a huge fan of your column."

If email is any indication, roughly one-third of TMQ readers are female, the mega-babe obsessions notwithstanding; of course, a common request is more beefcake.

Amy Watts of Athens, Ga., puts herself in the group and notes, "A few weeks ago, I was visiting a friend and her husband and had a great time enjoying a preseason game on their high-definition widescreen TV." Diana Hays of New Orleans says she is a major Saints fan -- well, somebody got to do it -- and that she thinks "football is a game of liberal values" because team members are chosen exclusively on the basis of ability, with social standing or personal connections being irrelevant. Lisa James of Massapequa Park, N.Y., a Jets fan, joins the lib-double-XX list and observes, "Football is like chess with big people," which is kind of the way TMQ feels about it.

Katie MacDonald of Longmont, Colo., writes, "I am proud to say that I am a liberal woman and a huge football and sports fan. My entire family is full of Bronco maniacs and even though I was six years old at the time, I clearly remember the AFC Championship Game between the Broncos and the Browns and the infamous Elway-to-Mark Jackson touchdown at the end of the fourth quarter."

Jane Davis of Murfreesboro, Tenn., haikuizes,

Liberal girl loves  
the pageant of violence  
almost more than books.  
-- Jane Davis, Murfreesboro, Tenn.

Jenni Thurman of Portland, Ore., a Blue Men Group fan, summed up the answer to my question about whether there are liberal female football fans by saying "there are a bunch of us." Apparently so -- the above is only a small sample of several hundred messages. Okay, my sample is unscientific. But TMQ senses something here. Traditionally it is assumed that football is mostly for men, that women who like the sport must be conventional types who are rooting to please a husband, father or boyfriend. Based on my unscientific sample, it looks like more women are watching football because that's what they want to do.

## Redesign Note

Tuesday Morning Quarterback hopes you noticed NFL.com was redesigned last week to give it a sleeker and cleaner look. TMQ has worked for numerous magazines that went through numerous redesigns; magazines and, now, web sites get redesigned periodically. Here are the three stages of redesign reaction. When you first see the redesign, you say, "I hate it! Why didn't they leave it like it was?" Then, a few months later you are unable to remember what the previous design looked like. Finally, a year later you come across a copy of the old design and say, "I hate it! The new one is much better."

## RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT

### Obscure College Score of the Week

Brockport 42, Cortland State 24. The State University of New York at Brockport, whose campus is "bordered by the historic Erie Canal," was home to center Josh Warner of the Chicago Bears, one of the few Division III players currently on NFL rosters.

### Bonus Obscure Score

William Jewell 24, Culver-Stockton 3. One single guy defeated two entire cities! Located in Liberty, Mo., William Jewell is the best-bargain private college in the United States, according to the *Princeton Review*. The school has an Office of the First-Year Experience.

### Double Bonus Obscure Score

Luther 44, Martin Luther 6. In the 16th century, this game would have been held in a torture chamber! Located in Decorah, Iowa, Luther College was founded in 1861 and rents out its Round Table Room, where "skilled facilitators" provide "group facilitation services to assist in strategic planning, problem solving, assessment, decision-making, policy-making and consensus building." Martin Luther College of New Ulm, Minn., was founded in 1865. So the one in Iowa got dibs on picking names and chose "Luther" over "Martin Luther." Considering Martin Luther has a student body of just 1,050, it's impressive that nearly every number from 1 to 99 is taken on the roster.

Now, will either Luther or Martin Luther play Lex Luthor? And how many college matchups could pair schools with nearly identical names? Readers, please weigh in. The obvious pairing is that University of Washington could play George Washington, making it Washington versus George Washington; next week, the winner could face Washington University at St. Louis.

## Reader Animadversion

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown for mention in the column, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise. Many readers print TMQ to peruse during lunch or critically important business meetings. Adam Harstad of New York City notes, "Every Tuesday, TMQ costs large corporations countless hundreds of thousands of man-hours of work." One reader reports that his daily commute was insufficient to complete last week's:

Forty-minute train  
From Manhattan to Brooklyn  
Can't read TMQ  
-- Matt Zizzamia, Brooklyn, N.Y.

On TMQ's item questioning why 1.5 million people per year troop to visit the Grand Coulee Dam, Brian Heinrich of Bellingham, Wash., notes that a few years ago at Grand Coulee, which is one of the largest electricity-generating facilities in the world, the power failed.

Last week, I said that when I called Dave Wannstedt "solid" as a coach, I only meant that he was neither gas, liquid nor plasma. Ryan Anderson of Huntington Beach, California, notes physicists now believe

there is a fifth state of matter, "Bose-Einstein condensate," in which subatomic particles become so cold that atoms stop moving Anderson notes, "Sounds kind of like Wannstedt-coached teams once cold weather hits!"

Uri Blumenfeld of Raanana, Israel, defended the honor of windsurfing as a sport - Israel won its first-ever Olympic gold at Athens, in windsurfing - by noting that Greece chose one of its own, a windsurfer, to start the Games by lighting the flame. He also pointed out that one new women's football league has a team called the Philadelphia Phoenix. Phoenix bears a mythic connotation of course, but is also the name of another city. Isn't this like naming a team the Detroit Chicagos? If the franchise ever moves to Arizona, Blumenfeld notes, it can be called the Phoenix Phoenix.

Many Australian readers wrote to explain the distinction between rugby union, mainly a middle-class sport, and rugby league, mainly working class. Rishi Prabhakar of Sydney, who plays American-rules football for the Sydney University Lions -- world champions of the New South Wales Gridiron Football League, he notes -- provides this usage breakdown: "If the word 'rugby' is used in isolation, then we are referring to rugby union. Rugby league is called 'league' if you only want to use one word. Thus the Newcastle Knights (famed for cheerleader Jennifer Hawkins, the new Miss Universe) play rugby league, not rugby. Australian-rules football is known as 'rules' or 'Aussie rules,' unless you live in the states of Victoria, South Australia or Western Australia, in which case you probably call it football or 'footy.' American-rules football is called 'gridiron.'"

Regarding TMQ's contention that the Vikings will not advance until they deal with Randy Moss' ego, the tastefully named Gregg Rich of Denver reminds that when former Minnesota star Todd Steussie publicly called on Moss to place team ahead of self, Steussie was shown the door. In haiku, Steussie called out Moss.

Rewarded by a good-bye,  
now he blocks for Bucs.  
-- *Gregg Rich, Denver, Colo.*

Daniel Burke pointed out that "Wiffle" ball is spelled with no H. Burke says he's been scouring Wal-Marts for wiffle equipment without success, though recently joined in a 1960s-esque wiffle Homerun Derby. He haikuizes,

Homerun Derby now  
not as easy as when young.  
Man, my back is sore.  
-- *Daniel Burke, Franklin, Tenn.*

In my accounting of TMQ team name cognomen, readers were able to figure out all except Long Johns. "I looked it up on dictionary.com and it means long, warm underwear, what does that have to do with the NFL?" asked Luis Mosqueda of Monterrey, Mexico, where warm underwear is really required. Long Johns is my cognomen for the silver-clad pirate-themed Raiders, as in the pirate Long John Silver.

Chris Leland of Indianapolis noting that Indiana of Pennsylvania, located in Indiana, Pa., has its mirror opposite in the town of Philadelphia, Ind. On TMQ's complaint that no NFL team now uses as its color scheme red, white and flag blue -- not to put too fine a point on it, but the single most successful color scheme in world history -- Bjorn Delblanc of Edmonton, Alberta, noted that the Montreal Canadiens, who do use that color scheme, have won 24 Stanley Cups. So, these seem auspicious colors.

Adam Palmer of Tulsa, Okla., was among many to make an observation standard in my email box: that although the column is called Tuesday Morning Quarterback, it usually doesn't post till about noon Eastern. This is simply because NFL.com does its first big update of the day around noon Eastern. But, Adam, that's still morning in five of the six time zones of this great nation. Something that posts at noon Eastern is going up at 6 a.m. Hawaii time. So just imagine you're in Hawaii, which is good advice on a general basis anyway.

### TMQ Challenge

Last week's Challenge was to find the Looney Tunes reference hidden in the column. Many readers

quickly zeroed in. I said that the mouflon, in its Corsican native habitat, goes *le baaaa, le baaaa*. Robert Zwerner of Deerfield, Illinois was willing to bet a bottle of Sorian brandy that was a nod to Pepe le Pew. The cartoon skunk often made amorous advances toward a French kitten who would alluringly lick her fur and purr, *le mew, le mew*. Lisa Razel wins this Challenge by answering both in haiku and in French:

Le baaaa et le baaaa?  
Bruits comm le mew et le mew.  
Nom: Pepe le Pew.  
-- *Lisa Razel, Marietta, Ga.*

Now two words about the Challenge. First it's a challenge, not a contest. We promise nothing, the rules are kept secret even from the judges and the final decision will be completely arbitrary.

Second, this year winners will no longer receive a shockingly inexpensive NFL trinket. Instead you will receive a sentence of shameless praise in the column. I may, for example, call you "one of the leading contemporary poststructuralist logicians." Then you can put on your resume, "I have been called 'one of the leading contemporary poststructuralist logicians,'" and just leave out, or place in very tiny type, that it was NFL.com who called you this. For now, please applaud our first winner of the season, the witty, sophisticated, ravishingly beautiful Lisa Razel.

This week's Challenge is to give a name to the new TMQ logo, who for the moment is known around NFL.com offices only as Glasses Guy. Lots of logo images have names. For instance, the smiling clown on the old Palace Amusements building in Asbury Park, N.J., home of the first Tunnel of Love, was Tillie. Propose your name for Glasses Guy, with witty and sophisticated reasoning, at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com), including your name and hometown for mention in the column.

And yes, as many readers including Greg Salvatore of Tempe, Arizona, pointed out, last year's TMQ logo was red, white and blue, while this year's is purple, green and blue. Obviously, I'm trying to force people to buy all-new TMQ licensed merchandise.

### **Next Week**

Finally real games to talk about!



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## By the Hammer of Grabthar, they were avenged!

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season and also appear on NFL Network, providing commentary Tuesday nights on NFL Total Access. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

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(Sept. 14, 2004) -- Man, Clinton Portis looked good running for 148 yards in his debut for the Washington Redskins. Tuesday Morning Quarterback was especially impressed that Portis immediately flew to Denver and gained another 156 yards the same evening for his old team, the Broncos.

What -- that was some guy named Quentin Griffin? Or maybe it was Larry Yafnaro or Fielding Mellish (see below) carrying the ball in Denver. As TMQ noted last week, Broncos helmets are now stamped with instructions that say, INSERT RUNNING BACK, GAIN 1,000 YARDS. Seems every gentleman who lines up at tailback in the Denver system does well -- which raises the musical question, *why don't all NFL teams use the Denver system?*

Since running backs coach Bobby Turner, the mysterious mad genius of NFL coaching, arrived at Denver a decade ago and installed his system, the Broncos have the second-most rushing yards in the league, and have done so with a succession of who-dat gentlemen toting the rock. (Griffin was a fourth-round draft choice, Terrell Davis a sixth-rounder, and so on.) As TMQ has previously detailed, Turner mandates that running backs make just one cut per carry -- choose a hole and accelerate, no "look ma, I'm dancing!" For ego reasons, tailbacks across the NFL are dancing, stutter-stepping and going down one second later. At Denver, the stutter-step is forbidden and the result is great rushing performances.

League insiders and sports commentators denigrate the Broncos' rushing success by saying, "Oh, that's just the result of their system." So why don't all NFL teams use the Denver system? And why isn't Turner better known?

In other football news, hurricanes have been devastating Florida, but what's this business of changing the dates of games just because an enormous life-threatening cyclone is causing mass evacuations? Football players are tough guys, not girlie men. They should be willing to play in 140-mile-an-hour gusts and torrential sideways downpours. TMQ wanted to see Florida games played during hurricanes. Whoever won the toss would have taken the wind.

### Stats of the Week

At home on *Monday Night Football*, the run-oriented defending NFC champion Panthers gained four yards rushing in the second half.

### Stats of the Week No. 2

Byron Leftwich had 70 net yards passing in the first 58 minutes, then 72 net yards passing in the final two minutes.

**Stats of the Week No. 3**

Jerome Bettis gained one net yard and scored three touchdowns.

**Stats of the Week No. 4**

In a sequence of four snaps, Jay Fiedler threw an interception, fumbled and threw an interception.

**Stats of the Week No. 5**

Denver won despite a stretch in which the Broncos turned the ball over on three of four possessions.

**Stats of the Week No. 6**

Cleveland won by 17 points despite recording just 10 first downs.

**Stats of the Week No. 7**

Dallas ran a 19-play drive in 10:23 that resulted in no points.

**Stats of the Week No. 8**

Indianapolis ended its 2003 season with a loss at New England and began its 2004 season with a loss at New England. In a 10-month span, the Colts have played at New England three times.

**Stats of the Week No. 9**

In the 2003 regular season, Philadelphia got five touchdown receptions from its wide-receiver corps. Sunday, Terrell Owens made three touchdown receptions.

**Stats of the Week No. 10**

Stretching back to last season, Cincinnati has surrendered 483 yards rushing in its last two games.

**Stats of the Week No. 11**

Stretching back to last season, Buffalo has scored one touchdown in its last three games.

**Stats of the Week No. 12**

Adam Vinatieri scored the final points of the 2003 season and then scored the first points of the 2004 season. (Stat submitted by reader Katherine Bradner of Saratoga, N.Y.)

**Cheerleader of the Week**

Reader François Desreux of Verchain-Maugré, France, writes to nominate Nicole V. of the Cardinals based on the classic French priority of sheer beauty. So in France, where models go topless on beaches and images of glamorous nude women are everywhere, the men are now gawking at NFL cheer-babe sites? This is the strongest confirmation of U.S. cultural dominance TMQ has heard yet. Desreux praises the entire Arizona cheerleader squad for aesthetic appeal, noting, "I can't understand why Sun Devil Stadium doesn't sell out." That's high praise from a French guy. (Sorry, from a French *homme*) Nicole V., a college student, says her favorite movie is *How to Lose a Guy in 10 Days*, which suggests she has a lot of expertise in unloading men. Thus don't get your hopes up, gents.

**Reading-room note**

At the end of last season, TMQ offered to award an automatic Cheerleader of the Week to any NFL cheer-babe who, in her team bio, listed her favorite book as any volume by Marcel Proust or Willa Cather. So far as I can tell, no one has taken me up on this generous offer. But are there cheerleaders who list serious literary books as their favorites? If you find one, let me know at the address at Reader Animadversion.

### **By the Hammer of Grabthar, They Were Avenged!**

After allowing Jamal Lewis 500 yards rushing in two meetings last season, the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1) held him to 57 yards on 20 carries.

### **Sweet Play of the Week No. 1**

Game scoreless, Atlanta faced fourth-and-2 on the San Francisco 39. The Falcons lined up in an I-backfield with Peerless Price as a wingback right; the Squared Sevens' defense bunched in, expecting a run up the middle. The I-backs came straight toward the line, Michael-Mike Vick faking to the tailback; Price did a dancer's "turn out," curled behind Vick and took an end-around running left, achieving a 16-yard gain as San Francisco had no idea who had the ball. Atlanta scored a touchdown two plays later.

### **Sweet Play of the Week No. 2**

Trailing Cincinnati 7-0 in the opening quarter, Jersey/B faced third-and-3 on the Bengals' 3. The Jets split Curtis Martin left next to a receiver, threw him a quick hitch and he wiggled into the end zone as the receiver screened. This is the play that St. John's of Minnesota used to defeat Mount Union in the Division III championship last year! This is one of the most common high school plays! Cincinnati acted like they'd never seen it.

### **Sour Play of the Week**

With Jacksonville facing fourth-and-14 from its own 34 with 1:18 remaining and trailing by four, the Jags sent their best receiver, Jimmy Smith, deep along the sideline. The clock is almost spent, the opponent is in desperation mode, where oh where might the pass go? *Maybe up the field!* Yet Smith was single-covered on the fly pattern while two Bills DBs stood in the center of the gridiron like sculptures, apparently guarding each other. Forty-five yard completion when corner Nate Clements absurdly went for the interception -- gotta get my stats! -- rather than knock the ball down and ending the game. Clements caught the pass, then Smith wrestled it away. The stage was set for Jacksonville's improbable final-play victory.

High school players are taught that on fourth down, you *never* try to intercept, just knock the pass to the ground. Midway in a game, a fourth-down knockdown usually results in better field position than an interception. In the waning seconds, a fourth-down knockdown wins the game. The Official Oldest Child of TMQ, Grant, plays junior varsity football for Churchill High School in Montgomery County, Md., and TMQ reserves the right to boast about this program as may be appropriate. I called out, "Hey Grant, it's fourth down for the other team, you're in pass defense and the ball is coming directly toward you, what should you do?" Without hesitation, he replied, "Knock it down!" Here, Clements admits to Scott Pitoniak of the Rochester Democrat & Chronicle that he tried to intercept. There is huge monetary pressure on corners to get INTs -- Clements is coming up on his contract year and each interception he records will add large sums of money to whatever deal he is offered. Last December, Clements' name received Pro Bowl consideration. If he receives Pro Bowl consideration again this December, voters should bear in mind that Clements placed his own stats over victory for his team.

### **Sour Matched Set of Plays**

Leading 17-10 early in the third, Denver faced third-and-23 against Kansas City. The Chiefs ran what announcers call a blitz but TMQ calls a zone rush -- a cornerback crossed the line while three linemen rushed, and a total of four gentlemen can't be a blitz. The tactic totally flummoxed the Denver offensive line, which let the corner by untouched. Defender in his face, Jake Plummer heave-hoed a wild pass that was intercepted, and one play later, the score was tied. In a show of solidarity with Plummer's refusal to do the safe thing and take a sack, in the same game Trent Green of Kansas City ran backward 23 yards

before being tackled, though he was out of the pocket and could simply have chucked the ball away.

### **Slowest Touchdown Ever?**

According to the gamebook of the Detroit-Chicago collision, the 92-yard Bracey Walker blocked-kick return for a touchdown took 27 seconds.

### **Slowest Non-Touchdown Ever?**

According to the gamebook of the Atlanta-San Francisco collision, Aaron Beasley's 85-yard interception return took 19 seconds.

### **Why Are You Punting???????**

It's Green Bay 24, Carolina 7 with 10:05 remaining in the fourth quarter in Charlotte. The defending NFC champion Panthers face fourth-and-2 on their own 33. In trots the punting unit. Must be a fake, TMQ thinks: Boom goes the punt. Why are you punting? *Why are you punting?????????* Ten minutes remaining and down by three scores, you must take chances, and you're not going to see many chances more attractive than fourth-and-2. Who cares if it's your own 33! When the Panthers punted, they might as well have handed the referees a signed concession statement. There was still time for everybody to get a blueberry-almond martini before the bars closed.

By punting, Carolina reduced its hope of winning the game to a Green Bay turnover. The odds that an NFL team will turn the ball over on any given possession are about one in five, or 20 percent. If you run on fourth-and-2, your chance of success is 56 percent -- actual figure for fourth-and-2 runs in the NFL in 2003. (If you throw on this down, as so many pass-wacky NFL team would, your chance declines to 37 percent, but that's another matter.) In order for the Panthers to have any hope after the punt, Green Bay would have needed to turn the ball over *immediately*, and the odds of an immediate turnover are slim. Carolina did not get the ball back until there was 5:32 remaining; the Panthers recorded a touchdown and then, still down two scores, were forced to onside kick at 4:45 remaining. There's a 24 percent chance of recovering an anticipated onside kick, a *MNF* graphic told viewers. Bottom line: Rather than take a 56 percent chance with 10 minutes remaining, the Panthers took a 24 percent chance with 4:45 remaining. Carolina only gambled once it was too late to matter.

Yes, if the Panthers had gone for it, they might have failed, putting Green Bay in excellent field position. But by punting, Carolina conceded the game. In the NFL, there's no BCS poll that penalizes margin of victory -- better to go down gambling and lose big than play to contain the margin of defeat, which is what John Fox did last night. Carolina, *why did you punt?????????*

### **Champagne for Everyone**

Detroit won on the road for the first time during the George W. Bush presidency.

### **Wow! Catches of the Week**

Roy Williams of Detroit made a leaping, one-handed, deflect-it-to-himself catch between two Chicago defenders. Kelly Campbell's diving-while-running-full-speed 43-yard touchdown catch for Minnesota against Dallas was wow-worthy. And though TMQ is loath to laud the insufferable Terrell Owens, the gentlemen's first touchdown catch, looking backward over his shoulder directly into the declining afternoon sun, was impressive.

### **When Not to Complain to the Refs**

Fans go nuts when penalties nullify big plays, but sometimes the big play would not have occurred were it not for the infraction. Cards leading Rams 10-9 at the start of the fourth quarter, Arizona's Adrian Wilson intercepted a pass and returned it for an apparent touchdown -- called back for defensive holding. Watch the tape and you'll see the Arizona player who was flagged had his arms around the intended receiver, stopping his progress. Wilson, who was standing behind the intended receiver, found the ball in

his hands. If not for the holding, there would have been no interception.

### **Best Performance By a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Be in San Diego**

While Eli Manning was fumbling late in a Jersey/A loss and high-priced holdout Philip Rivers was comfortably seated on the Bolts' bench, Drew Brees played an almost-perfect game for San Diego. His look-left, throw-right touchdown to Eric Parker, the game-winner, had the silhouette of Steve Young in his prime.

### **Retired Broadcaster Watch**

Deion Sanders was all zeros on the defensive stats line -- he seemed to be avoiding contact. Check Cleveland's 46-yard touchdown pass to Quincy Morgan. Baltimore rushed three, while eight defenders were available to guard four receivers -- yet Morgan was uncovered. On the play, Sanders is standing still like a sculpture, covering no one. Let's drop the "Prime Time" business and rename him Midafternoon Soap Opera.

### **Best Blocks**

Curtis Martin sure looked fine rushing for 196 yards, but few backs have ever blocked for themselves. On his 24-yard fourth quarter touchdown rush, Martin got perfect downfield clear-out blocks from Jason Fabini and Kevin Mawae. And guard Pete Kendall, discarded by Dennis Green in Arizona -- inexplicably Green just cut Kendall, not even attempting to trade him -- played quite nicely. On Shaun Alexander's 14-yard screen-pass touchdown, the Blue Men runner got a perfect peel-back block from center Robbie Tobeck. As TMQ often complains, on screen passes offensive linemen often jog downfield as if they themselves were running for touchdowns, eyeing defenders in the distance and ignoring immediate threats. Tobeck saw the guy who was about to get his guy, and peeled back to flatten him.

The entire Redskins' line blocked well on Clinton Portis' 64-yard touchdown rush, though it helped that the Tampa line was in a weird double-stunt toward the offensive left, leaving a gaping hole on the offensive right that Portis exploited. It's pretty fun to run 64 yards for a touchdown on your first outing with your new team when everyone in front of you has already been knocked to the ground.

### **They Were Pumped!**

Early against Pittsburgh, Oakland called a pump-and-go left to Doug Gabriel, 58-yard touchdown reception. In the fourth quarter, Oakland called a pump-and-go left to Alvis Whitted and the Hypocycloids again fell for exactly the same play, 19-yard touchdown reception

### **Flying Elvii Streak Watch**

The Patriots have won 16 straight, have beaten the Colts in five straight meetings, have scored on their opening possession six straight times -- to save space, future columns will only list streaks that New England is not on. (Note: According to the Elias Sports Bureau, this is the first time TMQ has ever used the phrase, "to save space.")

### **Ah, For the Days of Third-and-10**

In the Kansas City-Denver game, the two teams combined to face third-and-11, third-and-12, third-and-13, third-and-14, third-and-15, third-and-18, third-and-19, another third-and-19, third-and-23 and third-and-33.

### **Wacky Hotel of the Week**

Recently the Official Wife of TMQ, traveling on business, stayed at the Donghu Hotel in Wuhan, China. The facility is "bursting out vigor of youth" because "the winds of reform are blowing through the hotel," in which case maybe someone should close the windows. The Donghu specializes in "the slap-up feast for

take-charge of the reception of national leaders in the long term." The Donghu further offers "Chinese and Western-style food banquet, bender, team meal, buffet and zero service." Do any China-adept readers know what the phrases the hotel translates as "slap-up feast" and "zero service" might mean in the local context?

### **Then Again, Maybe the Ravens Should Outsource to China the Production of Game Plans**

Ralph Robinson of Brookline, Mass., notes the defending champion Patriots will introduce a Chinese-language section on their web site. Please, Patriots, don't get the Chinese interested in football. First, there are 1.2 billion of them. Can you imagine how many NFL expansion franchises and realignments would be required? Also, fans would expect a slap-up feast while tailgating. TMQ proposes the name for the first NFL expansion team for China -- the Beijing Gang of Eleven.

### **Best Purist Quarter**

Man, the 1966 Packers sure looked good beating the Carolina Panthers on Monday night. That was the 1966 Packers, wasn't it? Power run after power run. Okay, so the actions were motion-counters rather than two-guard sweeps, but the spirit was the same.

Purists admire clock-killer possessions in which teams with the lead methodically grind away time until those lovely double-zeros appear on the scoreboard. Green Bay had the ball at midfield to start the fourth quarter, leading by the new economy score of 24-7. Through the fourth quarter, Green Bay coaches called 13 runs and five passes, keeping the clock ticking. After recovering an onside kick with 4:45 remaining, the Packers ran on six of seven downs. When they punted away ahead by 10 points at the two-minute warning, Carolina was finished. Green Bay didn't score in the fourth quarter, but it monopolized the clock, and the football gods were appeased.

### **They're Ruing in Indy, Really Ruing**

Last December and January, TMQ kept re-using my running item, "You'll Rue the Day You Didn't Miss," urging Mike Vanderjagt to honk an unimportant one in order to end his streak, "or by the football gods, you are sure to honk your next kick when the game is on the line." Then it turned out Vanderjagt was never asked to attempt a pressure field goal in the playoffs. Two weeks ago, I noted that the gentleman's miss as the clock expired at the Pro Bowl didn't mean anything since it was an exhibition game -- and once again predicted of Vanderjagt that he'd rue the day he did not miss, as the "Big Honk" was inevitable. Yea, verily, at New England it came to pass.

Reader Cynthia Riordan of Holliston, Mass., notes Vanderjagt was even was so foolish as to taunt the Patriots' bench before the kick -- taunting the defending champions, taunting a team that had beaten his team in four straight encounters! -- by pointing at their bench and rubbing his fingers together in the "money" gesture just before the play. "There's no doubt the football gods smote him down," Riordan says. TMQ received dozens of haiku on Vanderjagt's Big Honk.

A sampling:

Vanderjagt honks one  
at the Razor. Wide right and  
his streak is over.  
-- *Tamar Nugent, Queens, N.Y.*

TMQ begged him;  
Vanderjagt ignored advice.  
Gods' patience ran out.  
-- *Roberto Vicente, Indianapolis*

This Pats' fan serene  
as Vanderjagt tries big kick;  
honk was guaranteed.

-- Bob Goudreau, Cary, N.C.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All No. 1**

Trailing Cleveland 3-0 in the second, Baltimore faced third-and-2 at midfield. The Ravens had the league's No. 1 rushing attack in 2003; Jamal Lewis terrorized the Browns with 500 yards rushing in two meetings. So did Baltimore try a power run? The Nevermores came out in a shotgun formation -- a shotgun on third-and-2! Incompletion, punt. It wasn't even a play fake; just a straight shotgun pass. Though throughout the day the Ravens, despite their running prowess, had trouble executing play fakes.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All No. 2**

Last year I wrote so many times about Buffalo shooting itself in the foot by passing on short-yardage or goal-to-go situations -- here's the last of the *five* 2003 columns to note Bills' fiascos caused by passing when only a yard was required -- that finally I said, "At this point Tuesday Morning Quarterback has written so many items about the Bills bringing defeat upon themselves by going pass-wacky on shortage-yardage downs that I might as well enter a generic Buffalo short-yardage-fiasco item into my AutoText." And, in fact, I just reproduced that block of words from my AutoText.

Nonetheless, for the record, it's Buffalo 7 and Jacksonville 6 early in the fourth quarter, Bills facing third and goal on the Jax 1. Run, and there's a 58 percent chance of a touchdown: That's an actual figure for third-and-goal rushes from the 1 in the NFL in 2003. Throw, and there's a 46 percent chance of a touchdown: That's an actual figure for third-and-goal passes from the 1 in the NFL in 2003. Plus, a run that gains even a little sets up fourth-and-inches for a touchdown, while a pass is unlikely to have that result. Plus, the closer you get to the goal line the harder it is to throw, since the defense has steadily less territory to defend. So did the Bills learn anything from constant 2003 short-yardage passing fiascos? Drew Bledsoe sprints backwards 10 yards -- they're one yard from paydirt, and *Bledsoe is sprinting backwards*. Sack ... field goal on the next down. Instead of being ahead eight, the Bills are ahead four and lose when the Jaguars complete their improbable clock-expires touchdown drive.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All No. 3**

Trailing 14-6 early in the fourth quarter, San Francisco had first-and-goal on the Atlanta 3. Did the Niners pound, pound, pound in keeping with the item above? Incompletion; incompletion; interception returned 85 yards. Ay caramba.

### **We're All Professionals Here**

The Saints and 'Hawks, who met Sunday, are a combined 20-47 on opening day.

### **Best Play After Midnight**

Trailing the defending champion Flying Elvii 27-24 with 1:43 remaining at 12:04 a.m. local, Indianapolis took over on its own 36. Peyton Manning lined up in the shotgun, gestured like he was audibling to a run and then play faked the "stretch" handoff he usually uses on audibles. Slot receiver Brandon Stokley danced with his man off the line then ran a short skinny post; the safeties bit and ignored Stokley. Forty-five yard catch-and-run and the stage is set for the football gods to chortle as Mike Vanderjagt honks the kick that would have forced overtime.

### **Worst Play After Midnight**

Now the Colts are facing third-and-8 on the Patriots' 17 with no timeouts and 49 seconds remaining at 12:07 a.m. local. To that point they had rushed 42 times for 202 yards, exploiting the Patriots' only weakness -- run defense. Why not run here? A short run leaves Vanderjagt in position for a high-percentage field goal that forces overtime. If the run earns a first down, a spike stops the clock. Instead, the Colts lined up in shotgun formation, planning to pass.

Pause your mental TiVo here and review the first Indianapolis possession of the game. Trailing 3-0, the

Colts had first-and-goal on the New England 6. What did they do? As pointed out by reader Miguel Molina of Houston, they threw incomplete on first down, then on second down threw an interception from the shotgun. Why not just run? On a night when Indianapolis rushed well -- averaging 4.8 yards a carry -- it was the Colts' failure simply to run after reaching the red zone on their first and last possessions that doomed the challenger's hopes. (Yes, Edgerrin James fumbled on a goal-line Colts' run, but fumbles are random mistakes, not tactical decisions.) Had Manning simply handed the ball off on the first and last Colts' red-zone possessions, two field goals were likely. Instead, Indianapolis failed to score both times. Now restart your mental TiVo. Manning's in the shotgun. On the right side of the Colts' line, tackle Ryan Diem is next to nervous sophomore tight end Dallas Clark. The Patriots played a soft three-man rush on the previous downs, but now five gentlemen crowd the line, looking to blitz. Two Pats are lined up directly "over" Clark, who has a reputation as someone who'd rather catch than block. Diem and Clark are gesturing like mad to each other; something is fouled up, and TMQ suspects Diem is urgently communicating that Clark must stay in and block. The ball is snapped and, rather than block, Clark runs a turn-out, as if expecting a "hot read" anti-blitz pass. Diem takes one of the two defenders coming through the hole Clark left. Willie McGinest, the other defender, roars in untouched by human hands for the sack. And set aside that the Colts' line call was so discombobulated, that although there were six blocking five -- Edgerrin James read the blitz and stayed in -- no one touched McGinest. Seeing him coming, Manning *ran backward five yards* and went down for a 12-yard loss. Manning committed the cardinal sin of allowing himself to be sacked out of reliable field-goal range. Ye gods. If they'd only handed off straight up the middle!

### **Yes, Sometimes Blitzes Work**

The successful defensive play described above was a blitz. I don't contend blitzing never works, only that on average it hurts more than it helps. Sunday, the Redskins blitzed defensive backs often against the discombobulated Tampa offensive line, forcing a fumble and an interception. It was a highly successful blitz day for the tastefully named Gregg Williams, Washington's new defensive coordinator. But yea, verily, if the Redskins continue blitzing as often as they did in the opener, they will come to woe. They may even rue!

### **Worst Play Ere the Clock Struck Midnight**

Trailing 27-24 with 2:51 remaining, Indianapolis had the Flying Elvii facing third-and-9 from their own 2-yard line. A stop here and the punt gives the Colts good field position plus plenty of time. Male-model-esque Tom Brady lined up in the shotgun four yards deep in the end zone; you'd think the defensive line would have been salivating at the chance of a safety. There goes the snap, and inexplicably *both* Colts defensive tackles ran "spin" moves -- charge into the blocker, then do a complete 360 and try to slip to his left or right. Spin moves usually only work for very fast and nimble defensive ends; the Colts' lumbering DTs are hardly masters. Worse, the spin move requires you to take an initial step *away* from the line. While the Colts DTs were spinning themselves into a frenzy -- neither so much as made it across the line of scrimmage -- Brady had ample time to scan the field and hit David Givens for 20 yards and the first down. When the Colts got the ball back four plays later, they were in their own territory, out of timeouts and in clock trouble.

### **Cheer-Babe Professionalism**

The home Broncos, Eagles and Redskins all won as their cheerleaders displayed professionalism by wearing quite skimpy numbers. TMQ believes that cheerleader professionalism propitiates the football gods, causing them to bestow victory, although this did not work Monday night in Carolina where the Topcats danced and flounced in minimalist attire, and the Panthers nonetheless got steamrolled. Also it's possible that the Dolphins cheer-babes, who wear skimpy two pieces in warm weather, displayed professionalism on Saturday, and their team did not win. But the Miami-Tennessee game was apparently played at an undisclosed location with all cameras banned. It wasn't aired on TV, and TMQ never saw a clip on any highlight show or sports newscast. Can we be sure this game actually occurred? Maybe it was faked on a soundstage in Arizona.

### **El Nino Blamed for Red Sox Playoff Collapse -- Wait, That Hasn't Happened Yet**

According to the National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration, El Nino has returned. Yes, this means another year of local news weather people attributing everything to El Nino. Rain? El Nino. No

rain? El Nino. Sun, clouds, wind, temperatures, golf balls the size of hail -- all will be attributed to El Nino.

### **Preposterous Punt**

The Sequel: As TMQ has also noted, Buffalo's current run of troubles began in 2002 with the Preposterous Punt -- trailing by 10, facing fourth-and-2 on the New England 32-yard line, the Bills punted rather than go for the first or attempt a figgie. The football gods still haven't gotten over their fury at that mincing fraidy-cat call. Against Jax on Sunday, leading 10-6 with 2:18 remaining, the Bills faced fourth-and-10 on the Jaguars' 33. Rather than try for a field goal that makes it a one-touchdown lead, or try for the first -- sure it's fourth-and-10, but it's preposterous to punt from the 33 -- Buffalo punted. The kick rolled into the end zone for a net gain of 13 yards. Emboldened by Buffalo's mincing fraidy-cat play, Jacksonville marched 80 yards to win on a touchdown as the clock expired, converting fourth-and-14, fourth-and-2 and fourth-and-7 on the drive. (The punt came from the 38 after Buffalo took a deliberate penalty to move the kicker back, but it's still a net of 13 yards on the strategy.)

### **I Need Three, One for Each of My Kids' Desks**

You can buy a librarian action figure modeled on a real librarian, the estimable Nancy Pearl of the Seattle Public Library. The action figure is shushing.

### **Oh Ye Mortals, Trifle Not with the Football Gods**

Last season Oklahoma was the top-rated team in college much of the year, then ran up the score against Texas A&M, winning 77-0 -- TMQ called the final result 77-00 -- in a game in which the Sooners kept passing even after they had an unassailable lead. The football gods showed their anger. From the 77-00 win on, everything went downhill for Oklahoma for the remainder of the season. The Sooners dropped their final two games in the Big 12 championship and the BCS championship. So did Oklahoma learn its lesson? On Saturday, the team ran up the score against Houston in a 63-13 win, continuing to pass in the second half, including five passes in the fourth quarter even though they were ahead 56-7 when the quarter began. Coach, were you worried about losing your 49-point fourth-quarter lead? There's a term for passing when you're ahead by 49 points in the fourth quarter, and the term is bad sportsmanship.

In contrast, as Western Illinois beat Cheyney 98-7, the Leathernecks threw only one pass in the second half. In position to break the century barrier at game's end, Western Illinois knelt on the ball. Presumably the football gods will punish Oklahoma and reward Western Illinois. Cheyney coach Lee Brown's postgame speech: "Well boys, you held them under 100."

Note: the Sooners have a classic football-factory schedule -- more home games than road games. Football-factory schools can buy their way into such arrangements, and it makes for wining records and happy alums at the home stadium, followed by collapse in bowls games played on the road.

### **Plain Brown Wrapper Update**

A TMQ fan asked me to autograph a Philadelphia Eagles cheerleaders' lingerie calendar; he ordered one shipped to my office, I signed and mailed to him. What I discovered was that the Philadelphia Eagles cheerleaders' lingerie calendar comes in a plain brown wrapper. Not only does it not say in bright green letters -- INSIDE: HIGHLY AESTHETIC NFL CHEER-BABES WEARING ONE-OUNCE THONGS! -- but the plain brown wrapper even has a cryptic return address -- Blawnox, Pa. -- that mentions nothing about the Eagles or Philadelphia. Obviously the team marketing department understands its customers!

### **Eagles Non-Thong-Related Warning**

In the 2003 season opener, the Bucs strutted and danced on the sidelines as they defeated the Eagles; TMQ warned this rodomontade would be punished by the football gods and it was as the defending champions failed to make the postseason. In the 2004 season opener Sunday, the Eagles strutted and danced on the sidelines as they defeated Jersey/A. Yea, verily, be thou warned: Philadelphia, if the whole team catches Terrell Owens disease, thou art doomed. Doomed!

## TMQ Super Bowl Prediction

Beginning with the column's onset in 2000, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has annually made the same prediction -- that "the team goin' to Disney World will come from among those that did not make the *Monday Night Football* cut." Lo and behold, Baltimore won the Super Bowl after not appearing on *MNF*, and the Patriots won their first ring after not appearing on *MNF*. That makes TMQ 2-for-4 in predicting Super Bowl winners, and last winter, Carolina qualified for the game and nearly won after not appearing on *MNF*. Okay, so in no case did I actually forecast the exact team -- don't get technical. But every year, I have cast my lot with the downtrodden of the NFL, siding with the clubs not liked by the touts, the experts and the league's scheduling office, and two out of four times been right.

So for the fifth straight year, I have consulted the football gods and predict, "The team goin' to Disney World will come from among those that did not make the *Monday Night Football* cut." Here is this year's list: Arizona, Atlanta, Buffalo, Chicago, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, Jersey/A, New Orleans, Oakland, Pittsburgh, San Diego and San Francisco. Now I'll say about these teams what TMQ says every year about the *MNF* rejects: "Yes, this is a sorry group, but if the league braintrust thinks these are the teams that will have losing seasons, then one of them must be good."

*MNF* note: As usual, the Monday night schedule looks like monster game after monster game, and as usual, by December at least one pairing will turn out to be a woof-woof. There's got to be a way to add schedule flexibility to insure that December *MNF* collisions are attractive matchups.

## By the 53rd Running Play, De La Salle Was Starting to Catch On

Many people heard that De La Salle High School of Concord, Calif., was defeated by three-time Washington State champion Bellevue High School, ending De La Salle's record 151-game winning streak. The contest was held in front of 24,987 at Qwest Field, making TMQ wonder how it was arranged for a California high-school team to play a road game two states distant. (Concord, Calif., is 800 miles from Seattle.) Tom Kreitzberg of Silver Spring, Md., points out the killer fact of the event -- Bellevue never passed, rushing 54 times on 54 snaps. That's what TMQ calls establishing the run! "I just hope Andy Reid is paying attention," Kreitzberg notes.

## RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT

### Obscure College Score of the Week.

Mars Hill 68, Saint Augustine 12. Well, of course an entire college beat a guy who died in the year 430! Located in Mars Hill, N.C., the school is "the oldest college in western North Carolina on its original site." I've always preferred eastern South Carolina to western North Carolina. The school is named after a hill near Athens where, in the first century, the apostle Paul argued that Greek reason and Christian faith were compatible. In Greek, the hill is called Areopagus, so you can pretty much see why they didn't name it Areopagus College.

### Bonus Obscure Score

Whitworth 52, Redlands 49. Located in Spokane, Wash., Whitworth in its own student handbook refers to campus administration as "the Wicked Witch of the West." TMQ finds that practically all United States colleges and universities claim to be highly ranked in the influential *U.S. News & World Report* rating, and Whitworth is no exception. The school's home page declares, "*U.S. News* rankings lift Whitworth to #5 for best colleges." But when you go to the ranking, you find that where Whitworth finished fifth was the category "Western universities -- master's." That's hardly the same as "best colleges," now is it, Whitworth? **Obscure College Matchups**

Following the Luther-Martin Luther game, I asked readers for example of other similar-sounding collegiate matchups. Chris Lawler of Boston, a student at Northeastern University of Boston, proposed his school play Northeastern State of Oklahoma. TMQ proposes that the game be held in Arizona and billed as Northeastern versus Northeastern in the Southwestern Bowl. Lawler notes that Northeastern of Oklahoma calls its men's teams the Redmen, though their uniforms are green. Check this picture of 100 guys in all green over the headline, REDMEN FOOTBALL.

Greg Jensen of Dayton, Ohio, proposed that Miami University play University of Miami. TMQ has long wondered why this is no such annual grudge match - probably because the Hurricanes are terrified of the damage to their reputation should they lose. TMQ also loves that the emergence of the Miami University program has forced the Hurricanes, during football season, to call themselves "Miami of Florida."

Shawn of Colorado Springs notes that if Augustana of Illinois played Augustana of South Dakota, the match would also pit the Vikings against the Vikings. The tastefully named Gregg Jessip of Omaha, Neb., added that when the Augustana Vikings played the Augustana Vikings, the cheerleaders should be called the Valkyries.

Scott Leonard of Topeka, Kan., points out, "There are 10 colleges of the Lutheran Church-Missouri Synod called Concordia: Concordia University, Ann Arbor, Mich.; Concordia University, Austin, Texas; Concordia College, Bronxville, N.Y.; Concordia University, Irvine, Calif.; Concordia University, Mequon, Wis.; Concordia Portland, Ore.; Concordia University, River Forest, Ill.; Concordia University, St. Paul, Minn., (Bills coach Mike Mularkey was the offensive line coach here in 1993); Concordia College, Selma, Ala.; and Concordia University, Seward, Neb." The Concordia colleges could spend the entire football season doing nothing but playing other colleges named Concordia.

Arnold Febre of Houston proposed these matchups: Wesley College versus Lesley College; Holy Cross College versus College of the Holy Cross; Bethany College of California versus Bethany College Kansas with the winner to face Bethany College of West Virginia; Bethel College of Indian versus Bethel College of Kansas with the winner to face Bethel College of Tennessee.

Heath Florkey of Dayton, Ohio, suggested that Pittsburgh of Pennsylvania could play Pittsburg of Kansas -- one of TMQ's favorite obscure schools, and one that considers its spelling the authentic one -- while Franklin & Marshall could square off against Marshall. Here, observe that the Diplomats of Franklin & Marshall have been playing college football since 1886. Not the same guys, though.

Scott Trump of Washington, D.C., points out that if his alma mater, Indiana of Pennsylvania -- TMQ's absolute favorite obscure college -- played Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis, the game would pair IUP vs. IUPUI.

Brian Kalamajka of Suffolk, Va., noted that if Simon's Rock College of Massachusetts played the Institute of Paper Science and Technology of Georgia Tech, it would be Rock versus Paper, and spectators could wave scissors. (The Institute of Paper Science and Technology offers an expert-referrals service "to assist you with your pulp and paper concerns.") If Faith Baptist Bible College played Hope College, it would be Faith versus Hope. Troy State could also play Athens State, but wasn't Athens versus Troy settled a long time ago?

### **Cutting Edge Final Score Predictions**

Because the *New York Times* carried out its tragic decision to stop making inaccurate exact final score predictions for NFL games, the beloved TMQ item *New York Times* Final-Score Score has been retired. This new item, which looks at sorted and sundry attempts to predict exact final scores, replaces it.

This week Fox Sports used the computer game ESPN NFL 25K to predict an exact final score of Kansas City 28, Denver 13. The computer game apparently doesn't know how hard it is for visitors to win in Colorado air -- the final was Denver 34, Kansas City 24.

### **Reader Animadversion**

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown for mention in the column, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Jennifer McClean of the Ferring Research Institute in San Diego, a liberal scientist woman who loves football -- this demographic is getting out of control -- points out a web site that offers a haiku for each of the entries in the Periodic Table of the Elements. (And, yes, I heard from lots of politically

conservative women who like football, including Melissa Ritchings of Franklin, N.H. My point about politically liberal women was that they seemed the large demography least likely to like football, yet it appears there are plenty who do.) Tuesday Morning Quarterback has long wanted to offer a line of health foods marketed with the slogan, "Made with elements from nature's own Periodic Table."

Last week, I dubbed the Eagles the Philadelphia Nesharim -- Eagles in Hebrew, which reads right to left like the Eagles' logo. The accompanying caption showed Jevon Kearse and asked how one might say "fear the Freak" in Hebrew. Naturally a reader knew! Elie Kirshenbaum, a high school senior in Beit Shemesh, Israel, and a Jets fan, said he would translate "fear the Freak" as *Tiphached MeHacharig*.

### Last Week's Challenge

Last week's Challenge was to name the new TMQ logo, known around NFL.com offices only as Glasses Guy. Eugene Emperado of Chicago proposed calling him Dundee, after the Robin Williams character in the movie *The Best of Times*. That is a rent-worthy nostalgia flick in which Williams, middle-aged, tries to reenact with a different result the great trauma of his youth -- dropping what would have been the winning touchdown pass in the biggest high-school football game of the year.

Jamie Cartledge of Kansas City, Mo., proposed calling him Canseco, after a gentlemen with a gift for re-directing the flight of balls. In a similar vein, Nick Keefe of Germantown, Md., suggested Pinkston, as in Todd. (Actually Darrell would be better as Darrell Jackson of Seattle had the most drops, 12, in 2003.)

Barb McWithey of Plymouth, Wis., suggested that since the logo guy is a geek, it should be named Bill, after the world's most successful geek. Jeffrey Staggs of Baltimore suggested that since the new TMQ logo hues are the colors of Mardi Gras, the guy be named Fat Tuesday Morning Quarterback. Joe Persico of Hudson, Wis., proposed the logo be called simply Bonk! Jonathan Pankratz of Gatineau, Québec, suggested Boink! Matt Tagliaferri of Cleveland said the guy looks like the *Mad Magazine* cartoonist Don Martin, who used nonsense caption sounds like "doont," and therefore suggested the name Doont!

Kama Sue Siegel of Portland, Ore., thought Reilly, for resemblance to Charles Nelson Reilly. Jason Myatt of Merced, Ga., was among many who proposed Riggs, for resemblance to Bobby Riggs. Adam Miller of Rochester, N.Y., was among many to suggest Woody, owing to Woody Allen resemblance. Keeping the Allen theme, Rick Berman of Tel Aviv, Israel, suggested Zellig. Michael Borel of Brooklyn Park, Minn., thought Steve, for resemblance to Steve Allen. Lyle Huber of Las Cruces, N.M., suggested Flynn after the character actor Joe Flynn.

Kim Nerenhausen, a Packers fan living in Cairo, Egypt, suggested Ram Adan, for Ramadan, the Islamic celebration that is roughly parallel to the Easter in Easterbrook. Alan Gold of Key West, Fla., knocked me on the floor by suggesting the guy be called Ryan Leaf.

Chang Kim of Jersey City, N.J., noted the resemblance of Glasses Guy to Elvis Costello -- they've even got the same expressions on their faces -- and proposed Costello. Dave Jones of Milford, Ohio, suggested Bilko, after the Phil Silvers character.

Brett Bernstein of Chicago noted that the logo ball is coming up from the ground, and wondered if it was being inexpertly thrown by Spenser, the youngest Official Child of TMQ. Actually Spenser, who's nine, has been throwing nothing but a regulation-size NFL game ball since he was eight, and already has a fairly tight spiral. My long-term financial plan is for Spenser to be the No. 1 pick in the 2017 NFL draft, then be traded by the San Diego Chargers to some team that hands him the heady bonus that will insure mom and dad's sunset years. Assuming current trends for the fictional contract... In 2017, Spenser will sign a "29-year, \$40 billion" contract that actually run two months and pays one percent of announced face value, but that will be plenty heady enough. My long-term financial Plan B is to sell TMQ caps on streetcorners.

Actually, what Glasses Guy is doing, or failing to do, is field a punt. And the word "fielding" leads us to our winner -- can I segue or what? Matthew Stollak of Green Bay, Wis., where they drink Point beer not Stevens Point beer, noted that Glasses Guy resembles not just Woody Allen but Allen's creation Fielding Mellish, nebbish protagonist of the classic movie *Bananas*. There are times, Matthew, many times, when I feel myself a nebbish protagonist in a low-budget indie movie about a subject unrelated to my own life.

But Fielding -- it's a clever name, and the poor logo is, after all, botching an attempt to field a kick. So henceforth the Glasses Guy will be known as Fielding. Mr. Data, make it so!

Now to Stollak's prize. As explained last week, Challenge winners will no longer receive a shockingly inexpensive NFL trinket. Instead, they will receive shameless praise in the column. Stollak is an assistant professor of business administration at St. Norbert College. Considering this calling, here is his shameless praise: "Matthew Stollak ranks among the leading modern innovators in the teaching of business administration. He brings an ethic of excellence to the classroom." Dr. Stollak, put that in your CV and just don't mention it was NFL.com that said this.

**This Week's Challenge** The real games are back, but that also means announcer clichés are back. One TMQ cannot abide is calling everybody underrated. So far as TMQ can determine, according to network bobbleheads, virtually every player in the NFL is underrated. I've heard players who just made the Pro Bowl described as underrated. "He's one of the most underrated players in the NFL," is a typical comment. The Challenge question: who is the *least* underrated player in the NFL?

**Next Week** Tuesday Morning Quarterback, the director's cut.



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## Calling Dr. Watson -- plus every 19 years, Jerry Rice has an off day

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

FOXBORO, Mass. (Sept. 21, 2009) -- The New England Patriots' record 112-game winning streak came to an end today as the defending Super Bowl champions were defeated 21-20 by the expansion Los Angeles Bimbos.

*"It was a heck of a ride, but realistically, I knew that winning the 113th straight game would be tough," Patriots coach Bill Belichick told a packed news conference. "I think it was Bear Bryant, or maybe Gertrude Stein, who said, 'Keep winning until you stop.' That was our philosophy."*

*Sportswriters and commentators have marveled as New England has won game after game after game, including six consecutive Super Bowls, using a succession of unknowns and waiver-wire acquisitions. Former three-time Super Bowl MVP Tom Brady left the Patriots in 2005 to become a male model; Pro Bowl star Ty Law was waived the same year and replaced with an Arena League player whose name Patriots coaches did not even know; New England adopted a formal policy of starting only offensive linemen who had gone undrafted. But the winning just kept on.*

*Along the way, New England set all-time streak records for most consecutive games without surrendering a sack (103), most consecutive games starting a running back somebody else didn't want (94) and most consecutive home playoff victories in snow (14). At one point, stretching through two seasons, New England also set a streak record for most consecutive offensive passing plays without a rushing play (1,485).*

*When Adam Vinatieri's last-second field-goal attempt against the Bimbos sailed wide, snapping his record of 47 consecutive game-winning last-second field goals, President Paris Hilton called Belichick and said, "You may finally have lost, but I'd still be very glad to meet with your players in the locker room." Vice President Denzel Washington declared from the White House, "The Patriots are a tribute to the American spirit, and -- and -- and -- I must kill Paris Hilton!"*

In other streak news, Jerry Rice finally lost his streak of games with a reception: He was stopped cold at a mere 274 consecutive games. It was the first time since 1985 that Rice took the field and did not catch a pass. Everybody knows Rice is the best-ever receiver, but Tuesday Morning Quarterback would like to point out just how far ahead of the competition this gentleman stands.

Rice has 1,521 career receptions. Second-best all-time is 1,101 by Cris Carter: Rice has done 38 percent better than the No. 2 guy. Rice has 22,488 career receiving yards gained. Second best all-time is 14,806 yards by Tim Brown of the Bucs: Rice has done 52 percent better than the No. 2 guy. Rice has 194 career receiving touchdowns. Second best all-time is 130 by Carter: Rice has done 49 percent better than the No. 2 guy. The second best all-time reception streak is 183 games by Art Monk: Rice has done 50 percent better than the No. 2 guy.

These margins are unprecedented. The NFL's all-time leading rusher, Emmitt Smith, has four percent more yards than the No. 2 guy, Barry Sanders. The NBA's all-time leading scorer, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, has four percent more points than the No. 2 guy, Karl Malone. The all-time home run leader, Hank Aaron, has over five percent more homers than the No. 2 guy, Babe Ruth. Few athletes in any sport have ever

dominated statistics the way Jerry Rice dominates football receiving numbers.

Is Jerry Rice the best football player ever? You won't hear me object to that statement. As Rice prepares to take a final bow, bear in mind the incredible margins of his success. In other NFL news, it's only Week 3 and already this weekend offers just one pairing of undefeated teams, Philadelphia at Detroit. A mere seven NFL teams remain undefeated -- will there be *any* matchup of undefeateds left by October? I don't wish to alarm you, but current trends make the Detroit at Jacksonville matchup on Nov. 14 look like the possible monster game of the year.

### **Stats of the Week**

Carson Palmer had 57 net yards passing in the first 58 minutes against Miami, and 59 net yards passing in the final two minutes.

### **Stats of the Week No. 2**

Carolina, which had four yards rushing in the second half against Green Bay, had 141 yards rushing in the second half six days later against Kansas City.

### **Stats of the Week No. 3**

Jacksonville is 2-0 despite being just 3 of 23 on third-down conversion attempts.

### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Jacksonville has done much better on fourth down (3 of 3) than third down (3 of 23).

### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

A. J. Feely has played six quarters for Miami and thrown two interceptions returned for touchdowns.

### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

Ronald Curry of Oakland matched his career receiving total (43 yards in three years) on a single catch against Buffalo.

### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

Trent Green had a sequence in which seven consecutive pass attempts were either incomplete or intercepted.

### **Stats of the Week No. 8**

Tampa held the Seahawks to nine first downs, and lost.

### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

The Bills had 157 yards gained called back by penalties.

### **Stats of the Week No. 10**

The Eagles and Jets have already scored seven offensive touchdowns, while Tampa has yet to score one.

### **Stats of the Week No. 11**

Stretching back to last season, Atlanta is 4-10 when Michael-Mike Vick is out and 5-1 when he plays.

### **Stats of the Week No. 12**

Stretching back to the 2000 season, Minnesota has lost 21 of its last 28 outdoor games.

### **Literary Cheerleader of the Week**

Last week TMQ asked readers to scan NFL cheer-babe sites for pom-wavers who list serious literary works as their favorite books. By the most amazing and astonishing coincidence, it returned out there were large numbers of readers willing to spend time gawking at cheerleaders in revealing swimsuits! I mean, at cheerleader book preferences. And it turned out there were a surprising number of NFL cheer-babes whose favorite books are serious ones. I'll be doing literary cheerleaders for many columns, and don't need any further nominees owing to the landslide of responses to last week's appeal.

The first Literary Cheerleader of the Week, nominated by Cliff Buck of Tallahassee, Fla., is Akilah of the Washington Redskins, who lists her favorite book as *The Bluest Eye* by Toni Morrison. Akilah majored in English at Allegheny College, has had bit parts in a couple Hollywood flicks and her team bio reports that her ideal date would be snorkeling. Also, she's a free-agent cheerleader! Akilah was on the Philadelphia cheer-babe squad two years ago, then shifted to the Redskins. Maybe the Eagles had to cut her to clear cap room to buy more lingerie. Akilah's occupation is "wish coordinator." But don't get your hopes up gents, one suspects this has something to do with children.

### **Mike Brown Play of the Week (Temporarily Revived Item)**

The Chicago Mingdingxiong ("bears whose outcomes are determined by fate") leading 7-3 in the second quarter, Green Bay with first-and-goal on the Chicago 2, Ahman Green fumbled, Mike Brown picked the ball up and returned it 95 yards for the touchdown that was the game's pivotal play. The fumble came on Green's fifth consecutive carry on the drive -- Green is tough, but let your guy get gang-tackled on four consecutive snaps and on snap No. 5 he might make a mistake. TMQ once had Mike Brown Play of the Week as a regular item, especially in 2001 when the gentleman won two games in two weeks with long turnover returns. Now the item makes a one-week revival and is retired again, since Brown is out for the year with an injury.

### **Ernest Wilford Play of the Week (New Item)**

Rookie receiver Ernest Wilford has scored Jacksonville's only two touchdowns this season, and both have provided the winning points in victories. Wilford's career statistics include: two games, two total receptions, two game-winning touchdowns.

### **Roy Williams Play of the Week (New Item)**

Two spectacular touchdown catches in the same game -- this hyped high-pick gentleman is locked in an early contest with the who-dat Wilford for top new impact player.

### **Sweet Plays of the Week (Falcons Edition)**

Atlanta leading St. Louis 24-17 in the early fourth, Les Mouflons had the ball on their 1. Marc Bulger dropped back into his end zone; Brady Smith tomahawked Bulger's arm and snagged the ball out of the air, and it was a touchdown without Smith even having to move. The drive chart should have said, "one play, zero yards in zero seconds." In the same contest, Michael-Mike Vick's bootleg/head-over-heels run to the St. Louis 2 was both sweet to watch and athletically remarkable. But 12 carries in a game is too many for a quarterback, unless they are Joe Montana-style carries where the quarterback takes an angle to the sideline and sprints out of bounds. Vick is definitely not doing Montana-style sprints to the sidelines. This can't last: Michael-Mike, don't *ever* go head over heels again.

### **Sweet Play of the Week, Defensive No. 1**

Minnesota reached the Philadelphia 1- and 2-yard lines in first-half drives that resulted in only three points, and this was the determining factor in the Vikings-Eagles showdown. Both times Daunte Culpepper ran on the critical snap; once he lost a fumble, the other time was stopped and Minnesota kicked. On the latter play, with Philadelphia leading 7-3, the Vikings faced third-and-goal from the Philadelphia 2. Culpepper lined up in the shotgun -- can't anybody power-run in short yardage anymore? -- then ran the pump-draw the Vikings used last year. On it, Culpepper starts toward the end zone like it's a quarterback draw, then either stops at the last second and throws, or stops, pump fakes and resumes running. Last season, variations on this action worked pretty much whenever Minnesota ran them. The Eagles defense had obviously practiced against this play, however, and did not fall for either of Culpepper's fakes, tackling him at the 1. Culpepper trotted off with a look of bewilderment on his face as if to say, "*Don't they know they were supposed to be faked?*"

### **Sweet Play of the Week, Defensive No. 2**

Game tied at 17 early in the fourth quarter, the Flaming Thumbtacks faced fourth-and-2 on the Indianapolis 27. Rather than let NFL all-time leading scorer Gary Anderson attempt a 44-yard field goal for the lead, Tennessee went for it and threw deep to Derrick Mason near the goal line. The pass was true; Colts' cornerback Nick Harper never turned, but, facing Mason the entire time, watched the receiver's eyes as he hauled the ball in and then swiped it from his hands for a turnover. (The statistician credited Harper with a pick, though TMQ thought it should have been scored as a catch and a fumble, since it's normally scored as a fumble when one player snatches the ball out of another's hands.) Normally a corner who does not turn as the pass approaches commits a fatal error, but here Harper converted that error into a sweet play. The Colts scored on the possession and never looked back.

### **Sour Play of the Week**

Trailing 7-0 in the second quarter, Jersey/A recovered a Redskins' fumble on the Washington 37-yard line. Traditionally, immediately after a turnover, many teams try a deep strike. Sure enough, the Giants play faked and former extraterrestrial Kurt Warner threw to Tim Carter on a flag-post move for the touchdown. But why did the Potomac Nanticokes' defense fall for a play fake in a situation where you *expect* the opponent to throw deep? Especially considering that just two downs before the Washington fumble, the Giants faced third-and-2 on the Washington 36 and were stuffed on third down, then stuffed again on fourth down. Running up the middle again was unlikely to be on Jersey/A's mind.

### **Sour Play of the Week (Long-Yardage Edition)**

Last week Buffalo lost in the game's closing seconds after the Bills gave up a 45-yard pass completion to Jacksonville on fourth-and-14; the receiver was single-covered deep while two Bills DBs stood in the center of the field like topiary, apparently guarding each other. Sunday, Buffalo had Oakland facing third-and-27. Touchdown for the Raiders on a 43-yard completion to Ronald Curry; the receiver was single-covered deep while three Bills DBs stood in the center of the field like topiary, apparently guarding each other.

In a show of solidarity, San Francisco had two DBs standing in the center of the field like topiary, apparently guarding each other, as Donte' Stallworth got behind everyone for the touchdown reception that won the San Francisco-New Orleans collision.

### **Best Blocks**

Wow, the 1966 Green Bay Packers sure looked good beating Carolina on the opening *Monday Night Football* game, then on Sunday the 1966 Green Bay Packers looked great beating at 2004 Green Bay Packers at Lambeau. Wasn't that the 1966 Green Bay Packers? Pulling guards on almost every run. With the Bears leading 14-3, guard Ruben Brown pulled right and pasted a Packer at the point of attack; Thomas Jones found that it's pretty fun to run 54 yards when everyone in front of you has already been knocked to the ground. Chicago scored a touchdown three plays later, and the rout was on.

Indianapolis guard Rick DeMulling absolutely pasted his man as the point of attack as Edgerrin James ran four yards to put the Colts ahead 24-17 at Tennessee: Though this was a stacked-defense first-and-goal situation, no one touched James until he was crossing the goal line. Earlier, no Colt had touched

Tennessee's Chad Brown on his 20-yard touchdown run. The entire Carolina front blocked well on DeShaun Foster's 71-yard fourth-quarter run that sealed the Panthers' victory against Kansas City. It's pretty fun to run 71 yards when only one defensive player even makes contact with you until you've gone about 70 yards. On the play, a first-and-10, Kansas City expected a run and had all three of its linebackers close to the line and packed in very tight, all between the tackles. That is, Foster ran 71 yards against an overstacked rush defense.

### Curious Tactics, Dr. Watson No. 1

Trailing 7-6 with 2:20 remaining against Jax, the Broncos marched from their own 10 to the Jaguars' 24 -- surely causing Jax fans to think, "This is eerily similar to last week," when Jax sputtered against Buffalo until the final two minutes, then went the length of the field to win. Reaching the Jax 24, Denver spiked the ball to stop the clock. On second-and-10, the Broncos handed off to Quentin Griffin, who gained one yard; Denver called its final time out. On third-and 9-with 37 seconds left, Denver again handed off to Griffin, who fumbled; Jax recovered, and the rest was kneel downs. Why was Denver content to play for the field-goal attempt when it had only reached the 24? Denver's Jason Elam is good, but a 41-yard kick is hardly automatic. Plus, even if Griffin had not fumbled on the fateful final carry, the Broncos would have had to hustle the field-goal team on with less than 30 seconds on the game clock. Denver seemed to act as though victory was assured well before circumstances on the field matched this assumption -- and the football gods chortled.

### Curious Tactics, Dr. Watson No. 2

Trailing 24-17 with 4:31 remaining, Tennessee lined up to punt from midfield on fourth-and-10. TMQ knew it would be a fake, and so did the entire Colts' punt unit -- which played fake all the way and stopped the Titans' runner six yards shy of the first. What was the big clue? The Flaming Thumbtacks were already down to one timeout, meaning the standard tactic of punt: call timeouts and hope to get the ball back wasn't promising. Given that Indianapolis smelled fake all the way, why didn't Tennessee go with its regular offense?

### Curious Tactics, Dr. Watson No. 3

Scoring to tie the game at 13, Miami kicked off to the Tootsie Rolls, then stopped their first-down play for a short gain, making it second-and-6 at the Cincinnati 24 with 1:46 remaining in regulation. Miami called timeout: *Aaaaaiiiiiiiyyyyyyyye*, thought TMQ. The Dolphins were dreaming of stuffing the drive then getting the ball back. But even if they'd gotten the ball back, it likely would have been deep in their own territory with regulation almost expired. Cincinnati, on the other hand, had the ball and a chance to win. Plus, the Bengals had already used one timeout. *Why was Miami stopping the clock at the time when Cincinnati benefited by stopping the clock?* Miami handed Cincinnati an incredible favor -- the extra seconds necessary to make the final pass that moved the ball to the Dolphins' 21 with seven ticks left, whence the Cincinnati kicker won the game. And note please: The key play of this drive, a 20-yard pass with 57 seconds remaining, came as Miami blitzed.

### Kick Early, Go for It Late

Defy at your peril this Tuesday Morning Quarterback immutable law. Leading 7-3 in the second quarter at home, Tennessee faced fourth-and-1 on the Indianapolis 4. Kick early, go for it late! Tennessee went and was stuffed. When the score was tied in the fourth quarter, those lost three points loomed big. Tennessee ended the day 0 for 3 on fourth down attempts.

### Equal-Time Beefcake

Concerned for female readers, reader Jeffrey Flowers of Waltham, Mass., points out this beefcake pose of Blue Men Group running backs Mack Strong and Shawn Alexander, photo by Scott Eklund of the *Seattle Post-Intelligencer*. Note: The newspaper was formed by a merger, but doesn't "Post-Intelligencer" sound like "after intelligence?" Of course, that is a problem plaguing the news business generally. And considering all those merged newspaper names, TMQ feels sure that somewhere in this great nation of ours is a paper called the *Democrat Republican*.

*Then Again, 1-4 Is Considered Good In Arizona*

Quarterback Josh McCown of the Arizona Cactus Wrens (see below) was proclaimed by Dennis Green a budding star. Not to put too fine a point on it, but this gentleman is now 1-4 as a starter and has five career touchdown passes versus 10 interceptions.

### **Retired Broadcaster Watch**

Deion "Midafternoon Soap Opera" Sanders returned a punt 23 yards against Pittsburgh -- then began celebrating as if he'd just been named Miss America. While dancing, Sanders ripped off his helmet and pointed to himself; the 15-yard unsportsmanlike-conduct flag reduced his effort to a paltry net gain of eight yards. Get this guy back into the broadcast booth before he hurts someone, the someone being the Baltimore Ravens.

### **Early Blitzes Are Like Yeast**

In Week 1, big blitzing worked for several teams. This week the big blitz worked for Baltimore, Cincinnati, Dallas, Detroit and Jersey/A. Do not be deceived. Early in the season, defense has the advantage over offense, especially before offensive-line play jells. As the year progresses, offensive lines won't miss so many blitz pickups, and the big blitz will begin to backfire. Mark my words: I have spoken.

### **Ralph Nader's Recipe Is for Spoiled Cookies**

Beginning with the 1992 presidential election, *Family Circle* magazine asked each aspiring first lady to submit cookie recipes; readers bake the cookies and vote on which tastes best. Each time the best-cookie victor has foretold the presidential winner. Hillary Clinton's oatmeal chocolate chip cookies won in 1992 over Barbara Bush's regular chocolate chips, and won again in 1996 over Elizabeth Dole's pecan rolls. Laura Bush's recipe won in 2000 over Tipper Gore's. This spring, Teresa Heinz Kerry and Laura Bush submitted their recipes to *Family Circle*. Laura's is a hazardous-sounding concoction involving walnuts and sour cherries, while Teresa submitted a recipe for pumpkin spice cookies. Sour cherries? Political cookies should contain sour grapes! And what self-respecting suburban male swing voter is going to eat a pumpkin spice cookie? We need a third party independent cookie in this race.

Teresa Heinz Kerry now claims she didn't approve of her recipe. "I don't like pumpkin spice cookies," she told National Public Radio last month. "Somebody at my office gave that recipe out and, in fact, I think somebody really made it on purpose to give a nasty recipe." A vast right-wing cookie conspiracy! Also, this is the first known baked-goods variation on the politician's perennial "it was a staff error" defense. In the bipartisan spirit, TMQ notes that Laura Bush's recipe sounds really awful, too. Oatmeal chocolate chip, now there's a manly cookie -- maybe Hillary Clinton understands men better than she gets credit for. Here is Hillary's undefeated cookie.

### **Justification for Miss American Swimsuit Photo: It's a Swimsuit "Competition," You Know, Like Sports**

Tennessee leading heavily favored Florida before 109,061 in Knoxville on CBS, the Miss America swimsuit competition on ABC featuring the new Speedo micro-suits -- how is a guy supposed to make these kind of decisions? Yes, it's preposterous that women seeking the Miss America crown are expected to strut and TFTJ (contestant slang for "turn for the judges"), wearing almost nothing. But then all aspects of beauty pageants are preposterous, so what do you expect? If there were a Mr. America competition, contestants would be expected to flex and TFTJ in boxers, plus compete to disassemble and repair a bicycle, sing Broadway show tunes while barbecuing ribs, and finally, give a saccharine speech about how there would be world peace if only all nations could agree to watch the Super Bowl together. Anyway, congratulations to Deidre Downs of Alabama, who looked pretty good in that micro-Speedo, and to runner up Jennifer Dupont of Louisiana, who says the secret to her swimsuit look is weight training. You can order your own officially licensed Miss America tiara here.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never -- Hey, They Rushed**

Last week San Francisco reached first-and-goal at the Atlanta 3 and went pass-wacky: incompleteness, incompleteness, interception on the deciding series of the game. Did the Niners learn? This week, San Francisco twice faced goal-to-go at the New Orleans 1. Both times the Squared Sevens ran, both times a touchdown.

### **Cognomen Update**

They're the Cincinnati Tootsie Rolls to TMQ as long as they stick with the candy-bar look they showed Sunday. Black and orange, plus they resemble a candy bar -- this team will be popular on Halloween!

### **Penalty of the Week**

Seattle leading City of Tampa 10-6 with 1:53 remaining, Blue Men Group defensive end Grant Wistrom was called for pass interference -- he was upfield in coverage on a zone blitz. Defensive ends don't often get flagged for pass interference in the secondary.

### **Monday Night Football Crew to Work Five-Second "Fact Delay" at Presidential Debates**

NFL.com has announced a five-second delay between when readers read a Tuesday Morning Quarterback item and when they get the joke. League spokesman Greg Aiello said the five-second delay would "allow us to maintain very high standards of decency, or alternatively, to maintain the normal TMQ standard."

Okay, it's been five seconds. You can laugh now.

### **When Not to Complain to the Refs**

Trailing 30-27 with 21 seconds remaining, San Francisco threw a receiver hitch-screen which gained 37 yards to the New Orleans 1, then was called back to almost midfield, essentially ending the contest. Niners fans went nuts, but this was another example of the big play that would not have occurred were it not for the infraction. Tight end Brian Jennings, split wide left, was called for offensive pass interference because he began blocking the Saints' right corner before the San Francisco back caught the ball. It's illegal to block downfield before the pass is caught, and if something is illegal in the first quarter, it ought to be illegal in the final minute as well. Equally important, without this illegal block at the point of attack, the San Francisco runner was unlikely to have made his big play. Niners' fans have no complaint.

### **The Ultimate Weight Loss Plan**

The ultimate weight loss plan would be to lose *all* your weight, and that's what a company called Zero-G is offering. The firm has modified a Boeing 727 for use in the "parabolic" flight maneuvers that NASA and the Air Force employ to simulate weightlessness for about 30 seconds. Pay \$2,950 and you'll receive a day of training plus the airplane flight, during which you feel weightless and can bounce and flip around in a padded chamber. Note that the company's FAQ page includes the reassuring question, "Will I be covered by insurance?" Like all weight loss plans, however, you tend to put the weight back on -- all of it, 30 seconds later.

### **Feel Better Now?**

The recent explosion that caused an enormous mushroom cloud in North Korea was not a nuclear bomb test, just an accident, analysts now believe. Oh, just an accident that caused an enormous mushroom cloud. Those zany North Koreans!

### **We're All Professionals Here No. 1**

Seattle and City of Tampa, which met Sunday, have a combined franchise won-loss record of 373-500.

### **We're All Professionals Here No. 2**

Dallas and Cleveland combined to throw interceptions on three of four possessions.

### **Crazy Passes Are, Well, Crazy**

Jake Delhomme, under tackle and being spun around, heave-hoed a *crazy* pass that came down in a teammate's hands for a touchdown -- but Jake, never ever do this again. The ball was snapped with the first-quarter score Kansas City 3, Carolina 0 and the Panthers having second-and-goal; Delhomme should have taken the sack and made it third-and-goal. His pass was *crazy*. On Sunday, Mark Brunell threw a crazy pass under tackle and being spun around, and it was intercepted. A. J. Feeley threw a crazy pass under tackle, and was very fortunate a teammate alertly knocked it down to prevent it from being intercepted. Crazy passes almost always backfire. Note that Feeley kept attempting crazy passes until one was picked and run back for a touchdown.

### **Have to Stand Behind the Buffalo Offensive Line**

TMQ's season prediction haiku for the Bills was:

Drew? Lamb to slaughter.  
League's most overpaid OL.  
The Buffalo Bills.  
-- *TMQ, 2004*

Ye gods was this true Sunday, as the Buffalo offensive line surrendered seven sacks to the below-average Oakland defense and got blown backwards on a critical test-of-manhood play. Buffalo trailing the Raiders 10-3 early in the fourth quarter, the Bills went for it on fourth-and-goal from the Oakland 1. It's a run for a change, but the offensive line gets stood up and Travis Henry never even reached the line of scrimmage. Blocking linemen with heart love it when coaches call runs on fourth-and-short, as this shows faith in the offensive line. Offensive linemen who are overpaid and lack heart get blown backwards on fourth-and-1 with the game on the line.

### **Ulysses He's Not**

Last week Jeremy Bloom, the skier-football player who has been crusading against the NCAA, took his grievance the U. S. House of Representatives where he won a hearing before a subcommittee of the Judiciary Committee. Bloom is the guy who has endorsement contracts as a professional skier, and as a result was bounced by the NCAA from the University of Colorado football team. For two years Bloom has been demanding in various fora -- lawsuits, congressional hearings, op-ed articles -- that he be allowed to keep his Colorado football scholarship plus his endorsement income.

Now, TMQ doesn't have much use for NCAA officialdom. This organization averts its eyes from colleges that park athletes in cupcake classes (Introduction to Cable Television Appreciation) or lets athletes skip class altogether then drop out, uneducated, when their eligibility is used up. But should a school improperly file a receipt for a double cheeseburger for a prospect, the wrath of Sauron descends! No, TMQ doesn't have much use for NCAA officialdom.

But in this case I'm on the side of the NCAA. Bloom uses the language of due process and freedom, but this is really about him demanding preferential treatment. First, Bloom wanted the free ride of a paid scholarship, plus his endorsement income. Then he said he'd keep skiing professionally but "give up" endorsement deals, with an asterisk that the money would go into an account that funds his skiing, which isn't really giving up the income. The NCAA allows men and women to renounce professionalism and become eligible for college play, but the rule -- 12.1.2(a) -- is explicit, the person must be "no longer involved in professional athletics." Bloom insists he should keep skiing professionally and also be on an NCAA team. That is, he wants the benefits of the college-football system, yet demands he personally be exempt from the rules of the system that creates those benefits. Jeremy, want to play? Play by the same rules that apply to everybody else.

When he isn't skiing or suing, Bloom also does a little male modeling. In the interests of equal-time beefcake, here he is shirtless.

### Movie Disclaimer Watch

The disclaimer for the new flick *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* warns of "stylized violence." Is "stylized violence" somehow different from "violence?"

### This Item Is Authentic But Fabricated

I don't know about you, but I am sick of both sides of the controversy regarding the decades-old military records of John Kerry and George W. Bush. Tuesday Morning Quarterback calls on partisans of both camps to drop this unseemly squabble and concentrate on questions that matter, such as what the candidates would do if elected. (Hmm, TMQ calls on the candidates -- that sounds statesmanlike!)

Covering the squabble, the *New York Times* declared last week that the dubious CBS News documents are "fake but accurate." No, I don't understand this either. My worry is that a standard of "fake but accurate" may proliferate through American culture -- it sounds rather modern, doesn't it? We've already got docudrama, in which the viewer is given no clue what part of the show is based on history and what part is dreamed up for ratings purposes. We've already got "fictionalized" books that blur the authentic and phony for sales purposes. We've already got Woodstein journalism in which reporters place quotation marks around statements that have been invented. Will we now have "fake but accurate" as an evidentiary standard? Next, perhaps, will be "real but imaginary."

### Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?

As Miami's offense struggles under A. J. Feeley -- who's thrown as many touchdown passes to the defense as to his teammates -- Jay Fielder sits nailed to the bench. As the Miami starter, Fiedler is 36-18, and that equals the fourth-best winning percentage among active quarterbacks. No, he's not sexy, but he wins games, which hasn't happened since Dave Wannstedt made the canny decision to go with Feeley. (Remember, Wannstedt endlessly vacillated about quarterbacks in Chicago, too.) On Sunday night, the Marine Mammals fielded an offense with just three starters the same as the unit that ended the 2003 season -- a 10-6 year for Miami, bear in mind. So winning offensive players have been cast aside for a group that is now 0-2.

### Springtime for Alpharetta

Often TMQ wonders how the rich stay that way when they seem so gullible about losing their money. Remember the 1998 multi-billion dollar implosion at Long Term Capital Management? This firm made investments for the super-rich, \$1 million being the smallest share a person could buy. It lost billions, leaving the super-rich super-fleeced. The great part was that this ultra-exclusive investment was *earning lower returns than S&P index funds*. If the investors who got hammered in the implosion of Long Term Capital Management had just called the 800 numbers of Fidelity or T. Rowe Price or any respectable mutual fund that's open to anyone, they would have had a higher returns in addition to no losses.

Comes now word that a bunch of rich people in the swank Atlanta suburb of Alpharetta appear to have been swindled by a con woman who raised money to publish a social register, then disappeared. Let's hope, in Max Bialystock style, she sold 100 percent of the venture dozens of times! What made me laugh about the story was the tip-off the wealthy marks didn't get: She claimed the social register would be delivered to subscribers by limousine. By limousine -- when a uniformed agent of the United States government will bring a magazine to your home for less than a dollar? Yet the rich investors believed this, and soon were parted from their money.

Announcement: Tuesday Morning Quarterback Enterprises is seeking investors for my new publication *TMQ Insider*, which will be delivered to subscribers' homes by scantily clad cheer-babes. Please send your checks today.

### By the Hammer of Grabthar, He Was Avenged!

Last year in Philadelphia's first home Monday Night appearance, which came in the season's first week, Eagles' tight end L.J. Smith dropped two perfectly thrown touchdown passes. Last night he held onto

one, for an 11-yard score, when Philadelphia went five-wide on first-and-10 from the Minnesota 11 and Vikings defenders were confused about who should guard an unexpectedly split tight end.

### **This Week's Stargate Complaint**

*Star Trek Enterprise* remains in cryogenic freeze, so it's time to complain about *Stargate Atlantis*, the new Sci Fi Channel offering, which appears to have set an all-time record by going into hiatus after just nine episodes. Last week's *Stargate Atlantis* was one of an increasingly annoying breed in sci-fi, the cliffhanger in which someone's about to die or something terrible is about to happen, then TO BE CONTINUED comes on the screen, and then months later, when the concluding episode appears, the problem at the end of the first part is solved in 15 seconds. But what's bugging TMQ is that it's only been nine episodes and already *Stargate Atlantis* scriptwriters have sunk to the worst Star Trek cliché -- someone takes over the ship. Or, in this case, the flying city.

In all Star Trek serials, the ship is constantly being taken over: Maybe guests receive welcoming packets that include a brochure titled, "Helpful Hints for Seizing Federation Starships." TMQ's favorite came in an episode of *Star Trek Voyager*. *An alien was not only able to take command of the entire ship by quickly punching a couple of buttons on a computer panel, the alien not only knew exactly what buttons to push in what order, but the panel that allow him to take command of the entire ship was located in the kitchen. Now, on Stargate Atlantis, a raiding party from another planet has taken over the entire city of Atlantis. As usual in these excruciatingly predictable plots, there's one good guy on the loose somewhere; all seems totally lost; one single person gradually takes back the ship (sorry, city); and then, after the raiders have stolen and smashed everything in sight, suddenly the entire ship (sorry, city) is completely fixed and exactly as it was before the bad guys arrived.*

Bonus *Stargate Atlantis* complaint: The Stargate crew is now fighting what is described as the most advanced evil aliens in the universe. Evil aliens so advanced they wiped out the Ancients, the benign beings who built Atlantis and once ruled the Milky Way. Yet in the *Stargate Atlantis* pilot movie, the good guys shoot down a spaceship of the ultra-advanced aliens using a bazooka! (Actually what the actors are holding appears to be a model of a "laws rocket," the modern equivalent of the bazooka, but unlikely in any case to be of tremendous use against ultra-advanced starcruisers.)

### **Preposterous Punt: the Digital Sequel**

Reader Kevin on the FootballOutsiders discussion board reports that he was playing as Houston against Buffalo on ESPN NFL 2K5, and when the electronic Bills faced fourth down on the Houston 33, they punted. Incredible realism!

### **Cheer-Babe Professionalism**

The football gods were restive on Sunday, for they allowed City of Tampa to lose though the Bucs' cheerleaders showed great professionalism by debuting skimpy halter-top numbers. You can order the oversexed -- not that we're complaining! -- 2005 Tampa cheerleader swimsuit calendar here. ("The most ambitious, attractive and memorable calendar ever put out by the team.") In Oakland, the Raiders struggled early, perhaps because the highly aesthetic Raiderettes opened the game in bulky parka-like attire. In the second quarter they stripped to scanty two-pieces; Oakland immediately took the lead it never relinquished. All was restored to normalcy on Monday Night, when the legendary Philadelphia cheer-babes flounced on the sidelines in just shy of nothing, despite a kickoff temperature at 61 degrees and falling. The football gods were propitiated, and the Eagles crowned with victory.

### **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

#### **Obscure College Score of the Week**

Pittsburg State of Kansas 69, Southwestern Baptist 0. Located in Pittsburg, Kan. -- the correct way to spell the name, according to locals -- Pitt State, TMQ's second-favorite obscure college, is home to "the nation's only Gorillas." This refers not to frat boys, rather, the fact that Gorillas is the school's sports nickname. Actual gorillas are docile vegetarians. Nevertheless, see Pitt State's menacing who-you-lookin'-at anthropoid image here [www.pittstategorillas.com](http://www.pittstategorillas.com). Recently the school's women's teams voted

to become the Lady Gorillas, abandoning their former name, the Gussies, and missing their chance to go really modern by becoming the Hussies. Note to Oklahoma, which kept passing in the fourth quarter a week ago in order to run up the score to 63-13 against Houston: Pittsburgh of Kansas did not pass in the fourth quarter against Southwestern Baptist.

### Bonus Obscure College Score

Menlo 48, Great Britain Bulldogs 7. The Bulldogs are champs of the British Collegiate American Football League, which has established a toehold for the sport in the United Kingdom. Here, check out the British Collegiate American Football League Hall of Fame, which begins in 1997. Menlo College of Atherton, California, has a Meditation Room adjacent to the student dining hall.

### Obscure College Patron

The Broncos recently awarded a roster slot to Menlo's Nate Jackson, who caught a pass Sunday. But Matt Kuligowski of Memphis, Tenn., notes the Detroit Peugeots have become the NFL patron of obscure colleges. The team's roster lists gentlemen from Carroll, Eastern Kentucky, Ferris State, Grand Valley State, McNeese State, Morris Brown, Mount Union and from TMQ's favorite obscure college, Indiana of Pennsylvania.

### Obscure College Comeback

Cheyney, which lost its three previous games by a combined 204-26, blanked West Virginia State University, 6-0. Cheyney coach Lee Brown's postgame speech: "Well, boys, we've cut the margin to 204-32."

### Cutting Edge Final Score Predictions

Owing to the *New York Times'* tragic decision to stop making inaccurate exact final score predictions for NFL games, the beloved TMQ item *New York Times* Final-Score Score has been retired. This new item looks at sundry attempts to predict exact final scores. Jeff Zillgitt of *USA Today* went 0-16 in his quixotic attempt to predict an exact NFL final score. His "Upset Special" of Pittsburgh 17, Baltimore 14, was upsetting only to him since Baltimore won 30-13. Zillgitt's "Lock of the Week," Green Bay 28, Bears 10 must be about as stout as those Kryptonite bike locks that can be picked using a Bic pen. The Bears won 21-10.

### Reader Animadversion

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown for mention in the column, and I may quote from your e-mail and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Regan Stradtman of Palm Bay, Fla., notes that last week I left Jax off the list of teams not slated for *Monday Night Football*, and since I predicted that the Super Bowl winner will be a non-MNF baby, that's important. Okay, Jax is now added to my prediction.

Sheila Blackman notes that the Green Bay cheesehead is made from foam, not plastic. Here's a web site devoted to cheesehead products <http://www.cheesehead.com>, including extremely scary Reggie-White-endorsed cheese cologne. Blackman's poetic effort:

Just call it Point beer.  
Foam on our heads, not plastic  
at frozen tundra.  
-- Sheila Blackman, Green Bay

Regarding the Donghu Hotel in Wuhan, China, which boasts "a slap-up feast with zero service," John deWeerd of Stratford, Ontario, explains half of this boast: "Slap-up is a British phrase used to describe a hearty and informal meal, usually enjoyed in a raucous atmosphere and in the company of friends, as

evidenced by this quote from the famed British comedy Blackadder: 'Thruppence for a celebratory slap-up binge at Mrs. Miggins' pie shop.'" Ken Potter, a United States Marine stationed in Taipei, read the Donghu website in Mandarin and says the characters translated as "slap-up" and says they mean "of high quality." J.D. Harriman of Los Angeles, who works for a multinational law firm, reports that a colleague read the Mandarin version and thinks "zero service" means you order what you want, rather than receiving a fixed meal. Harriman liked this other nonsensical line from the English version of the Donghu site: "The celebrated kitcheners do it in person, the appetizing delicacy, tea and pastries from soup to nuts." Ben Steele, who reports that "as far as I can tell, I am the only Colts fan living in Beijing," proposes that the Mandarin phrase the hotel translates as "zero service" actually means no service charge added. Guangqi Ye of Baltimore provides what looks like the final answer. "Zero service" is the literal translation of an idiom for 24-hour room service -- there is zero time when there is no service.

Joshua Gilliland, a grad student living in Shanghai, recommends this website [www.english.com](http://www.english.com), which is chock with amusing mis-translations, most of them Japanese to English. Regarding the Hebrew phrases that have been showing up in the column recently, Hamilton Lau of Tokyo asks if someone can translate the TMQ signature phrase "for thong-based reasons" into Hebrew.

Many readers including LaShawna Smith of Reisterstown, Md., told me I was wrong to blame retired broadcaster Deion Sanders for blowing the coverage on Quincy Morgan's touchdown catch in the Ravens-Browns game. Ed Reed, it seems, was the guilty party.

Last week TMQ noted that Fox Sports tried to predict exact NFL scores using the video game I called "ESPN NFL 25K." Actually the game is ESPN NFL 2K5. Jim Herron of El Cerrito, Califa., offered, "I'm not surprised Fox got the score wrong using ESPN NFL 25K, since the code for that game contains stats from the year 2499."

TMQ refers to the ends of games as the moment of "double zeros." Kabir Akhtar of Los Angeles points out that most game clocks show 0:00, not 0:0 or 00:00, and therefore TMQ should call this moment "triple zeros." Mr. Data, make it so!

Lisa Yost asks, "Is there a time limit as to when a flag can be thrown? In their opening game the 49ers passed for a first down, went to the huddle, called a play, and were starting to the line when a ref threw a flag and called offensive pass interference." I didn't see it, so I can't comment -- a very referee-like position to take! But Lisa, just be glad that Star Trek referees from the future don't start traveling backward in time to make calls in games that have already ended.

Many beers advertise they are refreshing when cold or are cold-filtered or shipped cold and so on; "cold" and "beer" are two words pleasant in conjunction. John Zakarian of Kansas City, Mo., notes that Coors now says it is the "coldest-tasting" beer. Zakarian asks, does cold itself have a taste? Could Swiss Miss be the "warmest-tasting" hot-chocolate? November note: To TMQ the big election this fall is not for the presidency but for the Senate seat from Colorado. This race pits beer gent Pete Coors against Ken Salazar, who was TMQ's classmate at Colorado College.

I wondered why Miami University doesn't play University of Miami every fall in football, and speculated the southern of the two is worried it would lose. Hashim Abdullah of Miami (of Florida, not Ohio) points out that the two did meet on the gridiron in 1987, and the Hurricanes won 54-3. "That might be the biggest reason why they haven't played since," Abdullah proposes.

Apropos my contention that Oklahoma has once again offended the football gods by passing repeatedly in the fourth quarter though ahead 56-7 against Houston, Pierijn van der Putt of Utrecht, the Netherlands, supposes, "When you're shooting for greatness, you shouldn't shy away from angering the gods." He notes that European soccer fans "have to watch unsportsmanlike conduct every week, with soccer players faking injury, elbowing opponents in the jaw." Running up the score within the rules is genteel by comparison, van der Putt says.

Ryan Miller of New Concord, Ohio, points out the Cardinals are named after a bird that is indigenous to the Midwest, whereas the state bird of Arizona is the cactus wren, which nests in the saguaro cactus that is the state's symbol. So, Miller suggests, how about the Arizona Cactus Wrens? Bear in mind that for years, TMQ has referred to this team as the Arizona (CAUTION: MAY CONTAIN FOOTBALL-LIKE

SUBSTANCE) Cardinals. But considering the arrival of Dennis Green, I'm willing to give Arizona Cactus Wrens a try. Mr. Data, make it so!

### Last Week's Challenge

Tired of sportscasters who constantly say "he's one of the most underrated players" -- TMQ has heard this said of people who make Wheaties boxes -- I asked, who is the *least* underrated NFL performer?

An amazing number of readers, in fact a strong majority, locked in on Brett Favre. The objection was that while Favre is obviously good, sportswriters and on-air bobbleheads adulate him to excess, while rarely criticizing mistakes they would blast in others. For instance, Favre heard little sports-world criticism for his wild heave-ho interception in overtime against Philadelphia in last season's playoffs; he threw up a wild heave-ho INT on Sunday against Chicago, too, so that's two wild interceptions in his last three outings.

Mike Thiede of Oskaloosa, Iowa, summed the argument: "Although I'm a diehard Packers fan and born and raised in Wisconsin, in my opinion, Brett Favre is the least underrated player in the NFL. I believe Favre is one of the greatest QBs ever, but sports announcers exaggerate his merit. John Madden speaks as though Favre not only walks on water, but also invented the water." See Favre for what he is, readers begged -- a great quarterback who sometimes throws crazy interceptions. Don't pretend he's some demigod.

No. 2 for this distinction among readers was Peyton Manning, whom readers also considered good but excessively praised. Heather Howell of Gaithersburg, Md., wrote, "Where would he be without Marvin Harrison to throw to?" Andrea Cummings of Omaha, Neb., wrote, "Peyton Manning is good, but not that much better, in stats or wins, than a dozen other quarterbacks. Yet he seems to get 10 times as much attention." Matt Mitchell was one of many to name Michael-Mike Vick. "Although he may someday be the best NFL player, he's marketed as if he already is," Mitchell protested.

Vincent Vignola of Québec proposes Jeremy Shockey. Frequent injuries and pass drops aside, insufferable boasting aside, the crux of Vignola's case is that through his much-hyped career, Shockey he has fumbled exactly as many times as he as caught a touchdown pass. Nathan Jensen of Ephrata, Wash., notes that Shockey made the Pro Bowl after the 2002 season despite appearing in only nine games. That's least-underrated all the way! He haikuizes of Shockey,

Injured nearly all  
year, still picked for the Pro Bowl.  
Hype exceeds his deeds.  
-- *Nathan Jensen, Ephrata, Wash.*

Jeff Marion of Eugene, Ore., dubs Tom Brady least underrated because "while he's quite good, it is absurd for the media to call someone who has won two Super Bowl MVP awards 'underrated.'" TMQ heard Brady described as "underrated" by the announcers during the NFL opening night game. Brady's even on the cover of the 2004 *NFL Record and Fact Book*, the league's official source authority. And people say he's underrated! Apropos TMQ's new policy of shameless praise for Challenge winners, Marion adds, "If I win, you may refer to me as the most underrated sales manager in Eugene, Ore."

Jake Berg of Oswego, N.Y., noted that NFL.com's own Gil Brandt recently described Hines Ward as an "unsung hero" even though Ward has been to the Pro Bowl three times and been named the Pittsburgh MVP. That makes Ward a least-underrated gent.

Ken Barth of Pittsburgh nominates tackle Walter Jones, who for three straight years has skipped training camp, yet keeps making the Pro Bowl. Because Seahawks games are almost never shown to East Coast viewers, however, Jones is barely known to too much of the NFL fan base, making it hard to put him on the least underrated inventory.

Jere Northridge of State College, Penn., nominates former Vikings tailback Leroy Hoad, who reportedly once said, "When you need a yard, I'll get you three. When you need five, I'll get you three." The quote is too good to check, as writers say.

Amy Misciasci of Tampa, Fla., calls Ray Lewis least underrated: "He is indeed a great player, but I'm fed up with the slavish attention heaped upon him in every broadcast, especially his barking before games. Doesn't he have teammates? You'd never know."

Doyle Bedingfield of La Belle, Fla., suggests Joey Galloway, in whom three No. 1 picks have been invested (one by Seattle, two by Dallas) and yet whose career yards-per-season average of about 700 yards is unremarkable.

Many readers, including Yuval Shapira, a Philadelphia Nesharim fan in Tel Aviv, Israel, nominated Eli Manning as least underrated -- subject of enormous promotion before he'd done anything. Tammy Kelly, a librarian at the Truman Presidential Library in Independence, Mo., seconded the Manning nomination. Kelly, a Chiefs fan, says she would prefer the male-model-esque Jesse Palmer at quarterback for the Giants in any case.

TMQ fingers Eli Manning as the least underrated player: Receiving huge amounts of publicity and money before you actually do anything is the essence of being least underrated. Kelly takes this week's Challenge. In keeping with this year's policy, her prize is a quotation of shameless praise: "Tammy Kelly is a highly accomplished librarian. Future historians will be glad that vital presidential documents were placed under her care." Put that in your resume, Tammy, and just leave out that it was NFL.com that said this about you.

### **This Week's Challenge**

Victor Moreno of Querétaro, México, proposed this Challenge -- devise mythology for the football gods. What are their names? Their powers? Who slew whom and smote what when they came into being? Propose your mythology using the link at Reader Animadversion. Short suggestions for one or two football gods are all that's required -- I'll put them together into a panoply.

### **Next Week**

Read more, think less! Get the new Tuesday Morning Quarterback low-carb edition.



## TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

### Watch football to honor education, plus beware the wrath of Lambasthor!

**By Gregg Easterbrook**  
**Special to NFL.com**

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Sept. 28, 2004) -- There will be a brief interruption for a book report on an important new work, *The Meaning of Sports* by Michael Mandelbaum. This gentleman is a distinguished analyst of foreign policy, whose previous volumes include such efforts as *The Rise of Nations in the Soviet Union*. TMQ opened the new book with trepidation since I thought I had the Brookings fellow-moonlighting sportswriter market pretty much to myself. Now another egghead jumps into the field -- hey, the competition gets stiffer every year. Luckily for me, the Brookings Institution does not test for steroids.

Mandelbaum concludes his book by supposing, "It is possible that baseball, basketball and football will become less important" in the coming century. Say it isn't so! Of course, a lot of things are *possible*. It's possible that Anna Kournikova will return my phone calls.

*The Meaning of Sports* is most intriguing when it analyzes why Americans are so nuts about organized games. Baseball, basketball and football all arose at about the same time, the late 19th century -- just as the United States was becoming industrial, Mandelbaum notes, and just as the public-school movement became earnest. Prior to the late 19th century, few worked in factories, while completion of high school was rare. "The industrial revolution created a world in which the skills needed for productive work could no longer all be acquired within the family or within guilds," Mandelbaum writes. "School provided the setting not only in which skills were learned but also in which games were organized. The association between sports and school began in the private English academies that trained the leaders of the British Empire. From them, sports spread to institutions open to all children, first in Britain and then in North America."

Before the late 19th century brought widespread attendance at public schools, often children worked full-time from age 12 onward, especially on farms, and what time was allotted for play was spent at Tom Sawyer-style activities. Once most boys and girls experienced a 16-year or 18-year childhood centered around school, organized sports replaced stickball and rock hunting, and most fields for organized sports were located at schools. Educators thought organized sports were beneficial because they taught teamwork under pressure: and the industrial revolution relied on people able to work together in difficult circumstances, whereas labor in the old agricultural economy was mainly a loner's pursuit. Millions of people participated in sports during schooling, then left school obsessed with following sports as adults. "Watching others play these games became a way of recapturing their own past," Mandelbaum writes, a form of continuous nostalgia for schoolboy and schoolgirl days.

That's a pretty smart analysis. You'd be well advised to obtain a copy of *The Meaning of Sports*, one of the most thoughtful works ever on sport and society. But think about what Mandelbaum has shown -- sports obsession was caused by universal schooling. So how can sports mania be bad? It's a sign of our love of learning! Get me the remote, the swimsuit calendars and some microbrew fast; I want to demonstrate my commitment to education.

In other NFL news, league spokesman Greg Aiello announced that if the Indianapolis Colts and the Green Bay Packers meet in the Super Bowl, all defensive backs will be replaced by highway patrolmen on motorcycles.

And in still other NFL news, there's no matchup of undefeated teams this weekend. It's only Week 3 and there are just five possible pairings of undefeated teams left in 2004 -- Seattle at New England on Oct. 17, Jersey/B at New England on Oct. 24 and Seattle at Jersey/B, New England at Jersey/B and Atlanta at Seattle so late in the season it's highly unlikely both clubs will enter unbeaten. Could it be that already, we have seen the last of collisions between teams without a defeat?

### **Stats of the Week**

The league's top five defensive teams -- Denver, Seattle, Washington, Buffalo and Miami -- have a combined record of 6-8.

### **Stats of the Week No. 2**

The league's top five offensive teams -- Indianapolis, Minnesota, Jersey/A, Philadelphia and New England -- have a combined record of 11-3.

### **Stats of the Week No. 3**

Jacksonville is 3-0 despite being 6 of 34 on third-down conversion attempts.

### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Jacksonville has done much better on fourth down (4 of 4) than third down (6 of 34).

### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

In the first half, Indianapolis and Green Bay combined for 516 yards passing and seven passing touchdowns vs. 57 yards rushing and no rushing touchdowns.

### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

Shaun Alexander has more touchdowns than the entire Arizona and Miami teams combined.

### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

Stretching back to last season, Kansas City followed a 13-3 run with an 0-4 run.

### **Stats of the Week No. 8**

Indianapolis opened by throwing on 22 consecutive snaps.

### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

Morten Andersen, who Sunday set the NFL record for most games played, has scored 965 points since the New Orleans Saints waived him a decade ago, declaring him washed up.

### **Literary Cheerleader of the Week**

Only cheerleaders who list serious books or authors as their favorites are eligible for this distinction. Gonzalo Montes de Oca proposed Wendy of the San Francisco Gold Rush, who says her favorite book is *Great Expectations*. According to her team bio, Wendy's occupation is "academic assistant" -- that's fairly bookish -- and she says the hardest part of being a cheerleader is "fighting the common stereotypes." Including, presumably, the common stereotype that cheer-babes read nothing more challenging than *Who Moved My Cheese*. Wendy, TMQ's new Literary Cheerleader of the Week item, is fighting the stereotype!

## NFL in Lebanon Update

Reader Charbel Eid of Lebanon reports that in his country, viewers typically are offered eight NFL games ("live matches," as local programming guides say) each weekend, meaning Lebanese viewers see more of the NFL than American viewers. Four competing broadcast and cable carriers in Lebanon have rights to NFL games, resulting in eight offerings. Fox Sports Middle East lists choices through Thursday.

## Why Are You Punting?????

Trailing 27-7 at the beginning of the fourth quarter, Detroit faced fourth-and-10 on the Philadelphia 44. You're down 20 points in the fourth quarter, you are in opposition territory, you must go for it! In trots the punting unit, boom goes the punt into the end zone for the touchback and a net field-position gain of 24 yards. Steve Mariucci might as well have left to get a blueberry-almond martini, since he announced Detroit was no longer attempting to win the game, rather, was playing to contain the margin of defeat. In the NFL, there's no BCS poll that penalizes margin of victory -- better to go down gambling and lose big than play to contain the margin of defeat.

## Why Are You Kicking?

Trailing 17-0 at the beginning of the fourth quarter, the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1) faced fourth-and-14 on the Giants' 32. In came the field-goal unit. Sure this is long yardage, but you're trailing big in the fourth quarter, you've got to gamble! In the NFL, there's no BCS poll that penalizes margin of victory -- better to go down gambling and lose big than play to contain the margin of defeat. Field goal makes it 17-3, Cleveland never threatens again.

Sadly, there is an incentive in the NFL to contain the margin of defeat. Mariucci's game ended Philadelphia 30, Detroit 13. Suppose he'd gone down gambling and lost 37-7 instead. The standings would be the same but at the end of the season, when Detroit management was debating whether to keep the coach on, a strike against him might be, "Look, we lost to the Eagles by 30 points." Punting when far behind is not irrational from the standpoint of coach's job protection. But the coach who cares should be pulling out all the stops to win, not thinking ahead to his performance review meeting in January.

## Preposterous Punt Avoided

Leading 13-10 in the third quarter on a windy day, Denver faced fourth-and-9 on the San Diego 33. This is the area Tuesday Morning Quarterback calls the Maroon Zone, where it may be too far for a field goal but is preposterous to punt. Maroon Zone performance is a neglected key to winning football. Denver went for it and stunned the Bolts by throwing deep to Ashley Lelie, who was single-covered despite an obvious passing situation. A touchdown and the game's decisive play.

## Sweet Play of the Week (Halfback Pass No. 1)

Richie Anderson not only threw a 26-yard touchdown that proved the deciding points against Washington, he took the handoff and took five full strides, really selling his fake, before looking up. Often gentlemen throwing the halfback pass start looking nervously up the field the instant they get the ball, which tells the safeties it's a trick play. Anderson sold so well, he should go into multi-level marketing.

## Sweet Play of the Week (Halfback Pass No. 2)

San Diego faced third-and-6 at midfield. LaDainian Tomlinson took the handoff sweeping right. He stopped and looked back left. Now, this can't be the high-school play where the tailback throws to the quarterback! A completion to Drew Brees -- who actually wants to play quarterback in San Diego -- for a gain of 38.

## Sweet Play of the Week No. 3

Leading San Francisco 10-0, the Blue Men Group faced first-and-goal on the Niners' 3. TMQ's immutable

law of the goal line holds that if you're going to play-action do it on first down, when the opponent is thinking run. A Seattle receiver comes left for the fake end-around; Matt Hasselbeck rolls right; easy touchdown to Shaun Alexander in the flat, and the 'Hawks never looked back.

### But What Have You Done for Us Lately?

Javon Walker of Green Bay had 11 receptions for 198 yards and three touchdowns -- and ended up the goat, owing to a late fumble.

### Glam Mag Concludes: Sex Is Not Sexy

Each September, TMQ chortles over the "What's Sexy Now?" edition of *InStyle* magazine, which runs more pages of designer ads and celebrity fluff than the monthly content of all intellectual publications combined. This year's "What's Sexy Now?" issue of *InStyle* is 620 pages. *The Sun Also Rises* is 251 pages.

Three years ago, *InStyle* pondered the question of "What's Sexy Now?" and came to the highly counterintuitive conclusion that what's sexy now is naked babes. The mag's cover featured Kate Hudson naked, hands strategically placed, and quoted her declaring, "I love being nude!" Two years ago, *InStyle* pondered the question of "What's Sexy Now?" and came to the dreary conclusion: Jennifer Aniston fully clothed. Last year, *InStyle* hit rock bottom, concluding that "What's Sexy Now?" was Britney Spears showing her underpants. This year, the "What's Sexy Now?" cover is Halle Berry -- who, scientists have confirmed, is quite sexy. But the celebrity forth that follows is as bad as ever. TMQ's timesaving concise version:

**Halle Berry:** "There's something very bohemian about wearing animal prints, that's sexy to me ... for most of my life I've dreamt that while I'm talking, my teeth start flying out of my mouth and I run around the room trying to catch them ... cats are truly sexy, my marriage may have fallen apart but I have a great new cat."

**Matt LeBlanc:** "I like to get in and just disappear into a bed ... beauty only goes so far, if I'm looking for something that lasts a little longer, it's the girl that has something between her ears." Note, "who" has something between her ears is correct, but you would need something between your ears to know this.

**Alicia Silverstone:** "There's nothing sexier than sleeping on hemp sheets, hemp is not sprayed with fertilizers and pesticides like cotton is ... what's important to me is that a man be open, communicative, really funny, adorable, charming, intelligent, responsible, powerful and sexy." Any other requirements?

**Andre 3000:** "The one chance you have to be yourself is in your bed, so I luxuriate and let my body breathe. If I were camping with friends, I'd wear flannels because you can't walk around a cabin half-naked."

**Heather Graham:** "In high school I really wanted a water bed, but now I think it would make me seasick ... I'm into being naked on high-thread-count sheets." Her advice to other women: "Find a nice guy." So that's the secret!

Ultimately "What's Sexy Now?" must be -- nothing, since *InStyle* interviewed a dozen celebrities, and none said anything about their likes or dislikes when it comes to sex itself.

### Early Blitzes Are Like Yeast

This week, big blitzing worked for Philadelphia, Jersey/A, Dallas and other teams. Do not be deceived. Early in the season, defense has the advantage. As the year progresses, offensive lines won't miss so many blitz pick-ups, and the big blitz will begin to backfire. Mark my words. In fact ...

### Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!

Torry Holt of Les Mouflons snagged a long touchdown against a six-blitz; Ronald Curry of Oakland caught his touchdown against a six blitz; Randy Moss' second touchdown came against a seven-blitz; Javon Walker scored a 79-yard touchdown against a blitz and Detroit's sole spark, a touchdown drive at the end of the first half, came on a series when Philadelphia safety-blitzed twice.

But nothing compares to the blitz-induced meltdown Green Bay brought upon itself at Indianapolis. In the first half, the Packers blitzed as much as TMQ has ever seen, coming on most Colts' downs, and not just five-man blitzes but six- and seven-man. Twice Green Bay blitzed eight, which you almost never see since it is, after all, an engraved invitation for the offense to score a touchdown. The result of Green Bay's blitz mania was a fiasco. Indianapolis gained 247 yards in the first quarter alone -- a rate of 988 yards per game!

With the game tied 14-14 late in the first quarter, Green Bay had Indianapolis facing second-and-10. Eight-man blitz, almost effortless 34-yard touchdown pass to Brandon Stokley, no Packer in his general area. Now it's the second quarter, with Indianapolis up 21-14 and surely the Packers have rethought. Indianapolis faces third-and-18. Since the typical NFL pass attempt yields about seven yards, all the Packers have to do is play straight defense and the odds favor a stop. Instead, it's a blitz! Six gentlemen cross the line, 34-yard touchdown to Stokley and the Packers have dug themselves quite a hole. On the next Indianapolis series -- now it's Colts 28, Packers 17 -- Green Bay switched to conventional defense and got a quick three-and-out. On the series after that, Green Bay returned to blitzing, quick Indianapolis touchdown.

First-half bottom line? Discounting a kneel-down with 10 seconds left, there were five Indianapolis possessions on which Green Bay blitzed, resulting in five Indianapolis touchdowns; one Indianapolis possession on which Green Bay did not blitz, resulting in a three-and-out. Why do sportswriters, broadcasters and, often, coaches find these relationships so difficult to grasp?

### **Agents to Publish a Calendar with Photos of Their Pet Weasels**

Most NFL teams now produce steamy cheer-babe swimsuit calendars; a few have dipped their toes into beefcake calendars with players shirtless; will it all lead to pet calendars? Members of the Detroit Lions brought their dogs to be photographed for a calendar for charity.

### **Curious Tactics After Midnight**

Trailing by 3, the Redskins got to the Dallas 21 on the final play at 12:29 a.m. ET, but could not stop the clock to attempt a field goal; Joe Gibbs lost his third timeout by challenging a Dallas play that was sure to be upheld. That was far from the only instance in which Professor Dumbledore looked considerably less than an all-seeing wizard. Earlier in the half, Gibbs lost his second timeout when he called it after Dallas was assessed a timeout on a failed challenge -- the action had been stopped for several minutes, then Gibbs called timeout! Sixteen seconds remaining in the first half, the Potomac Nanticokes were out of timeouts at the Dallas 1, and Redskins coaches called a play-action pass. But the Skins had just been stuffed on two consecutive runs from the 1. Who was going to fall for a play-fake at that point? Not the Cowboys, and the ball clanged to the ground incomplete.

### **Curious Tactics, Dr. Watson (Kickoff Edition No. 1)**

Scoring to make it 25-22 with 36 seconds in regulation, St. Louis squib-kicked to New Orleans. Thought TMQ, *AaaaaiiiiiiiiiyyyyyyyyeEEEE!* squibs are advised in the final minute if the opponent must go the length of the field for a touchdown, or if the clock is mere ticks away from all zeds (see below). But New Orleans only needed a field goal and was holding all three time outs, which meant it would be able to run five plays in the remaining time. The squib resulted in Saints' ball on their 42 -- even better than if Les Mouflons had kicked off out of bounds. Three plays later the Saints kicked the tying field goal; New Orleans won in overtime. Ye gods.

### **Curious Tactics, Dr. Watson (Kickoff Edition No. 2)**

True, Tennessee was down to a wing and a prayer when it lined up to receive a kickoff trailing 15-13 with 9 seconds remaining. True, anyone except the Buffalo Bills expects a trick-play return in this

situation, so the chance of success is slight. But who's going to fall for a Home Run Throwback? Needing a desperation return, the Flaming Thumbtacks called the play they used four years ago on the most famous desperation return in NFL history, the 'Music City Miracle' that has been seen on highlight reels hundreds of times. Since the play was expected, why not fake a throwback? Jacksonville was waiting, and dropped the throwback receiver for an 8-yard loss to end the contest.

Of course the problem may have been that Sunday, the Titans actually threw the lateral backwards. If they'd thrown a forward pass, like in the 'Music City Miracle', maybe they'd have won! TMO's pal and former boss Charlie Peters, founder of the Washington Monthly, was sitting at what's now called FedEx Field on the day of the 'Miracle', waiting for the Redskins to play the late start. (Charlie is a politically liberal male NFL fanatic, but I have no intention of opening that demographic.) The FedEx crowd knows Frank Wycheck, the tight end who threw the 'Miracle', because Wycheck performed at the University of Maryland. Peters reports that when the clip of the play was shown on the Jumbotron, he looked up and said, "I can't believe they put Frank Wycheck in at quarterback!" Quarterbacks throw forward passes, was his point.

### **Best Blocks**

Just because you're 41 years old and been held to catches in only 275 of your last 276 games doesn't mean you can't block! Oakland and City of Tampa tied at 6 late in the second quarter, Jerry Rice cleaned out a Bucs' defender in front of the receiver hitch screen, clearing the way for Ronald Curry's 19-yard touchdown catch. The Raiders never looked back.

### **Worst Blocks No. 1**

Kansas City has one of the league's best offensive lines, but something went badly wrong when it was Chiefs 21, Moo Cows 21 with three minutes remaining and Kansas City facing third-and-12. The Chiefs kept seven to block, yet Texans' linebacker Antwan Peek, lined up in the guard-tackle gap, came untouched by human hands to sack Trent Green. Punt, and Houston drove for the winning field goal.

### **Worst Blocks No. 2**

The Washington Redskins have one of the league's worst offensive lines, so something went badly normal as they surrendered five sacks on *Monday Night Football*. Redskins coaches entered the game expecting a terrible line performance; since they had Mark Brunell sprinting backwards so far he must have been carrying a passport in case he left the country. Third-and-1 in the second quarter, Brunell sprints far backwards, pass incomplete. Third-and-3 in the third quarter, Brunell sprints far backwards, passes for just 2 yards and it's a long throw to get it back to the line. Fourth-and-1 in the third quarter, Brunell sprints far backwards, pass incomplete. Brunell was rolling out and sprinting far backward regularly, yet still got sacked five times.

Worst among Redskins blockers was the extremely overpaid tackle Chris Samuels. Dallas leading 7-0 in the second quarter, the Redskins face second-and-7. All extremely overpaid tackle Chris Samuels has to do is "chip" -- he doesn't even have a man, merely is supposed to help with another man. What Samuels does is brush La'Roi Glover, then stand watching as Glover sacks Mark Brunell. Samuels couldn't be bothered to produce even half a block! A few snaps later, as Clinton Portis ran, TMO espied Samuels doing absolutely nothing -- just standing up at the snap and then looking around, not even going through the pretense of giving effort. TMO counted half a dozen plays on which Samuels was standing, doing nothing, while the quarterback or runner madly tried to evade the Dallas defense.

### **Health Researchers Warn of Galactic Obesity**

Astronomers discovered an enormous cloud of sugar floating near the center of the Milky Way. Well -- of course there is sugar in a Milky Way! A National Science Foundation statement reports, "The astronomers detected the eight-atom sugar molecule glycolaldehyde in a gas-and-dust cloud called Sagittarius B2. Such clouds, often light-years across, are the raw material from which stars and planets are formed. The astronomers detected the same molecule in a warmer part of that cloud in 2000, but the new detection shows that the sugar exists at an extremely low temperature -- only 8 degrees above absolute zero." So there are not only clouds of sugar floating in space, the sugar is in a state of frozen

confection. If astronomers discover enormous deep-space clouds of artificial sweetener, this would be the first proof of alien life.

If you're wondering how there could be clouds of sugar light-years across, many carbon-based compounds form naturally in stellar nebulae. Clouds of amino acids, the building block of proteins, have been found in deep space. In the case of the interstellar sugar, "Glycoaldehyde is composed of two carbon atoms, two oxygen atoms and four hydrogen atoms. Glycolaldehyde can react with three-carbon sugar to produce a five-carbon sugar called ribose. Ribose molecules form the backbone structure of the molecules DNA and RNA." That huge amounts of the materials used by life are observed floating through space is considered a major clue about how life began – and one of the reasons we are unlikely to be alone in the cosmos.

### "It's 59 to 3, Clint, and We'll Be Back in a Minute"

Fans constantly grumble about the games local network affiliates choose to show -- but you never know in advance which games will turn out hot. The question is, why don't local affiliates switch *once they do know*? In the nation's capital where TMQ lurks, the Sunday early slots saw Philadelphia at Detroit on Fox and Baltimore at Cincinnati on CBS. The Fox affiliate stayed with every sleep-inducing snap even as Philadelphia-Detroit became a 27-7 blowout, while the New Orleans-St. Louis game was going into overtime. The CBS affiliate stayed with every sleep-inducing snap even as Baltimore-Cincinnati became a 23-9 blowout, while the Houston-Kansas City game was going down to the final play. *Once you do know* which games are no longer contested and which ones are red hot, why do local affiliates stay with the dull games and not switch to exciting ones?

### Sour Matching Plays of the Week

Game scoreless, Philadelphia Nesharim at Detroit Peugeotts, Donovan McNabb completes a 48-yard pass to Freddie Mitchell -- who is covered on the deep post only by a linebacker, Earl Holmes. Two plays later Bryant Westbrook lines up as a wide receiver; a pass interference on the defender puts the ball at first-and-goal on the Detroit 1; the defender was a linebacker, James Davis, the only gentlemen lined up across from Westbrook.

**Pass-Wacky Update** St. Louis has called 124 passes (attempts plus sacks) and 60 runs, a two-to-one pass ratio. This figure is worst in the league, and it's added up to a 1-2 record. This has not been because Les Mouflons have been trying to make up big deficits, as two of their three games have been close all the way.

### Season-Changing Play of the Week No. 1

It was Kansas City 14, Houston 6 in the third quarter, Chiefs second and goal on the Moo Cows' 2, when Trent Green threw his careless pass into coverage that Marcus Coleman returned 102 yards for a touchdown. Instead of going ahead 21-6 and starting to cruise, Kansas City found itself tied at 14; the game was lost on Houston's last-second field goal, and the Chiefs' season may be lost at 0-3. Why did Kansas City, a top rushing team, go pass-wacky on second and goal? TMQ constantly cautions that if you want to play-action at the goal line do it on first down, when the opponent is thinking run, not on second down, when the opponent has just stuffed a run and is thinking pass. If the Kansas City season is lost, this play may be seen as the key -- all because the Chiefs failed simply to run straight ahead in a situation when running straight ahead is odds-on to work. (Last season 54 percent of rushes on second and goal resulted in a touchdown, according to FootballOutsiders [www.footballoutsiders.com](http://www.footballoutsiders.com).)

### Season-Changing Play of the Week No. 2

According to the league's official Game Book, when the Dolphins took on the Steelers, the weather was "mostly cloudy." Okay, deep standing water on the field is not, technically, weather. But the conditions were the same for both sides; Pittsburgh adjusted and Miami did not. If the Miami season is lost at 0-3, the following sequence may be seen as the reason. Trailing 3-0 in the third quarter, the Dolphins faced third and 1 on their 47. Run stuffed for no gain. Miami went on fourth and 1, run stuffed for no gain. Standing water or not, an NFL team must be able to gain one yard in two tries.

## Are They Really Sure About That 20 Minutes?

The Bureau of Labor Statistics published the first-ever detailed survey of how Americans of today use their time. What struck TMQ about the research is how similar men and women sounded in time-use. Men do about one hour more paid work per day than women, who do about one hour more unpaid labor (house chores and caring for others) than men. Scary part of the Bureau of Labor Statistics study – Americans use exactly half of their precious leisure time in their brief stay on this Earth to watch television. Americans spend on average 2.5 hours per day watching TV, compared to 20 minutes thinking.

## Equal-Time Beefcake

Elaine Merrill of Chicago writes, "I would like to suggest you no longer refer to the 'male-model-esque Tom Brady.' Surely he has attained the status of simply male model, as he is now appearing in magazine print ads for The Gap." Merrill reports that she is a politically liberal Flaming Thumbtacks fan with a Ph.D. in neurobiology -- this liberal female scientist football enthusiast demographic is getting out of hand! She adds, "I have just provided you with a perfectly legitimate excuse for a beefcake shot of Brady."

## Curse of the Florida Quarterbacks

Brad Johnson and the male-model-esque A.J. Feeley have already combined to throw three interceptions returned for touchdowns. Since being handed the Marine Mammals' job, Feeley has won no games, thrown two touchdown passes to his own team and two to the other team. Sunday night, Feeley tossed picks on each of the first two Miami possessions, starting the Dolphins in a hole they never climbed out of. But he looks marvelous with his moussed hair!

Let me quote from last week's column, changing only the Dolphins' record and the fact that Miami just benched another starter (Wade Smith) from its 2003 offense, now having only two starters the same as last season, when the team went 10-6: "Jay Fiedler remains nailed to the bench. As the Miami starter, Fiedler is 36-18, and that equals the fourth-best winning percentage among active quarterbacks. No, he's not sexy, but he wins games: which hasn't happened since Dave Wannstedt made the canny decision to go with Feeley. (Remember, Wannstedt vacillated about quarterbacks in Chicago, too.) On Sunday night, the Marine Mammals fielded an offense with just two starters the same as the unit that ended the 2003 season -- a 10-6 year for Miami, bear in mind. So winning offensive players have been cast aside for a group that is now 0-3."

## Of Course, If the Polling Error Was Plus or Minus 50 Percent...

This poll by the Annenberg Public Policy Center found that only 9 percent of American Indians considered the name Washington Redskins to be offensive. Reaction of TMQ, who's been crusading against this name for years: Now they tell me!

## Ernest Wilford Play of the Week

Who-dat rookie Ernest Wilford of Jacksonville now has three career catches -- two that were game-winning touchdowns, one on Sunday that sustained the Jaguars' drive for their last-second win. In the final two minutes, TMQ and my nine-year-old, Spenser, a Jax fan, were chanting "ERRR-nest WILLL-ford, ERRR-nest WILLL-ford."

## Sominex Presents the NFL Game of the Week

Atlanta 6, Arizona 3. More punts (11) and more sacks (11) than total points by both teams.

## Crazy Pass of the Week

Baltimore leading the Cincinnati Candy Corns (see below) by the score of 10-0, Carson Palmer was under tackle, leapt into the air and heave-hoed a crazy pass that was intercepted. Often it's a great play when a quarterback throws the ball away, and sometimes it's even a good play when the quarterback takes a

sack. What is it with this year's plague of crazy passes under tackle?

### **Sensitive Young Male Seeks SF Who Gets NFL Sunday Ticket**

Items on the surprisingly large number of politically liberal women who are NFL fans drew this suggestion from Dmitriy Sokolovskiy of North Reading, Mass.: "It might be a good idea to organize a dating service for people with football in common." When the news pages say FootballSingles.com has become the next big Internet hit, I'll rue the day I didn't leap at Sokolovskiy's idea.

### **New Jersey Resplendent!**

In the NFL state standings, Missouri is 1-5, California and Florida are 3-6 while New Jersey is 4-1.

### **Football Gods Smile on Jax**

For years, the football gods have been punishing Jacksonville for the most disastrous event in franchise history -- Jax's 62-7 playoff win over Miami, following which Jaguars players boasted and strutted to great excess. The football gods took offense. Finally their wrath hath faded. In Week 1, Jax converted three fourth downs during a desperation drive and won on the final play against Buffalo. In Week 2, Denver fumbled to Jax with 30 seconds remaining, when the Broncos were in position for the winning field goal. This Sunday, Jax reached the Tennessee 1, first-and-goal, 42 seconds remaining, holding one timeout, trailing 12-7. Did the Jaguars go pass-wacky; lobbing fades into the corner as many NFL offensive coordinators now do in this situation? Fred Taylor for no gain on first down. Fred Taylor for the touchdown on second down, staying with the run even though there was just 13 seconds remaining. Six plays earlier on the same desperation drive, Jax ran on fourth-and-1. The football gods smile on those who show heart when all is on the line.

### **Hidden Play**

Leading 38-31 with 4:45 remaining, Indianapolis faced second-and-12 on the Green Bay 24. Purists, including TMQ, would have run to grind the clock, knowing a field goal makes it a 10-point late lead. The Lucky Charms' call was play-action right on the stretch handoff fake, pass back across the left to Reggie Wayne, who catches at the 9 near the sidelines and then alertly drops to the ground to make sure he doesn't step out and stop the clock. At this point, the Packers were beaten. This is what TMQ calls a "hidden play" -- one that will never make a highlight reel, but helps determine the course of a game.

### **Hidden Indicator**

In Week 2, Mike Tice of Minnesota did not challenge a touchdown awarded to Terrell Owens of Philadelphia, though replays showed Owens never held the ball, and the serious pun potential Mike Mularkey of Buffalo did not challenge the officials' failure to assess a safety against the Raiders, though replays showed a safety -- more below. Both these non-challenging coaches are former NFL tight ends named Mike. This is the kind of hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's understanding of the game. Unfortunately, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has no idea what it means.

## **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

### **Obscure College Score of the Week**

Lakeland 75, Benedictine of Illinois 7. Lakeland scored 11 rushing touchdowns and did *not* set a collegiate record for rushing touchdowns. Located in Sheboygan, Wis., Lakeland fields 15 Division III sports teams despite having just 871 students.

### **Bonus Obscure College Score**

Wofford 56, Johnson C. Smith 0. Located in Charlotte, N.C., Johnson C. Smith is named for the husband of Jane Berry Smith, who in the 1920s gave seed money that started the school. Johnson C. Smith does

well on best-value ratings, since a relative-bargain \$19,010 buys a year of liberal-arts education. Also, "each student receives an IBM laptop computer equipped with the latest software ." Set your home page to NFL.com! Mom and dad, the laptop is going to cost \$19,010, but the education is free.

### **Cover-Your-Eyes College Score**

West Chester 70, Cheyney 0. Cheyney has been outscored 274-26. Cheyney coach Lee Brown's postgame speech: "Well, boys, we still haven't given up 300."

### **Major College Question**

So Chris Rix of Florida State is injured -- that's okay, he'll play several more years. At this point, what is this guy, an eighth-year junior? A "true" graduate student?

### **Florida-State-Based Segue**

TMQ watches a lot of football at the high school, college and pro levels, and on the whole I find officials are usually right. Most complaints about officiating involve calls the zebras make at game speed, and are revealed to be imperfect only seen in slo-mo from multiple angles. But though the officials are usually right, it amazes me that -- being officials -- they can appear confused about the most basic thing, the rules.

Case one: Buffalo at Oakland in Week 2. The Raiders ran a play from their 6; Oakland's Roland Williams tackled Buffalo's Takeo Spikes in the end zone to prevent Spikes from sacking Rich Gannon; zebras marched off half the distance and spotted the ball on the Oakland 3. A penalty in the team's end zone is a safety! The officiating crew talked and talked and talked, and finally referee Mike Carey announced that because Williams first grabbed Spikes' jersey at the 1, the holding began outside the end zone and wasn't a safety.

Since when is there a distinction about where infractions begin? Team A has the ball at midfield; Team B's cornerback interferes with Team A's receiver at the 40; they keep running down the sideline and at the 5, Team B's corner wraps his arms around Team A's receiver to prevent a touchdown. The ball would be spotted at the 5, not the 40. TMQ read the NFL rules and couldn't find any clause saying that if an offensive player commits penalties outside and inside the end zone on the same play, that's not a safety. I did find a rule that says a safety occurs when the "offensive team commits a foul and the spot of enforcement is behind its own goal line." Spot of enforcement is defined as "the spot where the foul is committed." The foul was committed in the end zone.

Case two: Florida State (finally the segue!) versus Clemson on Saturday. A Florida State DB intercepted a pass on the Seminoles' 6, ran into the end zone and then stepped out. Safety! No, officials gave the ball to Florida State on its 4. But this clause from the NCAA's own 2004 rule book -- see section 5.1.a.1 on page 105 -- says that when a defender intercepts the ball "between his 5-yard line and the goal line and his original momentum carries into the end zone," the ball belongs to the offense. The interception happened outside the 5, and it wasn't momentum in any case -- the Florida State defender jogged into the end zone deliberately, apparently thinking that would cause a touchback with the Seminoles getting the ball on the 20 instead of inside their 5. The defender was Antonio Cromartie, touted as a first-round NFL draft pick: Don't tell me he is unable to change direction in 6 yards. As it happened, Clemson blocked Florida State's punt for a safety, then returning the free kick for a touchdown. Thus Clemson came out ahead compared to if the call had been correct, and the football gods chortled. But shouldn't calls be correct in the first place?

### **High-School Item You Were Warned About**

Previously I reserved the right to boast about football at my local high school, Churchill High in Montgomery County, Md., and exercise that right now. Three few weeks ago, the Bulldogs beat a local power, Gaithersburg High, which Churchill hadn't defeated since 1993. Last week, Churchill defeated Seneca Valley, the Green Bay Packers of Maryland prep football: Seneca Valley has won seven of the last 15 state championships, and Churchill had not defeated this school since 1988. At the final gun, Churchill students rushed the field for the first time since Dhani Jones, now of the Eagles, was Churchill's star. The

moment when a thousand kids stood in the center of the field and danced meant more than the game itself.

Though the NFL is the epitome of the sport, TMQ loves football at its human scale, at high schools and small colleges. There the goal is to learn sportsmanship and teamwork, while games are expressions of community spirit, moneymaking being irrelevant. Churchill football is trending up owing to the arrival of a gifted coach, James Collins, and why his arrival matters is a lesson in the human-scale aspect. Collins is good at Xs and Os and halftime tirades and the rest, but the best thing about him is that he's a teacher in the county public system (math and computer science), and a teacher who cares. Being a teacher, he's involved in the life of the community, especially in helping boys to mature. It is at the high-school and small-college level that you find coaches who are also teachers, involved in boys' or girls' lives in ways unrelated to the manic quest for victories and ratings. Teacher-coaches at the human-scale level of sports have far more positive influence on young lives than coaches at the top of the profession, where all is winning and money.

I've haven't written this item to flatter the local high-school coach. Rather, it's a news alert -- remember the name James Collins, because someday you will open the morning paper and read that he has been hired to run a major-college program. Jamie, just stick around till my kids finish high school, okay?

### Cutting Edge Final Score Predictions

Reader Daryle LaMonica nominates Fox Sports, which attempted to predict the exact final scores of all this weekend's big-college collisions. Result, 0 for 17.

### Reader Animadversion

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown for mention in the column, and I may quote your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

May Subido-Jarvis, a Redskins fan who resides in the Potomac Drainage Basin, suggests that referees signals be revised to make them more expressive. May, you should know that Neil Easterbrook, an Official Brother of TMQ and a professor at the seriously purple Texas Christian University, has long proposed that officials be required to *act out* the penalty. Don't just say "holding," one official should grab the other and show how the holding occurred. If it's "personal foul, blow to the head," one official should whack the other in the head. And so on. This would liven up penalty explanations, and prove that the zebras actually saw the infraction.

Jacqueline McAra of Vancouver, British Columbia, notes that I have resolved to call the game's end "triple zeros," since most game clocks show 0:00 at that point. But a few say 00:00 -- "quad zed" to a Canadian -- so shouldn't I say "multiple zeros," Jacqueline wonders. In the interest of Canadio-American friendship, henceforth I will call the moment of game's end "all zeds." Mr. Data, make it so!

Dan Stern of Rockville, Md., reports that he just read my new book *The Progress Paradox* -- Dan, you have extraordinarily good taste! -- and found within a paradox. *The Progress Paradox* cites research showing that Americans don't sleep enough. The body stops manufacturing stress hormones during sleep, so our great-grandparents, who averaged nine hours a night versus the current average of seven, suffered less stress-hormone exposure. Also, the book notes that people who watch television until bedtime tend to sleep poorly compared to those who read or engage in some other calm activity. With its flashy superficiality and emphasis on violence real or imagined, television unsettles the nerves -- children and teens, especially, should not watch immediately before sleep. *The Progress Paradox* suggests that if Americans went to bed one hour earlier each night, and turned off the television one hour before that, we would enjoy an improved sense of well-being. But, Stern notes, TMQ also endorses football addiction, and *Monday Night Football* doesn't end till midnight on the East Coast! In haiku,

TMQ suggests  
early bedtime. Monday night  
football smites him down.  
-- Dan Stern, Rockville, Maryland

Ari Fischbein of Far Rockaway, N.Y., says the TMQ signature phrase "for thong-based reasons" would be *l'sibot tachtonim retzuot* in Hebrew. Rechavia Berman of Tel Aviv, editor of a Hebrew-language, renders it as *MeSibot Tluyot Xutini*, reporting that the "Xutini" part is a Hebrew pun, which we'll have to take his word for.

Many readers including Niko Bowie suggested the Bengals' new look does not turn them into the Tootsie Rolls, rather into the Candy Corns. Perfect for Halloween! In haiku,

Tootsie Rolls: all brown.

Bengals: black, orange and white.

They are Candy Corns.

-- Niko Bowie, Cambridge, Massachusetts

After TMQ renamed the Cards the Arizona Cactus Wrens -- reasoning that the cardinal is a bird of the Midwest while the cactus wren is the Arizona state bird -- Kenneth Butler provided this map of the cardinal's habitat range, which shows the feathered subject is found in much of Arizona. B. J. Haeck of San Diego noted that the pyrrhuloxia, a species of finch indigenous to the Southwest, is related to the cardinal: He recommends the Arizona Pyrrhuloxia as a cognomen. B.J., I'm already constantly explaining the Chicago Mingdingxiong and Pittsburgh Hypocycloids, I think I'll stick to the Cactus Wrens.

Richard Moore notes I was wrong to say I would create a "panoply" of football gods; a "pantheon" is what I meant. Moore: "Panoply was a splendid suit of armor in the age of Pericles. Pantheon is all the gods of a people."

Many readers, including Doreen Kaminor of Little Rock, Ark., objected to TMQ saying Michael-Mike Vick had gone "head over heels" in a risky way. "Head over heels is the normal human condition," Kaminor wrote. "It's when you go heels over head, like Vick did, there is risk."

### Last Week's Challenge

Last week's was to propose a pantheon of football gods, including their mythology.

Michael Jacobson proposed Set and Hut, twin Egyptian gods of pre-snap cadence and false starts. Wade White of Rural Hall, N.C., proposed Lambo, god of cold games, who wreaks vengeance upon teams whose coaches over-dress in ridiculous K2 parkas in bad weather.

Robert McBride of Fort Worth, Texas, home to the seriously purple Texas Christian University, proposed Mozen, god of balanced attacks -- the word means "balance" in Chaldaean, which we'll have to take his word for. Justin Merritt of Northfield, Minn., proposed that Nike be the god of marketing. Nike communicates his commands through commercials during the Super Bowl, his feasting day.

Christian Olsson of Largs, Scotland -- who says he is the only Swedish-born American-rules football player in Scotland -- proposes Nortia, goddess of quarterbacks. "She is depicted as a vain young woman always with a mirror close at hand," Olsson writes. "Nortia is popular because of her beauty, and does not like to admit she depends on her brother Bardok, god of offensive lines. Bardok is a forgotten god with few followers." Olsson plays for the Glasgow Tigers.

Kim Boisen of Denmark suggests Fumblius, bumbling little brother of the football gods: "Even though no one invites him when the football gods gather, he always seems to show up anyway." Tomás Rodríguez of Austin, Texas, suggests, "Tundra, spirit of frozen turf. He empowers teams with strong running games and is locked in eternal struggle with the capricious Westcoast, who smiles occasionally on pass-wacky teams, but whose favor is tenuous."

John Fraser of Peterborough, Ontario, suggested Fielding, god of clumsy tactics. Fielding is the nickname of the guy in the Tuesday Morning Quarterback logo. Michael Peterson of Mobile, Ala., suggested that the chorus of the football gods be headed by John Facenda, deep-throated narrator who was known as "the voice of god" in the old NFL Films productions that dominated the era before ESPN's *NFL Primetime*. Matt Shannon of Baltimore suggested Venus as the goddess of cheer-babes. Samantha Gelfend of Los Angeles

proposed that the cheerleader deities be the sisters Sheer and Micro.

Halvard Leira of Oslo, Norway, proposes Balder, after the Norse god of light, joy, purity, beauty and innocence. Balder would be the protector of Pop Warner football. John Zakarian of Kansas City proposes an Aztec deity, Quetzalfootbatl, pronounced "qwatch-EL-football," god of wide receivers. Quetzalfootbatl is bigheaded, prone to stunts and actually believes he is open on every play.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback has noted before that the Oilers became the Titans even though, according to Greek mythology, the Olympian gods bested the Titans' pantheon at the primordial battle of the Titanomachy. The Tennessee franchise offended the football gods by adopting the name of downcast deities. As punishment, the football gods now mess with the Titans, denying them the Super Bowl by one foot. Reader Steve Spann of Signal Mountain, Tenn., fleshes out the story in more detail:

"The Titans and Titanesses were 12 deities, including Gaea and Uranus, who ruled the universe until their defeat by the Olympian gods at the battle of Titanomachy. The Olympians were led by Zeus. Around 440 BC, the Parthenon was completed in Athens and contained a statue of Athena, daughter of Zeus. In 1897, a replica of the Parthenon was constructed in Nashville, Tenn.. In 1990, a replica of the statue of Athena was placed inside the Parthenon in Nashville.

"Soon thereafter the Titans, then disguised as Oilers, led the Bills 35-3 in a playoff game; the Bills came back to win. This happened *just after the statue of Athena was completed* in Nashville's Parthenon. A digitally enhanced replay of the second half of the Bills-Oilers playoff game reveals the barely perceived outlines of incoming tridents and thunderbolts near the Oilers bench. Possessing foresight, the football gods knew the Oilers would change their name to the Titans and play in Nashville, in the shadow of the monument to the Olympian goddess Athena. Worse, when they reached Nashville, the Titans called their stadium The Coliseum, taking a Roman name and further insulting the Greek gods of Nashville's Parthenon.

"In conclusion, your readers should know that the football gods exist and include among their number the goddess Athena, who like her father, Zeus, continues to fight to prevent the Titans from being crowned champions. Only by changing their name to the Tennessee Olympians can the franchise lift this celestial curse."

Víctor Moreno of Querétaro, Mexico, suggested the chief god of the football gods be Lombardios, who looks down with disdain on practically everything that's happened to the game since he ascended. But as for the chief god, so many readers made the following suggestion that I pulled out of a hat credit to Peter Mitchell, a high school student in Havertown, Pa.: the chief deity of the football gods is Grabthar.

The winner of this week's Challenge is Khalfani Mothudi of Brooklyn, N.Y., who proposed Lambasthor, god of halftime tirades by coaches. In keeping with the new Challenge policy, his prize is shameless praise. Mothudi is an aspiring writer on politics. Therefore, "Khalfani Mothudi stands among the most promising commentators of his generation. Lovers of writing should remember his name." Khalfani, now you can quote that, just leave out that it was NFL.com that said this about you.

### **This Week's Challenge**

Tuesday Morning Quarterback cannot abide ridiculous movie disclaimers, the kind that warn of "predictable car-chase violence" instead of just "violence." What warning disclaimers should appear on NFL games? Use the link at Reader Animadversion to propose yours.

### **Next Week**

Astronomers find giant clouds of Tostitos floating near the Crab Dip nebula!



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## Time for a "Charles" rule, and TMQ salutes the Gambian pouched rat

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Oct. 5, 2004) -- So Emmitt Smith, you hang around for 15 years, you carry the ball 4,210 times and sooner or later they'll let you throw a pass!

Here is Smith's official career log -- 15 years of passing statistics to list his one single attempt, heave-hoed Sunday against New Orleans. Tuesday Morning Quarterback loves everything about Emmitt Smith: His records, his Super Bowl rings, his work ethic, his television commercials with talking puppets. It was wonderful see to him have one more monster game, 127 yards gained and a touchdown pass. And it was fun to see Arizona win big since, after all, you don't see that often. What a shame only 28,109 were on hand, meaning 44,905 empty seats at Sun Devil Stadium -- the place appeared to be hosting a Division II event. Considering last year's last-second finale victory, this year's close game against defending champion New England and then Sunday's big Emmitt performance, the three most recent Cardinals' home appearances have been well worth attending.

What Tuesday Morning Quarterback wants to know is, why did this gentleman have to carry 4,210 times -- the NFL all-time record, needless to say -- until he got to loft a pass, however wobbly? TMQ believes in the halfback pass, not so much for whether it makes a big play, but for what happens on all the other downs that aren't halfback passes. Once a team has shown it can complete a halfback pass, defenses must go a little soft on the team's outside runs: Defensive backs can't come right up in run support. Just as a successful end-around provides most of its dividends on plays that aren't end-arounds, by forcing the defense to keep someone "at home" opposite the action, halfback passes make it easier to run wide on those many plays that are not halfback passes.

Prediction: according to current trends, Emmitt Smith will throw his second career pass in October 2018.

In other NFL news, it's good that the league tightened up the "chuck" rule -- but the rule is only supposed to apply to the first five yards, not the entire field. Already this season there have been two pivotal pass interference calls against defenders who did not interfere: On Walt Harris of the Redskins in the Washington-Dallas game last week, on Tory James of Cincinnati this Sunday against Pittsburgh. In both cases the defender was playing the ball all the way, using legal form, doing nothing that in the opinion of yours truly so much as resembled interference; both calls set up short touchdown plays that became the winning points for the other team. Please, officiating crews: A defender who has turned around and is trying to catch the pass has the same right to it as the receiver. Also, to increase the dignity of the game, Tuesday Morning Quarterback continues to assert that the "chuck" rule should be renamed the "Charles" rule.

In still other NFL news, move over Patriots, the Houston Texans are on an all-time team record winning streak -- two consecutive victories!

### Stats of the Week

The New England Patriots have gone more than a calendar year without losing.

### Stats of the Week No. 2

Miami quarterbacks have thrown two touchdown passes to their own teammates and three to other teams.

### **Stats of the Week No. 3**

Shaun Alexander did not play Sunday, yet still has more touchdowns than the Miami and Tampa offenses combined.

### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Stretching back to last season, Atlanta is 2-10 when Michael-Mike Vick is out and 7-1 when he plays.

### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

The three Florida team are ranked 25th, 27th and 32nd in offense.

### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

The Houston Texans scored 30 points for the first time since -- ever.

### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

Committing penalties on three consecutive snaps, Buffalo turned a third-and-1 in New England territory into a third-and-21 in Bills territory.

### **Stats of the Week No. 8**

Last season Atlanta allowed 26 points per game; this season it is allowing 12 points.

### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

The top five defensive teams -- Seattle, Denver, Miami, Washington and Pittsburgh -- have a combined record of 10-9.

### **Stats of the Week No. 10**

The top five offensive teams -- Minnesota, Indianapolis, New England, Philadelphia and Dallas -- have a combined record of 14-3.

### **Stats of the Week No. 11**

Baltimore gained 80 yards rushing at home against one of the league's worst defenses.

### **Stats of the Week No. 12**

In the fourth game of his fourth season, LaDainian Tomlinson became San Diego's all-time leading rusher.

### **Literary Cheerleader of the Week**

Only cheerleaders who list serious books or authors as their favorites are eligible. This week's winner, nominated by Alfred Wallace of St. Louis -- who reports he spent a considerable time gawking at NFL cheer-babe sites and "doing serious analysis on their literary tastes" -- is Angeline of Les Mouflons. The Rams don't list cheerleader favorite books, but Angeline's team bio reports that she is working on her master's in linguistics and literature, which sounds fairly bookish. Asked what she would want if stranded

on a desert island, she did not answer Andre 3000 but rather, "a telephone, sunblock and some books," which again sounds fairly bookish. Angeline also reports that if she were president, she would seek legislation to make it easier for qualified parents to adopt children. Angeline, would you mind appearing at the presidential debate on Friday? This would provide bipartisan aesthetic relief.

### **Sinister, Devious Trick Play of the Week**

Game scoreless, St. Louis ran a 14-play drive that culminated in fourth and goal on the San Francisco 1. Angeline's Les Mouflons came out in a slotback formation; the Niners were looking for some kind of trick play; simple fullback "belly" handoff to Joey Goodspeed for the touchdown. In the case of St. Louis, using football's single most basic action, the fullback belly, constitutes a trick play! Coming into the game, the Rams were passing on 67 percent of downs and were 1-2. Against the Squared Sevens the Rams rushed on 59 of downs, and won handily.

### **Best Play by a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Play in San Diego**

While Eli Manning watched from the bench at Lambeau and high-priced holdout Philip Rivers was nailed to the Chargers' pine, Drew Brees evaded a pass-rusher and hit Reche Caldwell for a 58-yard touchdown pass to ice San Diego's win over favored Tennessee. I don't wish to alarm you, but Brees is currently the seventh-rated passer in the NFL. Also, the much-maligned -- including by TMQ -- San Diego offensive line played well Sunday.

### **Why Certain Teams Are 0-4**

Jersey/B leading 10-6 with 1:20 remaining in the first half, Dolphins' safety Arturo Freeman intercepted a pass and took off down the sidelines toward the end zone. Replays showed *three* Miami defenders near Freeman immediately came to a halt, stood like topiary and raised hands into the air in the touchdown gesture, rather than accompanying their teammate down the sidelines and try to participate in the play. Freeman was stopped at the Jets 7 -- he really, really could have used a few blockers -- and Miami had to settle for the field goal.

### **In Keeping the Washington Theme, the New Club's Logo Will Be a Weather Vane That Changes Whichever Way the Wind Blows**

Baseball is returning to Washington -- check this 2001 *Washington Monthly* article by Dayn Perry, which in seer-like fashion spells out the reasons the Expos would move to Washington, but not until the year 2004.

Now there are two questions, and the first seems to be what rich person or group of rich people will own the team and be lavished with taxpayers' money for the tax-funded stadium. Tuesday Morning Quarterback asks, if tax money is to be lavished, then why shouldn't the new Washington baseball team be publicly owned? Everyone's assuming some immutable law of nature requires Major League Baseball to pick a rich individual as owner.

There's nothing immutable here -- the team can be publicly owned through public stock, giving those whose taxes will be used a chance to buy in. Public stock ownership has worked out just fine for the Green Bay Packers, one of the most stable and successful franchises in sports.

Next, what to name the team? Many want to revive the name Washington Senators, but in today's environment, it would have to be the Washington Cynical Self-Serving Hypocritical Senators, a name which applies in bipartisan terms to both parties. TMQ offers these alternative suggestions:

- The Washington Power Brokers.
- The Washington Special Interests. ("They didn't look very special out there today, Clint.")
- The Washington Georges, using the dollar bill as their logo.
- The Washington Media Conspiracy.
- The Washington Insiders. Perfect for a domed stadium! During good years they could be known as the powerful Insiders.

And of course the new team's cheerleading unit will be known as the Monicas.

### **Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!**

Game tied at 3, the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1) had the Washington Redskins facing fourth and 6 on the Cleveland 37. Joe Gibbs goes for it rather than boom a Preposterous Punt; Cleveland blitzes six; easy completion to Laveranues Coles for 30 yards, and Washington scores a touchdown two snaps later. Then, in a show of solidarity, Washington handed back the game to Cleveland via big-blitz. Trailing 17-13 with 4:14 remaining, the Nanticokes had the Browns facing third and 3 on their 33. Seven-man blitz, 33-yard completion to Andre Davis and by the point Washington got the ball back, it was panic time. The Skins were also called for roughing-the-passer twice on blitzes, these calls sustaining Cleveland drives that led to 10 points.

### **Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 2**

Leading 17-10 with 1:38 remaining in the second quarter against the defending champion 17-win-streak Patriots, the Bills had New England facing third and 8 on the Buffalo 30. Since the average NFL pass attempt yields about seven yards -- anyway, it's a blitz! Seven gentlemen cross the line, almost effortless touchdown pass to David Patten, who is covered by, technically speaking, no one.

Yes, blitzing sometimes works: Atlanta, Houston, New England and Philadelphia all prospered by the blitz Sunday. Kevin Mathis' 35-yard interception return for the Falcons came on a blitz; Jamie Sharper's fumble return touchdown came on a blitz; two other Moo Cow takeaways were on blitzes. TMQ's point is that on average, the blitz helps the offense more than the defense. The Steelers' 11-yard touchdown pass to the Vernon Haynes came against a seven-gentleman blitz on third and 8; had Cincinnati played straight defense, the odds favored a stop.

### **Globalization Reaches for the Stars**

A few weeks ago, the Air Force launched the last Atlas rocket powered by American-built Rocketdyne main engines; all future Atlas rockets will use an improved engine built in Russia. This might bother some as outsourcing, but TMQ finds it delightfully happy news. The original Atlas (today's model resembles it mainly in name) was designed in the late 1950s as an ICBMs to rain nuclear bombs on the Soviet Union. Now the Russians help build the Atlas, and now its main use is launching communication satellites. American defense contractors offer joint-venture launches on Russia's Proton rocket, and on rockets originally designed in the Soviet Union with mass destruction in mind. There's even a pure-commercial venture, Sea Launch, that involves U.S., Russian and Ukrainian companies cooperating to fire communications satellites into space using a mix of American and former Soviet technology. This really must be the third millennium!

### **Preposterous Punt Avoided!**

Game scoreless in the third, Green Bay facing fourth-and-5 on the Jersey/A 28 and driving into a wind, the Packers go for everything -- 28-yard touchdown pass from Brett Favre to Javon Walker. Yes, Favre also threw a crazy interception in this game, which the Giants won. At least Green Bay did not launch a Preposterous Punt.

### **Sweet Who-Dat Play of the Week No. 1**

Game scoreless, Kansas City faced third and goal on the Baltimore 2. The Chiefs lined up "trips" right with the feared Tony Gonzalez and Dante Hall joined by who-dat reserve tight end Jason Dunn, who entering the game had eight receptions in the last three seasons. Dunn came in motion back toward the formation, then cut underneath Gonzalez and Hall toward the center of the end zone; Gonzalez and Hall each drew double coverage; no one went with Dunn. Touchdown pass on a play that was designed for an unknown reserve tight end. Note: the Nevermores sustained this drive by six-blitzing when Kansas City faced third-and-9, allowing a 19-yard completion.

### **Sweet Who-Dat Play of the Week No. 2**

Now it's Kansas City 10, Baltimore 3, the Ravens with first and 10 on their 43. Jamal Lewis sweeps right, draws a crowd, then laterals back across the field to quarterback Kyle Boller, who throws deep to who-dat reserve receiver Randy Hymes. Entering the game, Hymes had one touchdown reception in the last three seasons; he is uncovered and scores on a 57-yard catch. Baltimore answers a Kansas City play designed for an unknown by calling a play designed for its own unknown!

### **Sweet Play of the Week (Defensive)**

Pittsburgh leading 21-17, Cincinnati with first down at its 20 at the two-minute warning, Carson Palmer threw the ball directly into the hands of Hypocycloids safety Troy Polamalu, who returned it for the icing touchdown, breaking five tackles on the play. Polamalu jitterbugged and jerked so much he looked like he'd had way too much caffeine at halftime: call this the Starbucks Return.

### **Worst Series Ere the Clock Struck Midnight**

Trailing 27-24 at home, the Baltimore Ravens took possession at 11:51 p.m. ET with 5:50 remaining. On the series the Ravens committed two penalties and allowed a sack, ending up punting on fourth-and-27.

### **Worst Series After the Clock Struck Midnight**

The Ravens took possession again at 12:02 a.m. ET with 2:33 remaining. On the series they fumbled and allowed a sack, then threw incomplete on fourth-and-13, ending the game.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All**

Trailing 14-7, the Cincinnati Candy Corns faced third-and-2 on the Pittsburgh 16. Four wides, pass incomplete -- can't anybody power-run on short yardage anymore? And this was not an attempt to throw deep against an overstack and get a touchdown; rather a dinky, junky-looking short-out thing that would have gained three yards max. Trailing 17-9 with 10:45 remaining, facing fourth-and-1 on the Colts 40, Jacksonville went for the home run and completed a 40-yard touchdown pass to Jimmy Smith on a fly route -- going for the home run on a short-yardage play TMQ can understand. But calling a rinky-dink pass designed to gain three yards? Cincinnati has to settle for the field goal, and the Hypocycloids begin to take command.

### **Best Use of TMQ**

Tuesday Morning Quarterback's immutable law of the goal line holds that if you want to play-action at the goal line do it on first down, when the opponent is thinking run, not on second down, when the opponent has just stuffed a run and is thinking pass. Reaching first and goal at the Tampa 5, game scoreless, Denver play-actioned on first down, easy touchdown toss third-string tight end Patrick Hape -- whose only other catch this season was also a touchdown off a play-fake at the goal line.

### **"Kurt Warner" May Be From a Planet of Highly Advanced Ungulates**

Will Elliott of San Antonio, Texas, notes that wild mouflon, imported from Corsica, are overrunning Hawaii Volcanoes National Park. Game officials refer to them as "alien ungulates." Wildlife biologists studying the mouflon have found them practicing trick-play formations and lots of passes, but no runs.

### **Movie Disclaimer Watch**

Reader Richard Magid notes the disclaimer of the new high-school football flick *Friday Night Lights* warns of "rough sports action." If it's roughing, the movie should draw a penalty.

### **Note to Directors of NFL Cheerleading Squads, Nothing in this Item Should Be Construed as Discouraging "Partial Nudity"**

Ads for the ABC show *Boston Legal*, which marks the return to television of William Shatner -- who

according to his ABC bio began his acting career "at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival under Sir Tyrone Guthrie -- warn of "partial nudity." Aren't you either naked or not? But concepts like "partial nudity" are very current, since today's news is full of partial disclosure, partial accuracy and so on. Watch the for presidential debate on Friday night, where both candidates are sure to be partially honest!

In light of the above, TMQ recommends the just-out book *The Post-Truth Era* by Ralph Keyes, a fascinating and important dissection of how American culture encourages making things up. In our fabricated docudrama-world, what matters is not what you can establish as true but what you can confuse people into thinking might be true -- Michael Moore on the left and the Swift Boat guys on the right are the current exemplars of "post-truth" politics. Keyes' excellent new book should be read in conjunction with the 2003 *The Cheating Culture* by David Callahan, also well-written and important.

### **Elegant Tactics, Dr. Watson**

Facing fourth-and-5 on the San Diego 6, trailing by the new economy score of 24-7 with 12:31 remaining, Tennessee coaches sent in the field goal unit. This looked like a mincing, fraidy-cat call -- but after notching the figgie to make it 24-10, the Flaming Thumbtacks onside kicked and recovered. TMQ suspects Jeff Fisher took the field goal planning to onside; not bad in playing the percentages, since surprise onside kicks work about 70 percent of the time, and San Diego was surprised. The Titans scored a quick touchdown to make it 24-17, though the Bolts held on to win.

### **Why the End-Around Is Better Than the Reverse**

"It's a double reverse!" ESPN's Tom Jackson cried during a highlight of the Saints-Cardinals game. No, it was a single reverse. Aaron Brooks handed off to Aaron Stecker going left, who handed off to a receiver coming right. That's a single reverse -- the ball changed direction once. To make a double reverse, the receiver would have had to hand off again to another gentleman going back left, so that the ball changed direction twice. Though the receiver could not have done this since he fumbled the handoff, which Adrian Wilson recovered and returned for an Arizona touchdown.

The reason almost every NFL play that bobbleheads call a "reverse" is actually an end-around is to avoid running backs making handoffs. Usually on plays that announcers call a reverse, the quarterback fakes a handoff to the running back, then gives to a receiver coming around -- there's only one handoff and it's done by the quarterback, who's accustomed to handing off. On a reverse a non-quarterback must make a handoff, and such exchanges are fraught with peril, as New Orleans learned. One reason a true double reverse almost never occurs in the NFL -- or in college games, for that matter -- is that on such a play *two* non-quarterbacks must make handoffs, and the odds of a fumble escalate geometrically.

### **International Cheer-Babe News**

Reader Alexander Fox attended the NFL Europe's World Bowl in June and reports the Berlin Thunder dance team wore "thigh-high black leather boots, leather miniskirts and tight tube-tops, a pretty good example of cheer-babe professionalism." No wonder the football gods crowned the Thunder with a championship against Frankfurt. You can gawk at the victorious Berlin team's dance squad here.

Go here, then click on "cheerleaders" to gawk at the Frankfurt Galaxy pep squad. Click the thumbnail for Danielle. One of the personality questions she is asked translates to, "If you had a time machine, where would you travel?" Her reply translates as, "To the year 3000, to find out what's going on." Danielle, I can answer that: By the year 3000, the Buffalo Bills and Minnesota Vikings will have won the Super Bowl.

### **"This Is a Bad Time for a Penalty, Clint."**

As long as we are giving bobbleheads a hard time, during the San Francisco-St. Louis game, as the Rams tried for a first down, Paul Maguire intoned, "This depends on where the officials spot the ball." It *always* depends on where the officials spot the ball!

### **New York Times Correction of the Week**

"A television review referred incorrectly to the box office performance of *The Day After Tomorrow*. Its domestic receipts totaled \$186.4 million, and its worldwide sales \$540.4 million; it was not a flop." No, it wasn't a flop, which just goes to confirm TMQ's Iron Law of Movies and Books: The stupider a movie or book is, the more money it makes. "This is unbelievable!" Dennis Quaid, hero of *The Day After Tomorrow*, proclaims early in the movie. Couldn't have put it better myself.

In *The Day After Tomorrow*, global warming causes New York City to be blast-frozen under a glacier that forms on a single day -- which is not remotely similar to any phenomenon ever observed in nature. (Details of the nonsense of the "science" presented in this movie are here, plus citations to serious scientific papers about the very real dangers of artificially caused climate change.) Super-cold winds hit Manhattan, blast-freezing into place a tsunami washing over the city at that moment. "The temperature is dropping 10 degrees per second!" a character exclaims. At that rate, you could go from a bright sunny day to absolute zero in less than a minute.

Aside from the complication that temperature drops of 10 degrees per second have never been observed in nature, ice ages don't begin with instant cold. What accompanies the onset of ice ages is gradual reduction in air temperatures coupled to gradual expansion of northern snow cover, which then reflects more sunlight back into space, cooling the planet further. Glaciers expand when the annual summer melt takes away less than the annual winter growth of snow, and this is a slow process. During the last ice age, the growth of the Holocene ice sheets took thousands of years, not a few moments, with the southernmost edge of glaciers extending short distances each season. No running person was ever caught and frozen by a super-fast-advancing glacier, as happens in *The Day After Tomorrow*.

Next, even if gusts of ultra-cold air were blasting New York City, would it be physically possible for them to freeze a tsunami in minutes? Bear in mind that the liquid in question is freeze-resistant seawater. There are standard calculations involving the density and salinity of seawater and the "convection coefficient" of the speed at which water temperatures change. Reader Troy Savoie calculates that even if the air blast that hit New York City in the movie was at minus-129 degrees Fahrenheit, lowest temperature ever recorded on Earth, it would take about three months for each hundred feet of seawater in the city to freeze. Savoie calculates that even wind at absolute zero, minus-460 degrees Fahrenheit -- the temperature of outer space -- could not freeze a tidal wave in moments.

But since *The Day After Tomorrow* was scientifically illiterate and incredibly stupid, it made \$540 million!

Planetary harmonic convergence? Researchers at MIT have detected global warming on Pluto. Frozen nitrogen on the surface of Pluto has warmed by four degrees Fahrenheit in the last 14 years, though surface air temperatures still hover around minus-235.

### **When You're Coaching the Bengals, There's a Lot of Pressure to Find a Way to Lose**

As TMQ noted in my AFC preview, "Marvin Lewis faces a classic coach's choice -- should he play Jon Kitna, who's lightly regarded yet did fine in 2003, or Carson Palmer, who's a boy wonder but has no experience? If the boy wonder gets Cincinnati into a hole by losing a couple early, it could be yet another fruitless season by the banks of the Ohio River." Now Cincinnati is in a hole at 1-3 with Palmer looking awful. Next classic coach's dilemma -- does Lewis yank the boy wonder for Kitna?

### **In Praise of Giant Rats**

Last year Tuesday Morning Quarterback noted of monkey pox, then in the news, "Researchers think the monkey-pox outbreak was triggered by prairie dogs that came into contact with an infected Gambian giant pouched rat. Forget how this chain of events could be figured out in such a short time, while science is still unable to determine why women are wide awake after sex, and men want to sleep. The real question: What caused innocent, trusting little prairie dogs to come into contact with Gambian giant pouched rats?"

My item clearly implied skepticism about the Gambian pouched rat. Turns out I spoke too soon! Today these plucky creatures are helping clear Mozambique of land mines from its civil war. Dogs have been trained as land-mine sniffers, but if they step on the mine, no more dog; three-pound Gambian pouched rats are too light cause detonation. These rats have exceptionally powerful noses, being able to sense

the slightest trace of the nitro compounds in explosives. And while dogs will sniff for mines for a while and then get bored and want to frolic, Gambian giant pouched rats possess noble clarity of purpose: So long as they are given a chunk of banana for each mine found they will tirelessly, single-mindedly spend every waking hour searching for another. Giant Gambian pouched rats of Mozambique, Tuesday Morning Quarterback salutes you!

### **Crazy Pass Watch**

Two weeks ago when Jake Delhomme heave-hoed an absolutely crazy pass that became a touchdown in a Carolina win over Kansas City, Cats' fans danced but TMQ cautioned, "Jake, never ever do this again." On Sunday, Delhomme heave-hoed another absolutely crazy pass that was intercepted by Atlanta, setting up the field goal that turned the tide toward the Falcons; later he heave-hoed a pass that Atlanta returned for a touchdown. Pressing your luck might work once; pressing your luck often is a formula for a losing season.

### **Sampling Error Is Plus or Minus Three Tacos (Sampling Error, Get It?)**

Forget those scientific polls, if you want to know who the next president will be, check with California Tortilla. A locally owned mini-chain in Montgomery County, Md., California Tortilla is the Official Rapid Food Restaurant of TMQ -- very yummy fare, plus cashiers who shout "Yeeeeee-haw!" (True.) California Tortilla runs pre-election burrito contests in which cooks invent a burrito for each contender, then keep track of which one customers buy most. The California Tortilla burrito poll has correctly predicted every presidential winner since its inception, even correctly predicted the winner of a hotly contested five-way local congressional race in 2002. Race to California Tortilla and order the burritos (Kerry's with Boston beans, Bush's with hickory flavor) of the man you want to win. California Tortilla is not offering a Ralph Nader option -- if only all states could say the same! -- but if it did, TMQ proposes that the Nader burrito contain spoiled chicken and sour grapes.

### **Those Zany, Wacky Supreme Court Justices**

"I even take the position that sexual orgies eliminate social tensions and ought to be encouraged." Who said this last week -- Hugh Hefner, Pamela Anderson, Madonna? Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia, the Court's most accomplished conservative, said it at Harvard. Now, obviously, no one needs to encourage college students to have more sex. But Mr. Justice Scalia, exactly what specific public-policy proposal do you have to encourage sexual orgies that eliminate tension? Do you plan to use your power to order this practice?

### **Those Zany, Wacky Federal Appellate Judges**

In his new book *Catastrophe: Risk and Response*, Richard Posner, a judge on the federal Seventh Circuit Court of Appeals, supposes that humanity may soon be enslaved or slaughtered by intelligent robots who consider *Homo sapiens* primate forms: "Human beings may turn out to be the 21st century's chimpanzees, and if so the robots may have as little use and regard for us as we do for our fellow, but nonhuman, primates." Judge, if you really fear intelligent robots will conquer humanity, shouldn't you, like, be putting some tech geeks into jail while there's still time?

### **Those Zany, Wacky Local Affiliates**

TMQ lurks in the Washington, D.C., area. On Sunday the question was what game CBS would show in the 1 p.m. ET slot. Tuesday Morning Quarterback assumed it would be the marquee matchup of the week, Indianapolis at Jacksonville -- the clubs a combined 5-1 at kickoff, this contest was the sole pairing of Week 4 in which both teams had winning records.

So what did our nation's capital see? Cincinnati at Pittsburgh, combined record 3-3. CBS spokeswoman Robin Brendle told yours truly that game was chosen because, "there are a lot of Pittsburgh fans in the Washington area." The network usually tells the local affiliate what to air, and though local affiliates can request a different game instead, they must make a specific appeal to network headquarters, which the Washington-area CBS affiliate did not, Brendle said.

Television is driven by ratings, of course, but wouldn't the best possible game seem to hold the best chance of viewers? Cincinnati at Pittsburgh was okay; Indy at Jax went down to a dramatic final series, like every Jacksonville game this season.

### Where Was Ernest?

"ERRR-nest WILLL-ford, ERRR-nest WILLL-ford," chanted TMQ and my nine-year-old, Spenser, a Jax fan, as the Jaguars tried for their fourth consecutive last-second cardiac win. Alas, no Wilford heroics this week. Indianapolis 24, Jax 17 at the two-minute warning, Jacksonville on the Colts 45 facing fourth-and-1 -- Fred Taylor up the middle, no gain. Since Jax sent Taylor into the line on three consecutive high-pressure short-yardage plays on its clock-beating drive to win last week at Tennessee, perhaps a change of pace was called for. But TMQ still thinks the football gods will smile on a team that shows heart by running when all is on the line.

### In America, the Trash Artist Would Receive Federal Funding

Reader Mike Burrows of Portsmouth, United Kingdom, notes that the night cleaning crew at the chic Tate Britain art gallery threw away some modern art they were unable to distinguish from garbage. Museum officials rushed to a Dumpster to retrieve the magnificent work of self-expression: "The gallery said the work is now covered at night so it cannot be removed again, and staff have been made aware that rubbish is part of the exhibit."

### Pennsylvania Resplendent!

Many readers including Beth Anne Markins of State College, Pa., protested last week's "New Jersey resplendent" item -- which showed New Jersey NFL teams having much better records than California or Florida teams -- did not add that Pennsylvania last week had the best state record, 5-1. This week Pennsylvania improved to an NFL-leading 7-1, while New Jersey kept pace at 6-1, California was 4-8 and Florida fell to 3-9. Note the old-economy Northeastern states are beating up on the Sunbelt.

### We'll Need to See Your Passport and Your Fold-Out

Reader Greg Wilson of Cambridge, Ontario, sent this newspaper story about highly dedicated Canadian border-control officers who demand nude photographs of women seeking visas to work as strippers. Canada has liberal laws regarding exotic dancing, and Canadian dance clubs often hire strippers from the United States or Europe to headline their acts. The pay is good if in "loonies" (Canadian dollars), but a work visa is required to enter the country with intent to perform for pay. Those dedicated, conscientious Canadian visa officers want to inspect nude photos for proof that the women in question do have careers in exotic dancing. TMQ salutes the dedication and professionalism of Canadian visa officers! Note: Sadly, there is logic here. International trafficking of poor women for prostitution is a rising problem; see these reports from Human Rights Watch. By requiring photos that show a dancer has disrobed for pay in a club, immigration officers insure that the visa-seeker actually is a professional stripper, not someone in the thrall of a trafficking ring. But pretend you don't know that in order to enjoy the item.

**Best Blocks** v On Troy Polamalu's 26-yard Starbucks Return for the touchdown against Cincinnati, Pittsburgh defensive end Aaron Smith was among several Steelers to paste assorted Candy Corns in Polamalu's way. On Amos Zereoue's 55-yard touchdown run against Houston, several Raiders linemen hustled downfield to make secondary blocks, including Frank Middleton, who's officially 330 pounds but widely believed to top the scales at about 400 pounds, who hustled all the way to the Houston 10. On Lee Suggs' 25-yard run to set up Cleveland's first score, center Jeff Faine absolutely pasted the man at the point of attack. On Warrick Dunn's 38-yard touchdown run, Dunn was barely touched, which means a perfect play for the Atlanta offensive line.

The best blocks of the day came on Tiki Barber's 52-yard touchdown run that tied the game at Green Bay. The Giants had a heavy formation with a motion man coming back to block at the point of attack off-tackle. Who-dat guard Jason Whittle had a perfect pancake block in the hole; who-dat tackle David Diehl not only knocked his man to the ground but then -- in a move TMQ wishes more coaches would coach -- jumped on top of his man so that he could not get back up. The ballcarrier was never touched. Note that this play came two snaps after Green Bay got its dramatic fourth-down touchdown; often a

defense relaxes and gives up a big play immediately after the team has scored and appears to be in command. It's pretty fun to run 52 yards for a touchdown in Tittletown when everyone in front of you has already been knocked to the ground.

### **Worst Blocks**

Two weeks ago on the deciding play of Buffalo's three-point loss at Oakland, the Bills' overpaid offensive line was pushed backward when Buffalo went for it on fourth-and-goal at the Raiders 1. Now it's defending champion New England 24, Buffalo 17 with 3:24 remaining and Buffalo faces third-and-2 on the Patriots 16, a sellout home crowd roaring at military-afterburner decibels. Yet the Buffalo offensive line is pushed backward just like the game before, loss of yardage for the runner. Now it's fourth-and-3 on the New England 19, Drew Bledsoe is hammered by two Patriots a second after receiving the snap, fumbles and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook. The Buffalo offensive line allowed seven sacks, including sacks on third-and-6, third-and-7 and another third-and-6, plus a sack that took the Bills out of field goal range. Ye gods, this offensive line is pathetic.

And, yes, TMQ predicted the addition of offensive line coach Jim McNally would aid Buffalo: But then, my motto is All Predictions Wrong or Your Money Back.

Bills' offensive line performance has become even worse since McNally arrived. On Sunday "line calls," which tell blockers what to do, were repeatedly botched, allowing New England blitzers to advance untouched by human hands. On the fourth-and-3 that decided the game, New England linebacker Tedy Bruschi, obviously preparing to blitz, lined up directly across from right guard Chris Villarrial. At the snap, Villarrial inexplicably pulled right as if to lead a non-existent sweep -- vacating the hole Bruschi came through untouched to hammer Bledsoe one second after he received the snap. This botched blocking ended Buffalo's hopes for the game and, perhaps, for the season. TMQ watched the play several times in increasing disbelief: With a Patriots blitz directly over the guard on the snap that may determine the Bills season, that guard pulled and enthusiastically ran to nowhere, leaving an unobstructed lane directly to the quarterback. And what of Richard Seymour, the Patriot who scooped up Bledsoe's fumble and returned it for six, where did Seymour come from? At the snap, left tackle Marcus Price lightly brushed Seymour, then stood still and simply watched Seymour chase Bledsoe, Price making no attempt whatsoever to block. You are not going to win many games when offensive linemen deliberately run away from blitzers, or when linemen who make no attempt whatsoever to block on fourth-and-3 -- both are symptoms of suspect coaching.

Speaking of bad blocking, you don't want to be Tyler Whitley when the Marine Mammals look at game film this week. (For humanitarian reasons, Miami may not look at game film this week.) Trailing Jersey/A by seven points, Miami had first down on the Jets 15. The call was sweep left, Whitley pulling to lead; Whitley never even made contact with his man at the point of attack, who dropped Leonard Henry for a loss. Second down, the call is screen right; Whitley never even made contact with his man, who dropped Henry after only a yard gained. Suddenly it's third-and-13, and Miami ended up settling for the field goal. Like Buffalo's, the Miami offensive line was consistently awful, allowing Jay Fiedler to be hammered within a second of getting the snap; Carolina, Tampa and Washington also got cover-your-eyes performances from their offensive lines.

And yes, TMQ called for Fiedler's reinstatement, and Fiedler threw two interceptions plus lost two fumbles. It's pretty hard to quarterback when you are consistently getting hit within one second of receiving the snap.

### **Insurers Will Pay Thousands for Unnecessary Tests, But Reject the Dog's Claim for a Biscuit**

British researchers have trained a dog to detect biological markers in cancerous tissue, according to *The New York Times*. At one level, yours truly reacted to this news favorably: Finally, a dog that actually does something of value! Many's the time I have instructed Geneva, brainless Official Dog of TMQ -- a Chesapeake retriever, noble state dog of Maryland -- to do something of value. But at another level I wondered what hospital, exactly, will utilize this discovery: "Mrs. Swampscott, we'll have the results in a few minutes. The dog is analyzing your tissue sample."

### **Game Being Played in TMQ's Nightmares**

Cincinnati in their new road uniforms versus Cincinnati in their new home uniforms.

## RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT

### Obscure College Score of the Week

Colby 23, Middlebury 6. These hippy-dippy schools play football? Colby and Middlebury are both top academic schools, but known for excruciating PC. At Colby, instead of Saturday night parties there are anti-globalization teach-ins with Peruvian chicha. Postgame speech of Middlebury football coach Bob Ritter: "Well boys, if I may use an inappropriate gender reference, you did not outscore Colby, but then the whole concept of 'most points wins' is an artifact of the patriarchal repressive social order."

### Bonus Obscure College Score

Western Oregon 52, Western Washington 49. Thirty-three points were scored in the four overtimes of this collision, in which Western Oregon quarterback Denny Bies threw 62 times.

Located in Monmouth, Ore., Western Oregon University's dining halls offer marinated tofu.

### Cover-Your-Eyes College Score

Millersville 38, Cheyney 0. Cheyney has been outscored 312-26. Cheyney coach Lee Brown's postgame speech: "Well boys, you can start making New Year's Day plans."

### Obscure College Rodomontade

Joe Hatley of Overland Park, Kan., notes that a week ago TMQ's second-favorite obscure college, Pittsburg of Kansas, beat Missouri-Rolla 91-27 in a game that featured 17 touchdowns. Although it was 63-7 at the start of the fourth quarter, the Gorillas continued to throw -- worried about losing your 56-point fourth-quarter lead, coach? Then on Saturday, Pittsburg of Kansas beat Washburn 70-14 in a game that featured a mere 12 touchdowns. Although it was 63-14 at the start of the fourth quarter, the Gorillas continued to throw -- worried about losing your 49-point fourth-quarter lead, coach? "The football gods will surely smite the Gorillas," Hatley projects.

### Reader Animadversion

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Matt Mitchell of Apopka, Fla. -- in an email delightfully headlined "A.J. Feeley Linked to Global Warming and Cancer in Laboratory Rats" -- notes that after the Miami-Pittsburgh Splash Bowl, Bill Cowher excused Feeley's performance by saying that young quarterbacks make mistakes. True, Mitchell notes, but the winning quarterback was rookie Ben Roethlisberger, making his first-ever start, who had considerably less experience than the male-model-esque Feeley.

Jason Brown of Chicago, a former Navy officer, notes that in the Navy-Air Force collision, Navy went for it on fourth-and-10 from the Air Force 35 rather than launch a Preposterous Punt. Navy converted and scored a touchdown on the drive, later winning by three. In haiku,

Navy fourth-and-10  
from 35, eschews punt:  
The football gods smile!

-- Jason Brown, Chicago

Tracy Whitney of Malden, Mass., protested that last week's football gods pantheon named Nike the god

of marketing and said the Super Bowl was "his" feasting day. Nike was a goddess.

### Last Week's Challenge

Last week's Challenge was to compose a warning disclaimer for NFL games.

Suggestions included:

"WARNING: CONTAINS GRATUITOUS PREENING." Rand Miranda, Singapore.

"The following program contains scenes of graphic pass-wackiness and may be unsuitable for younger viewers attempting to learn proper football." Lisa Farley, Watertown, Mass.

"Past performance is no guarantee of current standings." Andy Levitt, New York City.

"SALARY CAP FOR COMPARISON PURPOSES ONLY. TEAM ACTUAL SPENDING MAY VARY." James Turner, Derry, N.H.

"Viewers strongly cautioned: Broadcast may include unnatural facial contortions by head coach." Jennifer Thurman, Portland, Ore.

"Ceasing to watch football now may add years to your marriage." Nadine Segari, Chalmette, La. Nadine, like a lot of sensible warnings, this one's gonna be ignored.

"New England Patriots: This product guaranteed fresh up to one (1) year after opening." Greg Crawford, San Antonio, Texas.

"This NFL game has been modified from its original version and has been reformatted for your screen -- unless you have the new 100-yard-long wide-screen TV." Andrew Dobson, Salisbury Beach, Mass.

And this week's Challenge winner is,

"Contains incredible excitement! (Excitement may not be shown in your market)." E.J. Howard, New York City.

In keeping with this year's Challenge policy, the winner's prize is a sentence of shameless praise. Therefore, "E.J. Howard stands astride the New York City landscape as a colossus. He is to Manhattan as the football gods are to Asgard."

### This Week's Challenge

The second presidential debate will be held on Friday night in St. Louis. What question about football would you submit to George W. Bush or John Kerry? Use the link at Reader Animadversion.

**Next Week** Ralph Nader answers your football questions! Third-party candidate demands that members of the public be allowed in huddles.



## Free the Inactive Seven, and pity the poor bastards!

*By Gregg Easterbrook*  
*Special to NFL.com*

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Oct. 12, 2004) -- Good golly Miss Molly, injuries are devastating the NFL, leaving teams shorthanded. This brings to mind a longstanding Tuesday Morning Quarterback cause: Free the Inactive Seven!

Pro football teams have 53 gentlemen on the roster, but before kickoff, seven must be designated inactive, condemned to watch in street clothes. The third quarterback may dress but play only if the first two quarterbacks leave the contest and do not return, so in effect the Inactive Seven is really the Inactive Eight.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback has long wondered why the inactive list exists. Certainly not to save the owners money. Inactive players occupy slots on the regular roster and, watching in street clothes, get full game checks exactly as if they had played. (The "practice squad," which draws only token pay, is a different outfit.) Gentlemen on the inactive list also accrue credits toward free agency and pensions, exactly as if they had played. No, the inactive list doesn't save anyone a dime.

All the inactive list accomplishes is preventing fully paid NFL players from suiting up and performing. Sometimes players on the inactive list are hurt and wouldn't go regardless, but because a minimum of seven is required, almost every inactive list includes healthy players. Surely the Inactive Seven are a factor that increases injuries. Having healthy players sitting around in designer jumpsuits forces active players to take more snaps, especially on special teams, increasing their exposure to injury. The more players who can perform, the thinner the injury risk is spread.

And consider the third quarterback, who can play only if the first two leave for good, which almost never happens. Quarterbacks are the most valuable members of football teams, and their development is a multi-million-dollar matter in the NFL. If third quarterbacks were free to take the field, they could hold for kicks and come in for specialty plays, gaining some game-speed experience. Instead, third quarterbacks never get grass stains, while most teams are reluctant to use the second quarterback on trick plays for fear that he'll get hurt.

The inactive list arose when rosters were expanded to 53 years ago, then the old "moves" system, under which each team could make a limited number of roster changes annually, was discarded. Now teams can change their rosters as often as they please, with the provisos that seven cannot dress; purists seem to feel that 45 players, the roster maximum, was the "correct" number dressed for a football game. No immutable law dictates this number, it's just arbitrarily chosen. The league could have teams dress 20 and require everyone to play both ways, or dress 90 as do many Division I-A colleges, or any other number pulled from a hat.

Having an inactive list only forces owners to pay for performances they don't receive, while complicating the already-bad injury picture. Free the Inactive Seven!

In other football news, the crazy-pass fad continues to sweep the NFL. This week, Marc Bulger threw a crazy pass into double coverage, and it yielded a touchdown. Kerry Collins threw a crazy pass into double coverage, and it yielded an interception returned by Indianapolis for a touchdown. Brett Favre repeatedly made crazy throws into coverage, and the yield was 402 yards passing but also three interceptions and defeat.

Sportscasters constantly declare that NFL stars must "make a play," by which they seem to mean, "do something crazy." But at times, the best move for the quarterback is to throw the ball away, or check down to the safety-valve receiver for a short gain. This year, there seems an epidemic of trying to "make a play" by forcing the ball into coverage, perhaps because quarterbacks know the officials are calling pass interference more tightly. Dear NFL quarterbacks, anybody can heave the ball into coverage: This is not a skill. Nine out of 10 crazy passes backfire, and TMQ is seeing a lot of crazy passes this year.

In still other NFL news, were the Seahawks "looking past" the Rams? Seattle led 27-10 midway through the fourth quarter at home; the Hawks knew the Patriots had already won the early start; you could see on the faces of Seattle players that they were beginning to savor a week of hype and national attention in the runup to their "battle of the undefeateds" at New England on Sunday. Oh ye mortals, count not the chickens until the clock reads all-zeds. And looking ahead to that battle of the almost-undefeateds -- New England may be 4-0, but its victories have come over teams that are a combined 5-14.

### **Stats of the Week**

Seattle, which had the No. 1 defense going into the weekend, failed to hold a 17-point fourth-quarter lead at home.

### **Stats of the Week No. 2**

Washington, which had the No. 4 defense going into the weekend, failed to hold a 10-point third-quarter lead at home.

### **Stats of the Week No. 3**

Jacksonville is doing much better on fourth down (7 of 10) than on third down (21 of 63).

### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Tim Rattay now holds the record for most completions in a game, 38, in San Francisco history. Not Joe Montana, Steve Young, John Brodie or Y.A. Tittle -- Tim Rattay.

### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

Julius Peppers advanced the ball 101 yards and failed to score.

### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

Baltimore scored two touchdowns in 2:12 without its offense ever stepping on the field.

### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

Buffalo staged an 11-play, 6:47 drive that resulted in a punt.

### **Stats of the Week No. 8**

Green Bay recorded 35 yards rushing at home.

### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

Washington recorded 107 yards of total offense at home.

### **Stats of the Week No. 10**

Peyton Manning has more touchdown passes, 14, than the total touchdowns of all but three other teams

(San Diego, Minnesota, Pittsburgh).

### Literary Cheerleader of the Week

Only cheerleaders who list serious books or authors as their favorites are eligible. This week's winner, nominated by Anna Engle of Cambridge, Mass., is Candice Jones of the Broncos, who says *Pride and Prejudice* and *Catcher in the Rye* are her favorite books. According to her team bio, Jones has a degree in art history, which sounds fairly bookish, and teaches ballet and jazz dance. Asked why she wanted to be a cheerleader, Jones replied, "It adds to the texture and variety of accomplishment that I strive to achieve," a bookish response, and notes that the hardest part of being a cheerleader is "maintaining a tan." Jones says her favorite thing to do in the mile-high state is First Friday Art Walk, a monthly event in the Santa Fe art gallery district of Denver.

### In Praise of the Incomplete Pass

On the first play against Green Bay on *Monday Night Football*, Tennessee went deep to Drew Bennett, incomplete. TMQ thought it was the Titans' best play in a 48-27 win. Why? Through its first four games Tennessee had been calling dinky short passes almost exclusively, and this allowed defenses to chock up against the dinky short pass, and against the run. Taking a shot deep right away, by contrast, forced the Packers' defense to back off a bit, and then the Flaming Thumbtacks began to steamroller Green Bay with rushing plays. Three times the Titans attempted deep-strike fly patterns in the first half, and though all fell incomplete, Green Bay's pass defenders kept softening to prevent the long-bomb six, opening up everything else. Then, with the score Tennessee 17, Green Bay 3 and the Titans facing third and 23, Eddie Berlin ran what looked like another fly, and rookie Green Bay corner Ahmad Carroll backpedaled furiously, worried about getting burned for six points; Berlin broke the pattern off for a long square-out, 30-yard gain and the first down. Tennessee scored on the possession to make it 24-3 and never looked back.

In today's short-pass-wacky NFL, many offensive coordinators call little but quick outs, quick slants and short crossing patterns. The result is that defenses can choke up on those patterns, and also are ideally positioned to stop the run. The occasional long-bomb attempt -- especially early, setting the tone for the game -- forces defenses to respect the deep areas. Even if incomplete, deep passes help the offense.

### Kick Early, Go For It Late

Trailing 3-0 in the first quarter, Dallas faced fourth and 1 on Jersey/A's 5. Kick early, go for it late! Instead the Cowboys go for it and lose two yards. Sure it's a letdown to come so close and settle for three, but late in the game, when the Cowboys missed a crucial 52-yard field-goal attempt, they were ruing, really ruing, that they had not done the high-percentage thing in the first quarter.

### Kick Early, Go For It Late No. 2

Leading 13-10 in the middle of the third quarter, Denver faced fourth and goal on the Carolina 1. With the Bronco's solid defense and the Denver fourth-quarter oxygen-depletion advantage, a six-point lead is attractive. Instead the Broncos go for it; Jake Plummer sprints backward all the way to the 13, then heave-hoes a wild pass that is intercepted and returned to the Denver 3, Carolina touchdown three plays later. Kick early, go for it late is an immutable law -- defy it at your peril. Plus you're on the opponent's one, *why are you sprinting backward?* Run here and if you fail, the opponent is pinned against his goal line.

Question for readers -- does anyone know the exact difference in atmospheric oxygen concentration at sea level versus on the 50-yard-line of the Broncos' field? Use the link at Reader Animadversion.

### All Predictions Wrong Or Your Money Back

So much for TMQ's theory that injuries decline once preseason ends -- according to Phillip Wilson of the *Indianapolis Star*, 34 players were placed on injured reserve in the first month of the season, worst such figure in five years.

### Maroon Zone Play of the Day

Tuesday Morning Quarterback considers the Maroon Zone just as important as the red zone. The Maroon Zone is the area where it's too far to launch a field goal but would be preposterous to punt; the Maroon Zone is roughly the opponent's 30 to 45, varying based on wind. Trailing 7-0, Detroit faced fourth-and-5 on the Atlanta 39. The Lions went for the home run by sending Az-Zahir Hakim deep, 39-yard touchdown that proved the winning margin. Contrast this to Buffalo, which launched yet another Preposterous Punt, this time from the Jersey/B 37, and ended up losing by two points.

### Dwayne-Rudd-Class Play

Denver 20, Carolina 17 with seven minutes remaining, Carolina had fourth-and-9 on the Broncos' 25. Carolina was whistled for false start, but that only moved the ball back to the 31, meaning a 48-yard field-goal attempt -- make-able in mile-high air. Then the Panthers' Matt Willig was called for unsportsmanlike for hurling the flag back at an official. The flag struck Willig in the chest, and he seemed to think this gave him the right to a childish fit; later on the sidelines he complained that the flag *might* have hit him in the eye, though did not. Willig's penalty pushed the ball out of field goal range; Carolina punted, and went on to lose by three points. This is the NFL's stupidest penalty since Dwayne Rudd threw his helmet on what would have been the winning down for Cleveland, giving Kansas City a bonus snap on which it kicked a field goal for victory.

### Opposite of a Rudd-Class Play

Baltimore kicking off in the fourth quarter, Nanticokes' returner Chad Morton ran toward the ball as it approached the sideline at the Washington 15. Morton deliberately stepped out of bounds, then reached back in to touch the rolling ball on the field. Brilliant! Kickoff rules specify that if a player who is out of bounds touches a live kick, the kickoff is declared out and the receiving team gets possession on the 40 - - regardless of whether the ball actually goes out. Morton knew that deliberately stepping out of bounds, then reaching back to touch the ball, would advance the Redskins' drive start from the 15 to the 40. Tuesday Morning Quarterback is constantly amazed that highly paid professional football players on special teams so often seem not to know the quirky rules of kicking plays. Morton knew.

### Warning -- Serious Item

Most Americans and Europeans live pretty well, and take their pretty good lives for granted. To be reminded what it is like to live daily life in desperation for sustenance, read this article in the new issue of *On Earth* magazine. It details the horrific working conditions of the Mosquito Coast divers of Nicaragua and Honduras, who risk their lives for starvation wages in order to bring up from the depths many of the lobsters that Americans and Europeans eat, taking for granted.

### Caution: Object Approaching May Be a Football

As the annual *Pro Football Forecast 2004* detailed, the Seattle Seahawks had the most dropped passes in the NFL in 2003 -- dropped passes meaning pure drops of throws that hit the receiver on the hands, not failure to make a hard catch. Hawks players dropped 41 passes during the 2003 regular season; Hawk Koren Robinson already has eight drops this year [http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/football/194670\\_hbok11.html](http://seattlepi.nwsourc.com/football/194670_hbok11.html), and the season is young. On Sunday, the Seahawks pure-dropped four passes in the second half. Hawks' receivers were glancing upfield and thinking about big gains, rather than looking the ball into their hands and thinking about the first down. In addition to denying Seattle first downs, the dropped passes hurt much more than would a run for no gain, since the drops kept stopping the clock -- and St. Louis forced overtime with a figgie with 13 seconds remaining.

### Bringing a Mountain to Boston Proved Prohibitively Expensive

The cover of the new *Men's Journal* depicts Tom Brady looking very male-model-esque after having hiked up to a scenic location atop towering mountains. But according to the *New York Post*, Brady actually was photographed in Boston, and then superimposed into the mountain scene. This raises the question, can we be sure those 19 straight wins really happened? Maybe the entire New England streak was faked on a

sound stage in Arizona.

### Equal-Time Beefcake

Reader Liz Bales suggest this calendar of shirtless Packers players; proceeds from sales go to medical research. "Just though this might be something that the Official Wife of TMQ might want to check out, so she can make a fully informed decision," Bales writes. They may be losing at the moment in Green Bay, but they are oiled and flexing with the best of them. She haikuizes,

Money for beefcake  
will support a charity.  
That's money well-spent.  
-- Liz Bales, West Bend, Wis.

### Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!

Yes, Baltimore and Washington pummeled each other with blitzes, the Redskins forcing the Ravens into three interceptions on three consecutive possessions and the Ravens recording a turnover touchdown on a safety blitz. But mostly the big-blitz backfired Sunday, as it usually does. Jersey/B big-blitzed on the 46-yard touchdown pass to Lee Evans that put Buffalo in the lead late. In overtime, Arizona had San Francisco facing third and 10 in its territory. Since the average NFL pass attempt yields seven yards -- anyway, it's a blitz! Six gentlemen crossed the line, roughing the passer, the Niners keep the ball and score to win on the possession. But nothing Sunday topped this:

In overtime, St. Louis faces third and long on its own 48. Since the average NFL pass attempt yields seven yards -- anyway, seven Seattle defenders crossed the line. TMQ cried aloud, *Aaaaaiiiiiiiyyyyyeeeee!* Touchdown pass to the legendary Shaun McDonald, who's single-covered deep with no safety in sight, and the NFL has one fewer unbeaten club.

### Movie Disclaimer Watch

Disclaimers for the new satire movie *Team America* warn of "violent images... involving puppets." Are "violent images" somehow different from "violence?"

### Best High School Play

Jersey/A leading Dallas 19-10 in the fourth, the Giants faced third and 10 on their 30. Jersey/A lined up with Tiki Barber far wide left and a slot receiver inside left; at the snap Barber stepped backward and caught a "hitch" while the slot receiver blocked the man covering Barber, who ran 55 yards and put the Giants in position for the touchdown that sealed the game. Two guys split wide, one catches a hitch while the other blocks the man defending the guy who catches the hitch, is the single most common high school passing play -- TMQ was at a high school game on Friday night where this play must have been called 15 times by the two sides combined. The Dallas defense acted like they'd never seen it.

### The Second Golden Age of Cussing Occurred When Dick Cheney Became Vice President

Last spring a *Wall Street Journal* article on scholarly research into the history of swearing declared that 19th-century westward expansion was "the golden age of cussing." The article found a cultural-diversity basis to swearing, noting, "immigrants brought their oaths to America." The *Wall Street Journal* reported that TMQ's favorite exclamation, ye gods, was first recorded by grammarians in the year 1763. The article said that to moralists of previous eras, "stallion" was a forbidden term because it suggested sexual prowess, while acceptable expletives included pshaw, gee whiz, land's sakes, jeez Louise and what in the Sam Hill! On the 19th century frontier, grammarians have found, "wild and lawless development of language went on," while swearing was the leading causing of fisticuffs and gunfights. Thus this script for a linguistic-research-based Western:

SHERIFF. I come lookin' for you, Billy. The ladies who work upstairs at the saloon said you been engaged in wild and lawless development of language.

OUTLAW. Pshaw! I'm a stallion, sheriff.

SHERIFF. I don't cotton to that kind of talk in my town.

OUTLAW. What in the Sam Hill you propose to do about it?

*Citizens clear street as men prepare to draw.*

### Retired Broadcaster Watch

For TMQ, the big question about the return of Deion "Midafternoon Soap Opera" Sanders has been -- what's in it for the Ravens? Why participate in this guy's self-promotional stunt? What's in it for the Ravens, apparently, is that other teams still believe the Deion hype. Washington leading 10-7 in the third quarter, the Redskins punted; Deion came around as if to take the punt-reverse handoff; it was a fake, but most of the Potomac Nanticokes' special team chased Sanders, ignoring B.J. Sams, who ran the rock 78 yards for a touchdown. And the Redskins followed Sanders even though he's done diddly on punt returns this season, while Sams had a punt-return touchdown for the Ravens the previous week.

Yes, Sanders got an interception later. But the moment he snagged the ball he started waving it in the air during the play. Verily, it shall come to pass that the Ravens will rue the day they let Sanders back onto the field.

### Man Gawks at Bikini Beach Babes, Special Prosecutor Named

At Northwestern University last week, *Washington Post* sportswriter and ESPN bobblehead Michael Wilbon said he attended bikini beach volleyball events at the Athens Olympics mainly to check out the babes. According to this account in the *Daily Northwestern*, an audience of journalism students "gasp" on Wilbon's declaration. Dear journalism students of Northwestern University: you have lived somewhat sheltered lives if the news that men look at women causes you to gasp. Women's volleyball would not be enjoying its surge of popularity if Misty May and Kerry Walsh had not started performing in a couple ounces of scientifically advanced fabric, and the *whole point* was to get people to look. Yes, it can be ridiculous that women gain attention by shedding clothes, but note that the bikini-triggered popularity of women's volleyball now broadly benefits the entire sport, including at the collegiate level where women perform in regular athletic dress. So would the sport be better off if May and Walsh never disrobed?

### Celebrity Fever Strikes NFL

Not only were the Washington Redskins snookered by a fake to a media-hyped athlete, so too the Houston Texans. Vikings 7, Texans 0, Minnesota third and goal on the Houston 5. The Vikings faked an end-around to Moss and *everybody* went for it, leaving who-dat Nate Burleson alone for the touchdown.

### In the Series Finale, Sipowicz Duels Renko

ABC is running full-page ads saying this is the final season for *NYPD Blue*. Haven't there been several final seasons of this series? It's just as well, since by this point everyone who has ever worked with, known, dated or been related to Detective Sipowicz has been murdered, died in a horrifying accident or expired of a mysterious disease. It's a wonder people don't fall dead around Sipowicz as he walks down the street. Dennis Franz, who plays Sipowicz, broke a barrier of some sort when he played a bad guy *and* a good guy in different seasons of the old *Hill Street Blues* show. Recently, according to his ABC bio, "Franz was among a select group -- including Faith Hill, Britney Spears and NSYNC -- who read selections from Pope John II's private poem books for a CD that serves as a companion piece to *The Private Prayer Books of Pope John Paul II*, a seven-volume collection of his personal writings." Sipowicz and Britney Spears reading religious poetry: it's enough to cause the faithful to undergo reverse conversions. And how can they be the Holy Father's "private" poems if they are being handed to celebrities to read? At any rate, here is a block of all-purpose dialogue from *NYPD Blue*:

COP ONE: I got jammed up on my way to the house.

COP TWO: Didn't you tell them you were on the job?

COP ONE: Yeah. But they jammed me up.

COP TWO: At the house?

COP ONE: On my way to the house. On the job.

*Sipowicz walks by and both cops immediately collapse from a mysterious rare disease.*

### **Curious Tactics, Dr. Watson**

Leading 27-24 with 2:40 remaining in regulation, Seattle had first-and-10 on its 36. Run, grind the clock! Instead pass incomplete, clock stops and the football gods winced. St. Louis scored to force overtime with 13 seconds remaining. Yes, Seattle runs had been stuffed on the previous possession. But the point of the final possession was to deplete the clock. Had Seattle simply handed off for no gain on that first down, the Rams would have run out of time.

### **The Football Gods Promised an Investigation**

I don't wish to alarm you, but Houston is averaging more passing yards than Indianapolis, and San Diego is second in the NFL in scoring.

### **Poor Bustards**

Wildlife officials are attempting to re-introduce the great bustard, once though extinct, into the British Isles. Note: this item exists solely to support the headline.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk** Two weeks ago, the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1) trailed Jersey/A at 17-0 at the beginning of the fourth quarter, and faced fourth and 14 on the Giants' 32. In came the field goal unit; the figgie made it 17-3, and Cleveland never threatened again. Sunday, trailing Pittsburgh 34-13 late in the third quarter, the Browns faced fourth and 9 on the Steelers' 28. In came the field goal unit; the figgie made it 34-16, and Cleveland never threatened again. Often taking the field goal makes sense even when behind -- TMQ, after all, cleaves to the immutable law Kick Early, Go For It Late. But when you're away behind and the sun is beginning to decline toward the horizon, you've got to start taking chances.

### **Please Don't Tell Us Halliburton Will Get the Contract to Supply the Antimatter**

Senior Airman Todd Bush, stationed at Ramstein Air Base In Germany, points out this *San Francisco Chronicle* article which asserts the Air Force is experimenting with antimatter. Possible uses are advanced propulsion and super-powerful bombs that cause no radiation. One twenty-fifth of a gram of antimatter, a very tiny amount, could yield as much energy as all the fuel aboard the space shuttle, the article says. Antimatter does not occur naturally in this part of the galaxy: it can be manufactured in particle accelerators, though only in microscopic quantities. So it's not clear how practical the Air Force research may be. But it's only 2004, and already someone is looking into antimatter power. Jeez Louise!

### **Best Play by a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Be in San Diego**

While Eli Manning watched from the bench at Dallas and high-priced holdout Philip Rivers was nailed to the Chargers' pine, Drew Brees threw a perfect 11-yard touchdown pass to Antonio Gates to make it Bolts 21, Jax 0 and the rout was on. The situation was third and goal from the Jacksonville 11. Gates, a tight end, lined up in the backfield and the Jaguars seemed to assume he was there to block; no one covered the gentlemen when he simply jogged into the left flat.

Bolts note: Man, San Diego looked sharp in its throwback powder blues. These were the best-looking unis in sports in the 1960s, and they are the best-looking unis in sports today. Why oh why don't the

Chargers switch back?

### International Mega-Babe News

Reader François Desreux of Verchain-Maugré, France, writes that Julie Taton -- TMQ's 2003 Mega-Babe of the Year -- has become a television personality and also now makes appearances on behalf of Amnesty International. Taton earned TMQ's nod for becoming both Miss Universe and Miss World from Belgium in the same year. Many modeling portraits of her are here. TMQ also loves that the photos are found at a web address called BelgianBabes, a site devoted to Belgian women who work as fashion models. Sadly, the photos are distressingly tasteful.

### Advice to Viewers in South Florida and Western New York for 1 p.m. Sunday: Calk Molding, Rotate Tires, Analyze Global Warming Studies

On Sunday the 0-4 Buffalo Bills meet the 0-5 Miami Dolphins -- not even the football gods will watch. Note No. 1: Dallas fans continue to gnash their teeth that Bills Parcells traded his 2004 No. 1 choice, and the chance to land promising tailback Stephen Jackson, to bank Buffalo's 2005 No. 1. As TMQ noted in his NFC preview, "Parcells gambled Buffalo will have an awful year, and the 2005 Bills' No. 1 will come near the top of the draft." That gamble is looking awfully good. Stretching back to last season, Buffalo has lost six straight, worst in the league. Note No. 2: Until Miami play improves, TMQ will call them the Ventral Fins.

### New York Times Corrections of the Week

Correction from the a recent *New York Times*: "A sports article about the Philadelphia Eagles' lineup for the coming season referred incorrectly to the status of three players. Corey Simon is a defensive tackle, not a defensive end. Jeremiah Trotter left the team before the 2002 season, not before last season. Nate Wayne came to the Eagles from Green Bay before last season, not this season." So the *New York Times* was wrong about weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, but pulls out all the stops to correct the inadvertent misimpression that Corey Simon is a defensive end!

### Best Blocks

Dallas leading 10-6, Jersey/A's Tiki Barber ran 58 yards after offensive linemen Shaun O'Hara and Chris Snee made perfect blocks at the point of attack, and the Giants ended the series with a touchdown. It's pretty fun to run 58 yards in the stadium with the big white star when everyone in front of you has already been knocked to the ground. Center Robbie Tobeck and guard Chris Gray opened a perfect hole on Shaun Alexander's 41-yard run against Les Moufflons. Unknown tackle Shane Olivea took out two gentlemen on LaDainian Tomlinson's 54-yard screen-pass jaunt for the Bolts, and unknown backup tailback Jesse Chatman looked like an instant star for San Diego because the holes were so big. TMQ counted one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three, one-thousand four, one-thousand five, one-thousand seven, one-thousand seven and one-thousand eight on Marc Bulger's touchdown pass to Brandon Manumaleuna. And the Tennessee offensive line, especially Fred Miller and unknown Jacob Bell, looked like five Clark Kents in pasting Green Bay defenders in the first half on Monday Night. On the third-down hitch screen that sustained the Flaming Thumbtacks' first drive, Miller not only had a monster block but did something TMQ wishes more offensive linemen were coached to do -- after knocking his man down, Miller jumped atop him so that the gentleman could not get back up.

### Worst Blocks

Fourth-and-1 on the Giants' 5, Dallas loses two yards as Jersey/A linebacker Kevin Lewis comes through untouched by human hands. Cowboys' guard Larry Allen, lined up across from Lewis, inexplicably ignored him and double-teamed another Giant. You will not convert many fourth-and-1s if the lineman in the hole at the point of attack never even attempts to block the opponent there.

### Let's See, If I Catch One Every Game for the Next 11 Years...

Eric Moulds now has a reception in 98 straight games -- just 176 more to go to catch Jerry Rice!

### This Week's Star Trek Complaint

In the correct galactic time-line this item was to run in a 2006 column announcing the new Tuesday Morning Quarterback interactive 3-D cheerleader lingerie calendar sponsored by Quizno's. But sinister aliens from the future traveled backward in time to alter history, and now this item is running this week!

In the 79 original Captain Kirk episodes of Star Trek, there were four episodes that involved time-travel - scriptwriters steered clear of time travel owing to the very high absurdity quotient, since if you can alter time, nothing would ever make any sense. In contrast the latest serial, *Star Trek Enterprise*, feels almost entirely time-travel. *Star Trek Enterprise* just hit its 79th episode, and seemingly half had time-travel as their main plot or subplot. First the sinister Suliban are trying to destroy Earth by using information being sent backwards in time from the far future. Then the sinister Xindi are trying to destroy Earth by using technology being sent backwards in time from the far future. The Suliban and Xindi aren't single episodes but recurring "story arcs," showing up in episode after episode about time travel. Once Captain Archer ends up in the 31st century and sees the entire Earth a smoking ruins owing to some mistake he made in the 22nd century. Constantly, a Federation officer from the far future shows up and warns Archer the fate of the galaxy depends in *Enterprise* restoring the "correct" time line. Other episodes involve time-travel that occurs for other reasons, or even by accident.

Now the new season of *Star Trek Enterprise* has kicked off, and the ship has traveled backward in time to the 1940s, where Germany has won World War II via the assistance of sinister aliens. The Federation guy from the 31st century shows up yet again and warns Captain Archer that once again if *Enterprise* does not restore the correct time-line, the galaxy is doomed.

TMQ understands why time-travel plots are attractive to scriptwriters -- exactly because nothing needs to make any sense! But if the cosmic timeline is so fragile that one small spaceship from a backwater world can in a short period cause several complete alterations of the entire history of the galaxy, why would *Enterprise* be the only force changing time? Wouldn't all kinds of time travelers be altering history constantly all around us? Well, back to the item I planned to write on four-time Super Bowl-winning quarterback Fran Tarkenton.

### Jacques Derrida, 1930-2004

The philosopher Jacques Derrida died Friday. Few thinkers have had more impact for such recondite ideas. Derrida was given to gibberish pronouncements such as "deconstruction, if there is such a thing, takes places as the experience of the impossible." His followers received such words as oracular while his detractors received them as threats to Western civilization. (TMQ received them as gibberish.) Derrida believed writers never truly control what they say because limitations of language and social structure impose barriers no writer can evade; this is an important idea that should have lasting merit in literary criticism. The idea is also easy to satirize -- if an author's intent "cannot overcome the inherent contradictions of language itself, robbing texts of truthfulness, absolute meaning and permanence," as the *New York Times* said in its obituary, then Derrida's own theory may not be truthful, and if his own theory isn't true then maybe writers can in fact control their words and convey absolute truth, and so on. At least Derrida got people excited about intellectual theory, which is more than we can say for most intellectuals.

What struck yours truly about Derrida's passing is that, as the *Times* reported, his death "was announced by the president of France." Could you imagine any recent president of the United States announcing the death of an intellectual? Of a talk-show host, maybe. France is the one place in the world a person can still become celebrated merely by thinking. Jean Paul Sartre, for example, spent most of his life pronouncing oracular gibberish -- "all human actions are equivalent and all are on principle doomed to failure." He became a wealthy national celebrity who slept with hundreds of beautiful women who basically threw themselves at him, if the accounts of his sometime companion Simone de Beauvoir are correct. When Sartre died in 1980, hundreds of thousands of Parisians lined the streets for his funeral procession. When was the last time the death of an intellectual in the United States as received a major public event? Robert Frost in 1963 comes to mind. Can anyone think any other?

### We're All Professionals Here

In the Buffalo-Jersey/B game, there were penalties on four consecutive plays.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All**

New England 24, Miami 10 with 2:44 remaining, the Dolphins face second and goal on the Flying Elvii 1. A run was stuffed on first down, so no one's going to fall for a play-fake here! Play-fake, Jay Fiedler sprints backward all the way to the 13 where he's sacked. You're on the opponent's 1 -- *why are you sprinting backwards?* Run the ball straight up the middle three consecutive times and if you fail, you fail. Instead Miami went sack, short completion, incompleting and the New England 19-game winning streak was secure. Worst-blocks bonus: on the sack play Ventral Fins' center Seth McKinney, pulling right to pick up blitzing safety Rodney Harrison, barely slowed Harrison down, though McKinney outweighs him by 100 pounds.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All No. 2**

Trailing 16-10 in the early fourth quarter, Dallas faced fourth-and-1 on its own 43. The Cowboys went for it, pass incomplete. Can't anybody just run up the middle for a yard anymore? Yes, Dallas had failed earlier in the game when it ran up the middle on fourth and 1. But what are the odds of the Giants stopping a fourth and 1 run twice in the same game? And the pass wasn't even an attempt to hit the home run, it was a rinky-dinky junky-looking two-yard thing to who-dat reserve back Darian Barnes, who came into the game with three career receptions.

### **The Football Gods Reward Those Who Rush**

Trailing 21-0, Jax had first and 10 on the San Diego 11 with 4:09 remaining in the first half. The Jaguars ran on five consecutive snaps -- including on fourth and 1 -- and were rewarded with a touchdown. Yes, they went on to lose the game, but TMQ still thinks the football gods will smile on this team for purist power-running.

### **Sour Defensive Play of the Week**

Early in the game, Pittsburgh quarterback Ben Roethlisberger was flushed from the pocket and looked like he might run; Browns' corner Anthony Henry let receiver Plaxico Burress go because he thought there would be no pass; Roethlisberger stopped on a dime and threw for a 48-yard gain to Burress. Now it's Pittsburgh 17, Cleveland 10; again Ben Roethlisberger is flushed from the pocket and looks like he might run; again Browns' corner Anthony Henry lets receiver Plaxico Burress go because he thinks there will be no pass; again Roethlisberger stops on a dime and throws a 37-yard touchdown pass to Burress. Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice...

### **Sour Defensive Play of the Week No. 2**

Man, the male-model-esque Tom Brady play-faked well against Miami. He played-faked perfectly on the Patriots' first touchdown, on second-and-goal from the Dolphins' 1; no one even covered the receiver. Brady played-faked perfectly on the Patriots' second touchdown, on second-and-goal from the Dolphins' 5; no one even covered the receiver. Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice...

### **Sour Defensive Play of the Week No. 3**

Game scoreless, Minnesota faces third and goal on the Houston 1. Randy Moss is lined up right. Moo Cows' corner Marcus Coleman lines up on Moss' outside shoulder to stop the fade; no safety stands on the same side of the field. All Moss does is run a three-yard slant and turn, touchdown pass. How can the most dangerous receiver in the league be left one-on-one on third and 1 in a defensive set that leaves the slant pattern undefended?

### **Sour Defensive Play of the Week No. 4**

In overtime, with all eyes on Moss, Minnesota sent Marcus Robinson on the deep post and he dropped a perfect touchdown pass. Two snaps later, Minnesota sent Marcus Robinson on the deep post and he

caught a perfect touchdown pass. Fool me once, shame on you; fool me twice...

### **Sour Special Teams Play**

Trailing 14-7 with 27 seconds remaining in the first half, Atlanta lined up in field goal formation on the Detroit 12. Lions' defender Terrence Holt must have seen some cue, because he immediately began pointing to the Falcons' left flat, then ran out to that area. Atlanta executed the fake, and Holt dropped the runner for a loss, ending the half. Set aside that a fake field goal with only 27 seconds left is a shaky call; unless Atlanta scored a touchdown on the play, it might have ended up lining up for a field goal again anyway. But when a special-teams unit sent out to run a fake kick hears the defenders yelling that it will be a fake, call time-out (Atlanta had a time out) or just stand up and take the delay-of-game penalty.

### **Denver Helmet Instructions: "INSERT RUNNING BACK, GAIN THOUSAND YARDS"**

Denver substitute tailback Reuben Droughns, who entered the contest with 127 yard rushing in five years, ran for 193 yards.

### **Cheer-Babe-Based Portents**

It was 57 degrees Fahrenheit at kickoff at Qwest Field. Mike Martz wore a varsity jacket, Mike Holmgren a natty pullover. The Seattle Sea-Gals displayed professionalism by coming out in revealing two-pieces numbers that defied the Fahrenheit. Yet Hawks lost! (Note: in the cheer-babe context, "professionalism" means skin or at least skin tight.) It was 61 degrees Fahrenheit at kickoff at Fed Ex Field. The Redskins cheerleaders displayed professionalism by coming out in revealing two-pieces numbers that defied the Fahrenheit. Yet the Redskins lost! And consider, Adrian Peterson was on the cover of *Sports Illustrated* last Thursday, then had a *good* game Saturday for Oklahoma!

Tuesday Morning Quarterback is troubled by these signs and omens. The football gods are restive. All is not in order. Something mighty is about to happen.

### **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

#### **Obscure College Score of the Week**

Lake Forest 43, Knox 2. The Knox faithful lament: If only we'd gotten 21 more safeties! Located in Lake Forest, Ill., Lake Forest College currently enrolls significantly more women than men, something high school guys might want to take into account.

#### **Bonus Obscure College Score**

Albion 51, Tri-State 19. Located in Angola, Ind., Tri-State College boasts, "Students at TSU know how to have fun! Think Chicago Day Trip, the Home Sweet Dorm Contest, the Mid-Winter Blowout or a trip down one of the world's few refrigerated toboggan runs." There is an 18-hole golf course on the campus.

#### **Obscure College Rodomontade**

Last week's column noted that Pittsburg of Kansas, TMQ's second-favorite obscure college, won consecutive games by margins of 91-27 and 70-14 -- but in each case continued to pass like mad in the fourth quarter, running up the score in decidedly unsportsmanlike fashion. Saturday, the Gorillas beat Emporia State 72-27, but set a new low for lack of sportsmanship. Getting the ball with a 65-27 lead and 7:45 remaining in the fourth quarter, Pitt State passed on four of five plays, frantically trying to run up the score. Worried about losing your 38-point late fourth-quarter lead, coach? Earlier in the year, Pitt State was still passing in the fourth quarter despite leading Truman State by 77-7. Maybe Pitt State boosters are dancing over all these 70-points-plus outings, but Pitt State students and team members should feel embarrassed about being part of a program that consistently exhibits such poor sportsmanship. And yea, verily, mark my words, the football gods will smite Pitt State down for hubris.

#### **Cover-Your-Eyes College Score**

Mansfield 26, Cheyney 19. Cheyney has been outscored 338-45. Cheyney coach Lee Brown's postgame speech: "Well boys, next year we hope to schedule that team in *Friday Night Lights*. And I mean the actors, not the high-school kids."

### Cutting Edge Final Score Predictions

Robert Kleisch of Chicago nominates the exact final score predictions of the *Chicago Tribune* -- all wrong.

### Reader Animadversion

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Kathryn Brightbill was among many to point that TMQ was incorrect to call absolute zero, minus-460 degrees Fahrenheit, the "temperature of outer space." The temperature of space is 2.73 degrees Kelvin, or minus-455 degrees Fahrenheit. That little extra smackerel above absolute zero is the "background radiation," heat left over from the Big Bang and still detectable 14 billion years later. (Stars don't produce anywhere near enough luminosity to account for the "background radiation" -- either it's a remnant of the Big Bang or there is something really basic about the cosmos that is not yet understood.) TMQ was taken aback by the sheer number of readers who knew the exact temperature of outer space. Brightbill haikuizes,

Absolute zero?  
Outer space a bit warmer:  
2.73.  
-- Kathryn Brightbill, Bradenton, Fla.

Apropos last week's item on the unlikelihood that the British cancer-sniffing dog will get a job in health care -- TMQ suspects it just wouldn't go over if patients were told, "the dog is analyzing your sample" -- Lynne O'Connor of Kennett Square, Pennsylvania suggests the solution is to train Labrador retrievers for the cancer-cell sniffing task. That way, she suggests, patients could be told, "The lab is analyzing your sample."

Last week TMQ roasted the Bills' offensive line for the play that cost Buffalo its game against New England -- trailing by seven with three minutes remaining, Bills facing fourth-and-3 on the Patriots' 19, the Buffalo line allowed *two* Flying Elvii to come through untouched to sack Drew Bledsoe. TMQ was hard on Bills' guard Chris Villarrial, who "inexplicably pulled right as if to lead a non-existent sweep," rather than block the man in front of him, who came through untouched. Neil Herman of Buffalo points out that the day after the column, the *Buffalo News* published an entire article about that one single play, and the article vindicates Villarrial, who was supposed to pull to nowhere to influence New England into thinking the play was a sweep right. Bills' tailback Travis Henry was supposed to block in the hole Villarrial vacated, but Henry botched his assignment and trotted into the left flat, blocking no one. Right tackle Mike Williams was supposed to block in the hole Villarrial vacated, but botched his assignment and double-teamed someone else. Meanwhile left tackle Marcus Price did an "olé," stepping aside as his man went by the way a matador steps aside from the bull. TMQ has watched the replay in mounting disbelief, and considers this a nominee for Single Most Fouled Up Play in NFL history. With seven back to block five, *two* come through never touched; you are not going to win many games with a line so inept that with seven blocking five, two are never touched.

Buffalo newspapers note. There's the West Coast Offense, the Run-and-Shoot Offense; Mark Gaughan of the selfsame *Buffalo News* christened the Bills' cover-your-eyes attack the Root Canal Offense. Of using Les Mouflons as a cognomen for the Rams, Randall Sherman of Mapaville, Mo., notes that, "While St. Louis was founded by French trappers, the French influence faded by the early 19th century. Modern St. Louis shows more German, Italian and Irish influence than French. Perhaps you should start calling the team *Die Sturmboecke* -- the Battering Rams. The name might cause Mike Martz to keep the ball on the ground more."

### Last Week's Challenge

Last week's was to propose a football question for John Kerry or George W. Bush at a presidential debate.

Martha Merrywell of Houston proposed for Bush, "Do you know where the movie *Friday Night Lights* is set?" Hey Martha, Texas is a big state, Odessa is 350 miles from Crawford – actually, 353.95 miles, according to MapQuest.

Scott Durfee, also of Houston, proposed to both, "If you could play for a professional football team, what would your number be and why?" Some players believe various jersey numbers have mystic qualities -- 44 has better karma than 43, for instance. A presidential candidate who wanted a single-digit number might reveal himself as an egotist, whereas one who wanted an offensive lineman's number would be declaring himself a team player.

Jim McArdle of Barrington, Ill., suggests for both, "What are the differences between a single reverse, a double reverse and an end around?" Sid Gray of Nashville, Tenn., proposes, to John Kerry, "When watching instant-reply reviews, have there been calls you voted to overturn and also voted to uphold?" Carlos Augusto of Brazil proposes, to George W. Bush, "How many more times do you plan to call the blitz against other countries?"

Jennifer Anders of Virginia Beach, Va., proposes to Kerry: "What is the name of the Green Bay Packers' stadium?" Visiting Wisconsin, Kerry called it "Lambert Field;" Bush has cautioned that there could be nookleeyur reactors hidden under Lambert Field.

Justin Merritt of Northfield, Minn., proposes to both contenders, "Would you end the NFL draft and give us an all-volunteer league?" Merritt, an assistant professor at St. Olaf College, also proposed that this sentence from last week's column -- "Giant Gambian pouched rats of Mozambique, Tuesday Morning Quarterback salutes you!" -- is the greatest English sentence ever written. Well, Top 10 anyway. (If you don't get the sentence you will have to reread last week.)

Steve Rutherford of San Diego proposed for both, "Would you impose sanctions against the Miami Dolphins' offense?" Tuesday Morning Quarterback proposes to both, "Would you outsource NFL cheerleader jobs to India?" My follow-up question would be, "Should the Arizona Cardinals outsource their attendance?"

This week's Challenge winner is Loren Hillberg of Atherton, California, who proposes for both, "Would you ever punt inside the opponent's 40 yard line -- and if so why, why, why?" In keeping with this year's Challenge policy, his prize is a sentence of shameless praise. Hillberg is the chief counsel for Macromedia, which makes web-conferencing software. Thus, "Loren Hillberg is at the cutting edge of modern lawyering. No old-economy attorney would want to go up against this gentleman." Put that in your resume, Loren, and just don't add that it was NFL.com that said this about you.

### **This Week's Challenge**

Heavens to Betsy, good golly Miss Molly, propose a colorful expletive -- either historical or of your own invention -- that could appear on a family web site like NFL.com. Use the link at Reader Animadversion.

### **Next Week**

The Inactive Seven chain themselves to stadium gates in protest!



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## Free the Inactive Seven, and pity the poor bastards!

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

(Oct. 19, 2004) -- Congratulations to the New England Patriots, noble winners of -- no wait, scratch that. I don't know about you, but I am sick of the New England Patriots.

Twenty straight victories, two Super Bowl rings in three years, their male model-esque quarterback gracing more magazine covers than Richard Gere: Give us a break. New England works hard and is unselfish, its players rarely boast, and its magnificent new stadium was built with the owner's money rather than taxpayer funds; there's a lot to be said for the Patriots.

But I am sick of them. At least half the games in the New England streak have turned on good luck for the Patriots on the critical downs at the end; change New England's luck even slightly, and this club becomes another middle-of-the-pack outfit. New England's good fortune at avoiding injuries has been nothing short of spectacular -- lots of NFL teams would look better if hardly anyone ever got hurt. Just ask Carolina and Tennessee, or note how much better Houston is this season with numerous injured players who missed the 2003 campaign now back on the field. Plus it's fundamentally tedious when the same team always wins. Somebody else deserves a winning streak. At this point, I'm rooting for the Patriots to lose their next 20 consecutive games.

In other NFL news, the Washington Redskins are reeling partly because they have allowed five touchdowns on returns, and the City of Tampa Buccaneers are reeling partly because they allowed a 93-yard return for a touchdown with the game tied in the second half on Monday night. Nothing hurts more than to work, work, work for each precious yard of field position, then suddenly see some skinny gentleman racing the length of the gridiron in the opposite direction.

And in still other NFL news, Jersey/B at New England this Sunday is the last possible pairing of undefeated teams this season -- unless the game ends in a tie, and the Jets and Patriots remain undefeated until their second meeting on Dec. 26. (In theory an undefeated New England or Jersey/B could meet an undefeated Philadelphia in the Super Bowl, but since no team has ever gone 18-0, it's unlikely two will do so in the same season.) New Jersey Jets, TMQ will be rooting for you. Start the Patriots' 20-game losing streak!

### Stats of the Week

Since winning the Super Bowl, the Buccaneers are 8-14.

### Stats of the Week No. 2

Daunte Culpepper has 18 touchdown passes, more than the total touchdowns of all teams except Indianapolis and San Diego.

### Stats of the Week No. 3

Since entering Week 5 with the league's No. 1 rated defense, Seattle has given up 63 points.

### Stats of the Week No. 4

Reuben Droughns is on pace to rush for an all-time single-season record 2,583 yards.

### Stats of the Week No. 5

Detroit totaled 125 yards of offense at home, while Oakland totaled 145 yards of offense at home..

#### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

Miami quarterbacks have thrown four interceptions returned for touchdowns.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

Buffalo held the ball for all but four plays in the fourth quarter.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 8**

The top five defensive teams -- Denver, Washington, Miami, Tampa and Pittsburgh -- have a combined record of 13-17.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

The top five offensive teams -- Minnesota, Indianapolis, Green Bay, St. Louis and Denver -- have a combined record of 19-9.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 10**

New England and Philadelphia, both undefeated, have not attempted a fourth-down conversion this season. Stat submitted by reader Mike Paulson of Alexandria, Va.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 11**

Minnesota is averaging one-fifth more offense than the next-best team in the NFL -- 477 yards per game versus 389 for Indianapolis.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 12**

Stretching back to last season, Atlanta is 2-10 when Michael-Mike Vick does not play and 8-2 when he does.

#### **Literary Cheerleader of the Week**

Only cheerleaders who list serious books or authors as their favorites are eligible. This week's is Michelle of the Washington Redskins, favorite book being *Brave New World*. Michelle is a gymnastics instructor whose team bio says she started ballet at age four -- isn't that awfully late by the standards of modern dance? Note that Aldus Huxley's *Brave New World* is about a future dystopia, the reverse of a utopia. Writing in 1931, Huxley feared that materialism, rather than military or dictatorial power, would be the ultimate adversary of human freedom. In his book, men and women have voluntarily surrendered their personalities in return for having whatever possessions they want. Huxley thought people will always fight tyranny, but might surrender to materialism of their own free will. Writing in the late 1920s, Huxley believed he saw the budding signs of runaway materialism. Now the global GDP is 100 times what it was when *Brave New World* was written.

#### **Cortez Hankton Play of the Week**

"ERRR-nest WILLL-ford, ERRR-nest WILLL-ford," chanted TMQ and my nine-year-old, Spenser, a Jax fan, as the Jaguars marched down the field against Kansas City for yet another buzzer-beater win. Who-dat gentleman Wilford, with game-winning touchdown catches in two previous Jacksonville games, had a clutch 14-yard reception on the final drive. But there's lots of who-dats in Jacksonville, and this time Cortez Hankton, a second-year man with one reception on the season coming into the game, caught a 14-yard touchdown pass with 49 seconds remaining, giving Jax its victory.

### **Best Play by a 14-Year Veteran**

Pittsburgh trailing Dallas 20-10 early in the fourth quarter, the Steelers faced third-and-4 on the Cowboys' 7. Shotgun, motion; Ben Roethlisberger watched for tight end Jerame Tuman, pulled the ball back when Tuman broke one way toward coverage and then rifled it in for the touchdown when Tuman broke the other way. Roethlisberger completed his last 11 consecutive pass attempts in Pittsburgh's comeback win. What's that -- you say it was only his fourth game? Ask me who Ben Roethlisberger reminds me of, and I'll tell you Peyton Manning.

### **Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk**

Trailing the defending champion Patriots 17-0, Seattle took the field goal on fourth-and-6 from the Flying Elvii 15. Trailing 20-3, Seattle took the field goal on fourth-and-4 from the Flying Elvii 22. Trailing 20-6, Seattle took the field goal on fourth-and-5 from the Flying Elvii 10. Yes, Tuesday Morning Quarterback preaches the immutable law Kick Early, Go For It Late. And that law worked for Jersey/B, which took the field goal when down 14-0 to San Francisco and later rallied to win. But the exception to the immutable law Kick Early, Go For It Late comes when you're way behind. Especially on the first two kicks, Seattle was way behind, yet played it conservative. You can't dance with the champ -- you've got to knock him down.

### **Kick Early, Go For It Late**

Trailing 21-17 with six minutes remaining, San Diego faced fourth-and-3 on the Atlanta 10. Now it's late, go for it! San Diego took the field goal and never got the ball back again.

### **Sweet Play of the Week No. 1**

The Browns leading 24-17 early in the fourth quarter, Cleveland faced third-and-3 on its 41. Running back Lee Suggs went into the right flat for what seemed like a dinky flare pass -- then cut upfield along the sidelines. Jeff Garcia hit Suggs in stride, and he outran the linebacker chasing him to the end zone. TMQ has always liked the tailback "up." Usually it's against linebacker coverage, and usually the linebacker is stunned when the pattern is not for a dinky short gain. Why don't teams send their tailbacks up the field more often?

### **Sweet Play of the Week No. 2**

Trent Green "crouch faked" the handoff to Priest Holmes, then threw a 52-yard strike to Johnnie Morton to set up Kansas City's first score. Few teams coach quarterbacks to "crouch" fake -- hunch over the ball on a play-action pass. Yet the crouch fake is consistently effective, making it nearly impossible for the defensive front seven to see if the quarterback has kept the rock. Why doesn't every team use the crouch fake?

### **Sweet Play of the Week No. 3**

Leading 23-20 with 2:45 remaining, New England faced the decisive down of the contest -- third-and-7 on its 40. Seattle seemed to assume it would be some dinky short-pass attempt. Tom Brady rolled left and had plenty of time; Bethel Johnson went deep against defenders expecting him to pull up short, and made a diving, running-full-speed catch at the Seattle 12-yard line; TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook. Set aside that this is the kind of once-engaging, now-infuriating play that has characterized New England's winning streak -- an incredibly difficult clutch catch on a pass that most good receivers would have dropped. Just consider how sweet the New England strategy was, going for the game-icing big gain when everyone expected something rinky-dinky.

### **Next, Bloomberg Offers Trading in Parking-Ticket Futures**

New York City's first budget under Mayor Michael Bloomberg specified that parking enforcement officers write 1.7 million more tickets than the previous year -- finally, officially putting ticket writers on quota. According to the *San Francisco Chronicle*, that city's meter maids and muffins have also gone on

commission. In 2003, during the California budget meltdown, the San Francisco Department of Parking and Traffic ordered meter personnel to write an extra 40,000 tickets in the next 45 days. California law prohibits ticket quotas, so the 40,000 mandated citations were officially a "goal," not a quota.

New York and San Francisco residents might try the website ParkingTicket.com. It charges one-half the face value of the fine to get the citation dismissed: "Our expert team of consultants has more than 80 years of parking-ticket contesting experience." Eighty years of parking-ticket experience -- cities were giving out parking tickets in 1924?

### **Sour Play of the Week No. 1**

Trailing 15-14 in the fourth quarter at Jersey/B, the Squared Sevens faced second-and-7 on the Jets' 27. The call was an end-around to Arnaz Battle; fumbled exchange, loss of 8. Suddenly San Francisco is out of field-goal range on the Jets' 35. A third-down pass clangs incomplete, and San Francisco launches a Preposterous Punt -- which booms into the end zone, Jets ball on their 20, net field-position gain for San Francisco of 15 yards. San Francisco *punted from the opponents' 35* when trailing in the fourth quarter. The football gods winced.

### **Sour Play of the Week No. 2**

Near the goal line, New England likes to throw the snap hitch -- quarterback takes the snap, straightens up and throws instantly -- to any wide receiver who is single-covered. David Givens scored from the Indianapolis 7 on the snap hitch in the AFC Championship Game last year, for example. Leading 10-0, the Flying Elvii had second-and-3 on the Blue Men Group 6. David Patten lined up wide left, exactly where Givens had been, and was single-covered, the safety shading toward the center. Male model-esque Tom Brady audibled to a snap hitch; Patten stiff-armed the cornerback and scored; suddenly the visitors are in a 17-0 hole to the defending champions. The Seahawks seemed surprised by the call. Where was Seattle's film study?

### **Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!**

Buffalo, Minnesota, New England, New Orleans, Philadelphia and Washington all got monster defensive plays on blitzes, while Pittsburgh defeated Dallas on a late fumble caused by a blitz. So, yes, blitzing sometimes works. TMO's contention is that on average it backfires -- at least, on average blitzing backfires in the expected-blitz situations, mainly third-and-long. Brandon Lloyd's 33-yard touchdown reception came when Jersey/B six-blitzed on third-and-long; Jabar Gaffney caught a 20-yard touchdown pass against a six-blitz; Shaun Alexander ran 9 yards for a touchdown when New England six-blitzed on second-and-long; and it was against a New Orleans six-blitz that Minnesota converted the third-down pass that enabled it to run out the clock.

### **Best 99-Yard Play**

Game scoreless, the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1) had first down on their own 1. Garcia rolled right, behind a pulling guard; Cincinnati safeties were nowhere to be seen after Andre Davis made his catch and took off. It's surprising how often teams gamble by throwing on first down from their own 1 -- and surprising how often defenses are surprised.

### **Cheer-Babe Professionalism**

Cheerleaders for Atlanta, Dallas, Jacksonville, New Orleans, Philadelphia, St. Louis and Tennessee all flounced in next-to-nothing, and their teams went 4-3 -- a reasonable display of the power of cheer-babe professionalism. But as usual, at the cutting edge were the who-needs-clothes Philadelphia Nesharim cheer squad. Kickoff temperature 56 degrees at Lincoln Financial Field, the Eagles cheerleaders opened the game in their hot-weather outfits, which are little more than bikinis with some athletic support added to make cartwheels possible. Needless to say, the football gods crowned Philadelphia with victory.

### **Eukaryote Crumpler Was Too Hard to Say**

Alge Crumpler of Atlanta had a nifty touchdown catch. What a relief his parents didn't name him Pond Scum Crumpler!

### Least Underrated Watch

Last month, TMQ complained that Hines Ward is constantly described as "underrated" despite this gentleman having attended three Pro Bowls. On Sunday, Phil Simms called Ward "one of the most underappreciated receivers."

### Fashion Nightmare Pairing

In the Houston-Tennessee game, both teams wore shimmering near-black pants. The Official Wife of TMQ would have dubbed this the Midnight Buns matchup.

### Gabrielle Reece Nude With a Spotted Owl Would Have Made a Good Picture

An editor of the august *The New Republic* (that's the august magazine, not an August issue) once mused that it should run an "in praise of sin" issue -- contending people ought to imbibe, party and have lots of sex in their one brief chance at life. *The New Republic* stuck with the serious, responsible public-policy analysis that is its reason for being. But now this idea has been done by the oft unpredictable *Outside* magazine, Bible of outdoorsy types. *Outside's* October number headlines, "Sex and Sin Issue!"

For starters, *Outside* posed volleyball star and mega-babe Gabrielle Reece in various stages of undress next to a Hummer, or holding a chainsaw after having cut down a tree. Chopping trees and SUVs are sins to the *Outside* readership, get it? (Reece undressed would cause thoughts of sin in almost any demographic.) But the features are what make the issue. One female writer says her secret pleasure is setting off explosives; another describes having sex while river rafting; a male writer admits to loving very loud, overpowered jet skis; an article extols the thrill of watching wild animals rip each other to shreds. Maybe *Outside* magazine was always best suited for this topic. If *The New Republic* had done a praise-of-sin issue, probably the hottest article would have been some Brookings Institution guy recounting the day he ordered a glass of sherry with lunch.

### Why Certain Teams Are 1-5

It was bad that Michael Pittman of City of Tampa fumbled at the St. Louis 7 with the game tied in the third, but what really killed the Bucs was that Rams S Adam Archuleta ran the fumble back 93 yards for a touchdown. Why did he run the fumble back 93 yards for a touchdown? Because Tampa players just stood around watching him. Check the replay: Mike Alstott is on the ground between Archuleta and the end zone, and doesn't even try to get up to make a tackle, just watches. Numerous other Bucs were in the general area when Archuleta started running, and only tackle Derrick Deese made an effort to chase the gentleman. Remember, the whistle had not sounded. High school coaches yell at their charges, "Play to the whistle." Tampa players just gave up, though the whistle had not sounded.

### Curious Tactics, Dr. Watson

Leading 31-10 in the fourth quarter, Green Bay coach Mike Sherman radioed in the halfback pass by Ahman Green. It worked for a touchdown, but why use this play with a big lead? Six days before on *Monday Night Football*, Green Bay had been stung when Tennessee called a receiver pass for a touchdown in the fourth quarter, with the Flaming Thumbtacks leading by 21 at the time. TMQ was puzzled by that call, too; now the Packers have replicated it. What's the point of showing your trick play when a game is already locked up?

### Curious Tactics, Dr. Watson No. 2

Why didn't Mike Tice challenge the touchdown awarded to the Saints with 2:45 remaining? There's no way Aaron Brooks got in; his knee went down long before he lunged the ball over the line. Tice and Mike Mularkey, two head coaches who are both former Minnesota tight ends named Mike, continue to seem reluctant to challenge calls. What strange harmonic convergence is at work?

## Curious Management, Dr. Watson

Tuesday Morning Quarterback always wonders why teams trade for disgruntled players, who rarely become re-gruntled at their new homes. New Orleans just gave up a No. 2 pick and a decent backup quarterback for disgruntled Green Bay corner Mike McKenzie, who looked awful in his Saints' debut as the Vikings netted 417 yards passing. Obvious next question: Why, given this, would anyone in his right mind trade for Ricky Williams?

## Best Blocks

TMQ counted one thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three, one thousand four, one thousand five, one thousand six on Byron Leftwich's touchdown pass to Fred Taylor, and counted one thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three, one thousand four, one thousand five on Jay Fiedler's touchdown pass to Derrius Thompson. I counted one thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three, one thousand four, one thousand five, one thousand six on Jake Plummer's touchdown pass to Ashley Lelie. I counted one thousand one, one thousand two, one thousand three, one thousand four, one thousand five frequently as Marc Bulger scanned the field.

Montrae Holland had a perfect block at the point of attack on Deuce McAllister's touchdown run against Minnesota. Jerame Tuman and Dan Kreider combined to take out three Dallas defenders as Jerome Bettis went in untouched for the deciding six. It's pretty fun to run for the game-winning touchdown in the stadium with the big blue star when everyone in front of you has already been knocked to the ground. Defenders also blocked well this weekend. Corey Simon of Philadelphia hustled downfield and made a great block to enable Lito Sheppard to score on an interception return. Cletidus Hunt of Green Bay hustled downfield and made a great block to enable Darren Sharper to score on an interception return.

No defender came remotely near Daunte Culpepper as he waited, waited, waited for Nate Burleson to get open for a 36-yard reception. Minnesota's skill players get all the press, but the Vikings have the league's best offensive line this season, and TMQ sees this as essential to their success. No matter who lines up at tailback, the Vikings run well -- which means excellent offensive line play.

## Worst Blocks

On a screen pass, offensive linemen are supposed to allow defenders to come toward the quarterback, but only after brushing them to slow them down. Game scoreless at Next One Will Have Five Blades Field, on their first series, the Seahawks faced third-and-7. The call was screen left. Hawks offensive linemen trotted left -- but no one ever brushed Richard Seymour, who deflected the pass for an interception. New England scored a touchdown on the possession and immediately the visitors were in a hole against the defending champions.

## Equal-Time Beefcake

Here is another of *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* photographer Scott Eklund's portraits of shirtless Blue Men Group players -- in this case hobbled defensive end Grant Wistrom and his running mate Chike Okeafor.

## Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All

Trailing 17-10 at the end of the third quarter, Miami had second-and-goal on the Buffalo 2. Slam the ball up the middle three straight plays? Pass attempt, sack; pass attempt, sack; field goal; Dolphins never threatened again.

## Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All No. 2

As noted by reader Omar Syed of Minneapolis, on the play that caused the deciding Dallas fumble, the 'Boys led 20-17 and faced third-and-13 from the Pittsburgh Hypocycloids' 47. The Hypocycloids had consumed their timeouts. Run the ball up the middle, the clock ticks down to the two-minute warning and then, assuming a punt into the end zone, the stout Dallas defense only must prevent Pittsburgh from gaining 50 yards in the final two minutes with no timeouts and the Dallas home crowd roaring at

military-afterburner decibels. Instead, it's a pass attempt that leads to a lost football -- and had the result been incomplete pass, it would have stopped the clock and saved Pittsburgh 30 seconds. (When New England was in a similar situation against Seattle as described above, the Hawks still had two timeouts, dictating more aggressive strategy).

### **Worst Series Ere the Clock Struck Midnight**

Trailing 28-21 with seven minutes remaining in the fourth quarter, Tampa had first-and-10 on the St. Louis 21 at 11:58 p.m. ET. Did the Bucs try to push Les Mouflons back with runs? Sack; incomplection; interception. Yipes stripes.

### **Best Series As the Clock Struck Midnight**

Taking over after the above-cited interception, the Rams ran on eight consecutive downs, keeping the clock ticking. The possession ended in a missed field goal at 12:26 a.m. ET, but at that point, there was only 1:09 left and the Bucs had consumed their timeouts.

### **Pennsylvania Resplendent!**

Current state standings: Pennsylvania 10-1, New Jersey 9-1, Missouri 5-6, California 6-12, Florida 5-13. Note the old-economy Northeastern states continue to beat up on the Sunbelt.

### **Sleep Researchers Recommend Watching Tapes of Tampa Bay Games of the 1970s**

Harvard Medical School now has not one, not two, but three endowed chairs in "sleep medicine." You can check out *Sleep*, the technical journal of the American Academy of Sleep Medicine. Don't miss the article "Phenotyping Sleep Propensity in Mice."

Insufficient sleep is a problem for millions of Americans, and decline in regular hours of sleep is a worrisome long-term trend. Our great-grandparents' generation slept an average of 10 hours per night, our parents' generation averaged eight hours, Americans today average seven hours and the number keeps falling. One reason stress is increasing is that the body stops making the stress hormone cortisol during sleep -- relief from stress hormones may be a fundamental reason why mammals sleep. Progressively fewer hours of sleep translate to progressively more hours exposed to stress hormones. Here's what Harvard Medical School has to say:

"Due to the high-paced demands of modern society, relatively few Americans obtain the 8-9 hours of sleep they need each night. This can result in chronic sleep debt, which not only interferes with glucose metabolism by increasing insulin resistance akin to what occurs in diabetes, but also degrades neurobehavioral performance and increases the risk of error and accident. Sleepiness is cited as a principal cause of more than 56,000 motor vehicle crashes annually in the United States. More than 70,000 people are injured and more than 1,500 die in those crashes. Young people in their teens and 20s, who are particularly susceptible to the effects of chronic sleep loss, are involved in more than half of the fall-asleep crashes on the nation's highways each year."

### **Michael-Mike Vick Plays of the Week**

Vick looked flashy on his touchdown run, and threw a beauty arcing pass to Dez White for a long touchdown. Tuesday Morning Quarterback was most impressed that twice Vick took off toward the line as if to run, drew the defense up and then stopped on a dime to complete a pass for the first down.

### **Today's Forecast: Bright Lights with Chance of Air Conditioning**

According to the official Game Book, the weather indoors at Atlanta on Sunday was "very good." According to the official Game Book, the weather indoors at New Orleans on Sunday was "mostly cloudy" with north winds at 13 miles per hour.

### **Worst Crowd Response**

Patrons enjoying the "very good" Georgia Dome weather repeatedly booed the Falcons, who entered the game 4-1.

### **Flags At Practice**

The Jersey/B Jets, least-penalized team in the NFL, are also the sole NFL team that always has officials working its practices and throwing flags. Coach Herman Edwards hit upon the idea of hiring off-duty officials when he took over the Jets' job, and the result has been that Jersey/B in the Edwards period has consistently been at or near the bottom in yards penalized. So why doesn't this idea catch on throughout the league? And if it did, would this make NFL officiating a full-time career? Currently, NFL officials are moonlighting from regular jobs, since working one game a week in the fall only isn't enough to make a living. But if officials were paid from July through January to work practices and games, plus the occasional minicamp, NFL officiating might become a career -- NBA and MLB officials are full-time -- and equally important, penalties during games might decline.

### **New Jersey Night Clubs May Still Have "Toxic Waste Nights," Where Anyone Recently Exposed Gets in Free**

Frank Vespa-Papaleo, director of the New Jersey Division on Civil Rights, recently ruled that ladies' nights at clubs are illegal because letting women in free, while assessing a cover charge for men, discriminates against males. The libertarian in me is outraged that the state of New Jersey seizes money from its citizens via taxation in order to pay Frank Vespa-Papaleo and his staff to stick their noses into issues so astonishingly minor. That aside, if ladies' nights are ended, men will be the principal victims. Enticing women to night spots via free admission or cheap drinks helps men because it populates clubs with double-X individuals, and the men can fantasize that it is their incredible animal magnetism, not the drinks or the music, that has drawn in the women.

### **Best Play by a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Be in San Diego**

While Eli Manning had the weekend off to look for a parking space in New York City, and high-priced holdout Philip Rivers was nailed to the Chargers' pine, Drew Brees threw a perfect 17-yard touchdown strike to Erik Parker with 18 seconds remaining in the first half. It was a "sluggo" route, a quick slant-and-go; Atlanta corner Aaron Beasley fell for the pump fake by Brees. Pray tell -- how can you fall for the pump fake when there are only 18 seconds left in the half? The Bolts might have gone on to lose, but Brees played well throughout.

### **Weird Penalty Watch**

Philadelphia's return of the opening kickoff against Carolina was nullified by a flag for unsportsmanlike conduct assessed on the Eagles bench. Philadelphia Director of Security Butch Buchanico got excited and started running up the sideline alongside the return man; he slammed into an official, drawing the yellow. What TMQ wondered was, why does Andy Reid need a Director of Security when he's already surrounded by 53 enormous ill-tempered gentlemen in plastic armor?

### **By the Hammer of Grabthar, He Was Avenged!**

Sammy Morris looked good in 2000 as a rookie for Buffalo, but the Bills then nailed him to the bench, bringing in a succession of tailbacks -- Travis Henry, Willis McGahee, Shawn Bryson, Olandis Gary, Joe Burns -- who played instead. Now a Dolphin, Sammy Morris on Sunday got his first start at tailback since October 2001, and ran for 91 yards against Buffalo.

### **Denver Helmet Instructions: "INSERT RUNNING BACK, GAIN THOUSAND YARDS"**

Fifth-year substitute tailback Reuben Droughns, who in his first four seasons had a total of 97 yards rushing, has 369 yards in the last two games as the Broncos starter.

### **This Year's Interference Problem**

This year, officials are to call defensive pass interference tighter, and TMQ thinks that's good since the defensive interference no-calls in the Indianapolis at New England playoff game last winter still rankle. But some officials seem to be interpreting the new directive as instructions to favor receivers over defenders. In Week 5, officials failed to flag Jeremy Shockey of Jersey/A for offensive interference when he obviously pushed off on a short touchdown reception against Dallas. This Sunday night, Randy Moss obviously pushed off on a short pattern at the goal line, and instead of being flagged for offensive interference, drew a defensive interference call that placed the ball on the New Orleans 1, setting up the Vikings' first touchdown. Later, on Moss' 43-yard touchdown reception, he obviously pushed a defender out of the way in order to stay on his route. Strict enforcement of defensive interference is a good idea: This should not mean that officials look away when offensive players break the rules.

### **TMQ Thought for the Day**

Why are places where terrorists or spies assemble called "safe houses?" So far as Tuesday Morning Quarterback can tell, there is no physical difference between a "safe house" and a "house," so these places should simply be called houses. Plus they hardly sound safe. Considering the tonnage of U.S. and Israeli precision-guided munitions that have fallen on such abodes in recent years, it sounds like a safe house is a very dangerous place.

### **Crazy Pass Watch**

Kerry Collins heave-hoed into triple coverage for an interception. Joey Harrington heave-hoed into triple coverage for an interception returned for a touchdown. Steve McNair heave-hoed into double coverage for an interception, and did so on a play when his line was giving him plenty of time; also, he heaved up a wild pass for an interception while under tackle. Even Tom Brady threw a pass directly to a Blue Man, though Brady's line was giving him plenty of time. TMQ continues to think that this season, NFL quarterbacks are throwing more crazy passes than usual, under pressure to "make a play" rather than do the smart thing and zing the ball out of bounds when no one is open.

### **Preposterous Punt Avoided**

Facing fourth-and-5 on the Miami 33, Buffalo didn't punt! The Bills went for it and converted, and though they missed a field-goal attempt three plays later, this rare show of fortitude caused the football gods to smile on Buffalo on the day.

### **Game Being Played in TMQ's Nightmares**

Cincinnati in its new road uniforms versus Buffalo in its monochrome of all 19th Century Rusting Russian Dreadnaught Aft Bulkhead Cyanic.

### **Hidden Indicator**

As noted by reader Curtis Ruder of San Antonio, Texas, in the Kansas City-Jacksonville game, the time of possession was exactly 30:00 for both teams; both teams recorded 19 first downs, launched five punts and drew five penalties. This is the kind of hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's understanding of the game. Unfortunately, Ruder reports, "I have no idea what it means."

### **Cheerleaders in the News**

According to her team bio, cheer-babe Gia of the Carolina Panthers' Top Cats squad is by profession a "loss prevention specialist." Why hasn't she been added to the Carolina coaching staff!

### **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

#### **Obscure College Score of the Week**

Angelo State 21, Northeastern State 16. Located in San Antonio, Texas, Angelo State is "committed to offering you the best possible education at the best possible price." Few colleges compete on price -- you're supposed to bargain, bargain, bargain to save 10 bucks on airfare but meekly hand over \$30,000 per year to admissions officers. Angelo State offers Texas residents a semester for less than \$5,000, including just \$32 for your parking pass.

### Bonus Obscure College Score

MacMurray 35, Greenville 7. Located in Jacksonville, Ill., MacMurray offers scholarships in highland dancing. "Scottish culture is a distinctive element of the history of the College," MacMurray says, "an element that provides for unique opportunities for MacMurray to celebrate its Scottish traditions and distinguish itself from other private liberal-arts colleges." Bagpipers perform at many college events.

### Bad Sportsmanship Watch

Mount Union, the Death Star of Division III, won its 100th consecutive regular-season game, defeating Marietta 57-0. Mount Union hasn't lost in the regular season since October 1994. But as Tuesday Morning Quarterback pointed out last season, the Raiders coaches are poor sports, repeatedly running up the score on undermanned opponents. Saturday, Mount Union threw five times in the fourth quarter, frantically trying to run up the score, though the fourth quarter began with Mount Union ahead 50-0. Small-college programs are supposed to teach sportsmanship and values, not bully behavior. Increasingly, TMQ thinks this is becoming a problem for football -- too much emphasis on humiliating opponents, loss of concern for sportsmanlike values.

### Cover-Your-Eyes College Score

Bloomsburg 69, Cheyney 0. Cheyney has been outscored 407-45. Cheyney coach Lee Brown's postgame speech: "Well, boys, you looked good in warmups."

### College Blitz Bonus

Last year, West Virginia appeared to have Miami beaten -- the Hurricanes trailed with seconds remaining and faced fourth-and-13. West Virginia saved them by calling an all-out blitz, Hurricane conversion and winning field goal on the final play. Last week, Louisville appeared to have Miami beaten -- the Hurricanes trailed by four with two minutes remaining and faced third-and-10. Louisville saved them by calling an all-out blitz, Hurricane conversion and winning touchdown with seconds to play. Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! applies at the college level, too.

### Reader Animadversion

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise. In the continuing debate over what to call the moment when the game ends -- TMQ has progressed from "double zeros" to "multiple zeros" to "all zeds" -- Bruce Clift points out that "zed" means the letter Z, not zero. He proposes "all naughts." In haiku,

All-zeds cannot be:  
Naught is zero, zed is zee.  
"All-naughts" did mean ye.  
-- Bruce Clift, Scotts Valley, Calif.

On my item on the disclaimer for the puppet movie *Team America*, Anna Norcross notes producers cut a puppet-sex scene to prevent the flick from being rated NC-17. Norcross haikuizes,

Wooden puppet sex?  
No. Too realistic -- too  
like real Boomer sex.  
-- Anna Norcross, Erie, Colo.

On my contention that Dennis Franz set some kind of record by playing both a bad guy and a good guy in different seasons of the old *Hill Street Blues*, Michael Bradley of Broomall, Pa., says at least one actor got there first: "Al Harrington, who later played Ben Kooka, a good guy, on *Hawaii Five-O*, appeared several times on the show as a criminal during the first seasons." Franz note: It always bothered me that he got to speak the closing line of the *Hill Street Blues* series finale. This distinction should have been accorded one of the original cast members.

Apropos TMQ's item on the death of deconstructionist Jacques Derrida, Kevin Pugh, an assistant professor of educational psychology at the University of Toledo, imagines this postmodern football encounter:

Coach: How could you throw that crazy pass? Didn't you see the safety?

Quarterback: I did see the safety, but then I thought, how do I know the safety really exists? My eyes perceive a safety and he seems to be covering the receiver, but this might only be from my frame of reference. Someone in the stands might perceive the safety to be covering another receiver, or no one at all. Who am I to say that my perception is correct and theirs is wrong? Then I thought, maybe the safety does exist! But the taboo against throwing into double coverage is just an oppressive ideology used by the dominant hegemony to maintain the imperialist power structure. So you see, I had to make the throw in order to liberate myself.

Karen Brown-Wheeler of Belmont, Calif., further noted, "Derrida's death and the French public's mourning for Sartre reminded me of Adam Gopnick's observation in his wonderful book of essays on living in France, *Paris to the Moon*, that while American journalists employ fact-checkers, to the bafflement and suspicion of French interview subjects, if the French had a similar position it would be a theory checker, for the French tend to valorize theory above facts."

After watching Julius Peppers of Carolina gasping for air by the end of his near-touchdown 101-yard interception return at Denver, TMQ asked who might know the exact difference in concentration of oxygen at sea level versus at the 50-yard-line of the Broncos field. A truly spooky number of readers knew, and the first thing they knew was that the determining factor is atmospheric pressure, not O2 concentration. The oxygen fraction of the air is the same, about 21 percent, in both places -- but owing to lower atmospheric pressure in Denver, there is simply less air, including less of all the gases in air (nitrogen, oxygen, carbon dioxide) and thus less O2 for us mammals. Jim Gustafson, a former Colorado resident who now lives just barely above sea level in Manhattan Beach, Calif., notes, "Since Invesco Field is 5,280 feet above sea level, that means that the barometric pressure is 625 mm Hg versus 760 mm Hg at sea level. This leaves only 81 percent of the oxygen molecules per volume of air at the 50 yard line in Denver as at sea level." A reader haikuized,

Peppers sucking wind?

It's the pressure difference --

O2 level same.

-- Ravi Shah, Raleigh, N.C.

Pedro Muiño, an associate professor of chemistry at St. Francis University in Loretto, Pa., adds more detail: "Let's factor in that atmospheric pressure can oscillate due to weather conditions by as much as three percent above or below the mean, and we can conclude that oxygen at the 50-yard-line of the Broncos field can be between 13 percent and 19 percent lower than at sea level. Of course, that home-field advantage is nothing compared to the one enjoyed by the Bolivian National Fútbol (I mean, soccer) Team. These guys play home games at La Paz, altitude 13,000 feet. There, atmospheric pressure is 40 percent below sea level. I was once at 13,000 feet in the mountains of Colorado, and just walking made me tired." Muiño offers this formula for oxygen availability, and suggests quoting it to impress cheer-babes: "The barometric formula is  $P = P_0 \times e^{(-mgh/RT)}$ , where  $P_0$  is the pressure at sea level in any units you want,  $m$  is the average mass of 1 mole of air (you must use the value 0.029 kg),  $g$  is the acceleration due to gravity (9.81 m/s<sup>2</sup>),  $h$  is the altitude (must be given in meters),  $R$  is the gas constant (8.3145 J/mol K),  $T$  is the mean temperature of the air (in Kelvin, 50 F is 283 K), and  $e^{\wedge}$  is the exponential function or the inverse function of the natural log."

How does all this impact the lungs? Dr. Thomas Hauser, director of Nuclear Cardiology at Beth Israel Deaconess Medical Center in Boston, writes, "What really matters is the partial pressure of oxygen in the

alveoli. At sea level, partial pressure of oxygen in the lungs is about 100 'torr,' or millimeters of mercury displaced. At 100 torr, blood hemoglobin carries about 98 percent of the maximal possible oxygen load, often referred to as an oxygen saturation of 98 percent. In Denver, the partial pressure of oxygen is about 75 torr, and oxygen saturation is about 95 percent. So even though there may be a 19 percent reduction in the available oxygen, there is only a three percent drop in actual oxygen delivery to the body. But as any athlete can tell you, that three percent can make a big difference in peak performance. The body notices and increases the amount of hemoglobin in the blood over time so that total oxygen delivery gradually normalizes. That is why endurance athletes often train at altitude, to increase hemoglobin." He sums in haiku,

Mile High Stadium:  
 Three percent less oxygen,  
 foes wilt in the fourth.  
 -- *Thomas Hauser, Boston, Mass.*

Curtis Seaman of Fort Collins, Colo., where TMQ's Colorado College classmate, Ken Salazar, is running for the United States Senate against beer gent Pete Coors -- notes that after the Packers allowed Philadelphia to convert its fateful fourth-and-26 last January in the playoffs, Green Bay fired defensive coordinator Ed Donatell, though his troops had mainly performed well in 2003. Since Donatell was cashiered, the Packers' defensive performance has been awful except Sunday against hapless Detroit -- the team 2-4 and a week ago surrendering the most-ever points at Lambeau. Beer gent note: During his recent *Meet the Press* debate with Salazar, Coors declared that Americans "should be more worried today, actually, about Iran and North Dakota ". This statement could certainly get Coors elected in South Dakota! The beer gent meant North Korea. Here's a good profile of Salazar, who grew up poor on a Colorado ranch with no running water and is well on his way to becoming one of the most important people in the American West.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback continues to complain that Pittsburg of Kansas, my second-favorite obscure college, has shown poor sportsmanship by repeatedly passing in the fourth quarter when holding huge leads. On Saturday, Pitt State beat Missouri Southern 59-7. The Gorillas once again showed poor sportsmanship by frantically trying to run up the score, passing on three consecutive plays in the fourth quarter despite a 52-7 advantage. Brian Jackson of Marietta, Ga., points out that in the Gorillas' 70-14 defeat of Washburn, Pittsburg of Kansas averaged more yards per rush than per pass. "Obviously they were trying to hold the score down by passing," Jackson writes. Last week's item on spooky Air Force research into antimatter bombs said such devices might cause huge blasts but "no radiation." Maybe not the nuclear-fallout kind, but Eli Rykoff, a grad student in physics at the University of Michigan, notes that a matter-antimatter reaction would generate strong gamma rays. Gamma rays are deadly "unless you are lucky enough to turn into the Incredible Hulk," he notes. Rykoff offers this season's first gamma-ray haiku:

"No radiation"  
 from antimatter -- except  
 gamma rays, which kill.  
 -*Eli Rykoff, Ann Arbor, Mich.*

Last week's column noted that high-school guys might consider Lake Forest College because its student body is 57 percent female. William Brownlee of Tampa reports that his alma mater, the University of South Florida, is 60 percent female and owing to its considerable size, currently enrolls a whopping 7,868 more women than men. "USF is the place high-school guys would want to consider," Brownlee posits.

### Last Week's Challenge

In keeping with last week's item on the "Golden Age of Cussing," the Challenge was to propose either invented or historical expletives that could appear on a family web site like NFL.com.

Nate Ellefson of Shoreview, Minn., suggested "gummit," short for "dadgummit," which Apollo 15 astronaut Dave Scott exclaimed when a mechanism jammed on the surface of the Moon. Here's the transcript.

Erika Pflederer of Chicago says she uses, "Shoot a pig!" Britt Wilson of Calgary, Alberta, reports that in small-town Saskatchewan, a common expletive is "Hokey Dinah!" Roy Felipe of Columbia, Md., suggests "Holy Frijoles!" He notes, "This polishes your Spanish and reminds us to eat more fiber." Peter Mitchell of Havertown, Pa., a previous Challenge winner, suggested "balderdash!" Erik Wolfe suggested "gadzooks!"

In the cartoon category, Andy Schulkind of Portland, Maine, suggested "Great Caesar's ghost!" Perry White, Clark Kent's boss at the *Daily Planet*, was given to his exclamation. Joe Gannon suggests "oh my stars and garters," often spoken by Beast, one of the X Men. Dave Bigge of New York City suggested "Heavens to Murgatroyd," often spoken by Snagglepuss.

Christine Karnisky of Rochester, N.Y., was among many who proposed "great googlie mooglie," what the groundskeeper exclaims in the Snickers commercial upon realizing he has laboriously painted the word CHEFS in the Kansas City Chiefs end zone. Troy Baumann of Madison, Wis., suggested "Yipes stripes!" This immediately caused me to hear the old Fruit Stripes gum jingle in my head -- gadzooks, does that date me or what?

Elissa Gontero, a Pittsburgh fan who works at the Lancaster Literary Guild, reports that she sometimes exclaim to herself "Holy Mother of Pearl!" She adds, "The language definitely gets a bit saltier when I'm watching the Steelers play." Dave Shapiro of Milwaukee noted that TMQ's favorite exclamation, ye gods, dates at least as far back as Shakespeare. "Ye gods, it doth amaze me:" Cassius, *Julius Caesar*, Act I, Scene 2.

Then there were expletives related to football players or terms. Khalil Miller of Hyattsville, Md., suggested Vince Lombardi's favorite exclamation, "For the love of Pete!" Tammy Hepps of New York City, a Philadelphia Nesharim fan, suggested "gbaja," as in "Gbaja, that's gotta hurt!" (Kabeer Gbaja-Biamila is a player for the Packers.) Will Grapperhaus of Louisville, Ky., a Rams fan, suggested "martz," to be exclaimed of strange or unwelcome behavior. As in, "What the martz?" Grapperhaus says, "How I long for the days when my team's coach simply cried." Bill Cranor of Austin, Texas, also suggested "martz!" This expletive reminds TMQ of "quatz!" That's what the living super-computer exclaimed when frustrated in the Dan Simmons "Hyperion" sci-fi novels.

Andrew Dobson suggested, "Good griesel!" Scotty Williams suggested "leapin' Leon Lett!" Brian Davis of Memphis, Tenn., suggested "by Dan Fouts' beard!" An anonymous reader suggested "favre" for the inexplicable, as in Brett Favre throwing into double coverage, as in "You picked the Dolphins to win the Super Bowl -- what the favre were you thinking?"

J. D. Harriman of Los Angeles writes, "In my family we always substitute the phrase 'bad word' in place of a curse word. As in, 'Oh, bad word!' It worked pretty well until I overheard my daughter say, 'Bad word you, you bad word bad word.'"

This week's Challenge winner is Will Grapperhaus, by a coin flip over Bill Cranor, for "martz!" Last week, one of my kids came down with strep throat and I found myself muttering, "Aw, martz." The real-world Martz wore a heavy jacket indoors at the Edward Jones Dome on Monday night, causing TMQ to exclaim, "What the martz?" In keeping with this year's Challenge policy, his prize is a sentence of shameless praise. Grapperhaus works for Unique Management, a company that helps libraries recover fees on long-overdue books. So here is his shameless praise: "Better hustle that copy of *The Brothers Karamozov* back to the library quick. Will Grapperhaus will not rest when there is a book overdue."

### **This Week's Challenge**

Predict the weather inside a domed stadium. Use the link at Reader Animadversion.

### **Next Week**

Please don't tell me I have to write anything about New England's 21-game winning streak.



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## Why football is intellectual, plus weather forecasts for inside domed stadia

**By Gregg Easterbrook**  
*Special to NFL.com*

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Oct. 26, 2004) -- With the World Series in swing, let's pause to reflect on baseball. The gracious, pastoral feeling of this sport can be just the thing on a warm summer's night. The human-scale aspect of baseball is attractive; all you need is a field, no tons of equipment or months of practice required. Plus, as Michael Mandelbaum writes in his excellent new book *The Meaning of Sport*, baseball is the lingering expression of America's rural times gone by. Baseball can be played in a farm field, and is an un-timed game -- you just keep going till the playing is complete, the same as yesterday's farmers just kept going till the labor was done. Football, Mandelbaum writes, is, in contrast, the expression of America's industrial revolution -- large-scale teamwork tightly controlled by an all-mighty clock. In its lore, historical significance and mannerly pace, baseball can be something to behold. "National pastime" is the right phrase for baseball, whose deepest appeal may be as pastime rather than as a sport.

But while lauding baseball, let's add what it is not -- the intellectual sport. Intellectuals tend to adulate baseball, often doing so in the context of laments over Cubs, Red Sox or Brooklyn Dodgers disappointments. Yet football is a far more challenging game mentally than baseball. Academic-trendy figures who speak of baseball as the intellectual sport may do so only because football is too complicated for them to understand.

In baseball, generally only a few players are involved per play; often as few as three. In football, 22 people are doing something on every down, executing complex tasks. Baseball has a few dozen strategies for pitching, fielder alignment and base running; football has hundreds of plays. Baseball tactics change a little from game to game; football tactics often change tremendously from game to game. Most baseball practice involves individuals honing their own skills; most football practice involves large groups of gentlemen learning to cooperate with each other. Some top college performers never make the NFL level because they can't handle the mental demands of football, whereas a baseball player cut because he could not remember the playbook is rare indeed. In complexity and intellectual challenge, football beats baseball many times over.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback hopes you enjoy the World Series. Personally, I'm rooting for the Cardinals because I think their birds-on-the-bat uniform is one of the prettiest in sports. But as you watch the boys of October perform, remember that football is the real sport for intellectuals.

In other NFL news, Hollywood scriptwriters are working on a movie sequel called *Forget the Titans*. Hard to believe it was just two weeks ago that Tennessee was blowing out Green Bay at Lambeau Field. Tuesday Morning Quarterback has always liked the Titans for their style of play, their lack of boasting and their classy coach. Plus, the Titans endured a period of wandering, and the gods are supposed to reward that sort of thing. Now 2-5, the Titans are all but done for the season. Injuries have been devastating -- and the offseason will be devastating too. Tennessee is far over the projected 2005 salary cap, and may have little choice but to purge its roster of starters. Tennessee's window of opportunity to win the Super Bowl, which seemed to open with the maturation of Steve McNair, now appears poised to slam shut.

And in still other NFL news, as the Cowboys and Titans fade, can the Packers and Chiefs rebound? Both are burdened by losing records, yet both practically shook their stadiums with monster wins Sunday.

Kansas City beat a division-leading opponent by 46 points, and did not try to run up the score -- the Chiefs passed only twice in the fourth quarter. Methinks we have not heard the last of Green Bay and Kansas City.

#### **Stats of the Week**

Since taking the field for their Super Bowl appearances, Carolina and Oakland are a combined 7-24.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 2**

Baltimore was held to 160 yards of offense, yet won easily.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 3**

Kansas City recorded 27 more first downs than Atlanta.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Since entering Week 5 with the league's No. 1 rated defense, Seattle has given up 88 points.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

For the second consecutive week, a Green Bay tailback threw a touchdown pass.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

Matt Hasselbeck and Drew Bledsoe threw as many interceptions as the Bears, Bengals, Bucs, Browns, Cardinals, Chargers, Chiefs, Colts, Cowboys, Dolphins, Eagles, Giants, Jaguars, Jets, Lions, Packers, Panthers, Patriots, Ravens and Vikings combined.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

Baltimore had more return yards (203) than offensive yards (160).

#### **Stats of the Week No. 8**

Kansas City's record-setting eight touchdown runs in a single game is eight more than Buffalo has on the entire season.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

New England's defense has allowed just 72 yards on 72 red-zone plays this season, an average of 36 inches per red-zone play, while gaining four takeaways. Stat from FootballOutsiders.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 10**

The top five defensive teams -- Washington, Denver, Tampa, Miami and Buffalo -- have a combined record of 10-22.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 11**

The top five offensive teams -- Minnesota, Green Bay, Indianapolis, Philadelphia and Kansas City -- have a combined record of 20-11.

#### **Literary Cheerleader of the Week**

Only cheerleaders who list serious books or authors as their favorites are eligible. This week's literary cheerleader is Janey of the Falcons, who says the last book she read is *Ulysses* by James Joyce. This book is considered by many critics the greatest English-language novel of the 20th century, but TMQ is not all that sure if anyone has ever actually finished *Ulysses*. The novel is very long and obscurantist. College kids love to praise this work for its word puzzles and inner dialogue, but how many have read *Ulysses* as opposed to, say, read about it? TMQ guesses not one reader in 10 who starts *Ulysses* reaches the end. (In the end, Bloom acquires super-powers and stops an alien attack against Earth -- see, nobody ever gets to that part.) But we'll take it on faith that Janey read *Ulysses*.

According to her team bio, Janey has won several national talent competitions such as Showstopper, and her most prized possession is her day planner. That's what the protagonist of *Ulysses* needed! If Bloom only had a Franklin Day Planner, the entire novel could have been avoided.

### **Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk**

It's overtime in Philadelphia-Cleveland collision. In the waning seconds of regulation, the Browns scored to force a fifth period, sending the dog-dressed crowd into delirium. Now Cleveland faces fourth-and-1 on its 48. You're going for this, right? The Eagles are an undefeated elite team; the Browns are a 3-3 who-dem outfit; the hometown crowd is roaring at military-afterburner decibels. You're going for this, right? Last season, NFL teams that ran on fourth-and-1 converted 75 percent of the time. So if Cleveland runs, it has a 75 percent chance of a first down and the upper hand for victory; plus ground defense is the Eagles' weakness, the Browns had rushed for 165 yards to that point. If Cleveland punts, it hands the ball back to a team that had already gained almost 450 yards against the suspect Browns defense. So you're going for this, right? *You are going for this, right?* Boom, a punt. Philadelphia marches for the field goal and victory; Cleveland never has possession again.

If you're 3-3, what have you got to lose by going for the first down in this situation? The punt didn't even help tactically -- Philadelphia took exactly one snap to get back to where the Eagles would have been if the Browns had gone for the first down and failed. Cleveland had a chance to take fate into its own hands, and instead passively punted the ball away. This seems yet another instance of an NFL coach trying to avoid criticism. Had Cleveland gone for it and missed, Butch Davis would have been blamed for the call; as it was, his players were blamed for soft defense on the final Philadelphia drive.

### **Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk No. 2**

Trailing 13-3 in Arizona, Seattle was on the Cactus Wrens' 44 at the start of the third quarter, facing fourth-and-2. *You are going for this, right?* Losing the previous week at New England, the Seahawks constantly kicked when behind rather than gamble for a touchdown. Surely they've learned that lesson. Surely they are not going to punt on fourth-and-short in opposition territory while trailing by 10 points. Boom goes the punt.

### **Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk No. 3**

Trailing 17-3 at Baltimore in the third quarter, Buffalo faced fourth-and-goal on the Ravens 3. In trotted the field-goal unit. You're way behind, you're 1-4, *what do you have to lose?* The field goal made it 17-6, and Buffalo's coaches might as well have left at that point to get blueberry-almond martinis. Teams that are 1-4 and trailing by a big margin should not be lining up for field goals on the opposition 3.

### **Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk No. 4**

Trailing 17-3, Tennessee faced fourth-and-25 at the Minnesota 40 at the start of the fourth quarter. Sure it's fourth-and-25, but that didn't stop the Eagles in the playoffs last year, did it? Plus you're 2-4 and if defeated again, your season is practically finis. So go for it -- what have you got to lose? Boom goes the punt. Emboldened by this mincing fraidy-cat call, Minnesota staged a 10-play drive that ended in a field goal and ended any remnant Titans' hope.

### **Crazy Pass Watch**

Jersey/A leading Detroit 10-7 with 52 seconds remaining in the first half, the Giants had first-and-10 on the Lions 11 and held two timeouts. The timeouts meant Jersey/A could run several plays, and no need for anything dicey -- a field goal makes it a nice 13-7 lead at halftime. Instead Kurt Warner heave-hoes a crazy pass into double coverage, interception, and you sensed things turned at this point toward Detroit. There are times when the best play a quarterback makes is simply sailing the ball out of bounds if no one is open.

### **Maroon Zone Play of the Week**

Leading 10-3 in the second quarter, Minnesota faced fourth-and-6 on the Tennessee 33. The game was played indoors, so aging kicker Morten Andersen might have hit a 50-yard field goal. But the Vikings have the league's best offense and went for it, 14-yard conversion to Nate Burleson, touchdown on the possession. Increasingly TMQ thinks success in the Maroon Zone -- where it's too far for a field goal but too close to punt -- is a key to football.

### **Sweet Play of the Week**

Trailing 7-6, New England faced second-and-goal in the Jersey/B 7 with 11 seconds remaining in the first half, the Patriots out of timeouts. Take the safe field goal, right? That's what yours truly would have done. New England went for the touchdown, aware that any play stopped on the field means the first half clock runs out. Touchdown pass to David Patten and the defending champions lead by what would turn out to be the final score, 13-7. New England put itself into position for this score with an equally sweet play. At the Jersey/B 48 with 1:29 remaining in the half, the Patriots sent Kevin Faulk over the middle for what appeared to be a standard short pattern -- and instead had him turn upfield and run a fly, completed for a 24-yard gain. A "double move" by a running back out of the backfield is a rare sight: It was also a slow-developing play, and the Flying Elvii offensive line kept the Jets far from Tom Brady as it developed.

Note, please, the team that can't stop winning showed the courage to go for it rather than kick, while numerous losing teams went buck-buck-brawckkkkkkk under similar circumstances.

### **Sweet Play of the Week No. 2**

Game scoreless, Miami handed off on a reverse to receiver Marty Booker, who stopped and threw a perfect strike to Chris Chambers for a 48-yard gain. Sammy Morris scored a touchdown on the next snap, and you sensed the Dolphins' frustrations would finally end.

### **Sour Play of the Week**

Leading 14-7 in the third, Miami faced fourth-and-inches on its own 40. In trotted the punting unit. TMQ attends a lot of high-school football games, and whenever there is punt formation on fourth and short, coaches scream to their charges "It's going to be a fake!" They expect the fake because so little ground needs be gained for the first down. The St. Louis Rams could use a good high school coach: Direct-snap to the up man who ran six yards for the first, with Les Mouflons looking shocked that it was a fake.

### **Sour Play of the Week No. 2**

Trailing 10-7 with 28 seconds remaining in the first half, Indianapolis had first-and-10 on the Jax 43, holding one time out. The Colts play-faked, and Jacksonville bit. Completion of 26 yards on a down-the-middle "seam" pattern to tight end Marcus Pollard. Who falls for a play-action from the 43 with the half almost expired? Two snaps later, Indianapolis scored a 17-yard touchdown on exactly the same pattern, a down-the-middle "seam" route to tight end Dallas Clark.

### **Sour Play of the Week No. 3**

Trailing 17-3 early in the third quarterback, the Flaming Thumbtacks had second-and-goal on the Minnesota 5. Power-run three straight snaps for the odds-on touchdown? Tennessee came out all-receivers, empty backfield. An empty backfield means the Vikings' linebackers do not need to honor the

run -- and seeing no running back, Vikings linebackers stepped back and lined up on the goal line. There, linebacker Raonall Smith intercepted Billy Volek's pass, and the Titans' cause was lost.

### Sweet 'N' Sour Play

Game scoreless, Detroit facing third-and-6 on the Giants 18, Joey Harrington threw a perfect touchdown pass to flashy rookie Roy Williams on the "zee-in." That was sweet. Detroit sent four receivers and Jersey/A rushed four, meaning the Giants had seven dropping into coverage to guard four -- yet Williams, Detroit's most dangerous player, was single-covered, no safety in sight. That was sour.

### Sweet 'N' Sour Play No. 2

Cincinnati appearing on *Monday Night Football* for the first time since the first George Bush was president, game scoreless, the Bengals face third-and-16 at midfield. Fifty-yard touchdown pass to Chad Johnson on the up; that was sweet. Johnson, the team's most dangerous player, was single-covered deep on third and long, and Denver safety John Lynch totally ignored Johnson as he ran by; that was sour. Later, Carson Palmer connected on another 50-yard pass to Johnson, who again was single-covered deep.

### TMQ in the News

The October issue of swank *Vanity Fair* magazine touts Tuesday Morning Quarterback as a "cult weekly online NFL column of unlikely provenance" that is "disarmingly nerdy" but "nevertheless offers astute and coach-baiting game analysis as few TV commentators or beat writers do." In a 4,425-word hipster's guide to following the NFL, the only football analysts or broadcasters mentioned are yours truly and Mel Kiper Jr. I made the cut but not John Madden! Of course, I would gladly exchange that for one day of Madden's income.

### Best Purist Drive

City of Tampa ran a 93-yard, 16-play touchdown drive on which the ball was advanced by seven different players.

### Best Postmodern Drive

Jax leading 10-7, Indianapolis got the ball on its 20 with 1:52 left in the half. The Lucky Charms called pass on 10 consecutive downs (including a sack and a pass nullified by penalty), scoring a touchdown with 12 seconds remaining.

### Ernest Wilford Play of the Week

"ERRR-nest WILLL-ford, ERRR-nest WILLL-ford," chanted TMQ and my nine-year-old Spenser, a Jax fan, as the Jaguars marched down the field against Indianapolis for yet another buzzer-beater win. Wilford made a clutch reception to convert a third-and-long on Jacksonville's winning final drive, and as usual it was his only catch of the day: Ernest is invisible until the game is on the line.

### Equal-Time Beefcake

Phoebe Albert, a Rams fan, points out this *Sports Illustrated* photo of Chike Okeafor of the Seahawks doing shirtless kung fu. That cat looks fast as lightning! In fact, it's a little bit frightening.

### Leap of the Week

Kansas City iced its game against Atlanta by going for the touchdown from the Falcons 1 on the final play of the first half, scoring to make it 35-3 at the intermission. On the play, Priest Holmes leapt into the end zone. Why don't more teams use the vault when a yard is needed? Usually the runner who needs a yard plows into the line; a leaping runner is nearly impossible to stop for a single yard. Also, why do teams

use the leaping runner only at the goal line? If a single yard is needed anywhere else on the field, a leap would be just as hard to stop there too.

### Forecast for Next Week's Column: Witty with Chance of Cheesecake

Through the early 1990s, computer models predicted endless federal budget deficits; soon Washington was running a huge surplus. At that point computer models predicted years of surpluses; in the 2004 fiscal year, the federal deficit was an all-time-high \$422 billion. Always bear in mind, when examining projections of stock markets, global warming or NFL outcomes, how rarely long-term predictions do better than chance. Which brings us to an emerging species of ridiculous prediction: The long-term weather forecast. The standard weather forecast tells you what is likely today and tomorrow. Today's forecast is usually pretty close, and tomorrow's has value. Recently forecasters have begun to predict the third, fourth, or fifth day in advance, or even farther into the future.

Weather forecasts beyond a couple days out are chancy because climate dynamics are still poorly understood: no one fully understands what causes fronts, winds and air masses, let alone how they interact. Example: the National Weather Service Climate Prediction Center forecast an unusually warm 2003 winter for eastern United States. Instead, it was unusually cold. The National Oceanographic and Atmospheric Administration has just predicted a cool winter east of the Mississippi and a warm winter to the west of Twain's river. What are the odds this will prove true?

Another reason long-term forecasts are mushy is that computer forecasting tools such as NOAA 's Nested Grid Model have high "resolution" only to about 48 hours. High resolution means blocks of specific data, rather than averaged estimates. The higher the resolution when dealing with huge amounts of data, the longer the computational time -- and even zoomy supercomputers gag on more than about 48 hours' worth of detailed weather information. Some very zoomy General Circulation Models used to forecast global warming, such as the model at the Geophysical Fluid Dynamics Laboratory at Princeton, can take weeks to churn through predictions about climate trends. Producing prompt, updated weather forecasting requires speed; lowering the resolution of the data makes speed possible, but that means using averaged data rather than specifics. This insures that the farther past 48 hours a weather forecast goes, the less accurate it becomes.

Yet with weather news in ever-higher demand, forecasters keep pretending they can tell us on Monday what will happen Friday, or even a week from Friday! Now we've got the Weather Channel, talking weather all day long; its web site, plus the web sites of competitors Accuweather and Weather Underground; extensive weather coverage in newspapers and on local newscasts; and the famed full-page weather chart of *USA Today* plus its many imitators. The forecasts are part of contemporary mania for weather news: networks send anchor people to broadcast from beaches near hurricanes, senior citizens sit glued to the Weather Channel hour on end. To fill space and air time, and present the illusion of scientific certainty, these outlets now offer preposterously specific weather forecasts five, seven, 10 or even 15 days in advance. The result isn't pretty, as Tuesday Morning Quarterback found by logging some of forecasts this summer and comparing them to the actual weather.

- *Washington Post* July 26 forecast for Miami on Aug. 1: Cloudy. Actual, heavy thunderstorms.
- Weather Channel July 26 forecast for Cincinnati on Aug. 4: Partly cloudy. Actual, heavy thunderstorm.
- Accuweather.com July 26 forecast for Dallas on Aug. 9: Some clouds. Actual, sunny. (A two-week forecast!)
- *Los Angeles Times* July 26 forecast for Los Angeles on July 30: Partly cloudy, high of 79. Actual: sunny, high of 70.
- National Weather Service July 26 forecast for Atlanta on July 30: "Thunderstorm possible." Actual: clear. For Atlanta on August 1: "Partly cloudy. A 20 percent chance of showers and thunderstorms in the morning then a 30 percent chance in the afternoon." Actual: Sunny all day.
- National Weather Service July 26 forecast for Boston on July Aug. 1: "40 percent chance of showers." Actual: Clear.

A few long-term forecasts yours truly tracked were right, but only because they made generalized predictions such as "chance of rain." Many days-away forecasts simply list the annual average temperature and rainfall for that date -- useful to know, but not something that should be dressed up as a meaningful prediction.

Worthless long-term weather forecasting engages no risk for the forecaster, since when the day finally rolls around, everyone has forgotten what was predicted. Wackiest of them all: Accuweather now offer 15-day *hourly* forecasts, attempting to predict exactly what the conditions will be at, say, 3 p.m. two weeks from now. Here's the current 15-day forecast for Seattle -- according to Accuweather, on Nov. 9, Seattle weather will be cloudy with a high of 51 degrees. Hit the "get details" button, and Accuweather offers a paid premium service that predicts exact wind speed and direction hour by hour on Nov. 9.

### **Cheer-Babes in the News**

Redskins cheerleader Kimberly Linberger was profiled in *Washington Post*, which she told, "They pay us \$50 per home game, but I'd cheer for free." Kimberly, don't admit this! Most NFL teams confer only token payments on cheerleaders, and Tuesday Morning Quarterback think that's wrong. Cheerleaders are part of the entertainment -- and never forget, professional sports is fundamentally an entertainment industry. Cheer-babes work out hard, dance hard and are one of the reasons the tickets sell. They should receive reasonable compensation. As for Linberger, in her real-world job she's an IT program manager -- so when she's not flouncing, she's upgrading. Do you hate computer upgrades as much as I do? Every time the IT manager of TMQ's office comes around smiling to install an upgrade, I scream, "No, no, leave my computer exactly the way it is." Of course if the IT manager looked like Kimberly Linberger, I would instead say, "Come in and take a really long time. Break something so I have to call you back."

According to her team bio, Linberger was born on Guam, has 14 years of ballet training and has visited 25 countries as a cheerleader. (The Skins have one of the NFL's top programs for sending cheerleaders around the world for goodwill visits and to appear at U.S. military bases.) Linberger holds a bachelor's in computer science from James Madison University, and as to her team swimsuit-calendar pose, we can link to the photo but not show it, for she-forgot-her-top-based reasons.

### **Best Blocks**

Whole item reserved this week for the Kansas City offensive line, which played one of the best OL games in NFL history. Willie Roaf, Brian Waters, Casey Wiegmann, Will Shields and John Welbourn were the starters from left to right, and they had the football gods smiling in approval. Eight rushing touchdowns against a team that came into the game number-one in the league against the run; 271 yards rushing; 540 total yards of offense and 36 first downs; no sacks allowed; all these stats are tributes to the Kansas City blocking. Note that when Priest Holmes left the contest in favor of who-dat Derrick Blaylock, there was no dropoff in rushing, because the blocking was superior throughout. When the Chiefs were on the Falcons 1 in the third quarter, leading 35-10, and Blaylock was supposed to leap into the end zone, he started to jump and then realized there was no need because the entire Atlanta front had already been flattened; so Blaylock just walked in. That play summed one of the greatest offensive line games ever.

### **"What the Martz?" Moment of the Week**

Scored tied at 7, the Marine Mammals threw incomplete on third-and-18 from the St. Louis 32, and also were called for holding. Mike Martz's choices: Decline the penalty and leave Miami fourth-and-18 on the 32, or take the penalty and make it third-and-28 from the 42. Taking the penalty pushed Miami out of field goal range while awarding the Dolphins an extra play; declining would have forced a 49-yard field goal attempt on a day with high humidity. (It's harder to kick long distances when the air is humid.) Martz took the penalty. Given an extra play, the Dolphins threw 42 yards for the touchdown to tight end Randy McMichael. And just to help Miami out, Martz had Les Mouflons blitz on the play; McMichael ran straight up the field and no strong safety was to be seen.

### **Best Play by a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Be in San Diego**

While Eli Manning watched Kurt Warner throw into coverage and high-priced holdout Philip Rivers was nailed to the Chargers pine, Drew Brees hit a perfect 23-yard strike to Keenan McCardell on San Diego's go-ahead drive. Carolina leading 6-0 in the third, the Bolts faced first-and-10 on their 49. Brees faked the toss-sweep left, then rolled right and drilled the ball to McCardell; three snaps later, LaDainian Tomlinson went in from the 8, and San Diego never looked back. I don't wish to alarm you, but Brees is currently the sixth-rated passer in the league.

### Why Certain Teams Are 1-5

Trailing 17-6 in the fourth quarter, Buffalo faced third-and-goal at the Ravens 5. The pass was intercepted by safety Chad Williams, who took off with Buffalo's very highly paid Willis McGahee in pursuit. McGahee chased Williams to about midfield and then, though only slightly behind the Raven runner, simply gave up and watched as Williams continued toward the Buffalo end zone. Eventually Williams was tripped up at the Buffalo 6; a field goal followed, as did defeat. When very highly paid gentlemen like McGahee simply give up on plays and stand around watching, it's a sign of a team that deserves to lose.

### Programming Complaints and Compliments

Fox's Green Bay-Dallas game was in the Sunday doubleheader slot. In our nation's capital, where yours truly lurks, and elsewhere including Los Angeles -- notes reader Tom Hitchcock of Costa Mesa, Calif. -- Fox stayed with every last sleep-inducing play until the clock read all-naughts, though it was Green Bay 41, Dallas 13 when the fourth quarter began. The network could have switched to Raiders-Saints or Cards-Seahawks, both of which it had the rights to and both of which went down to the wire. Sure, nobody knows in advance which game is going to be hot. But once it's the fourth quarter and you *do* know, why don't broadcasters switch?

Meanwhile the networks alternate the doubleheader privilege, and Sunday was Fox's turn. Yet in the Washington area, the CBS local affiliate aired the 4 p.m.-start Jets at Patriots. About 45 percent of the country saw Jets at Patriots; in those places CBS showed no game in the early slot in order to use its one airing right of the day on Jets at Patriots. TMQ is mighty glad it worked out this way -- a fan-friendly example of a network making an effort to show the best matchup.

### Best Game by a 15-Year Veteran

"Washed up" Emmitt Smith had 106 yards rushing, including the 23-yard touchdown run that iced Arizona's upset win. Smith looked sharper and more powerful than anyone Dallas had at running back on Sunday. Tell me again why teams believe they benefit from waiving future Hall of Fame veterans while they can still play? Dallas and Smith, San Francisco and Jerry Rice, Buffalo and Bruce Smith, etc.

Downside: There were more empty seats (37,319) than occupied seats (35,695) at Sun Devil Stadium. Arizona customers please note, stretching back to last season, the Cardinals have played four consecutive home games that were well worth attending -- a last-second upset of Minnesota, a close lose to the defending champion Patriots, a blowout win over New Orleans and Sunday's upset win over Seattle. Plus, the Cardinals cheerleaders are highly aesthetic and usually scantily attired in the warm sun. Now would be a good time to buy some tickets for the next Cardinals' home date, Nov. 14 against Jersey/A.

### Massachusetts Resplendent!

Flora Lee of Dallas was among many to request the complete NFL state standings, not just the highlights. Here it is:

Massachusetts: 6-0  
 Pennsylvania: 11-1  
 Minnesota 5-1  
 New Jersey: 9-3  
 Colorado, Georgia: tied at 5-2  
 Indiana, Michigan: tied at 4-2  
 Maryland: 6-6  
 Washington State 3-3  
 Missouri: 6-7  
 Louisiana, Wisconsin: tied at 3-4  
 Texas: 5-7  
 Ohio: 5-8  
 Florida: 8-13

California: 7-13  
Arizona 2-4  
Tennessee 2-5  
Illinois, New York, North Carolina: tied at 1-5.

### Though Your Ratings in the Overnight Polls May Not Be Good

Now that the election is only a week away, Tuesday Morning Quarterback reminds readers -- you've only got one week left to get a date in a swing state!

#### Signs and Portents No. 1

As many readers including Dan Danka of Pittsburgh have pointed out, forget the polls and focus groups, the Washington Redskins reliably predict elections. For each presidential contest going back to 1940, first presidential year the Redskins performed in Washington, if in their final home game before the voting the Skins win, then the party in power keeps the White House; if the Skins lose, the party out of power takes the White House. This Sunday, Green Bay plays at Washington in the Redskins' final home appearance before the election. So if the Packers win John Kerry will be the next president, while if the Redskins win, George W. Bush will be re-elected.

How fitting the Packers should draw this assignment -- they're from a swing state, Wisconsin! TMQ has learned on an *exclusive* basis that the Democratic National Committee has been funneling donations to the Green Bay salary cap, while the Pentagon has secretly equipped Redskins quarterbacks with GPS-guided footballs. Remember, this is a Tuesday Morning Quarterback *exclusive*.

#### Signs and Portents No. 2

There will be a total eclipse of the Moon tomorrow night during the World Series game. According to *Sky & Telescope* magazine, "This is the first time a total eclipse of the Moon will be visible from a major league ballpark during a World Series game, and such a coincidence is not likely to happen again until the second half of this century." As the Moon darkens, TMQ will be watching nervously for centaurs, comets, basilisks and other omens.

### RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT

#### Obscure College Score of the Week

Pikeville 29, Virginia-Wise 19. Located in Pikeville, Kentucky, and founded by Presbyterians in the 19th century to offer education to the poor of Appalachia, Pikeville College now refers to itself as "PC." A college where everything is officially PC!

#### Bonus Obscure College Score

Bentley 63, Saint Anselm 3. Bentley quarterback Marc Eddy has thrown for 10,147 yards, joining Doug Flutie and Glenn Foley as the only New England collegiate quarterbacks to pass the 10,000 plateau. Located in Waltham, Mass., Bentley about calls itself "a business university" and says its goal is to prepare students for business careers. But tuition, room and board and the rest are fixed-fee. Shouldn't there be wild competition among suppliers to cut the costs of dorm rooms, outsource professors to India and cancel staff pension plans; plus embarrassing scandals of Bentley trustees expropriating funds? That would really prepare students for the modern business world.

#### Cover-Your-Eyes College Score

California of Pennsylvania 49, Cheyney 6. Cheyney has been outscored 456-51. Cheyney coach Lee Brown's postgame speech: "Well boys, next year I hope to schedule that team from *Remember the Titans*. The actors, not the high-school kids."

### Bad Sportsmanship Watch

TMQ has been after Pittsburg of Kansas for running up the score. Now, according to Jeremiah Tucker of the *Joplin Globe* of Joplin, Miss., it turns out coaches who have played the Gorillas have made the same accusation. Once this season, Pittsburg of Kansas ran a fake punt while leading 63-7.

### College Proof of Immutable Law

TMQ's immutable law of the extra point: Take One Till the Fourth. Coaches should throw away those pernicious point-card things and -- unless way behind -- ignore the margin until the fourth quarter. A 99 percent chance of one point is better than a 40 percent chance of two points, until the endgame when you know how the final scoreboard dynamic. Many's the team that passed up one point early and dearly wished it had that point back in the endgame: Carolina in the Super Bowl, for instance. Scoring to make it 19-7 against Texas A&M at College Station early in the third quarter, Colorado went for two -- that's what the coach's card said to do -- and failed. The Aggies ended up trying the game with a buzzer-beater field goal, then won in overtime. Had Colorado simply followed the law of Take One Till the Fourth, it would have left victorious.

### Reader Animadversion

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Many, many readers objected to my "unpatriotic" declaration that I am sick of the New England Patriots. Not that I don't think they are a worthy team -- remember, I praised them for unselfishness and hard work -- just that I'm sick of them and want somebody else to win at this point. Readers objected to my saying the Flying Elvii streak was partly based on good luck, and also my saying the streak was partly based on New England avoiding injuries. The latter comment was intended as tongue-in-cheek, since the Patriots had a ton of injuries in 2003. Reader Michael Logan noted, "If that was that a tongue-in-cheek observation, it was very oblique." Yeah, it was, my bad.

Charles Moylan of Arlington, Mass., performed an incredibly scientifically advanced analysis of all close-finish Patriots game during the streak, and maintains that in the close-finish games, chance favored the Patriots' opponents more often than it did the Patriots. Jon Thiele, a Packers fan currently living in Bosnia, countered TMQ's analysis with this quotation from Catherine the Great: "Good fortune is not as blind as it is generally thought to be. It is often nothing more than the result of sound, consistent actions that go unnoticed by the crowd." Laura Ross of State College, Pa., opined, "Yes, there were some calls that went in the favor of the Patriots, but in every game you will find a call that is controversial." Now for some complaints in haiku:

TMQ must love  
hate mail, speaking ill of Pats.  
Here's to twenty more!  
-- Jeffrey Smith, Albany, N.Y.

Health of Tom Brady  
not the only reason for  
wins in New England.  
-- Charles Moylan, Arlington, Mass.

Pats' streak due to luck?  
Ye gods! Give due credit to  
players and coaches.  
-- Barry Brown, Wanship, Utah

Do not resent a  
long winning streak: New England  
not a me-first team.

-- Jose Marquez, Somerville, Mass.

I would rank the factors in the Patriots' success thusly: hard work; team spirit; excellent coaching (New England is the most film-studied team in the league and yet every game seems to have a surprise for opponents); avoidance of boasting and preening; luck. Note that I don't list talent. At the NFL level, every team has talent -- teams that are heavy with talent get pounded week after week. Poor coaching, me-first attitudes and boasting can go a long way toward neutralizing talent. Often losing teams do more boasting and preening than winning ones, while there are some coaches who can take average players and win and others who can take great players and lose. New England has the first type of coaches.

Nevertheless, luck cannot be discounted. Many Flying Elvii faithful took most offense at my statement that chance was a factor in the winning streak. Americans seem loath to accept that luck plays a role in our life-outcomes -- we want to believe anyone who succeeds does so on hard work alone, or any team that wins does so strictly because it is deserving. But while I don't think luck is the main factor in our lives, it surely is important. Merely being born into an above-median-income family, for example, dramatically increases your chance of graduating from college and earning high wages in adulthood, and this holds across racial and ethnic groups. There's a hard-work element in who becomes rich or famous, or secures in a nice suburban lifestyle, but also a luck element; it would be well for Americans to bear this in mind, for the disadvantaged often end up where they do owing in part to bad luck. And you can't win 21 games in a row unless your luck is good -- unless the league's best kicker misses a field goal against you on the final play, and so on. There's no shame in the successful admitting they have benefited from luck: In fact, admitting this is admirable. I commend to readers the important recent book *Something for Nothing* by the social critic Jackson Lears, which explores why Americans are loath to admit the role luck plays in our lives.

Melissa Goodall of San Angelo, Texas, was among many to note I had Angelo State located in San Antonio, not San Angelo -- "Population 100,000 out in the middle of nowhere in West Texas, but a great place to grow up."

TMQ calls the Bills' hideous new color Nineteenth Century Rusting Russian Dreadnaught Aft Bulkhead Cyanic. A surprising number of nautically adept readers know that the *HMS Dreadnaught*, which gave the class of vessels its name, was not christened until 1906. Rodger Cole of Colorado Springs, Colo., provides this history of the *Dreadnaught*, including the rather undignified fact that she went from fleet flagship to sold for scrap in 1922, a mere 16 years after commissioning. (The Air Force is flying B-52s built 40 years ago, and plans to continue flying many until the year 2037, when they will be perilously close to a century old.) TMQ takes this point about the noble *Dreadnaught*, but will continue calling the Bills' hue by the same term. Just look at the color -- it's, like, totally 19th century.

Nikolaj Larsen of Dianalund, Denmark, where Tuesday Morning Quarterback appears on Tuesday nights, notes ladies' nights have also recently been banned in Danish clubs. Just as in New Jersey, banning ladies' nights supposedly in fairness to men, but actually harms men by discouraging women from going to night clubs. Nikolaj suggests that Sun Devil Stadium, perennially last in the league for attendance, hold ladies' days and let all double-XX individuals watch a Cardinals' game free.

Benjamin Luketich of Chantilly, Va., notes that by coincidence of scheduling (playing at Baltimore, Miami and Dallas), the Steelers have worn their black jerseys for the first six games, and will wear them next week, too, in Pittsburgh. He wonders, has any team ever worn exactly the same thing seven straight games? You have questions, TMQ readers have answers! Michael Clay of Miami Shores, Fla., notes the Dolphins have worn their whites all seven games this season. Last year, Clay adds, the Ventral Fins showed a wide assortment of orange, teal and white looks, and played better.

Now, about the Steelers play six straight in black. Everybody knows Miami and Dallas wear their whites at home, but what about Baltimore? The Ravens sometimes choose white at home in warm weather, and the Steelers played there in Week 2. But everything in TMQ is elaborately fact-checked -- unless I make it up! -- so how did I confirm that the Ravens wore white in Week 2? Easily, by going to Field Pass, clicking on Week 2, then clicking on video highlights of the Steelers at Ravens collision.

You may not have noticed yet, but NFL.com has added an excellent video feature to Field Pass, the site's premium section. Now you not only can listen to the home team's radio broadcast of any game, you can see video highlights from any game, and watch whenever you want. The video highlights include the final

two minutes of every game, and every play of every touchdown drive. This highlight access is, I must say, the cat's meow. Obviously TMQ appears on NFL.com, and here I am recommending an NFL product. But I also constantly complain about NFL products -- namely, the games! Currently Field Pass can be had for a remainder-of-the-season price of \$25, and there's a free-trial period. My guess is that if you try Field Pass you will quickly conclude, as you did with cell phones, ATM cards and automatic icemakers, that you can't remember how you lived without it.

Linda Rossell of Forked River, N.J., says my item on Fruit Stripes gum made the old jingle instantly pop into her head -- which is disturbing, she notes, as she is only 19 years old. John Nicolette notes that the full name of Falcons tight end Alge Crumpler is Algernon Crumpler: "He wasn't named after the stuff we clean out of our swimming pools." I feel considerably better about his parents now. Cleveland seemed to get away with several pretty obvious "pick" plays against Philadelphia. A reader laments in haiku,

Cleveland Oranges  
offensive game plan mimics  
Stockton-to-Malone.  
-- *Jay Levine*

Apropos TMQ calling the 49ers the Squared Sevens, Bill Gorman of San Francisco points out that the city itself is almost exactly a 7-mile by 7-mile square. A hip San Francisco urban magazine is called *7x7*.

### Last Week's Challenge

In keeping with this week's weather fixation, TMQ asked readers to forecast the weather inside a domed stadium.

Greg Albert, a teacher currently working in South Korea, suggested, "60 percent chance of turf toe." Rob Westbrook of Joppa, Md., suggested, "Period of highs and lows, zero precipitation except for the losing head coach." Trent Sterenchock of Martinez, Ga., suggested "Partly fluorescent." Edwin Hill of Evansville, Ind., suggested "Morning warm-ups, followed by eight-man fronts moving in throughout the afternoon." Karen Baxter of Seattle was among many to suggest some variation on this forecast for the old Kingdom: "Chance of ceiling tiles." Aaron Kleinman suggested of the current Superdome, "Increasing chance of concrete rain due to advanced age." Kleinman doesn't win, but did helpfully provide his own shameless praise in case he did: "Aaron Kleinman would be a welcome addition to any prestigious law school's Class of 2009."

Barb McWithey of Plymouth, Wis., suggested, "Partly crowded, with occasional drizzle of beer before kickoff. Then very crowded with significant periods of beer. Expect the crowds to clear by the fourth quarter depending on score."

Jean-Pierre Gagick of Paris, France, points out that since "blitz" means "lightning" in German, every domed stadium should have a weather forecast of stormy. Douglas Hilderbrand, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Washington, DC, says the only fitting forecast is "Fair." He notes that while bad weather conditions harm both teams equally, "perfect indoor conditions favor each team equally."

Nicole Groth of Waterloo, Iowa, offers this for any RCA Dome contest between the Colts and a defense-oriented team: "A high-pressure front will collide with a stationary front." Dwight Lemke proposed "Chance of halogen." Victor Moreno of Querétaro, Mexico, looks ahead to the Nov. 8 Vikes at Colts pairing; currently these teams are near the top on offense, near the bottom on defense. Forecast: "Downpour of yards, with thunder."

Bo McCroskey of New Orleans has this forecast for the half-enclosed Texas Stadium: "50 percent chance of weather." Brian Aeschlimann of Attleboro, Mass., provides this forecast for an eventual game of an NFL expansion franchise on the moon: "2.72 degrees Kelvin, clear sky, high solar winds, 15 percent chance of solar flares." Let's hope that one is played in a dome!

This week's winner is Barry Teele from Richmond, Va., who provided these multiple dome forecasts: "Atlanta: High expectations, with a 70 percent chance of red and black lightning flashes across the field. Dallas: Low visibility for home quarterbacks beyond 20 yards. St Louis: Tornado watch in effect for

Rams' head coaches. Detroit: 90 percent chance of passes raining on rookie receivers. New Orleans: We really have no idea what to expect each week in New Orleans." In keeping with this year's Challenge policy, Teele's prize is a sentence of shameless praise: "Move over, National Weather Service -- Barry Teele sees all and knows all."

### **This Week's Challenge**

My next column comes out on Election Day. Regardless of who wins, what should be the first football-related legislative priority for the new president? Use the link at Reader Animadversion.

### **Next Week**

Taking their cues from politicians, NFL teams sue to demand recounts!



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## Cheerleaders' Halloween costumes backfire, and why placebos are good for you

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Nov. 2, 2004) -- As everyone has heard all week, in every presidential election since 1936, if the Washington Redskins win their final home game before the Tuesday voting, the party in power keeps the White House; if the Redskins lose, the party out of power retakes the White House. In recent years, both political parties have become increasingly sophisticated about manipulating events -- polls, turnout, media coverage, "surprise" scandals and etc. Why are we so naive as to think both parties did not attempt to manipulate the Packers-Redskins outcome? On an *exclusive* basis, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has learned this is exactly what happened!

First, the Republic National Committee arranged for Joe Gibbs to come out of retirement and take over the Redskins -- talk about clever long-term planning. But the Democratic National Committee made secret unregulated donations to the Green Bay Packers' salary cap, nullifying the Gibbs edge.

Prior to the game, the Redskins placed prized No. 1 draft pick Sean Taylor on the inactive list, owing to a driving arrest. Tuesday Morning Quarterback has learned that the Democratic National Committee hired a Taylor look-alike to drive around the Washington area, hoping to get arrested. Meanwhile the Republic National Committee hired a Brett Favre look-alike to wander through the Pentagon, sticking his head into meetings and saying, "I would have found the explosives." This double was supposed to get arrested too, but instead, Pentagon workers mistook him for the real Favre and asked for autographs.

Next, the Republic National Committee secretly supplied extremely skimpy two-piece outfits to the Redskins' cheerleaders, which normally insures victory for the home team. But the Democratic National Committee secretly arranged for a total eclipse of the full Moon, nullifying the advantage conferred by scantily attired cheer-babes. You don't want to know how much soft money it takes to arrange a total eclipse of the full Moon!

Finally the game was played, and it all boiled down to this. Green Bay 20, Washington 14, Redskins facing third-and-8 on the Packers' 43 with 2:43 remaining. If the Packers just play straight defense, a stop is likely. Instead, it's a blitz: seven Green Bay gentlemen cross the line. TMQ has learned that the Republican National Committee used jamming devices to take over Green Bay's headset system, and made this defensive call. Sure enough, as the Packers go max-blitz, it's an easy touchdown pass to Clinton Portis, the Redskins will win, George W. Bush will be reelected! But wait, penalty against Washington, illegal shift: call not reviewable. TMQ has learned that the Democratic National Committee kidnapped the zebras and replaced them with party officials. Touchdown pass nullified, interception for the Packers on the next snap, Green Bay wins. If history holds, this makes John Kerry the next president. Except on an *exclusive* basis, TMQ has learned that Ralph Nader was observed in a trenchcoat on the sidelines.

In other NFL news, NFL spokesman Greg Aiello announced that if Indianapolis and Kansas City meet again in the playoffs, all defensive players will be required to wear Nomex flame-protection suits. "We're worried about the offensive players setting defenders on fire as they go past them so quickly," Aiello explained. "It's a safety issue."

And in still other NFL news, two weeks ago the Kansas City Chiefs and Green Bay Packers were a

combined 3-8. Now both have rolled over opponents for two consecutive weeks. We have not heard the last of Green Bay and Kansas City, methinks.

#### **Stats of the Week**

Kansas City has scored 101 points in its last two games.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 2**

Denver and Indianapolis both exceeded 500 yards of offense, and lost.

**Stats of the Week No. 3** New England gave up its first turnover return touchdown since the Patriots' winning streak began in 2003.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Daunte Culpepper is on a pace to break Dan Marino's single-season record for passing yards, while Peyton Manning is on a pace to break Marino's single-season record for touchdown passes.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

Counting sacks, New England coaches called passes on 29 consecutive plays. Counting downs nullified by penalty, Denver coaches called passes on 18 consecutive plays. Both teams lost.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

Since taking the field for their Super Bowl appearances, Carolina and Oakland are a combined 7-26.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

Kansas City recorded 590 yards of offense, 33 first downs *and* 233 return yards.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 8**

Buffalo scored 38 points despite just 209 yards of offense.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

The Tony Dungy-coached Colts are now last in defense, surrendering an average 419 yards per game.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 10**

When Indianapolis and Kansas City played in January, Kansas City scored 31 points and lost. When Indianapolis and Kansas City played Sunday, Indianapolis scored 35 points and lost.

**Stats of the Week No. 11** Atlanta is third in the league in rushing, and its top rusher is -- Michael-Mike Vick.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 12**

The teams with the three top-ranked defenses -- Washington, Buffalo and Tampa -- are a combined 6-15.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 13**

The teams with the three top-ranked offenses -- Minnesota, Indianapolis and Kansas City -- are a combined 12-9.

**Stats of the Week No. 14** San Diego, the 2003 last-place finisher, is currently the highest-scoring team in the league.

### Literary Cheerleader of the Week

Only cheerleaders who list serious books or authors as their favorites are eligible. This week's is Keela Harris of the Broncos, a student at the University of Northern Colorado, whose favorite book is *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings* by Maya Angelou. According to her team bio, Harris is the daughter of Bill Harris, who played for the Broncos in the early 1970s. She hopes for a career in broadcast journalism, and if she could pick two people to have dinner with, would pick Maria Shriver and Bill Cosby. Yours truly saw Cosby in concert at the Kennedy Center earlier this year and can report that he's as funny as ever -- and still performing in a Temple University sweatsuit like he did in the 1960s.

### Sweet Play of the Week

In losses to Houston and Jacksonville, Kansas City faced a late third down and, had it converted, could have held the ball for the win or to force overtime; both times the Chiefs failed and ended up losing the game. Leading Indianapolis 38-35 with 2:18 remaining, the Chiefs faced third-and-5 on the Colts' 14. Kansas City play-faked, Tony Gonzalez ran the zed-in, touchdown -- finally a successful late-game third down conversion.

### Sweet Play of the Week No. 2

Leading 6-3, Tennessee faced fourth-and-goal on the Cincinnati 1 with 2 seconds remaining in the first half. Yours truly would have taken the field goal. The Flaming Thumbtacks play-faked then rolled right, touchdown pass from Billy Volek to who-dat tight end Shad Meier. The play-fake numbered among the sweetest TMQ has seen.

### Sour Play of the Week

Trailing 31-10, New England reached first-and-goal on the Pittsburgh 7. To that point, Flying Elvii coaches had called 20 consecutive passing plays. Nevertheless, on first down New England ran a play fake, incomplection. On second down New England ran a play fake, incomplection. On third down New England ran a play fake, incomplection, field goal on fourth down. Who's going to fall for play fakes when you've thrown 20 consecutive times?

### Sour Play of the Week No. 2

The "trips" formation -- three wide receivers on the same side -- used to be considered exotic. But then women kissing used to be considered exotic, and now, on MTV, is considered old-fashioned. Similarly, today the trips set is commonly seen in high school games. Game scoreless, Jersey/B came out in a trips left on the Miami 35. Wayne Chrebet, the inside man among the three, simply ran straight up the field, single-covered by Junior Seau, a linebacker: touchdown reception. Miami seemed so confused by the trips formation that only a linebacker was available to cover a receiver deep. And if they were that confused, why didn't Dolphins' defenders form their hands into a "T" and stop the action?

### Sweet 'N' Sour Play of the Week

Trailing 14-7, Dallas faced fourth-and-3 on the Detroit 35. Rather than launch some mincing fraidy-cat punt, the 'Boys did the correct Maroon Zone thing and went for it, 7-yard run up the middle by Vinny Testaverde. Detroit lined up on the play as if expecting a Hail Mary game-ending pass -- the Lions had four down linemen but no linebackers inside the "box," everyone but the down linemen backed off. That meant Dallas had five offensive linemen to block four defensive linemen; Testaverde saw this and alertly audibled for a quarterback sneak. For the aging Testaverde to rush for a critical first down was sweet; for Detroit to be lined up in what amounted to a "prevent" formation on fourth-and-short was sour. Roster

note: at kickoff of the Dallas-Detroit game, Keyshawn Johnson was the sole Cowboys wide receiver dressed who had a career catch.

### **Jobs May Be Going Overseas, Deficits May Be Mounting, But America Still Leads the World in Beverage Convenience**

The new Honda Odyssey Touring minivan has 17 cupholders.

### **Hidden Play**

Hidden plays are those that will never appear on highlight reels, but stop or sustain drives. On Monday Night, Miami on its opening possession moved the ball to first-and-10 on the Jersey/B 41. The Ventral Fins called the "flea flicker," on which the running back takes the handoff and pitches back to the quarterback. Marty Booker dropped the pass at the Jets 5; the drive stalled and ended in a punt, meaning Miami failed to take a quick lead on the road. True, the pass wasn't perfectly thrown, but Booker had both hands on it. And as John Jefferson of the Chargers used to say: If you can put one hand on the ball you can catch it, and if you can put two hands on the ball you *must* catch it. The dropped pass near the goal line seemed to take the steam out of the Dolphins -- a classic hidden play.

### **Why Are You Punting???**

Trailing 15-10, Baltimore faced fourth-and-6 on its own 38 with 2:11 remaining. True, fourth-and-6 from your own side of the field is risky, but this was the do or die point of the game! Boom goes the punt. When the Ravens got the ball back they were on their own 29 with 1:34 remaining and no timeouts.

### **This Survey Made TMQ Want to Rent a BMW and Drive Around Looking for Women In Peugeots**

A survey in the German magazine *Men's Car* concluded that male BMW owners and female Peugeot owners get the most sex, while both male and female owners of Porsches experience the least sex. Even guys who own Kias, *Men's Car* found, get more nooky than guys who own Porsches, while women who own Audis enjoy sex almost twice as often as women who own Porsches. TMQ has these reactions: 1) You've got to be in your 60s to afford a Porsche, so let's be realistic; 2) Yes, France is the nation of romance, but just sitting in a French-built car makes women hot?; 3) Guys, if you always longed for a BMW, at least now you know why.

Note that when German companies sell things in the United States, they sometimes use German words to sound prestigious. The Mercedes Kompressor models, for example -- *kompessor* means turbocharger auf Deutsche. But when German companies sell things in Germany, they use English to sound prestigious. The magazine is called *Men's Car*, not *Autos für Männer*.

### **Earnest Wilford Mistake of the Week**

"ERRR-nest WILLL-ford, ERRR-nest WILLL-ford," chanted TMQ and my nine-year-old Spenser, a Jax fan, as the Jaguars marched down the field against Houston for what might have been another buzzer-beater win. The stage was set: Jacksonville trailed by a touchdown with 52 seconds remaining, and Wilford had not caught a ball all day, since this gentleman makes his mark only in the final 2 minutes. Byron Leftwich drops back, he throws to an open Ernest Wilford -- the ball bounces off Wilford's hands and is intercepted by Demarcus Faggins of Houston, who returns it for the game-icing touchdown.

### **Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!**

In the Green Bay-Washington game, the Redskins sent a corner blitz on first down, incomplection; sent a corner blitz on second down, incomplection; sent a corner blitz on third down, 18-yard completion to Javon Walker for the first. Green Bay scored a touchdown on the drive to take a 10-0 lead that caused cheering at the Democratic National Committee headquarters.

### **Dwayne-Rudd-Class Play of the Week**

Houston leading Jax 7-0, Jabar Gaffney of the Moo Cows took the ball on the end-around, turned upfield and had an unobstructed path to the end zone. Gaffney started to wave the ball around before getting to paydirt; he lost control at the Jacksonville 1 and the ball rolled out of the end zone, touchback Jax. To top it off, Gaffney jumped up into the crowd to celebrate as officials were busily overturning his touchdown. In the Detroit-Dallas game, Dre Bly of the Lions started waving the ball around 30 yards from the end zone on an interception return, and was lucky he didn't lose it too. Oh ye mortals, give not the football gods reason to knock the ball from your hands as punishment for hubris. Note: I don't wish to alarm you, but the Texans are now 4-3 and eighth in the NFL on offense.

### What the Favre?

Brett Favre was penalized 15 yards for throwing a low block.

### Kansas City Note

My father George was once flying on an American Airlines jetliner that was hit by lightning. (Large aircraft are "internally grounded" for lightning management.) When he got off at his destination, my dad looked back at the plane and saw that much of the red AMERICAN logo had been scorched off the fuselage. That is how the Atlanta Falcons and Indianapolis Colts, last two teams to play the Kansas City Chiefs, must feel today. Both teams left their games against the Chiefs with the logos practically scorched off their helmets.

### TMQ's Health Care Solution

Studies have shown that, are forms of psychological therapy and even types of surgical operations are not significantly more effective than placebos. This causes reformers to express outrage -- though all it may really prove is that the placebo itself is a useful tool of medicine. That is to say, it's not so much that pills and therapy do not work, it's that the placebo *does* work. The power of suggestion has long been recognized as significant. Probably placebos cause benefits by making you feel you've done something substantial to improve your health: gone to see a physician, swallowed a super-advanced chemical. In turn, via the power of suggestion, your belief that you've taking a substantial action helps you get better.

All of which raises the question: why aren't placebos a standard course of treatment given by doctors and hospitals? The answer is that placebos aren't expensive enough! Therefore I plan to make my fortune by marketing the incredible new drug Placebon™.

A patented, proprietary formula consisting entirely of sugar, Placebon™ will revolutionize medicine. Elaborately packaged in individual foil doses, Placebon™ will be obtained only with a doctor's prescription. Placebon™ will be the subject of a multi-million-dollar marketing campaign consisting of costly television advertising and full-page magazine ads with hundreds of words of disclaimers. In the TV ads, smiling multicultural people will run through fields of wildflowers laughing and embracing, but the announcer will never give the slightest hint what the drug is for.

Placebon™ will be extremely expensive, thus increasing demand. Pharmaceutical companies will treat doctors to lavish dinners, send them on all-expense-paid cruises and hand out handsome "consulting" fees to get them to prescribe Placebon™. Controlled clinical studies will fail to show that Placebon™ is any more effective than standard drugs, but the manufacturer will lobby the Food and Drug Administration not to report this. Celebrities will be hired to have public breakdowns, then make spectacular recoveries by taking Placebon™. A saccharine pill, Diet Placebon™, will also be marketed. Initially, many insurers will refuse to pay for Placebon™. But as senior citizens stream across the Canadian border to buy low-cost government-subsidized Placebon™, politicians will demand that insurers pay, and the health care share of the GDP will rise again.

By converting the placebo from practically free to extremely expensive, Placebon™ will expand the benefits of the placebo effect from a tiny few who participate in clinical trials to millions of Americans. Eventually a generic will be available at discount, while the patent-holder makes a tiny molecular change in order to maintain proprietary pricing of advanced Placebon™ 24, a longer-lasting version.

*Warning: do not take Placebon™ if you are pregnant, might be pregnant or might not be pregnant. Product not suitable for anyone who is tall or short or not tall or not short or medium height. Do not take Placebon™ without first paying a large amount of money to a doctor. Side effects may include pneumonia, cancer, bubonic plague and amputation. Do not consume any kind of food within 72 hours before or after taking this product. If you had trouble getting dates in high school, Placebon™ may not be right for you. Do not operate heavy excavation equipment, tunnel-boring machines or artillery after taking Placebon™.*

### **Maroon Zone Watch**

Trailing 10-3 late in the third quarter, Jacksonville faced fourth-and-6 on the Houston 44, and punted. Set aside that Jax downed the ball on the Texans 1; when the Jaguars finally got the ball back, they were on their own 20 with the third quarter nearly over. When trailing, almost any manageable-distance fourth down in opposition territory should be a go-for-it down.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed at All**

Trailing 20-0, Minnesota faced third-and-2 on the Jersey/A 42 in the early third quarter. This is a two-down situation, so why not just run up the middle on third down and run again if necessary on fourth? Instead the Vikings went pass-wacky, Daunte Culpepper threw an interception directly into the chest of Will Allen of the Giants, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed at All No. 2** Trailing 34-21 at home, Denver reached first-and-goal on the Atlanta 8 with 4:27 remaining, holding all its timeouts. Denver is an excellent rushing team. The game is being played a mile above sea level, where visitors gasp for breath in the fourth quarter. There is plenty of time to score twice. So did the Broncos pound, pound for the likely six points and then for the thrilling final minutes? Incompletion, incompletion, Jake Plummer scrambles 1 yard on a busted pass play, incompletion on fourth down and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed at All No. 3**

New England rushed just six times for 5 yards. Regardless of the scoreboard, it is impossible to win an NFL game by attempting just six rushes. A reader asks in haiku,

Are Elvii back in  
TMQ's good graces, post-  
big loss to Steelers?  
*Maureen Long, Cambridge, Mass.*

### **Therefore, Better to Avoid Scoring Touchdowns**

In a tense field goal contest, Philadelphia scored the game's first touchdown with 9:12 remaining in the fourth quarter. Immediately Baltimore drove to score the game's second touchdown. Often when a game is low-scoring, the defense plays extremely hard until the offense records a touchdown -- then immediately relaxes, thinking the lead is safe.

### **Crazy Run of the Week**

Game tied at 3, the Eagles had first-and-goal on the Ravens 5. Donovan McNabb lined up in the shotgun -- can't anyone power-run from the goal line anymore? -- then scrambled right. Reaching the 1, he tried to jump heels-over-head into the end zone and fumbled, Baltimore ball. Discretion is the better part of valor! Had McNabb simply hook-slid, Philadelphia would have had second-and-goal on the Baltimore 1.

### **Personal Lifestyle Information We Would Rather Not Have Known**

"There is nothing quite like self-flagellation on Halloween Day." Actual statement by announcer Dick Enberg during the Ravens-Eagles game.

### **Before Road Games, Coaches Should Explain to Cardinals Players That Those Strange Objects Up in the Stands Are Spectators**

Arizona has lost 17 consecutive away games. Must be the disoriented feeling of playing in front of a crowd! Sign of Cardinals' road stupefaction -- Neil Rackers of Arizona attempted a 64-yard field goal in strong swirling winds at Ralph Wilson Stadium. The kick failed to reach the end zone.

### **Best Play by a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Be in San Diego**

While Eli Manning watched Kurt Warner take over the Giants' jinx on Minnesota and high-priced holdout Philip Rivers was nailed to the Chargers' pine, Drew Brees pumped left and then threw an almost no-look pass back over the middle for the touchdown to Keenan McCardell that put San Diego into a commanding 21-7 lead. I don't wish to alarm you, but the Chargers are 5-3 and Brees is the third-rated passer in the National Football League. Note: Imagine if rather than using the fourth overall pick in last April's draft on the high-priced holdout Rivers, San Diego had instead picked Kellen Winslow Jr. or Roy Williams, and added them to the suddenly bolt-like Bolts offense.

### **Best High School Play**

Leading 6-3, Tennessee faced fourth-and-2 on the Cincinnati 41. In trotted the punt unit. A gigantic sign should have flashed on the scoreboard: WARNING, WARNING, FAKE PUNT. The Flaming Thumbtacks lined up in a high-school trick-play set with five men bunched near the right sideline, two men bunched near the left side, three men plus punter Craig Hentrich in the middle. The Candy Corns looked hopelessly confused: just one defender stood in the center across from the punter and the three blockers. Usually, in high school, this play becomes a screen to the large group at the sidelines; Cincinnati defenders crowded around that group anticipating the high-school action. No Bengals defender had the simple common sense to form his hands into the "T" symbol and stop the action. Hentrich went straight up the middle, three blocking one; got the first down; Tennessee scored a touchdown on the possession and never looked back.

### **Pennsylvania Resplendent!**

Pennsylvania is now the NFL's leading state, with a 13-1 record; Massachusetts has fallen to second place at 6-1; New Jersey is third at 11-3. Note the old-economy Northeastern states continue to beat up on the Sun Belt (California 8-14, Florida 8-15).

### **Harry Potter Will Be in Grad School By Then**

Columbia Pictures has announced that *Spiderman 3* will open in May 2007. TMQ suggests casting Ted Washington as Spidey's ultra-enormous nemesis, the Kingpin.

### **Red Nine! Shift 45 Curl! B Flat, Allegro!**

As noted by reader Greg Aaron among others, Eagles star Dhani Jones -- graduate of Churchill High School of Montgomery County, Md., the Official High School of TMQ's kids -- joined the Philadelphia Pops Orchestra last week as guest conductor for the *Liberty Bell March*. Jones is multitalented -- they teach 'em well at Churchill -- so TMQ is sure he did a solid job, though may have been tapping his baton on the Eagles playbook rather than the score. Probably the Philadelphia Pops Orchestra arranged the whole thing in hopes of getting to meet the Eagles cheerleaders.

### **Nice Switch**

Many readers, including Mike Murray of Chico, Calif., noted that Fox local affiliates switched in the second half away from the Giants-Vikings blowout to the down-to-the-wire Detroit-Dallas game. Bravo! No one knows in advance which games will be hot, but once networks do know, they should switch.

### **Money for Nothing, Physics Division**

Yours truly admires the pursuit of abstract knowledge -- except when pursued at high expense to taxpayers. Particle physics, which involves large machines that accelerate subatomic particles to high velocities, costs a great deal of money, most paid by taxpayers, and has little chance of ever producing information of benefit to those taxpayers. Fermilab in Batavia, Ill., the most powerful particle accelerator in the world, cost taxpayers about \$1.6 billion in today's dollars to build, and costs them about \$300 annually to operate. Return to taxpayers -- zero, since Fermilab is investigating such abstruse questions as the properties of the "quark," which appears to be the smallest unit of matter, and quark behavior has no applicability to energy production, national defense or anything else in the macro world. There's a tiny chance Fermilab and similar accelerators will discover something of practical value; there's also a tiny chance these facilities will inadvertently generate some subatomic substance that destroys the Earth, in a sort of reverse Big Bang. Anyway, while it's interesting to know how quarks behave, why should taxpayers fund such research? Fermilab and projects like it are basically a jobs program for physics professors and postdocs. Possibly Fermilab's sole feature of value to taxpayers is this page of physics games.

Comes now a nutty new frontier in subsidized physics research of dubious value. The Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council of the United Kingdom is proposing to spend at least 21 million British pounds to build a "neutrino factory". Neutrinos are subatomic ghost particles once thought to have no mass, and now believed to carry extremely tiny amounts of mass under some circumstances. Already, hundreds of millions of dollars of tax funds have been invested by several nations, including the United States, in building elaborate underground detectors that search for neutrinos coming from the Sun -- research that employs physicists, but has zero practical value to taxpayers. Now the United Kingdom may trigger a race to manufacture neutrinos for the purpose of study. Is there any chance of practical value from such work? Almost none. This sort of nutty research should only be done with private funds.

### Just Give a Little Whistle

"Play to the whistle!" high-school coaches endlessly excoriate their charges. Game scoreless in the Metrodome, Daunte Culpepper, feet on the 35-yard line, threw a hitch to Mewelde Moore, feet on the 34. Moore dropped the lateral like it was an angry ferret, and then stood doing nothing as Jersey/A recovered the live ball and ran down to the Vikings 22, setting up the Giants' first score. Not only do high-school coaches endlessly excoriate running backs and receivers to assume that any sideways throw is a lateral and fall on it: Moore stood watching the ball roll on the ground *although the whistle had not sounded*. Football gentlemen must always play to the whistle, then let the officials sort it all out.

Is there a problem with officials not blowing the whistle soon enough, and players thus getting out of the habit of listening for the whistle ending the play? TMQ has noticed that in a lot of high school and college games, especially, zebras don't seem to blow the whistle soon enough. A players' knee goes down, and then he lunges and loses the ball; it's treated as a fumble because the whistle did not sound when the knee touched. Or half-a-dozen tacklers wrap the runner up and push him back helplessly, yet the whistle does not sound until the runner actually thuds on the ground. A reader provides this haiku about slowness of whistles:

This play is over,  
yet I must keep on going:  
Ref, blow the whistle!  
-- Jeremy McGrath, Tonawanda, N.Y.

### Curious Tactics, Dr. Watson

A coaching cliché is "putting players into position to succeed." This seems nonsensical -- why would coaches not put players into position to succeed? But coaching decisions can, in fact, have a lot to do with whether players succeed. Chicago leading San Francisco 7-0 in the first quarter, the Bears facing third-and-goal on the Niners' 12. Craig Krenzel is making his first NFL start at quarterback, and looking shaky. A field goal is great for Chicago here. So coaches, call a run. Instead, Chicago coaches called a complex slow-developing pass, Krenzel held the ball too long and fumbled when hit, San Francisco takes over. The Bears went on to win, in part because in the second half, coaches called fewer passes than in the first half and put less pressure on Krenzel to make big plays -- that is, put him in position to succeed.

### The Sampling Error Is Plus or Minus Three Fajitas (Sampling Error, Get It?)

A month ago, TMQ wrote, "Forget those scientific polls, if you want to know who the next president will be, check with California Tortilla. These locally owned Montgomery County, Md., eateries, the Official Rapid Food Restaurant of TMQ, have a flawless record of predicting election results via burritos. Cooks concoct a burrito named for each candidate, then keep track of how many sell: Invariably, the top-selling burrito accurately predicts the winner. Last night, the California Tortilla burrito poll closed. The final burrito count was John Kerry 1,868, George W. Bush 1,738. That's Kerry over Bush, 51.8 percent to 48.2 percent. Let's see how close that comes to today's actual vote.

### **This Week's *Star Trek* Complaint**

In this radio interview, *Star Trek* "science advisor" Andre Bormanis more or less admits that many things in *Star Trek* make no sense scientifically. Bormanis says the original Captain Kirk serials of the 1960s were intended to be scientifically credible (you did have to assume warp speed and teleportation), but doesn't attempt to defend the constant time-travel plots that are plaguing the latest serial, *Star Trek Enterprise*. Plus, he never explains something that drives TMQ crazy about all *Star Trek* shows -- why, when a phaser blast hits the outside of the ship, does this cause electrical fires *inside* on the bridge? Wouldn't faster-than-light starcruisers have circuit-breaker panels?

### **Best Blocks**

Once again, the Kansas City offensive line played so well this item is reserved for it alone. Representative down: Chiefs leading 21-14 in the second quarter, Kansas City called a screen pass on first-and-10. Guards Will Shields and Brian Waters blocked perfectly in front of the screen receiver, Priest Holmes, who rumbled 52 yards. On the next play, Kansas City scored to make it 28-14, and Indianapolis was in a hole. The Kansas City offensive line is playing so much better than any other offensive line that it's almost spooky.

Note: If I was going to mention any other offensive line, which I am not, the Blue Men Group had perfect "down" blocking when Shaun Alexander simply went off-tackle left and ran 44 yards, setting up the fourth-quarter touchdown that iced the Carolina-Seattle game. It's pretty fun to run for 44 yards when everyone in front of you has already been knocked to the ground. I am also not going to mention that San Diego is getting surprisingly good offensive line play from a group of gentlemen whom you have never heard of.

### **In the Morning We'll Have Light Airborne Pumice, Followed By Scattered Afternoon Lava**

Accuweather has been forecasting the "ashfall" from a possible eruption of Mount St. Helens.

### **Game Being Played in TMQ's Nightmares**

Cincinnati in its new road uniforms versus Tennessee in its high-school-style home uniforms. Wait -- that game was actually played Sunday.

### **More Signs and Portents**

The Washington and Minnesota cheerleaders wore just shy of nothing for home games, yet their teams were defeated. Vikings cheer-babes even showed professionalism by wearing revealing Halloween costumes, and this didn't help. Denver cheerleaders showed tremendous professionalism by opening the game in we-are-not-shy Halloween costumes despite a kickoff temperature of 54 degrees, and the Broncos jumped to a quick 14-3 lead. But then, as reported by Michael DeLancey of Denver, who was at the game, at the start of the second quarter the Broncs cheerleaders disappeared into their locker room and returned in winter gear -- immediately the Falcons scored 31 unanswered points. DeLancey notes in poetry,

Babes tease football gods.  
Change of dress causes a loss:  
Broncos yield to Vick.  
-- Michael DeLancey, Denver

As noted by Gabriel Martinez Tribolet of San Diego, the Bolts cheerleaders sported revealing Halloween outfits, and their team was crowned with success. The Philadelphia Eagles cheer-babes appeared, as usual, in barely more than bikinis, and their team won. Yet home losses by Denver, Minnesota and Washington, despite conspicuous cheerleader professionalism, are deeply troubling to TMQ. All I can think of is that a total eclipse of the full Moon, coupled with a Red Sox victory in the World Series, nullifies the normal advantage conferred by nearly naked cheer-babes. Nevertheless, these signs and portents are unsettling. The football gods continue to be restive. Watch for omens such as birds flying north. Even with the New England streak ended, TMQ feels something else mighty is about to happen.

## **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

### **Obscure College Score of the Week**

Chattanooga 59, Appalachian 56. Sixteen touchdowns were scored and 1,337 yards of offense gained in this contest, which made the Indianapolis at Kansas City game seem like a defensive struggle. Chattanooga had an amazing 17 possessions -- ending in eight touchdowns, a field goal, five punts, two fumbles and a turnover on downs. The University of Tennessee at Chattanooga calls itself a "metropolitan university". Just the ticket for metrosexuals!

### **Bonus Obscure College Score**

Hamline 75, Macalaster 20. Located in St. Paul, Minn., Hamline University offers graduate-level courses that include "The History of Relations Between Humans and Animals" and "Home: An Interdisciplinary Study."

### **Double Bonus Obscure Score**

Hastings 60, Dana 35. As noted by reader James Stevenson, Dana quarterback Tom Lensch threw 101 passes; Dana ran the ball nine times. Located in Blair, Neb., Dana College has just 560 students, 93 of whom are on the football active roster with another 10 being redshirted.

### **Cover-Your-Eyes College Score**

East Stroudsburg 55, Cheyney 0. Cheyney has been outscored 511-51. Cheyney coach Lee Brown's postgame speech: "Well, boys, if we score 460 points in our final game against Kutztown, we can really turn things around."

### **Obscure College Game of the Year**

It's Indianapolis of Pennsylvania at California of Pennsylvania this coming Saturday, Nov. 6. Kickoff is 1 p.m. at Adamson Stadium. You can listen to the game here. And really, what are you doing at 1 p.m. Saturday that is more important than listening to the Obscure College Game of the Year?

### **Reader Animadversion**

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Last week's column said humid air was harder to kick a long field goal through than dry air. Many kickers certainly believe this -- it's assumed that water vapor in the air resists passage of the ball, via tiny amounts of friction. But numerous readers, including Roberto Gasparini, a Ph.D student in atmospheric science at Texas A&M, told TMQ that humid air is lighter than dry air and thus resists a flying football less. Dry air consists of molecules of diatomic nitrogen (atomic weight 28) and diatomic oxygen (atomic weight 32); as air becomes humid, some of these are displaced by water vapor (atomic weight 18). The lower atomic weight of water vapor means humid air is less dense than dry air, Gasparini says, and thereby easier to kick through.

In the Week 7 Philadelphia-Cleveland game, the Browns scored a touchdown with a few seconds remaining in regulation, then kicked a PAT to force overtime. Many readers, including Jeremy Zetouny of Tel Aviv, Israel, asked: Why didn't Cleveland go for two and the win? The Browns' chances of winning in overtime were maybe 50-50, Zetouny supposes, whereas their chances of gaining the two yards needed for the deuce conversion were much higher -- NFL teams are successful on about two-thirds of tries on fourth-and-2, which is essentially what a two-point situation is. The incredible crowd energy that would have flowed, had Cleveland gone for two, might have knocked the Eagles over on its own. Or Cleveland might have run a deuce attempt as a fake from kicking formation, and surely taken the Eagles off-guard. Instead Cleveland kicked for one and then lost in the extra session.

TMQ can't recall a recent NFL team that went for two to win or lose at the end of regulation, rather than kicking the singleton and proceeding to overtime. Closest I can think of: Buffalo was at the Miami goal line when a 1999 playoff game ended with the Dolphins ahead 24-17; Coach Wade Phillips later said that if the Bills had scored he would have gone for two and the win, but only because several Buffalo players had left the game injured, meaning the team would have been shorthanded in overtime. Not going for the win at the end of regulation is a matter of coaches wanting to avoid criticism. If the coach orders the team to go for two and the attempt fails, then the coach is blamed for the loss; if he plays it safe and take a single point for overtime and loses, then the players are blamed. A reader haikuizes,

Two-point or O-time?  
Coaches take the safe way out:  
always go OT.  
-- Adam Swejk, Columbus, Ohio

Yotam Kaufman of Jerusalem, Israel, writes, "Did you notice that in *The Return of the King*, the Orc commander yells 'fire!' when he wants his minions to shoot arrows? I find it unlikely the 'fire' command was used before the advent of firearms."

Mike Enos of Phoenix, Ariz., asked, "Is there any way I could convince you to turn the analytical powers of TMQ to this year's *Sports Illustrated* 40th anniversary swimsuit issue? I'm looking for some analysis about whether a painted-on suit really qualifies as a swimsuit -- or some sort of statistical insight into the number of pictures that only feature half a suit?"

Mike, you noted something caught by many alert *Sports Illustrated* readers, that apparently the modern string bikini covers way too much, so the only common-sense alternative is to unlace parts. The cover model's top was off, for example. According to this incredibly scientifically advanced analysis by Josh Levin of Slate.com, the latest *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue included 36 pictures of women in swimsuits, but of them there were "15 women wearing only part of their suits and positioned strategically next to inner tubes, barns, etc., plus six women wearing nothing but body paint." Levin further noted that the issue contained "11 interviews with members of the Swimsuit Hall of Fame." Considering that the Pro Football Hall of Fame initiation ceremonies are broadcast each year from Canton, why aren't the Swimsuit Hall of Fame initiation ceremonies on television?

A reader offers this haiku of shameless praise for the column: No Tuesday lunch out!  
Company chili at desk --  
TMQ tasty.  
-- Linda Robinson, Arlington, Mass.

### Last Week's Challenge

Last week's was to name the first football-related legislative priority of the new president, whoever he may be.

Tim Springfield of St. Paul, Minn., suggests a uniform freeze -- banning any further changes in NFL uniforms. Garret VanDenBerg of New Brighton, Minn., suggested ordering the Buffalo Bills to return to their old uniforms. Don Lecker of Newport, Maine, adds that the Detroit Pistons won their "bad boys" championship wearing red, white and blue, then switched to ugly gray uniforms, then simply went back to their old look and again won a championship. Geoff Holdt suggests, "Send Bill Belichick to the Middle East; he could easily solve all problems there." Ken Utting of Jacksonville, Fla., suggests ending the NFL

draft and replacing it with an all-volunteer force. Jonah Cohen of Newington, Conn., suggests making it a felony to shift to the prevent defense.

Maria of Lancaster, Pa., suggests the president require NFL players to wear see-through jerseys. Arthur Chen of Castle Rock, Colo., suggests a minimum-wage law for cheer-babes, including mandatory time-and-a-half for all instances of cheerleader professionalism -- that is, flouncing around half-clad even when it's cold. Mat Russell of New Market, N.H., suggests outlawing the NFL TV post-touchdown format of commercials, kickoff, more commercials. Aaron Kleinman of Washington, DC, suggests legislation to allow the reimportation of low-cost sidearm-throwing quarterbacks from the Canadian Football League.

Matt Hinton proposes a Leave No Drive Behind bill that would "require teams to go for it on fourth down when trailing and in opponents' territory in the second half." Kosta Karlos of Chicago suggests a New England Patriots Act, which would give the government special powers to wiretap, open mail and inspect computer records to uncover how the Patriots won so many games.

Paul Noonan of New York City wants legislation forbidding NFL zebras from saying "prior to the snap, false start," since false start can only occur prior to the snap. W. M. Whitaker of Level Green, Pa., suggests "eliminating the electoral college and the popular vote and simply letting Redskins games decide all presidential elections." Aaron Still of the United States Naval Academy wants legislation guaranteeing that every American city sees NFL games at least as good as the ones shown that week in Iran -- this Sunday, Iran saw Colts at Chiefs and Panthers at Seahawks.

This week's winner is Scott Buhanan of Salt Lake City, who provided an entire legislative agenda for the first 90 days of the new president. Buhanan's proposals included: "Pardon Al Davis; raise the minimum wage for NFL cheerleaders; use Department of Homeland Security agents as seat-fillers at Sun Devil Stadium; supply cheap prescription drugs for injured Carolina Panthers players; provide Medicare coverage for stick-um for Seattle wide receivers; proclaim Ernest Wilford Day." Buhanan is a software engineer and Raiders fan who says he "enjoys hypothetical moonlit beach walks with Eagles cheerleaders." In keeping with this year's Challenge policy, his prize is a sentence of shameless praise. Here it is: "Move over, Bill Gates -- Scott Buhanan is the new 800-pound gorilla of software engineering." Scott, put this quote in your resume, and just don't mention that it was NFL.com that said this about you.

### **This Week's Challenge**

Suppose the starship *Enterprise* went backward in time to alter NFL history. What aspect of the NFL timeline should be changed by time travelers from the future? Use the link at Reader Animadversion.

### **Next Week**

Exclusive polls of the 2008 presidential campaign!



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## An unbelievable column, plus guest speakers give the halftime tirade

*By Gregg Easterbrook*  
*Special to NFL.com*

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Nov. 9, 2004) -- "It's unbelievable!" Joe Theismann of ESPN declared during the Baltimore-Cleveland game. What's unbelievable? The Ravens' new practice facility, which has a 10,000-square-foot weight room, full-service cafeteria and video-game room. Sounds nice. But Joe, you saw it with your own eyes. Why didn't you believe it?

"It's unbelievable," Cris Collinsworth of FOX recently declared. What? That Clinton Portis fumbled. "It's unbelievable," Joe Buck of FOX recently declared. What? That the Colts were leading Green Bay by 38-31. "Unbelievable," Phil Simms of CBS pronounced of Steve Smith's touchdown catch in the Super Bowl. "Unbelievable," Greg Gumbel of CBS said of the crowd noise during the Indianapolis-Denver playoff game. "Unbelievable," Mike Patrick said of the Arizona-Minnesota contest that ended the 2003 season. "Unbelievable!" Chris Berman of ESPN said of a Dante Hall kick return. "Unbelievable!" John Madden of ABC said of a long touchdown in the Indianapolis-Tampa Monday Night comeback game of 2003. Dan Dierdorf of CBS, Daryl Johnston of FOX, Suzy Kolber of ESPN, Tony Siragusa of FOX, Solomon Wilcotts of our very own NFL Network -- if he or she makes a living talking about the NFL on television, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has heard her or him describe something as "unbelievable!"

But you just saw it with your own eyes -- why didn't you believe it? Oscar Wilde once said of the religious, "They only believe what they cannot see." As a churchgoer, I take the point. But why don't sports broadcasters believe what they *can* see?

Yours truly grew up in Buffalo, N.Y., avidly listening to the great Van Miller, one of the marvelous voices from the Golden Age of radio, call Bills games. Nobody ever did it better, except that to Miller, every fourth play was "unbelievable!" Last year, as Miller called his final game, a dispiriting loss to New England, Miller declared every fumble, dropped pass, penalty and blown coverage "unbelievable!" Van, you watched fumbles, dropped passes and penalties for 37 years. Why don't you believe them when you see them?

When sports announcers say something is "unbelievable," what they mean is that it's exciting or interesting. This is a reflection of general inflation of language in American culture. Contemporary editorialists and politicians never speak of a "problem," they speak of a "crisis;" nowadays you hear the phrase "serious crisis" invoked because "crisis" is so overused the word has been hollow. Critics don't call movies or music "good" or "bad," everything is either "brilliant" or "terrible." Returning to football, plays that are thrilling or improbable, such as last-second winning touchdowns, are inflated into "a miracle!" God, we can feel confident, does not intervene regarding fourth-down passes. Somehow in our language-inflated culture, it's not enough that a sporting event be exciting to watch, or a social issue be troubling to ponder. Language has to be pumped up to make every issue and event sound totally incredible.

I'm telling you, the serious crisis of sports announcing is unbelievable!

In other NFL news, at 3:52 p.m. ET on Sunday, as the Eagles left Ketchup Field in Pittsburgh mumbling "#@!?!\*" under their breaths, corks popped. In one of the sweetest traditions in sports lore, on opening day of every NFL season, each surviving member of the 1972 Miami Dolphins, sole perfect team in pro football history, sets aside a bottle of Champagne to cool. And it's genuine Champagne from Champagne,

not the boysenberry-infused sparkling-Gewurztraminer wine-like substance that passes for bubbly these days. At the moment the stadium clock hits double-zeros for the defeat of the season's last undefeated team, the 1972 Dolphins pull the corks, secure in the knowledge they will reign as sole perfect team for at least one additional year. Gentlemen of 1972, enjoy your annual draught. TMQ feels confident you will continue to sip Champagne each autumn until you are called to meet the football gods, and greeted by song and feasting.

Note: I just reproduced the above item from my AutoText, substituting only the name of the last undefeated, the field where it fell and the moment when all-naughts, the phrase I use now, showed on the clock. For five years I have reproduced that item from my AutoText, substituting only the year's particulars. Gentlemen of 1972, Tuesday Morning Quarterback feels confident I will continue to reproduce that item from my AutoText on an annual basis for many seasons to come. My heirs may be reproducing it decades or centuries in the future.

In still other NFL news, the Bengals wore a Halloween costume of black pants with orange jerseys as they hosted the Cowboys. As reader Michael Schatzman of Madeira, Ohio, noted, "Please stand by, the problem is not with your set." The week after the Eagles showed special black jerseys, the Ravens showed special black jerseys -- why didn't both teams go black when they met in Week 8? It could have been called the Stealth Bowl. The Bills hinted they will return to their handsome previous regalia: see below. Buffalo, just go back to the way you looked before! All will be forgiven.

And in still other NFL news, NFL spokesman Greg Aiello announced that if Indianapolis and Minnesota meet again in the Super Bowl, triple-digit scoreboards will be installed. "It would be very embarrassing if both teams went over 100 points and we could not properly display that information to the audience," Aiello explained.

### **Stat of the Week**

In consecutive games against unbeaten New England and Philadelphia, a combined 13-0 when Pittsburgh faced them, the Steelers jumped to a combined 51-6 lead.

### **Stats of the Week No. 2**

San Diego, last year's last-place finisher, has scored the most points of any NFL team.

### **Stats of the Week No. 3**

Arizona and Oakland, which both won on the road, ended a combined 0-30 road losing streak.

### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Atlanta has scored 170 points and surrendered 170 points.

### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

The Steelers outgained unbeaten Philadelphia by 307 yards.

### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

From the late second quarter through the mid third quarter, Buffalo held the ball for 27 consecutive plays and 11:03 of clock time.

### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

Since taking the field for their Super Bowl appearances Carolina and Oakland, which met Sunday, are a combined 8-27.

**Stats of the Week No. 8**

Kansas City scored 31 points, gained 459 yards and lost.

**Stats of the Week No. 9**

Kansas City is averaging 30 points per game and has a losing record.

**Stats of the Week No. 10**

In two meetings this year, the Browns held Jamal Lewis to 362 fewer yards than he gained against them in two meetings last year.

**Stats of the Week No. 11**

With 15 touchdowns, Priest Holmes has more touchdowns than four entire teams -- Cincinnati, Jacksonville, Washington and Miami. With 12 touchdowns, Shaun Alexander has as many as two entire teams, Washington and Miami.

**Stats of the Week No. 12**

Peyton Manning and Daunte Culpepper have combined for 47 touchdown passes and just 9 interceptions.

**Literary Cheerleader of the Week**

Only cheerleaders who list serious books or authors as their favorites are eligible. This week's, nominated by Jeanine DeBacker of San Leandro, Calif., is Melissa of the San Francisco 49ers, who lists *The Great Gatsby* as her favorite book. According to her team bio, Melissa is a Mexican-American who considers "working through injuries" the toughest part of being a cheerleader: it's not just the gentlemen who are spraining knees and pulling ligaments and playing with pain to keep the fans entertained. She also says of herself, "I have a long repertoire of cheesy jokes." Melissa, just like Tuesday Morning Quarterback!

**Sweet Play of the Week**

All NFL teams have an action in which the quarterback fakes a handoff up the middle, then gives the ball to a receiver on the end-around -- Indianapolis showed this action on Monday Night, for instance. The action works if the fake up the middle is a credible threat. Pittsburgh's opening drive against Philadelphia resulted in a 16-yard touchdown run by wide receiver Hines Ward on the end-around, following a fake up the middle to Jerome Bettis. To that point in the drive, Bettis had carried up the middle five times for 34 yards -- so when the Steelers faked to him up the middle, the Eagles bought the fake. Many teams call the middle-fake, end-around when they haven't been gaining up the middle, and then nobody buys the fake.

**Maroon Zone Play of the Day**

On the above-cited drive, game scoreless, Pittsburgh faced first-and-10 on the Philadelphia 40. Did the Steelers launch some mincing fraidy-cat punt? As pointed out by many readers including John Shepherd of Dallas, Pittsburgh went for it, power-run for six yards, touchdown on the drive and the Steelers never looked back. Winning Maroon Zone performance!

**Sweet Players of the Week**

New England kicked off at St. Louis with injuries at cornerback and receiver. So linebacker Mike Vrabel lined up as a tight end at the Rams goal line and caught a touchdown pass, while receiver Troy Brown played as a nickel back, recording three tackles and a pass defensed. Both these gentlemen played in accordance with the Patriots' program -- coming out of nowhere, they performed flawlessly.

### Why Tactics Matter

Pittsburgh is the league's hottest team, and while Ben Roethlisberger is getting the press, the Steelers defense explains much of the team's success. Currently the Pittsburgh defense is second-best in yards allowed and tied for third-best in points allowed, and that's after back-to-back games against New England and Philadelphia, two highest-scoring clubs. Honestly, how many Steelers defensive starters can you name without looking? Pittsburgh does not blitz much -- usually a linebacker pass-rushes, but since the team employs a base 3-4, that still only adds up to the conventional four pass rushers. What's effective about the Pittsburgh defense is that offenses are often confused regarding where the rush will come from: Of the seven-man defensive front it's impossible to predict, play-to-play, which four will rush. Also, Pittsburgh rushers execute usual "twists," rather than simply blasting straight ahead as most rushers do. Sunday against the Eagles, Pittsburgh defensive coordinator Dick LeBeau several times had two linebackers line up over the Philadelphia offensive guards, then rush crossing each other -- making an "X" pattern, the left linebacker rushing right and the right linebacker rushing left. When this happened the Philadelphia guards were confused about which way to turn, and Donovan McNabb had to throw the ball away to avoid being sacked.

### Why Management Matters

Kansas City has a red-hot offense yet a losing record, because its defense is surrendering 26.3 points per game. Why should this come as any surprise, since in the second half of the 2003 season, the Kansas City defense allowed 26.6 points per game? Then, in the offseason, the Chiefs made no attempt to sign defensive players. Kansas City management decided that a defense that was allowing 26.6 points per game would be sufficient for the 2004 season. What Kansas City management got is a defense allowing almost exactly its previous average.

### Dr. Phil Counsels T.O., Ray Lewis

On an *exclusive* basis, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has obtained this transcript of a private counseling session involving Terrell Owens, Ray Lewis and Dr. Phil.

**Owens:** Now, Ray is my friend, I'm not criticizing him. I would never criticize him. But in addition to wearing mismatched socks and not flossing, he belongs in the Guantanamo Bay detention center for interrogation.

**Lewis:** Terrell is a great player, he's a star, I would never say anything against him. But he is a menace to Western civilization and his DNA is 99 percent identical to a laboratory mouse.

**Owens:** So is yours, assuming you're human.

**Lewis:** I don't want to say anything against T.O., but his license tags are expired, he made noise during nap time in kindergarten and Safeway has him on videotape taking 14 items into the 10-item express lane.

**Owens:** If you have five bananas, that counts as one item! That's what my agent told me, anyway.

**Lewis:** The bananas had come off the bunch. I've seen the tape, man.

**Owens:** You're repulsive and you cannot pronounce "chlorofluorocarbon."

**Lewis:** You're insufferable and you cannot adequately describe the Kellogg-Briand Treaty of 1928.

**Dr. Phil:** I suggest we all have a big group hug.

**Lewis and Owens together:** Anything but a hug! I promise never to criticize him again.

**Dr. Phil:** Next week we will be inviting Donovan McNabb to join our counseling session.

### **The Football Gods Winced**

San Diego leading 7-0, New Orleans faced third-and-10 on its 46. Quarterback Aaron Brooks was under pressure. Rather than simply take the sack -- sometimes taking the sack is a smart play for a quarterback -- he spun around and, seeing tackle Wayne Gandy behind him, fired Gandy the ball. Gandy, an offensive lineman, is not the ideal gentleman to fire the ball to; also, since he was behind the quarterback, where exactly was he supposed to go? Gandy jumped out of the way of Brooks' lateral, as if the ball was a live ferret; the lateral rolled to the Saints 23 before a New Orleans player recovered it, loss of 23 yards. The Chargers scored a touchdown on their possession following the fourth-and-33 punt, and the Saints might as well have left to get blueberry-almond martinis.

### **The Football Gods Smiled**

Leading 27-3, the Steelers reached first-and-goal on the Philadelphia 7 with 2:48 remaining. Bill Cowher ordered his charges to kneel, though considering the two-minute warning, kneel-downs were not quite enough to kill the clock. Pittsburgh knelt four times, then let the Eagles get the ball back with 30 seconds remaining. The football gods reward those who do not run up the score! Yea, verily, Pittsburgh shall be rewarded.

### **Why Not Rush the Punter?**

Ahead 10-3 late in the third quarter, the Potomac Nanticokes sent eight rushers after a Detroit punt -- which was blocked and returned for the touchdown that proved the winning points. Trailing 13-12 in the fourth quarter, the Ravens forced Cleveland to punt from its 2, and sent seven rushers after the kick -- which was hurried and went out of bounds at the Browns 9, setting up Baltimore's go-ahead touchdown.

Watch NFL tape carefully, and you will see that most teams rarely go after punts. Often, only one or two players really rush the punter: Defenders lined up on the line are mainly smashing into the punting team's linemen to keep them from getting downfield, rather than punt-rushing. For instance, on the next Detroit punt after its block on Sunday, Washington rushed just one man. When NFL teams do come after the punter with lots of bodies, it is often a shock and leads to a block or a poor kick. Houston blocked a punt against Denver on Sunday by rushing three, which doesn't sound like much, but actually is a lot by contemporary NFL standards.

Why do NFL teams big-rush the punter so rarely? It's another sign of coaches playing it safe. If the coach orders a big punt rush and the result is roughing the kicker, then the coach is lambasted; if the coach sends one token rusher while everyone else drops back to block, the receiving team may end up with poor field position, but there's nothing to criticize. Many teams even call not rushing the punter the "safe" play -- the special-teams coach will say, "Safe, safe," to signal in a no-rushing action. Watch college teams that are good at blocking kicks, such as Virginia Tech, and what is their incredible secret? They rush a lot of guys. NFL teams might do more of same.

### **Sour Play of the Week**

Game scoreless, San Diego lined up to punt on fourth-and-inches from its own 47. The punter leapt into the air doing the old high-school bad-snap fake, while up-man Jesse Chatman took the direct snap and ran 22 yards; the Bolts scored a touchdown on the possession and never looked back.

New Orleans made the most basic of kick-defense mistakes -- not assuming fake on short yardage. Whenever a team lines up in field-goal or punt formation on fourth and short, the defense is supposed to assume fake.

### **Sweet 'N' Sour Play**

Yes, it was the old lonesome end -- Troy Brown pretended to be jogging off the field as the Patriots lined up for a figgie attempt, leading 19-14 at St. Louis. But Brown stopped at the sidelines, lined up, and was uncovered when kicker Adam Vinatieri tossed him the touchdown pass that started the New England rout. For the Patriots, the play was sweet. Meanwhile Les Mouflons were making the most basic of kick-

defense mistakes: not assuming fake on short yardage. The situation was fourth-and-goal from the St. Louis 4. Whenever a team lines up in field-goal or punt formation on fourth and short, the defense is supposed to assume fake. For the Rams, the play was sour.

### **Next Time, Wear a Halloween Costume as a Disguise**

Buffalo leading 7-3 in the second quarter, the Bills sent Jabari Greer, a defensive back, in as a wide receiver. Jersey/B defenders immediately pointed to Greer, as defenders are coached to do when someone unusual comes in for what is likely to be a trick play. Greer even wears number 37, which made him impossible to miss when lining up as a wide receiver. The Bills handed off to Greer on a reverse, and the gentlemen was swarmed under by Jets' defenders, who dropped him for a loss: He might as well have handed out cards that said, "I have come in to run a trick play." Note: Buffalo won despite launching not one but two Preposterous Punts, the Bills punting from the Jersey/B 37 and taking a deliberate penalty at the Jersey/B 35 before punting from the 40.

### **Mass Transit CEO Wants Everybody Else to Take the Subway So There's More Room on the Roads for His SUV**

The *Washington Post* reports that Richard White, chief executive of the problem-plagued Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, one of the nation's largest public-transit systems, has just announced he will start commuting by subway. Since assuming his post four years ago, the *Post* notes, White has driven to work, "because it was more convenient."

### **What the Favre?**

Colts' punter Hunter Smith was called for unnecessary roughness.

### **Best Play by a Someone Wearing a Halloween Costume**

Cincinnati leading Dallas 9-3 in the third quarter the Bengals, first NFL team ever to take the field dressed in Halloween costumes, faced third-and-6 on their own 24. Tight end Matt Schobel ran a simple "seam" route 10 yards straight up the field. There was no strong safety to be seen; Schobel was covered by reserve linebacker Scott Shanle, who has never started a game in his NFL career. Shanle lunged at Schobel as if to "chuck" him -- TMQ continues to think defenders should "charles" receivers, it's more dignified. Shanle missed; Schobel ran past, caught a short pass and legged it all 76 yards for the touchdown, no Dallas safety ever entering the picture. TMQ lamented that last season the Cowboys had the number-one ranked pass defense, and this season cannot stop a tight end from going 76 yards straight down the center of the field.

### **Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!**

San Francisco leading 24-21, Seattle had first-and-10 on the Squared Sevens 25. Before the snap, a mass of Niners crowded the line to blitz; Blue Men Group quarterback Matt Hasselbeck gestured and barked, obviously calling an anti-blitz "hot read;" San Francisco did not back out of its blitz, but at the snap sent eight gentlemen across the line. TMQ cried aloud, *Aaaaaiiiiiiiyyyyyyyye!!!!* Easy 25-yard touchdown pass to Koren Robinson, and Seattle took the lead it would never relinquish. While sportswriters and bobbleheads speak about eight-man blitzes, the tactic is rarely actually observed because it is an engraved invitation for the offense to score an easy touchdown.

### **Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 2**

Game tied at 24, Oakland had first-and-10 at the Carolina 41 with 1:25 remaining. The Panther sent eight gentlemen across the line to blitz. TMQ cried aloud, *Aaaaaiiiiiiiyyyyyyyye!!!!* An Oakland receiver easily got behind the defense and would have scored the winning touchdown; a Carolina defensive back grabbed him to prevent the winning touchdown; the interference penalty spotted the ball at the Panthers 2, whence the Raiders kicked the winning field goal. While sportswriters and bobbleheads speak about eight-man blitzes, the tactic is rarely actually observed because it is an engraved invitation for the offense to realize a big gain.

### Stop Me Before I Run-Blitz Again!

Chicago leading Jersey/A 21-14 in the fourth quarter, the Bears faced second-and-11 on the Giants 41. Before the snap, strong safety Gabril Wilson crept all the way up to the line on the Bears' left; at the snap, Wilson furiously blitzed. Running back Anthony Thomas ran left, going through the space Wilson vacated, and the Chicago Mingdingxiong -- "bears whose outcomes are determined by fate," in Mandarin -- had a game-icing 41-yard touchdown.

### Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk

Trailing 21-0 late in the second quarter, the Eagles faced fourth-and-6 on the Steelers 15. TMQ's immutable law holds: Kick Early, Go For It Late. Unless, that is, you are way behind, and a 21-point hole qualifies as way behind. In trotted the field goal unit, Philadelphia made it 21-3 and the Eagles never threatened again.

### Lambasthor, God of Halftime Tirades, Would Smile

Last spring yours truly moderated a Brookings Institution forum at which Jeffrey Sachs, distinguished director of the Earth Institute of Columbia University, declared that United States policy toward the developing world "really sucks." Yours truly responded by saying, "Professor Sachs, here at the Brookings Institution we do not say something 'sucks.' We say it 'fails to meet expectations.'"

This got me to thinking about the coach's traditional profanity-laced halftime tirade. What if instead it was conducted by guest speakers using well-bred language? Here is what would happen if a Brookings Institution scholar was hired to present the halftime tirade:

**Coach:** Look you guys, I'm tired of yelling the same stuff every halftime. Besides, I left my book of Winston Churchill quotations in the car. So today we have a guest tirade. I'd like to introduce Gregg Easterbrook, a visiting fellow from the Brookings Institution. Mr. Easterbrook is the author of six books, and --

**Player:** Hey coach, what's a "book?"

**Coach:** Shut up, Yafnaro. Now, here is our guest tirade.

**Me:** This team is really bottom quintile, you know that? I've never seen such a bunch of alienated low-performing descendents of *Homo habilis*. You are one standard deviation away from the cellar. You're -- you're -- you're maladjusted! You failed to meet expectations! That's right, failed to meet expectations. You there, Yafnaro, what were you visualizing when you threw that interception?

**Yafnaro:** I thought the receiver was open.

**Me:** You thought?! I've seen your SAT scores, don't tell me you "thought." Didn't you take into account the relative humidity! The barometric pressure! The curvature of the Earth!

**Yafnaro:** Um, no.

**Me:** Apparently not. Listen you nugatory flibbertigibbets, you know what they are saying about you over in the other locker room? They're calling you tergiversate! They're saying you are a fascicle of sebaceous helots mired in desuetude! Are you gonna let that pass?

**Players:** No! No!

**Me:** Then what do you want to go out there and do?

**Players:** Meet expectations.

**Me:** I can't hear you.

**Players:** (*loudly*) MEET EXPECTATIONS!

### **Now Cinderella Can't Fit Into the Slipper, But She Can Get a Volleyball Scholarship**

According to the market research firm NPD Group, today one-third of American women wear a size eight or larger shoe, versus 11 percent in 1987. Why? Blame sports! Foot bones grow in response to stress, and the huge post-Title-IX increase in girls and women participating in sports, combined to the huge increase in numbers of women working out at the gym, have led to an increase in average women's foot size.

### **Best Play by a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Be in San Diego**

While Eli Manning watched the Giants lose at home to the lowly Bears and high-priced holdout Philip Rivers was nailed to the Bolts' pine, Drew Brees threw four touchdown passes. I don't wish to alarm you, but the Chargers are 6-3 and Brees, who has 9 touchdown passes in the last two weeks, is the third-rated passer in the National Football League.

### **Uniform Amnesty Now!**

Reader Bob Doling of Arlington, Va., notes Buffalo general manager Tom Donahoe declared that next season the Bills will wear a "throwback" of their previous red, white and flag-blue jerseys. Tom, just junk the incredibly hideous new Bills look and return to the beautiful old look: all will be forgiven! Buffalo is 17-23 since abandoning red, white and American flag blue -- not to put too fine a point on it, but the single most successful color scheme in world history -- for its current hideous regalia based on Nineteenth Century Rusting Russian Dreadnaught Aft Bulkhead Cyanic. Doling notes in haiku,

Hope for Bills next year!  
Return to unis of old:  
red, white and flag blue.  
-- *Bob Doling of Arlington, Va.*

### **Questionable Call Ere the Clock Struck Midnight**

Boy, it sure looked like Ray Lewis was holding on the deciding play of the Browns-Ravens game. At 11:38 p.m. ET, Baltimore lead 20-13; the Browns had second-and-goal on the Ravens 5, with 45 seconds showing. Cleveland tight end Aaron Shea ran a short turn-in and was open in the end zone; Jeff Garcia delivered the pass; replays showed Lewis grab Shea's jersey and yank hard just before the ball arrived; the ball bounced off Shea's hands and into the mitts of safety Ed Reed, who ran it 106 yards the other way for a record-setting icing touchdown.

Was the pass tipped at the line? Maybe, but unlike pass interference, defensive holding is called regardless of whether there is a tipped pass. Of course the real-world bottom line is that Shea had both hands on the ball in the end zone and did not make the catch -- highly paid professional football players should be able to make a catch even with some ill-tempered gentleman yanking on their jersey. Still, it looked to TMQ as if flags should have flown. And note to Ed Reed, that run was entertaining, but next time you intercept a pass six yards deep in the end zone in the final minute, take a knee, okay?

### **Confident Call Ere the Clock Struck Midnight**

Game tied at 28, Indianapolis reached second-and-10 at the Minnesota 15 yard line with 55 seconds remaining at 11:58 p.m. ET. The Colts knelt twice, running the clock down to 6 seconds before lofting the winning field goal. (The Vikings were out of time-outs.)

Perfect tactics so long as the kicker hits -- had he missed, Indianapolis would have seemed very foolish not to attempt to score from the Minnesota 15.

**Sweet Plays Ere the Clock Struck Midnight** Trailing 28-21, Minnesota faced fourth-and-1 on the Lucky Charms 43 with 3:49 remaining. The Vikings came out in a heavy formation left; at the snap the running back and all the blockers went left; Daunte Culpepper bootlegged right and ran 9 yards for the first down, setting up Minnesota's tying touchdown. But it wasn't a "naked" bootleg, Culpepper had help. At the snap Jermaine Wiggins, lined up as a tight end on the right side, blocked toward the left -- then spun around and pulled right to protect Culpepper as he ran, very sweet play design. Now there is 1:51 remaining, score tied, and Indianapolis faces third-and-5 on the Minnesota 21. Peyton Manning, under tackle, used his left hand to throw a shovel pass to Edgerrin James, who reached the 15, where Indianapolis got its first down and began kneeling in anticipation of the winning kick. Left-handed! And not as risky as it looked since, as a shovel pass, if botched the play simply would have been an incomplection, leaving the Colts in position for a field goal attempt.

### Why Certain Teams Are 1-8

The Miami Ventral Fins lead 23-17 and had Arizona facing fourth-and-8 on its own 32 with 1:23 remaining. Quarterback Josh McCown was flushed from the pocket and raced toward the sideline. Miami corner Sam Madison, who was in the area, made no attempt to run McCown down, merely jogging in his general direction. McCown got the first; Arizona scored the winning touchdown with 23 seconds on the clock.

### Best Blocks

This week TMQ lauds the offensive lines of Buffalo, Tampa and Washington -- three lines much maligned in this space -- which combined to allow just one sack on Sunday. Meanwhile the Kansas City offensive line, praised in this space as the league's best, had a weak outing. Kansas City trailing City of Tampa 34-31 with 1:50 remaining, the Chiefs faced first-and-10 on the Bucs 43, holding two timeouts; given the hot Kansas City offense, you'd figure a last-minute win was in store. Instead on first down the Kansas City offensive line allowed a sack, though there were only four gentlemen rushing. Now it's fourth and 18 at midfield. Tampa rushes just three men, Kansas City has five back to block and Trent Green is sacked, game over.

### Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk, Indeed

Television ads for Burger King's Chickenfight chicken sandwich promotion show guys in chicken suits being bashed and smashed, but reassure in a disclaimer, "No real chickens were harmed." Wait a moment, the whole point of this promotion is to get customers to eat more chicken sandwiches -- that is, to increase harm to real chickens.

### News From the NFL Alternate Universe

Jerry Rice catches the ball in San Francisco! All is as it should be -- except, Rice was not wearing a Niners uniform. It's now *four years later* and San Francisco's decision to cut Rice, best-ever player for the franchise and possibly the best-ever player period, still seems one of the NFL's all-time blunders. But then, when Rice made his return to Candlestick Park wearing another team's garb, he did not return to Candlestick Park -- rather to Monster Park, the facility's new name. You can now address correspondence to the Niners at Monster Park, San Francisco Calif., 94124. How long until there is a Munster Park?

### Cheer-Babe Professionalism

Kickoff temperature 55 degrees with 25 mile-per-hour winds, the Buffalo Jills came out in miniskirts and bare midriffs. Spectators were wearing heavy coats; coaches on both sidelines sported windbreaker pants; players on the benches had ski caps pulled low over their ears; yet the cheerleaders were scantily attired! This represents one of the most dramatic examples of cheer-babe professionalism that TMQ has ever witnessed. Needless to say, the football gods crowned the team with success.

Beefcake note: The Ravens are now the sole NFL team that has cheer-studs as well as cheer-babes. On Sunday night, kickoff temperature 61 degrees, the Baltimore cheer-babes showed outstanding professionalism by wearing two-piece miniskirt numbers. What did the cheer-studs sport? Comfy warm track suits that covered their entire bodies. TMQ is a traditionalist, and feels it is imperative that, in the

endless battle of the bods, women maintain tradition by showing more than men. But for the cheer-babes to be nearly naked while the cheer-studs are fully clothed obviously is unfair to female fans.

### **Tasteless Uniforms Haiku -- Referring to the Uniforms, Not the Haiku**

Brandon Veale of Mount Pleasant, Mich., notes there is a New Zealand rugby team called the All-Blacks whose uniforms resemble the ones Baltimore wore on Sunday night, and who "perform a traditional Maori dance routine called the haka before each of their matches, a dance that looks vaguely like what Ray Lewis does before games." Here, view the All-Blacks doing the haka.

Veale offers this haiku:

Odd Nevermore duds  
look like Kiwi rugby team;  
Will Ray do haka?  
-- *Brandon Veale, Mount Pleasant, Mich.*

Of the shimmering all-bright-red look unveiled by the Arizona Cactus Wrens at Miami, reader Erin Elizabeth Miller offers,

New Cards uniforms  
look a lot like union suits:  
Where are the butt flaps?  
-- *Erin Elizabeth Miller, Washington, D.C.*

### **Game Being Played in TMQ's Nightmares**

A round-robin of Cincinnati in its new orange-jersey black-pants look versus Baltimore in its black-jersey black-pants look and Miami in last year's orange-jersey orange-pants look.

## **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

### **Obscure College Score of the Week**

Eastern Michigan 61, Central Michigan 58 in quadruple overtime. Four touchdowns, three field goals, two PAT kicks and two 2-point conversions were scored after regulation ended -- in all, 39 overtime points. Located in Ypsilanti, Mich., Eastern Michigan University currently needs a president, and has retained a company called Academic Search Consultation Service. Wait, colleges are supposed to be full of smart people -- yet Eastern Michigan needs to hire a company to tell it whom to hire? According to its web site, Academic Search has 19 people who do nothing all day long except tell universities whom to hire for management positions. Question for Eastern Michigan University: Will there be *any discernible difference at all* between the period when you are without a president, and after one arrives at great expense?

### **Bonus Obscure College Score**

Wooster 64, Wittenberg 58 in overtime. There were 17 touchdowns and two field goals in this contest, which featured an incredible 34 total possessions by the two teams. (Normally there are about 20 possessions in a football game.) Located in Wooster, Ohio -- "the major metropolitan areas of Cleveland, Columbus, Akron and Canton are all within a one-and-a-half hour drive," the school reassures -- the College of Wooster's scenic campus offers a golf course, a dorm that once was the college president's home, and the Rubbermaid Student Development Center.

### **Obscure College Game of the Year Result**

Kevin Weidl threw for 256 yards as Indiana of Pennsylvania defeated California of Pennsylvania in the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Obscure College Game of the Year. Indiana of Pennsylvania finished 7-3, in a three-way tie with Shippensburg and Edinboro for leadership in the PSAC-West conference. For

California of Pennsylvania, the defeat represented the Vulcans' 20th consecutive loss to Indiana of Pennsylvania in the schools' annual season-ending confrontation. But because they are Vulcans, the losers showed no emotions in defeat.

### Reader Animadversion

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise. Note: Bonus recognition to anyone who can cite the nod to a famous Broadway play that is encoded in this column.

The Green Bay-Washington game became the first since the 1936 election in which the outcome of the final Redskins' home contest before presidential voting accurately foretold the outcome. Reader Scott King asserts this only shows that officials flubbed the call when they overturned the late Washington touchdown that might have won the game for the home team. The California Tortilla burrito poll discussed in last week's column also notched its first failure. Exit polling failed too. But the *Family Circle* cookie predictor was correct, with subscribers voting for Laura Bush's cookie recipe over Teresa Heinz Kerry's recipe in a landslide. Readers offer these haiku:

Redskins, burritos?  
We the people made our choice,  
voting booth trumps all.  
-- Frank Hartmann, Boise, Idaho

Maryland? Blue state.  
Skewed sample of appetites;  
tortilla falls flat.  
--Brenda Izzo, New York City

Political game  
history rewritten when  
refs make the wrong call.  
-- Scott King, Bedford, Ind.

Speaking of exit polls, John Martin pointed out this unintentionally hilarious *Washington Post* article which declares, "After the survey is completed and the votes are counted, the exit poll results are adjusted to reflect the actual vote, which in theory improves the accuracy of all the exit poll results, including the breakdown of the vote by age, gender and other characteristics." So after the actual vote is known, the exit poll is adjusted to make it appear accurate all along! Isn't this the same as waiting until the game is over, then "adjusting" your prediction of the final score in order to claim you predicted the final score? Martin also lauded the election of TMQ's estimable Colorado College classmate Ken Salazar as a United States senator from Colorado.

Last week, TMQ quoted Dick Enberg's mystery comment during the Ravens-Eagles game, "There is nothing quite like self-flagellation on Halloween Day." Shaun Kuter of Tempe, Ariz., was among readers who contended Enberg said "self-adulation." Greg Gumbel from CBS studios in New York had just broken into the game to show a touchdown by Johnnie Morton of Kansas City, who after scoring did the Worm; Gumbel made a cryptic reference to the Worm being self-flagellation; Enberg switched the reference to self-adulation, perhaps cleverly trying to shift attention from Gumbel's interpretation. At least that's what I think happened, piecing together accounts from a dozen readers who were watching the game.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback has begun to call the Miami team the Ventral Fins. Erik de Guzman of Manassas, Va., points out that dolphins do not have ventral fins -- they have dorsal fins, pectoral fins and tail flukes. But on marine mammals, "ventral" fins are found on the bottom side, and Miami is currently at the bottom of the standings. The team will remain the Ventral Fins until no longer bottom-feeding.

Regarding my item asserting that referees are sometimes too slow to blow the whistle, confusing players about the "play to the whistle" maxim, Kevin McLaughlin of Chesterfield, Mo., who officiates high-school

football, provides these thoughts: "The down is not ended by the whistle; rather, the down is ended by downing of the ball carrier. (A knee down in high school and college, or a knee down as a result of contact by an opponent, or while in contact with an opponent, in the NFL). The whistle merely recognizes that the down has ended. You can have a late hit with no whistle, and you can have a player downed with no whistle. Ideally neither of those happens, but that is how the rules are written." He sums in haiku:

Don't play to whistle:  
whistle is merely signal.  
Play till runner down.  
-- Kevin McLaughlin, Chesterfield, Mo.

Last week, I could not recall "a recent NFL team that went for two to win or lose at the end of regulation, rather than kicking the singleton and proceeding to overtime." Many readers, including Jessica Jennings of Chicago, a Vikings fan, noted that Minnesota went for two with five seconds remaining against New Orleans in Week 15 of the 2002 season. The try prevailed, and the football gods rewarded Minnesota with a nine-game winning streak. Steve Ferra of Safety Harbor, Fla., added two unsuccessful attempts: "On Nov. 19, 1995, Tom Coughlin's expansion Jaguars pulled to within 17-16 with 36 seconds left at Tampa Bay. The Jags went for two and were denied. On Nov. 12, 1997, Dave Wannstedt tried the same and failed against the Packers after the Bears pulled within one point by scoring a TD in the final minute."

### Last Week's Challenge

In keeping with the time-travel plots plaguing *Star Trek Enterprise*, the Challenge was to name some aspect of the NFL timeline that future space travelers should come backward in time to alter.

Carol Lang-Drapala of Norman, Okla., wants the Federation crew to prevent the Houston Oilers of 1992 from blowing their 35-3 playoff lead over the Bills. Carol -- the Oilers could have done that themselves simply by running the ball in the second half, rather than repeatedly throwing incomplete and stopping the clock. Dominic Legaspi of Concord, Calif., would have caused Lawrence Phillips not to miss the 1999 blitz block that allowed a defender to level Steve Young, ending his career. Cris Alexander of Toronto suggested time-travelers prevent the Eagles from converting fourth-and-26 in last year's playoffs. Dorsey Howard of Harrisburg, Pa., suggested the *Enterprise* should return to the Music City Miracle game and use its advanced sensors to show that the "lateral" was a forward pass.

Jack Atiyeh of Allentown, Pa., would alter the iffy pass interference call against San Francisco at the end of the 1983 NFC Championship Game, which propelled the Redskins to the Super Bowl, where they lost 38-9 to the Raiders. Niners-Raiders that year would have made for a much better Super Bowl, he contends. Nick Eyrych would have altered the dropped interception by Cincinnati on the play before a fourth-quarter touchdown pass in the Bengals-Niners Super Bowl.

Noah Turner, a student at the University of Connecticut, would have had the *Enterprise* use its transporter to move Kevin Dyson one foot further at the end of the Rams-Titans Super Bowl, sending that game into overtime. Roland Cooper suggested the *Enterprise* should prevent the alien starcruiser from bringing "Kurt Warner" to the Rams that year in the first place.

Sean McCalley of Allen, Texas, would change the "tuck rule" call in the Raiders-Patriots Snow Bowl, preventing New England from winning the Super Bowl that year and possibly altering its entire dynasty. Brad Given of Hurricane, W.V., would have prevented The Fumble -- darkest event in Giants history -- by having the Star Trek crew tell Jersey/B that all they have to do is kneel on the ball.

Many readers, including Jenny Werrick of San Diego, would have prevented the Chargers from drafting Ryan Leaf. Greg Presto would have altered history to cause the Steelers to draft hometown star Dan Marino. Jayson Rock of Menomonee Falls, Wis., would have had the Packers take Barry Sanders instead of Tony Mandarich. Jed Dawson of Wisconsin would have prevented the Herschel Walker trade.

Many readers, including Charles K. Smith, suggested that time travelers should make Scott Norwood's last-second kick in the Bills-Giants Super Bowl go through. Charles, my feeling is that Norwood's kick *did*

go through, but sinister Giants fans from the future altered the timeline. Jason Sheehan of Newport News, Va., adds that if the timeline was altered so that Norwood's kick goes in, the Bills would surely still be wearing red, white and American flag blue -- not to put too fine a point on it, but the single-most successful color scheme in world history.

Jason Tritle of Baltimore was among many to suggest the timeline be altered such that all NFL franchises remain in their original cities. Brent Pecenka was among many to suggest that Super Bowl XX be altered such that Walter Payton gets a touchdown. David Newman of Jackson, Miss., would have had the *Enterprise* go back in time and beam up Mel Kiper's hair.

Rabbi Daniel Plotkin of St. Louis wants time travelers to reverse the NFL tradition of allowing only Dallas and Detroit to host Thanksgiving Day games. This year's Cowboys turkey matchup -- Dallas hosting the Bears -- "kind of makes me glad my in-laws aren't football fans," Plotkin says. Luke Twyford, an American-rules football fan in Wollongong, Australia, wants the *Enterprise* to go back in time and convince his parents to move to the United States so that he could have grown up surrounded by real football ("gridiron" to an Australian), not rugby and soccer. And Bob Goudreau of Cary, N.C., suggests the *Enterprise* go back in time to Nov. 1, 1936, and cause the Boston Braves to lose to the Chicago Cardinals -- thus preventing the presidential-election prediction streak of the team that came to be called the Washington Redskins from coming into existence.

The winner this week is Sean Hart of Cape Coral, Fla., who suggested time be altered so that NBC aired the end of the Heidi Game. Sean, your idea shows the danger of tampering with the timeline: There could be unintended consequences! In the classic 1952 Ray Bradbury short story *A Sound of Thunder* -- still the best sci-fi story about time travel -- the future is benign and happy. Time travel into the primordial past has become possible, but trips are elaborately arranged so that visitors only observe from levitated walkways, never touching anything. One man traveling back into the age of dinosaurs briefly leaves the group and wanders off alone. When the time tourists return to the present, the nation has just fallen into hideous dictatorship; the man looks at his shoe and realizes that far in the past, he stepped on a butterfly.

So suppose NBC had shown the end of the Heidi game. Callers never would have flooded local affiliate switchboards with complaints; the networks might not have decided never to cut off NFL games at 7 p.m. Eastern; there might be *less football on TV*, an outcome almost as bad as hideous dictatorship.

Sean Hart is the winner as a cautionary tale, and this year's Challenge prize is shameless praise. Hart, a Steelers fan, is a software engineer -- second consecutive software engineer winner -- and wrote his own praise: "Sean Hart is the William S. Burroughs of software. What he does may not make any sense, but somehow it works."

### **This Week's Challenge**

Who was the most important player in NFL history? Not the best, the most important. TMQ already has a theory; offer yours, using the link at Reader Animadversion. Note: A clue is encoded in this column.

### **Next Week**

NFL teams from Ohio score "provisional" touchdowns!



## Remembering Heidi, and the Curse of the Preposterous Punt

**By Gregg Easterbrook**  
**Special to NFL.com**

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Nov. 16, 2004) -- Let us now praise the most important player in NFL history. We speak, of course, of Preston Ridlehuber.

Ah, Ridlehuber! In Asgard the football gods speak your name in tones of reverence. Grabthar, chief of the football pantheon, pauses to throw incense into the ceremonial popcorn maker whenever your name is whispered. Nike, goddess of marketing, leaps in delight at the thought of your feats. Lambasthor, god of halftime tirades, has only good words to say about you.

The career statistics of Raiders' third-string tailback Preston Ridlehuber may lack distinction: 12 rushes, four receptions, one punt return and one pass completion. But no football player has ever done something as important as what Preston Ridlehuber did -- he won the Heidi Game.

The Heidi Game was played on Nov. 17, 1968, and the anniversary is tomorrow. It was an era, so dimly remembered, when many cities saw just one NFL game per week: an era of primitive darkness! In that week's nationally televised game, the Jets were leading the Raiders 32-29 with 50 seconds remaining, Oakland ball. The clock ticked to 7 p.m. Eastern, the old, highly formalized starting moment for prime time. Without explanation the NFL scene dissolved, to be replaced by an image of *ein kleines Mädchen* skipping through the Alps as someone yodeled.

Millions of Americans were outraged that wholesome family entertainment had replaced the crunching violence they had been enjoying. Millions called local network affiliates to complain and were further outraged when told -- pre-Internet, calling the local network sports desk was the main way to get scores -- that the Raiders put up two touchdowns in the final 49 seconds to win 43-32. The entire country had missed the best part! And the deciding play of the Heidi Game was a wild fumble that was booted, botched and muffed by numerous gentlemen until fallen on in the end zone by the most important player in NFL history, Raiders' third-string tailback Preston Ridlehuber.

Within mere hours of the Heidi Game, all networks had announced that henceforth they would never cut away from pro football for other programming. This established a vital premise: *nothing is more important than football*. The president might be giving a news conference to declare plans to invade Canada; the Pope might be reading a homily at which he announces his conversion to Zoroastrianism; Ashlee Simpson might actually be singing instead of lip-syncing; regardless, there is no chance any network would cut away from any NFL game.

Preston Ridlehuber's heroics paved the way for the modern era of Sunday NFL doubleheaders, Sunday and Monday night games, Saturday games in December, college football on television nearly round-the-clock. As you ease back into your couch with the remote, say a word of thanks to the man who made all this possible.

In other NFL news, Tuesday Morning Quarterback once wrote that the ultimate game would end 2-0 in overtime. On Sunday the Bears defeated the Titans by a safety in overtime -- only the second overtime safety in NFL annals. How did it happen? The Flaming Thumbtacks took their first possession of overtime at their 9-yard line. First down, pass incomplete; second down, loss to the 5; third down, Billy Volek sprinted backward into the end zone where he fumbled, recovered there by a Tennessee player, safety

and victory for the Chicago Mingdingxiong ("bears whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Mandarin). As TMQ has been noting, NFL teams have become too cavalier about passing from their own end zones. With Chicago needing just two points to win, Volek sprinted backward to the very place where two points could be obtained.

In still other NFL news, it sure looked like Derek Ross of Minnesota recovered Green Bay's fumble with 1:21 remaining, which would have put the Vikings in position for the win. Tuesday Morning Quarterback thinks officials at all levels call fumble scrambles incorrectly, and that the solution may be a new rule standard. What happened in the Packers-Vikings game is typical of the problem. The ball came loose and bounced around; Ross grabbed it with both knees down and made no attempt to get up; 10 guys formed a pile and fought to pull the ball away from each other; the refs jumped into the pile and, after peeling guys off, awarded possession to the winner of the Darwinian struggle at the bottom. But when Ross was holding the ball with knees down and making no attempt to get up, the whistle should have sounded. Most crazed pile-up fights over loose balls could be avoided if officials simply blew the whistle at the first point that anyone has possession with knees down. Avoiding the Darwinian pile-up would be in the interest of the sport -- since once 10 guys are wrestling in a pile, realistically, there is no way the officials can know who deserves the ball. Let's alter the rule so it is clear that the play ends the moment anyone has two hands on a fumble and is making no attempt to get up, even if someone yanks the ball away an instant later.

And in still more NFL news, Buffalo launched yet another Preposterous Punt, punting on fourth-and-5 from the 35-yard line of the defending champion Patriots with the game scoreless and a two-mile-per hour wind. It took New England just four snaps to pass the points where the Patriots would have gotten the ball had the Bills gone for the first and failed, or attempted a field goal and missed. Buffalo had lost its previous four trips to New England and needed to score early; anyway you can't dance with the champ, you must knock him down. That Buffalo keeps punting inside the opponents' 40-yard line signals a bizarre lack of commitment to winning on the part of the two successive Bills' head coaches. That Drew Bledsoe passively trudged off the field with his head hanging low as the punt unit came on, rather than demand the Bills go for it, signals the great Bledsoe's career is over. Imagine how Brett Favre would have reacted if coaches sent in the punter on fourth-and-5 from the opponent's 35 with the game scoreless! See more below.

### **Stats of the Week**

Pittsburgh has advanced from 31st in rushing in 2003 to second in rushing in 2004.

### **Stats of the Week No. 2**

The 42 points scored in the second quarter of the Dallas-Philadelphia Monday night game were more than the total points scored in nine of the 13 games played Sunday.

### **Stats of the Week No. 3**

In the last two games, Indianapolis has scored 80 points while Houston has given up 80 points.

### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Since Seattle entered Week 5 undefeated with the league's top-rated defense, the Seahawks have gone 2-4 and given up an average of 25.3 points per game.

### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

Kansas City gained 497 yards, and lost.

### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

Kansas City is scoring 28.6 points per game, second-best in the league, and has a losing record.

**Stats of the Week No. 7**

Playing at home against Cincinnati, which came into the game 27th-ranked on defense, the Washington Redskins had 59 yards of offense in the first half.

**Stats of the Week No. 8**

Peyton Manning is on a pace to throw 55 touchdown passes; the record is 48, by Dan Marino.

**Stats of the Week No. 9**

Chicago, Buffalo and Detroit all had more return yards than offensive yards.

**Stats of the Week No. 10**

Priest Holmes did not play Sunday, and still has more touchdowns than two entire teams, Washington and Miami.

**Stats of the Week No. 11**

If every pass an NFL quarterback throws simply clangs to the ground incomplete, his passer rating is 40. Drew Bledsoe finished the New England game with a 14.3 passer rating.

**Doctor-Cheerleader of the Week**

We'll take a one-week pause from the Literary Cheerleader of the Week format to honor Andrea Gordillo of City of Tampa, nominated by Phil Sulak of Bryan, Texas. Gordillo is both a cheer-babe and a dentist, holding a doctorate of dental medicine from the University of Florida. Presumably when she recommends a root canal that requires multiple return visits, her traditional male patients respond, "Yeah!" Before becoming a Bucs cheerleader, Gordillo was a member of a flamenco dance company. According to her team bio, her most fulfilling accomplishment was passing the dental boards.

Cheerleader undress note: This year for warm-weather games the Bucs' pep squad has sported two-piece numbers that rival those of the Eagles' cheerleaders for minimalism. The Tampa swimsuit calendar has also become popular with traditional males. It contains pictures we can link to but not show for forgot-her-top based reasons.

**The Case for the Zone Rush**

Pittsburgh continues to be the league's hottest team, led by its No. 1 rated defense. But sportswriters are inaccurately rolling out the old Blitzburgh nickname, while on-air bobbleheads cry "blitz!" when Pittsburgh is not blitzing. The Steelers play a base 3-4, and almost always rush a linebacker or defensive back: this may look like a blitz, but it's still only the standard four gentlemen crossing the line. TMQ reader Robert Shlanta once suggested that an action that looks like a blitz but isn't should be called a "spritz." Yours truly thinks what Pittsburgh usually does should be called a "zone rush." The beauty of the Steelers' scheme is that offenses never know which four of the 11 defenders will charge the quarterback; but it's usually only a total of four, to prevent Pittsburgh from getting burned deep as happens to so many teams when they true-blitz. Bobbleheads, call it a "zone rush," not a blitz, when a Pittsburgh linebacker or defensive back is coming, but only a total of four are rushing.

**Sweet Play of the Week**

Game tied at 31 with 1:05 remaining, Green Bay had second-and-10 on its own 46. Tailback Tony Fisher started up the field -- and instead of running a short dump-pass route as tailbacks usually do, ran a deep out and made a beauty sidelines catch for 25 yards, putting the Packers in position for the winning kick. TMQ approves of running backs sent on deep passing routes, because defenses assume running backs will only run short routes.

### Sweet Players of the Week

Daniel Foster of Sheffield, United Kingdom, notes that a week ago kicker Adam Vinatieri threw a touchdown pass for New England, and this week flanker Troy Brown made an interception. He asked, "What's next, will Tom Brady kick a field goal?"

### Sour Play of the Week

Trailing 17-14 at Arizona, Jersey/A faced fourth-and-5 on its own 35 with 6:10 remaining. Giants coaches called the fake punt. As TMQ endlessly reminds, whenever only a few yards are needed for the first down, defenders should assume a fake kick. The Giants lined up in the "swinging gate" with six players far on the left on the field, three in the center and two far on the right: in case there had been any lingering doubt, this announced to Arizona that the punt would be a fake. The Cactus Wrens covered the fake and the punter's pass fell incomplete, leaving Jersey/A to contemplate the shimmering all-red Arizona uniforms that TMQ reader Erin Elizabeth Miller christened the Union Suits look.

### Sour Play of the Week No. 2

Indianapolis put the exclamation point on its 49-14 milking of the Moo Cows with an 80-yard third-quarter touchdown pass to Dallas Clark, which made it 42-7 at the end of the third quarter. Not only did Clark, a tight end, outrun the entire Houston defense: the play came on a second-and-25, when the entire Houston defense should have been expecting a long pass attempt.

### Sweet 'N' Sour Play

Terrell Owens may be insufferable, but until somebody keeps him out of the end zone, this gentleman must be classified as sweet. Game scoreless in the first quarter, Owens went in motion right and ran a short turn-in -- this is a standard West Coast play that Jerry Rice has run a thousand times, and every NFL receiver has run at some point. It's designed to pick up 10 yards. Owens made the catch and should have been tackled for a 10-yard gain. Two Dallas defenders hit him, one from each side; T.O. is so darned strong that both defenders bounced off, and Owens scampered 59 yards for the touchdown. This play should have been a ho-hum short gain and instead was a long score; that was sweet. Last season the Cowboys had the league's number-one pass defense, yet on this play and several others Monday night, various Eagles ran through the Dallas secondary like no one was there. That was sour. And yes the Cowboys secondary has injuries, but every NFL team has injuries.

### In Paramount's Exciting New "Macbeth," the Title Character Is a Teenager Dealing With Coming-of-Age Issues in Orange County

If reviewers are right the wonderful, enchanting book *Polar Express* has been made into a lifeless, mindless big-budget movie that turns a story about doubt and imagination into a Christmas Eve car chase, only with trains instead of cars. The quality of the movie aside, what's striking is that the studio bought the title and the look of Chris van Allsburg's haunting illustrations, then changed everything -- most of what happens in the movie has nothing to do with the book. Since the book was very good, in order to make it into a movie, that aspect had to be eliminated!

Film studio Twentieth Century Fox bought the rights to Isaac Asimov's "I, Robot" tales, then produced a movie that bears no resemblance to those stories. So rest assured if you haven't read Asimov: there's no way he, or anyone with an IQ higher than a Chilean striped bass, could have produced anything as stupid as this summer's movie starring Will Smith. Nor did the recent big-budget movie *The Cat in the Hat* bear any resemblance to the book, though the protagonist was, in both cases, a cat. *The Cat in the Hat* movie was especially distasteful because it was full of crude jokes and bathroom humor -- crude jokes and bathroom humor constituting about the only things, besides cleavage and explosions, Hollywood produces these days. Theodore Geisel despised coarseness and prided himself on amusing children without rude references.

At any rate this buying up of rights to good books, then changing everything in order to make bad movies, made TMQ wonder about other similar possibilities for big-budget productions:

*For Whom the Bell Tolls.* Ben Affleck stars as an operative of An Agency Far, Far More Secret Than the CIA whose is sent behind the lines of the Spanish Civil War in order to prevent Nazi agents from using a beautiful scientist's invention to open a doorway into a parallel universe. Gorgeous shots of the Catalonia countryside, plus numerous car chases. Angelina Jolie costars as the scientist, who can only think when her shirt is off.

*Hedda Gabler.* Nicole Kidman produces and stars in this all-singing musical comedy adaptation of the Ibsen play. Story line is slightly altered to have Hedda be a beautiful Norwegian housewife who teaches kickboxing and operates an organic online catering firm. She falls in love with a dark, handsome stranger (Ben Stiller) and must reconcile her passion for him with her duty to her introverted husband Tesman (Andre3000), a scientist who has invented a doorway into a parallel universe.

*Goodnight Moon.* Big-budget adaptation of the children's classic uses incredible digital technology to make you believe that Cameron Diaz has turned into an old lady whispering "hush." The baby bunny in the bedroom falls through a doorway into a parallel universe and must stop a ring of ruthless spies bent on world domination -- all before lights-out! Eddie Murphy voices the mouse.

### **Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk**

It's the third quarter, and St. Louis leads 20-6. Seattle reaches fourth-and-7 on the Rams 27 and settles for the field goal. Sure, Tuesday Morning Quarterback's immutable law holds: Kick Early, Go For It Late. Unless you're way behind -- and a 14-point deficit in the second half on the road counts as way behind. Already this season, Seattle lost at New England when the Seahawks three times took field goals when trailing by 14 or more and facing fourth-and-6 or less. Did the Blue Men Group learn anything from their wheeze-out at New England? Apparently not, as Seattle wheezed out at St. Louis using the same "safe" tactic of taking field goals even when way behind.

### **Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk No. 2**

Trailing 17-0 with 5:49 remaining, the Washington Redskins faced fourth-and-8 on the Cincinnati 15. In trotted the field goal unit. You're down by 17 points with the game almost over, you're 3-5, *what have you got to lose?* And now, you're 3-6.

### **Our Schedule Is a Killer, a Lot of These Teams We Have to Play Use 11 Guys!**

All teams complain that they receive horribly difficult schedules -- though *everyone's* schedule cannot be tough, since for every team that gets a soft schedule, there must be a team that gets a soft schedule. Many schedule complaints boil down to, "They're making us play half our games on the road!" Coaches and general managers always moan about the schedule as part of setting expectations: if they succeed they must be geniuses to overcome a killer schedule, and if they fail, well, we had a killer schedule.

Only a few NFL teams have legitimate complaints about the 2004 schedule, and one is Minnesota. A week ago the Vikings played a road Monday night game at Indianapolis, then this Sunday played a road game at Green Bay. In recent years, the league has tried to manipulate the schedule so that teams do not play a road night game followed by another road game -- but something went wrong in this case, and Minnesota has a right to grouse. The only other team still facing this hurdle is New England, which on Dec. 20 plays a road Monday night game at Miami, then on Dec. 26 plays a road Sunday game at Jersey/B. The Flying Elvii have a right to grouse as well. (And so may viewers, brace yourself for the prospect the Ventral Fins will be 1-12 at kickoff of that Monday night collision.) Late in the season Denver plays at Kansas City on Sunday, then at Tennessee the following Saturday. This also means two road games in six days, though neither at night.

The land mines placed in the path of Minnesota, Denver and New England by the schedule pale in comparison to what Indianapolis faces. The Colts play at Chicago on the Sunday before Thanksgiving, then at Dallas on Thanksgiving -- two road games in five days. This might prove a backbreaker for the Colts' season, and Indianapolis fans have cause to complain.

### **The Football Gods Chortled**

The Falcons defense is playing much better this season under new defensive coordinator Ed Donatell than it did last season under Wade Phillips -- cutting points surrendered per game from 26 last season to 20. San Diego, where Phillips landed, has also improved its defensive performance, from 28 points per game allowed last season to 19. Who's the odd team out? Green Bay, which cashiered Donatell because the Philadelphia Nesharim converted a fourth-and-26 in the playoffs. Under Donatell in 2003, the Packers allowed 19 points per game; this year they are allowing 27.

### The Football Gods Scowled

Leading Houston by 42-7 in the fourth quarter, the Colts passed on four consecutive plays, frantically trying to run up the score. Oh ye mortals, trifle not with the football gods! TMQ fears there will be rending of garments and gnashing of teeth in Indianapolis as the Colts are punished. A reader notes in haiku,

Manning running up  
score for records will anger  
football gods.  
-- Rick Bauer, Edmonton, Alberta

### The Football Gods Were Not Amused

In recent weeks Bill Parcells has called his own team bad or stupid, and on Monday night, repeatedly shook his head as the Cowboys botched defensive downs. It can't be that Parcells is mega-ultra-genius when things go well, but the players are to blame when things go poorly. It is the coach's job to cause the team to perform well: if the team does not, the coach shares the blame. Bear Bryant always made a big point of taking blame upon himself; Parcells should read some Bryant. In previous coaching jobs, Parcells has shown a habit of demanding credit whenever there is success and blaming those around him whenever there is failure. You can't have it both ways, Bill -- it's unseemly to be shaking your head at your own players.

### David Garrard Play of the Week

"ERRR-nest WILLL-ford, ERRR-nest WILLL-ford," chanted TMQ and my nine-year-old Spenser, a Jax fan, as the marched down the field in overtime for yet another buzzer-beater win. Who-dat hero Wilford was shut out this day, but Jacksonville has a seemingly limitless supply of who-dat heroes. David Garrard, making his second career start, threw the overtime touchdown pass that won the game.

### Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!

Game tied at 20 with 5:35 remaining, New Orleans had first-and-10 on the Kansas City 42. It's a blitz. Five gentlemen cross the line, easy touchdown pass to Joe Horn and the Boy Scouts go on to win 27-20. As noted by reader Matt of Grand Rapids, Mich., in the preseason, new Chiefs defensive coordinator Gunther Cunningham boasted that Kansas City would blitz a lot, telling the *Kansas City Star*, "Are we going to give up some big plays? Yes, we are going to give up some big plays." Cunningham certainly been true to his word! Using this canny plan, the Chiefs are third-worst in the NFL in scoring defense.

Joe Horn note: reader Jeppe Lisdorf of Denmark points out that in order to have pulled his famous cell-phone stunt, Horn must have hidden phones in both goal posts, as how would he know which direction the Saints would be going when he scored? He haikuizes,

You can always reach  
Joe Horn with two mobiles in  
double coverage.  
-- Jeppe Lisdorf, Aalborg, Denmark

### Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 2

Leading 31-17, Green Bay had Minnesota facing first-and-10 on its 35 with 4:29 remaining. The Packers

blitzed on five on the next seven Minnesota snaps, and the Hyperboreans -- see below -- moved easily to score the touchdown that made it 31-24. After Minnesota got the ball back, it faced first-and-10 on its own 34 with 2:18 remaining. Five-man blitz, 40-yard completion to Nate Burleson and the Vikings scored again on the next snap to tie the game and set up the fantastic finish.

### **Curious Tactics, Dr. Watson**

Trailing 17-14, Jersey/B had first-and-goal at the Baltimore 4 with 50 seconds remaining, holding two time-outs. Ideally in this situation a team both scores the go-ahead touchdown and buries the clock so that the opponent has no time left in which to reply. But the Jets seemed so intent on running down the clock that they outsmarted themselves. Jersey/B stood around trying to decide whether to call a play or spike to stop the clock; the Jets didn't snap for their play until 18 seconds remained. Run stopped, timeout with second-and-goal on the 3. Next the Jets threw incomplete and, following trouble signaling in the play, called their final timeout -- that is, called a timeout even though the clock was stopped by the incomplete. This led to the tying field goal with 8 seconds remaining and much booing. Somehow you got the feeling Jersey/B coaches were too intent on burying the clock and not concerned enough with actually getting the touchdown, to the extent that they used up the seconds they themselves needed to win.

### **Curious Tactics, Dr. Watson No. 2**

Leading 14-0, Jersey/B had first-and-10 on the Baltimore 17 with 1:56 remaining in the first half. Going for the knockout punch, Jets coaches called a halfback option by Lamont Jordan. No one open, under pressure from two defenders, Jordan heave-hoed a wild pass that was intercepted and returned to the Jets 36; the Ravens scored a touchdown just before the half ended, and the sequence swung the game in Baltimore's favor. Curious to call a risky trick play when the Jets had plenty of time -- and all three timeouts -- to work the ball against a Ravens unit that, at that point, was dispirited. And curious to call a pass by Jordan if he hadn't been properly coached on halfback passing! Coaches tell halfbacks to throw the option only if the receiver is totally open, no defender in sight, and only if there is no pressure; otherwise forget the option and run, and we don't care if you take a loss. Jordan had no one open and was under pressure, but did not do the well-coached thing and just take the loss of a few yards.

### **Crowd Response Watch**

In the second quarter in Washington, home fans began to cheer lustily when they noticed Patrick Ramsey warming up on the sidelines. Redskins faithful are so dismayed over the performance of Mark Brunell that now they are watching Ramsey on the sidelines instead of watching the game.

### **Sub of the Week**

Pressed into service for the injured Dave Zastudil, Kordell Stewart boomed a beauty 42-yard knuckleball punt in overtime, pinning Jersey/B at its own 5. The Jets went three-and-out, and Baltimore scored to win on its ensuing possession. Note: In the game Ravens safety Ed Reed, who a week ago ran an interception back 106 yards for a touchdown, ran an interception back 104 yards for a touchdown, only to have the score nullified by a penalty.

### **This Week's Star-Trek-Related Complaint**

Recently Tuesday Morning Quarterback complained of hundreds of millions of dollars in federal tax subsidies supporting particle accelerator research, which stands little chance of discovering anything of practical value. But tax funds for particle accelerators sound wise compared to this news, pointed out by reader Jonathan Boyd -- the Air Force just spent \$25,000 for a report on the possibility of teleportation. Here, *USA Today* details what one prominent scientist tells the newspaper is "crackpot physics". The \$25,000 went to a company called Warp Drive Metrics, located in that scientific research hub, Las Vegas. "Warp Drive Metrics" doesn't have a web site, and is not listed in Las Vegas directory assistance. TMQ suspects "Warp Drive Metrics" is a device for beaming money out of the federal budget.

### **A Brief History of the Preposterous Punt**

On Nov. 3, 2002, trailing defending champion New England by 10 points, the Bills faced fourth-and-2 on the Patriots 32. Did they go for it? Attempt a field goal to close the deficit to one score? Buffalo punted from the New England 32! Emboldened by the mincing, fraidy-cat call, New England marched the length of the field for a touchdown that turned the contest into a blowout. That was almost exactly two years ago. To the point of the Preposterous Punt, Buffalo was 5-3 and second-highest scoring team in the league. Since then, the Bills have gone 12-21 and consistently been at or near the bottom in scoring. The extremely weird Bills' habit of punting inside the opponent's 40 has continued from the reign of the tastefully named Gregg Williams to the current stewardship of the serious pun potential Mike Mularkey. For instance, earlier this season Buffalo punted from the Jersey/B 37 in a game the Bills went on to lose by two points. No wonder the Bills are the third-lowest-scoring club in the league -- it's hard to ring up points when you don't even *try* to score.

Never underestimate the extent to which NFL teams do, in fact, respond to the messages coaches send them. By punting in opposition territory, two consecutive Buffalo coaches have sent the message that they think their players are incapable of picking up yards in pressure situations. Inside the opponent's 40 -- the Maroon Zone -- is where a team must convert mere possessions into scoring opportunities. In this part of the field, teams may actually be better off going for it and failing than launching a mincing fraidy-cat punt. Going for it sends the message that the coach is challenging his players to win the game, a message that redounds even if the attempt fails. Punting sends the message that the coach has no confidence in his players, or that the coach is not totally committed to winning, an equally bad message.

To the moment of the Preposterous Punt on Sunday, the Buffalo offense had staged a brisk opening drive, gaining 45 yards. On the next possession, after a decent drive of 23 yards, the Bills again punted inside New England territory, this time on fourth-and-7 from the Patriots 44. Realizing their coach had no confidence in them and was not totally committed to winning the game, Buffalo offensive players visibly gave up at this point, gaining only 72 yards in the rest of the game. To top off the fiasco off, trailing 23-0 in the late third quarter, the Bills faced fourth-and-2 from their own 31. Coaches sent in the punting unit. TMQ thought: You're 3-5, you're down by 23 points to the defending champions, *what do you have to lose!* What Buffalo players surely thought was: the coaching staff has quit on this game, so why shouldn't we?

As for Bledsoe, for two seasons this once-magnificent passer has meekly trotted off the field, head hanging low, as coaches send in the punting unit in opposition territory. If Green Bay coaches did the same to Brett Favre, there would be a detonation so powerful it would light up screens at the National Earthquake Information Center. As the Buffalo offense has sputtered under two different coaches, Bledsoe has never asserted himself to demand that the Bills play to win instead of playing not to lose; he has meekly hung his head low during embarrassment after embarrassment. Yesterday Ron Borges of the *Boston Globe* called Bledsoe "a sad imitation of what he once was." No one questions that Bledsoe is giving it all he's got. He just seems to have nothing left to give.

### **The NFL's Associate Deputy Assistant Director of Yardage Acquisition Processes Thought the Article Was Pretty Good**

TMQ recommends this article from the *Chronicle of Higher Education* on ridiculous academic titles, such as Assistant Professor of Nonformal Educational Processes.

### **Maryland, the Land the Passing Game Forgot**

James Miller, a law student at the University of Akron, points out that all pro and Division 1-A quarterbacks in Maryland are struggling. Mark Brunnell, Kyle Boller, Joel Statham of the University of Maryland and Aaron Polanco of Navy have combined to throw 24 touchdowns and 26 interceptions, and combined for 16 games of less than 100 yards passing. Polanco's 10 rushing touchdowns is more than any of the four has passing.

### **Uniform Shenanigans Update**

Bruce Cundiff of Alameda, Calif., notes that the looked-black-to-me "alternate" jerseys recently worn by the Eagles are called Midnight Green by the club. J. Crew color names come to the NFL! Maybe Cincinnati should start calling its color Warm Butterscotch instead of orange. Michael Clay of Miami Shores, Fla.,

notes that alternate jerseys are doing well this season. San Diego beat Jacksonville wearing its powder blues; Houston beat Jacksonville wearing its reds; Baltimore beat Cleveland wearing all-black; Philadelphia beat Baltimore wearing Midnight Green; Cincinnati has won two straight wearing Halloween costumes. Clay predicts a future trend of teams sporting their alternate look more often than their standard look -- Atlanta is 4-1 in reds this season, and red was the Falcons' alternate jersey in 2003.

### **Important News from the Sports-Cheesecake Boundary Line**

Paul Welch, a Vikings' fan who lives in the United Kingdom, notes that the team is currently asking Minnesota faithful to vote on which of three outfits the cheerleaders should sport for home games. The outfits are modeled by Minnesota cheer-babe Acacia, who according to her team bio is studying for her master's at the University of Minnesota and who also has, as they used to say on vaudeville, legs that go all the way down to the floor. Choice of outfit is particularly significant for Minnesota since the Vikings perform indoors, meaning cheerleaders can always be scantily attired, regardless of weather. TMQ urges you to vote on this vital question. If anyone challenges whether you are really a Vikings' fan, insist on casting a provisional ballot.

Jim Kullmer of Blairstown, Iowa, a Vikings' fan, proposes that the TMQ cognomen for this team become the Minnesota Hyperboreans: "According to Greek mythology, the Hyperboreans were people who lived in the extreme northern regions of the world, in a land of eternal sunshine. Residents of the upper Midwest can attest that the sun shines blindingly in the winter, especially on snow covered, frigid January days." The Minnesota Hyperboreans -- Mr. Data, make it so!

### **Best Bye Week by a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Be in San Diego**

While Eli Manning watched the Giants wheeze out in the desert and high-priced holdout Philip Rivers was attending a North Carolina State game, Drew Brees remained the third-rated quarterback in the league. Steve Moss of Highland, Ind., noted that although Manning and Rivers, the two highest-drafted rookie quarterbacks, have yet to say boo in the NFL, rookie signal callers Ben Roethlisberger and Craig Krenzel are a combined 10-0 as starters. Ciaran Flood of Middleton, N.J., urged TMQ, "Run that stat this week since the figure is unlikely to stay perfect after Eli gets the start Sunday."

### **Why Certain Teams Are 1-8**

Leading Carolina 17-6 in the third quarter, San Francisco fumbled and Mark Fields of the Panthers returned the fumble for a touchdown. But wait! Reversed by replay, San Francisco keeps the ball. On the next snap, Mark Fields intercepted and returned it to the San Francisco 1-yard line. Carolina scored a touchdown and the Panthers' comeback was on.

**Why Certain Teams Are 3-6** Trailing 17-14 in the fourth quarter, City of Tampa faced third-and-1 on the Atlanta 28. Michael Pittman fumbled and the Falcons returned it for a touchdown. But wait! Reversed by replay, Tampa keeps the ball. That makes it fourth-and-1, this time Pittman is hit in the backfield for a loss and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook. On both plays -- third-and-1, fourth-and-1 -- the Bucs' line got zero push.

### **Best Blocks**

The Atlanta offensive line was shaggy in 2003, but it's amazing how blocking for the league's fastest quarterback improves your performance. This season the Falcons line has turned in several monster performances, including leading the way for 205 yards of power-rushing Sunday against the stout Tampa defense. Atlanta leading 3-0 in the first quarter and facing third-and-6, Michael-Mike Vick faked a handoff and sprinted right on a design run, with tackle Todd Weiner pulling right. Weiner did not just push a man and stop to watch the play, as offensive linemen so often do; Weiner got 25 yards downfield before making the block that helped Vick run 41 yards. Atlanta scored a touchdown two snaps later and the remainder of the game was denouement. Also, a Best Blocks nod also goes to R.W. McQuarters of the Bears, who blocked not one but two Flaming Thumbtacks on Michael Haynes' interception return for a touchdown.

### **Crazy Pass Watch**

Carolina leading 30-27 with 3:33 remaining, San Francisco had second-and-7 on its own 41. Under tackle, Tim Rattay heaved a *crazy* pass directly into the hands of Panthers' defensive end Brentson Buckner, who returned the ball to the Niners 8, whence Carolina scored the icing touchdown. Sometimes the smartest play a quarterback can make is simply to take a sack.

### **Next, a Made-for-TV Movie About Weather Disasters That Threaten Women in Bikinis**

Recently TMQ noted that the deeply absurd hit movie *The Day After Tomorrow* depicted nature doing things that have never been observed in nature. This Sunday, CBS aired a disaster movie, *Category Six: Day of Destruction*, which depicted nature doing things that have never been observed in nature. If instantaneous ice ages (*The Day After Tomorrow*) or mega-tornados that level entire cities (*Category Six*) were possible, they would be observed in nature. TMQ worries that by presenting such science illiteracy, movie studios and networks will make viewers think that the threat of climate change is just more Hollywood nonsense: when the real sort of gradual climate change that has been observed in nature may be a genuine threat accelerated by artificial emissions of greenhouse gases. Anyway, CBS plans to make amends to viewers with the next episode of *Survivor*, which features women in bikinis being tied up. Tuesday Morning Quarterback is confident there is a *perfectly legitimate reason* related to the competition that women in bikinis had to be tied up.

### **Bring the Boys Home**

Buffalo played on the road at night on Sunday, and has played 22 of its last 24 night games on the road. This is at the request of Buffalo management: because many Bills faithful drive 100 miles or so from Toronto or Rochester to attend games, holding a night contest at Orchard Park means such fans will be lucky to be home at 3 a.m.. All other teams except Buffalo want their night games at home. In exchange for surrendering the privilege of night home games, in recent years the league has insured Buffalo attractive home opponents late in the season when snow might discourage attendance. This year's season-ending Jan. 2 visit of Pittsburgh is an example of an attractive late opponent that will sell out Wilson Stadium. So it is not irrational that Buffalo asks not to have night home games -- in fact, it's nice that team management shows concern for fans driving long distances in the middle of the night. But the Bills must go back to staging night games at home. Night road contests are so hard to win, playing all your night games on the road is like starting every season with a half-game penalty in the standings. Buffalo's won-lose ratio has taken a nosedive during the very period the Bills adopted the all-road-night-games policy.

### **Game Being Played in TMQ's Nightmares**

Cincinnati in its new orange shirts-black pants versus Cleveland in its black shirts-orange pants look shown Sunday.

### **Hidden Indicator**

Since the start of the 2001 season, Minnesota is 3-16 in games played on grass. This is the kind of hidden indicator that is essential to an insider's understanding of the game, and in this case, everyone knows exactly what it means.

### **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

#### **Obscure College Score of the Week**

Friends 14, Bethel of Kansas 7. Located in Wichita, Kansas, Friends University was founded in 1898 by the Society of Friends. Its sports teams are known as the Falcons -- sadly, not as the Fighting Friends.

#### **Bonus Obscure College Score**

Southern Utah 23, South Dakota State 17 in double overtime. This game was tied at 10 at the end of regulation, meaning as many points were scored on the 22 plays staged in overtime as on the 118 plays staged in the regular session. Located in Brookings, South Dakota, South Dakota State University calls

its sports teams the Jackrabbits; women's team are also Jackrabbits, not Jillrabbits. The school boasts its location is "just miles from the Minnesota border," which tells you something about South Dakota's attitude toward itself.

### ***New York Times* Final-Score Score**

Beloved item returns -- sort of. Though the *New York Times* ended its much-missed practice of making inaccurate NFL final score predictions in Friday's paper, sharp-eyed reader Devin Nordberg of Bolder, Colo., notes the *Times* web site now runs *The Associated Press* final score predictions. *Times* -endorsed prediction: Bucs 17, Falcons 16. Actual: Falcons 24, Bucs 16. *Times*-endorsed prediction: Seahawks 31, Rams 30. Actual: Rams 23, Seahawks 12. *New York Times*-Endorsed Final Score Score, 0-14.

### **Reader Animadversion**

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Gregory Armentrout of Frederick, Md., writes, "When I was younger, I used to say when the Vikings and Browns play each other, it was the Peanut Butter & Jelly game. Now, perhaps Arizona with its all-red Union Suit could start a tradition of a Christmas game against the Eagles, Packers or Jets in their all-greens." Armentrout also supposes that if the Seattle Blue Men Group played a game on the blue turf at Boise State, the players would be invisible.

I asked readers to find the reference to a Broadway play that was encoded in last week's column. Many, including Dov Rabinowitz of Jerusalem, Israel, cited the word "flibbertigibbets," which occurs in *The Sound of Music*. Claudia Hendersen of New York City suggested the name "Yafnaro," which crops up in *TMQ*, must come from a vaudeville routine. Actually, Vincent Yafnaro was a character in the Roger Ramjet cartoons. Scott McAuliffe of Atlanta thought all references to the Chicago Bears could also be seen as references to the musical *Chicago*. John Anderson of Greenville, S.C., caught that last week's column quoted the Oscar Wilde play *Salome* -- very erudite of you John, but has that play ever been rolled out on Broadway?

Here's the reference. In my imaginary halftime tirade, I sputtered to the hapless players, "You're -- you're -- you're maladjusted!" This is what the gray-flannel-suit Albert sputters to the free spirit Murray in the 1962 Broadway hit play, later a movie starring Jason Robards, *A Thousand Clowns*.

Of the Cincinnati Bengal, which *TMQ* has called the Candy Corns and Tootsie Rolls based on their ever-changing candy-colored uniforms, a reader haikuizes,

Candy Corns, Tootsies,  
Halloween gear: if only  
record were so sweet!  
-- Homer Smith, Cincinnati

Last week, as the final undefeated NFL team fell, I lauded the surviving members of the 1972 perfect-season Dolphins, then noted I had reproduced the laud from my AutoText. I said "my heirs will be reproducing the same AutoText statement decades or centuries into the future," meaning no other team will ever have a perfect season. But Jon Nighswander of Boston pointed out that "centuries into the future," there will be few surviving members of the 1972 Dolphins. "Unless they truly become sports immortals," Nighswander added.

Finally Carolyn McCourtney of Coral Gables, Fla., protested that since all adults are expected to read serious books occasionally, the Literary Cheerleader of the Week item "is just a flimsy excuse to gawk at delicious-looking cheer-babes." Carolyn, of course that's what it is! Besides, you're *supposed* to look at the cheerleaders.

### **Last Week's Challenge**

TMQ asked readers to name the most important player in pro football history -- not the best, the most important.

Karen Barefield of Alexandria, Va., was among many who named Broadway Joe Namath, for raising the sport's profile both on the field and off it, in product endorsements and media appearances. Edward Grulich, a State Department officer stationed in Taipei, suggested White Shoes Johnson, who invented the touchdown celebration and also helped raise the hype quotient of the NFL.

Maureen Danahy nominated Pudge Heffelfinger, who "in 1892 was paid \$500 to play a game for the Allegheny Athletic Association, winning it by scoring the sole touchdown in the contest. Paying players signaled the birth of professional football." Five hundred 1892 dollars inflates to about \$14,000 today, meaning the first paid professional football player received almost exactly as much as the current NFL minimum salary for one game. Jeff Fay of Albany, N.Y., proposed Red Grange, noting, "The NFL was a financially struggling oddity until Grange left the University of Illinois in 1925 as the most publicized player in college football history and signed with the Bears. Thereafter, pro football started to grab headlines."

Jean-Pierre Gagick of Paris, France, says "William Webb Ellis. In England in 1823, he was the first man to run with a ball during a soccer game, and thus rugby was born." Peter Ryan of Brown Deer, Wisconsin, nominated "George (Peggy) Parratt, who in 1906 recorded the first forward pass, transforming controlled rugby into America's beloved game of modern football." Matt Dycus of Bethesda, Maryland, nominated Kenny Washington, first African American player in the NFL.

Renee Trnka of Webster, Minn., says the most important player was Archie Manning, who begat Peyton and Eli. Eli, she thinks, is hot; not so far in the playing sense, though maybe that will change Sunday. Steve Winking of Springfield, Ill., said it was "Andy Livingston, who played for the New Orleans Saints. His bubble gum card was the first football card I ever saw. I liked the colors of the uniform so much, I started rooting for the Saints, and sadly enough, I still do." Mario Cantu of Monterrey, Mexico, a Cowboys fan, says Herschel Walker, whose trade bonanza set up Dallas for three Super Bowl rings. Brian Wolf of Wilmington, Del., proposes Vera Wang, who designed the barely-covers-anything outfits of the Philadelphia Eagles cheerleaders.

In the category of accomplishments both on and off the field, Shiraz Allidina proposed Byron White, both a football star and a Supreme Court justice. Scott Dempsey of South Bend, Ind., proposed Alan Page, an all-pro and then later a judge. Hans-Werner Egerland of Abingdon, Md., says Gene Upshaw, who was great both on the field and off, field running the players union. Steve Graunke of Indianapolis says it was Virgil Carter, the weak-armed Cincinnati quarterback for whom, in the late 1960s, then-obscure Bengals' offensive coordinator Bill Walsh developed what would eventually be called the West Coast Offense. Walsh drew notice for this theories later, as head coach at Stanford; had his style drawn notice while he was in Cincinnati, the style might be known to history as the Chili Atop Spaghetti Offense.

Ranjit Survanshi of Boston nominates Jets safety Mike D'Amato: "During the Raiders' go-ahead drive in the Heidi game, D'Amato committed a facemask penalty, which put the ball at the Jets' 43. On the next play, Raiders halfback Charlie Smith outraced D'Amato to the end zone. Had D'Amato not committed the penalty or been able to tackle Smith, the Raiders might not have scored, viewers would have only missed Oakland's final futile drive, few fans would have complained, and there might be less football on TV today."

Ranjit, you came so close! The desired answer -- known in advance to the sainted elite who bought my book *Tuesday Morning Quarterback*, which comes to the same conclusion -- was Preston Ridlehuber. This answer was proposed by several readers, of whom I chose Maurice Manring of Columbia, Mo., by drawing straws. Manring edits scholarly publications for the University of Missouri, and is the author of the book *Slave in a Box*, about the Aunt Jemima image in marketing. He writes under the name "M.M. Manring," and here is his shameless praise: "Look out, corporate marketers, M.M. Manring is on your case. No one has a keener eye for marketing hypocrisy." Put that quote on the jacket of the next edition, Maurice, and just leave out that it was NFL.com that said this about you.

### This Week's Challenge

This week's Challenge is to wait until the Challenge resumes. I'm putting the item on a brief hiatus as the approach of the holidays overloads my schedule, cutting into the time I would use to scan Challenge entries along with my panel of judges.

**Next Week**

Who will be the Preston Ridlehuber of the 21st century?



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## Peyton on a pace for Nobel Peace Prize, and Happy Throwback Thanksgiving!

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Nov. 23, 2004) -- The National Basketball Association and major-college football are hugely embarrassed right now by ugly, ugly brawls at games. The NBA, especially, looks just awful at the moment. By endlessly repeating video footage of the juvenile-delinquent behavior of the Indiana Pacers, cable news is making it seem that violent pandemonium is a common occurrence at games. But actually, fighting at American sports events is quite rare.

In their 2001 book *Sports Fans: the Psychological and Social Impact of Spectators*, four academic psychologists reviewed the technical literature and found that incidence of violent behavior at American sports events is no greater than in society as a whole. The researchers concluded that the chance of a fight breaking out during a game is just about exactly the same as the chance of a fight breaking out at any moment in daily life.

In recent years in the United Kingdom, Denmark, Belgium, South Korea, Russia and elsewhere, spectators have died during soccer matches; the global soccer-riot death toll is several hundred in recent decades. Deaths of spectators from fighting at United States sporting events are all but unknown in the same period. (In 2000, a Massachusetts father was beaten to death at a youth hockey practice by another father after their sons argued on the ice; the second man was convicted of involuntary manslaughter and is now in prison.) Serious fighting is so rare at American sporting events because spectators are, by and large, an orderly group. The cliché is that football games, especially, are attended by mobs of drunken testosterone-pumped ruffians spoiling to brawl. The reality is that the occasional off-color chant is the worst it gets at 99.9 percent of American football contests. In *Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer*, his new book about football fan mania, Warren St. John writes, "I've been going to football games since I was six, and I've never seen anything beyond a fistfight or the occasional fraternity scrum."

A section of *Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer* is devoted to St. John's amazement that huge numbers of people can attend football games, watch a violent entertainment, drink too much beer and yet almost never become violent themselves. Yours truly has attended numerous NFL games in the last few years, in a half-dozen cities, and never observed any inappropriate behavior, other than coaches calling passes on short-yardage downs. Because I am the scout for my son's high-school team, I also attend lots of high-school football. In the last two years I've been to football games at maybe 20 different high schools in the Washington, D.C. area and Baltimore, in every socio-economic strata from McMansion zones to inner city, and never seen anything but orderly behavior by spectators. In football's case, because teams and spectators are well-separated, unlike in basketball or other sports, fights between players and fans are nearly impossible. When fighting does occur at football games, it is on the field, between gentlemen protected by plastic armor that rules out actually landing a punch: fights between football players are quite silly in that regard.

These things said, there is no disputing that ugly fights or mortifying behavior do occur at American sports events. Not long ago a Texas Rangers player threw a chair at fans in a Major League Baseball game; two Chicago White Sox fans jumped onto the field in 2002 and struck a Kansas City coach; a Toronto Maple Leafs player struck a fan during a 2001 NHL game. There have also been a couple of melees at high-school sporting events in the last year. Television news shows images of such instances over and over, to give the impression sports fighting is common. But in the last few years there have been a huge number of sports contests staged in the United States -- many millions of sporting events,

when high school is included. Through the course millions of recent American sporting events, there have been maybe a dozen brawls or player-fan melees. This does not in any way excuse fighting at game -- only puts the fights into perspective, as events that receive news attention exactly because they are so rare.

In NFL news, Peyton Manning is on a pace to cure cancer, complete the "grand unification" equations of physics and bring peace to the Middle East.

In other NFL news, Thanksgiving has become Throwback Day, with teams to wear old-fashioned uniforms and old logos on the NFL.com home page. TMQ suggests this menu for your own personal Throwback Thanksgiving:

- Wild turkey, shot with a musket and hand-plucked.
- Dried maize; no corn-on-the-cob.
- Ample, overflowing servings of lobster. (The Pilgrims considered lobster tasteless and complained in their diaries of having to eat it so often.)
- Seal meat.
- Hard apple cider. (Till the early 1800s or so, hard cider was in rural North America considered the only totally safe beverage, because the alcohol killed waterborne pathogens; children often drank diluted hard cider and went through the day slightly tipsy.)
- For desert: plums, grapes and stewed pumpkin. (There is no chance the Pilgrims ate pie at the first Thanksgiving, because they had no refined sugar. Until the 1800s, most Americans rarely tasted anything containing refined sugar.)

As you dig into your turkey, stuffing and pecan pie, washed down with a \$10 bottle of wine superior in quality to any wine available to the 17th-century kings of France, remember how hard your ancestors worked, and how they sacrificed, in the dream that someday their descendants would be warm, well-fed and secure against nature. Considering that your forebears just a century ago had an average lifespan of 46 years and often shivered during winters while eating mostly salt-preserved food, try to get through turkey day without complaining about anything, okay? Happy Throwback Thanksgiving!

### **Stats of the Week**

Tony Dorsett began Sunday as fifth on the NFL all-time rushing list and finished Sunday as seventh, passed by Jerome Bettis and Curtis Martin on the same day.

### **Stats of the Week No. 2**

In Detroit's last two games, kick returner Eddie Drummond has scored three touchdowns and the Lions offense has scored one touchdown.

### **Stats of the Week No. 3**

Brett Favre passed for 201 yards in the fourth quarter during Green Bay's comeback at Houston.

### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Miami quarterbacks have thrown six interceptions returned for touchdowns. A. J. Feeley has four touchdown passes to his teammates and four touchdown passes to the opposition.

### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

Buffalo and Tampa Bay have combined to win six of their last eight games -- and both still have losing records.

### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

Getting his first start since 2002, Shaun King fumbled four times and threw three interceptions.

### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

New Orleans has the league's lowest-rated defense, despite a defensive line with three recent No. 1 draft picks.

### **Stats of the Week No. 8**

The first two quarterbacks drafted in 2004, Eli Manning and Philip Rivers, are a combined 0-1 as starters; two other rookie quarterbacks, Ben Roethlisberger and Craig Krenzel, are a combined 11-1.

### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

In his last six games, Reuben Droughns has averaged 136 yards rushing per game -- a pace for an all-time-record 2,176-yard season.

### **Stats of the Week No. 10**

Priest Holmes has not played in two weeks and still has more touchdowns than two entire teams, Washington and Miami.

### **Stats of the Week No. 11**

Indianapolis has more than *three times* as many touchdowns as Washington and Miami, plus more than twice as many touchdowns as 15 of the league's 31 other teams.

### **Stats of the Week No. 12**

Stretching back to college, Ben Roethlisberger has won 20 consecutive games as a starter.

### **Engineer-Cheerleader of the Week**

Literary Cheerleader of the Week temporarily suspended while we recognize cheerleader with other serious credentials. Eric Kabat of Dublin, Ohio, nominates Jennifer of the Indianapolis Colts, who is by profession a chemical engineer. Her team bio says she was born in Mayaguez, Puerto Rico, and that she has a bilingual dog. Jennifer, does this mean you can give the dog commands in both Spanish and English, or that the dog barks in both Spanish and English? *Raspa, raspa!* is I think how a dog would sound in Spanish.

Cheer-babe wardrobe note: On those windy plains of Indiana you'd think it would be too cold for bikinis, but you'd think wrong. Here in the Colts cheerleaders' swimsuit calendar, complete with non-Hoosier beach scenes. Also check the Colts' video section -- sponsored by Jiffy Lube -- which contains both team material and extensive footage of the cheerleaders being interviewed while wearing bikinis. Wouldn't *you* wear a bikini to an interview?

### **Sweet Play of the Week**

Game scoreless, San Diego faced third-and-6 on the Oakland 11. Tight end Antonio Gates split wide right and ran a fade route to the end zone, perfect touchdown pass from Drew Brees. A tight end who can run the fade route? And note to NFL defensive coordinators: You seem very slow to adjust to the fact that when the Chargers get to the red zone, Gates is going to get the ball.

### **Sour Play of the Week**

Indianapolis leading Chicago 17-3 in the late second quarter, the Lucky Charms had second-and-7 on the

Bears 10. Marvin Harrison ran the most basic pattern in football -- the "stop" or "hook." Harrison jogged 10 yards into the end zone, stopped and turned around; Peyton Manning zinged him a touchdown pass. No defender has made any attempt to cover Harrison: he was simply standing by himself. When you don't even try to cover the best receiver of the league's best offense, that is sour.

### **Sour Play of the Week No. 2**

No Tennessee player so much as attempted to block linebacker Greg Favors of Jax as he roared in to sack Steve McNair for a safety in the fourth quarter. The Flaming Thumbtacks went on to win, but this seemed another odd example of a phenomenon about which TMQ has been complaining, NFL quarterbacks sprinting backwards into their own end zones. The situation was Jacksonville leading 13-10, the Titans facing third-and-7 on their own 7. Why did McNair sprint backwards into the end zone in the first place?

### **Sweet 'N' Sour Play of the Week**

Les Mouflons leading 17-14 at the two-minute warning of the first half, the Bills faced third-and-19 from their 25. Buffalo ran the "flea flicker" -- Willis McGahee took the handoff up the middle and was to pitch back to Drew Bledsoe. McGahee found himself hemmed in by defenders. He leapt into the air, then reached around one outsized gentleman to throw a sidearm lateral to Bledsoe, who hit Sam Aiken for a 54-yard gain. Buffalo kicked a field goal on the drive, and the Bills comeback was set in motion. McGahee's difficult lateral was sweet. For the Rams, it was third-and-19 -- how can a receiver get completely behind the defense on such a down? That was sour.

### **Best Purist Drive**

Trailing the Detroit Peugeots 19-7 late in the third quarter, their season in jeopardy, the Minnesota Vikings staged a 16-play touchdown drive on which they converted three third downs and, not going pass-wacky, ran six times. A deuce conversion made it 19-15, and the comeback was on.

### **Best Purist Drive No. 2**

Leading by a shaky 10-7 margin, the Jets got the ball at their own 23 with 3:55 remaining. Lamont Jordan carried on six consecutive downs, all straight-ahead runs, and earned three first downs that zeroed the clock. The football gods admire those who grind the clock at the end, rather than go pass-wacky and throw incompletions that keep the opponent's hopes alive.

### **Preposterous Punt of the Week**

Game scoreless, the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1) faced fourth-and-2 on the Jets 42. Boom goes the punt. It took Jersey/B exactly one play to get back to the point where the ball would have been had Cleveland gone for it and missed. By playing it "safe" like this, the Browns went on to score just seven points in their loss.

### **Preposterous Punt Runner-Up**

Leading 17-14 late in the third quarter, the Blue Men Group had fourth-and-1 on the Miami 29. Seattle came out in a full-house backfield and barked a hard count, trying to draw the Ventral Fins offside; it failed, delay of game penalty. As noted by reader Robert Lopez, the Seahawks have the league's leading rusher; why not just run, rather than mince around with a high-school trick that rarely works even in high school? Now it's fourth-and-6 on the 34, and rather than go for it or attempt a field goal in three MPH winds, Seattle booms a punt. The Blue Men Group won on a late interception. But as Tuesday Morning Quarterback has noted in previous columns, Seattle has become awfully fraidy-cat on kicking decisions, and this has corresponded with their losing streak.

### **Equal-Time Beefcake**

More of photographer Scott Eklund's portraits of Seattle Seahawks posing shirtless. Here is special-teams

ace Alex Bannister. Bannister is now on IR, which gives him time to perfect his six-pack.

### High School Play of the Week

A standard high-school short yardage action is to play-fake to the tailback right and have the quarterback bootleg right (since most quarterbacks are right-handed); the fullback, who has faked a lead block, runs into the right flat for the pass. Trailing 14-10, Pittsburgh faced third-and-2 on the Cincinnati 8. Ben Roethlisberger faked to the tailback, rolled right and tossed a touchdown pass to fullback Dan Kreider, who had faked the lead-block. Houston used the same action for a touchdown against Green Bay.

### High School Play of the Week No. 2

Baltimore and Houston both called that high-school perennial, the sweep right with a pass back to the quarterback on the left. Both plays resulted in an incompletion.

### They Could Use an Egg Timer

A week ago on Monday Night Football against Dallas, Donovan McNabb scrambled around for 14 seconds before launching a touchdown pass. Sunday against Washington, McNabb scrambled around for 18 seconds before being sacked and losing a fumble. Obviously the Philadelphia coaching staff has to work with McNabb on getting the pass off in 14 seconds!

### Imagine If Either Had Even A Mediocre Offense

The league's two lowest-scoring teams, Washington and Miami, are ranked second and seventh, respectively, for defense.

### Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk

Game scoreless, the 3-6 Dallas Cowboys faced fourth-and-1 on the Baltimore 46. In trotted the punting unit. *You're 3-6, what have you got to lose?* Later, game still scoreless, Dallas faced fourth-and-goal on the Baltimore 1. In trotted the field goal unit. Yes, TMQ preaches Kick Early, Go for It Late. But if you fail on fourth-and-goal from the 1, the Ravens low-voltage offense is pinned against its end zone. Besides *you're 3-6, what have you got to lose?* And now you are 3-7.

### All Titles Approved by the Department of Redundancy Department

Paul Light of the Brookings Institution found that while a generation ago the federal government had 17 senior executive titles, today it confers 64 senior titles. Among TMQ's favorites: "Deputy Assistant Deputy Administrator," "Deputy Deputy Assistant Secretary," "Associate Deputy Assistant Secretary" and "Chief of Staff to the Associate Assistant Secretary." Light also found there are six times as many people holding senior titles in the federal government today than in 1960 -- 2,592 people with senior titles now, versus 451 in 1960. He found that the Department of Agriculture has more people with senior-level titles than the Department of Defense.

### Best Blocks

Reserved today for instances of offensive linemen who don't just brush their men, then stand up and watch the play, but rather hustle downfield. On Michael-Mike Vick's 24-yard run against Jersey/B, setting up the Falcons' first touchdown, *four* Atlanta offensive linemen got 15 yards or more downfield to block for Vick. On Deion Branch's 26-yard touchdown jaunt with a hitch pass, guards Joe Andruzzi and Steve Neal hustled all the way downfield and were alongside Branch as he crossed into the end zone.

### Maybe Ernest Wilford Should Be Selling Tickets

Jacksonville has sold out only one of its five home dates so far. Note to Jax fans: your team is 6-4 and

having a fascinating season. The weather is usually nice outside in Florida this time of year. Buy some seats, already.

### **Why Tactics Matter**

Game tied at 13, Houston faced second-and-3 on its own 23 with 2:25 remaining. Moo Cow coaches knew the Green Bay offense was red hot, the Packers having just rallied from a 13-3 deficit. Deep in their own territory, the Texans needed to make sure they did not punt back to the Packers with lots of time on the clock. So the situation dictated runs to insure Houston got a first down and controlled the clock, even if that meant not scoring in regulation and accepting overtime. Instead the Texans went incompleteness, incompleteness, punt. The incompleteness stopped the clock twice, allowing Green Bay enough time to move into position for the winning field goal with four seconds remaining.

### **Why Tactics Matter No. 2**

Atlanta leading 14-7, the Giants had the ball on the Falcons 28. Eli Manning threw an interception directly to defensive end Brady Smith, who had dropped into coverage on the zone blitz. Every team's standard anti-blitz play is a quick slant. In a zone blitz, one of the defensive ends drops into one of the slant-lane areas in order to create uncertainty in the quarterback's mind about whether he can simply zing off a quick slant pass. Defensive coordinators don't expect a defensive end in coverage actually to defend the pass; they just want the quarterback to hesitate about the slant pattern, giving blitzers time to arrive. But Eli, who may never have seen a pro-style zone blitz in college, just assumed the slant area would be open, and threw directly to Smith.

### **The Deputy Assistant Deputy Administrator for Wa-Wa Effects Will See You Now**

The Netherlands has a National Rock & Pop Institute dedicated to promote Dutch rock music. Rock is supposed to be a form of rebellious anti-establishment expression. Can't they do *anything* without government hand-holding in the European Union? Maybe they have officials with titles like Chief of Staff to the Associate Assistant Secretary for Power Ballads. If any Dutch-reading reader can scan the Institute's website for amusing absurdities, report them to me at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com).

### **Or Have a Relationship Talk. No Wait, Read the Article**

Suggestion for those in the Bay Area and South Florida television markets for this coming Sunday, as the 1-9 Ventral Fins play the 1-9 Squared Sevens: rather than watch the game, please read and summarize the article from the current issue of *Science* magazine, "Magnetic Response of Metamaterials at 100 Terahertz."

### **Why Certain Teams Are 1-9**

Trailing 28-0 at the end of the third quarter, San Francisco faced fourth-and-21 at the City of Tampa 29. In trotted the field goal unit. Sure it would have been a long shot to get the first down, but you're 1-8, you're down by four touchdowns late in the game, *what do you have to lose?* TMQ figured: The plan is to take a field goal, then onside kick. Boom goes the standard kickoff. You're 1-8, *what do you have to lose?* And now you're 1-9.

This is yet another example of an NFL coach playing to hold down the margin of defeat rather than playing to win. When Dennis Erickson's performance review meeting comes at the end of the season, he doesn't want one of the strikes against him to be, "The team was shut out twice this year." So he takes the field goal for the purpose of his resume -- the final score was 35-3, that's not a shutout -- rather than play for the chance of winning, however remote that chance had become.

### **At the Rate They Are Learning, All San Francisco Players Will Soon Be Ph.Ds.**

"49ERS CONTINUE LEARNING PROCESS." That was the headline a few days ago on the home page of the official web site of the 1-9 Squared Sevens.

## Disclaimer Watch

In Ford's new "Field of McQueen" commercial, a farmer builds a professional race course in his cornfield, then the digital ghost of Steve McQueen steps out of the cornfield to race the new Mustang around like a maniac. While this happens the crawl at the bottom says, CLOSED COURSE. Are there racetracks in cornfields that are open to regular highway traffic?

## Train the Bird to Say "Martz!" and "What the Favre!"

Sunny the parrot has been allowed to the British frigate *HMS Lancaster* after being removed because he let loose with a string of four-letter curses while an admiral was inspecting the ship. Sunny also likes to say, "Zulus – thousands of 'em!" (This is a line from a cheesy 1964 Michael Caine movie.)

## But What Can Science Tell Us About Whether a Coach Throwing His Clipboard Increases the Chance That the Team Will Score?

This *Science News* article, pointed out by Jennine Carmichael of Baltimore, reports two statisticians have studied the practice of "icing" kickers by calling timeouts before pressure field-goal attempts. The researchers found that "icing the kicker reduces the probability of a successful kick from 0.759 to 0.659."

## It's Enough to Make You Need a Glass of Sparkling-Wine-Style Beverage

The European Union, United States government and World Trade Organization continue to bicker over whether European nations can claim exclusive use of the word Champagne. European Union member nations say they should have exclusive use of many food product names, such as Parma ham or Roquefort cheese, on the theory that the terms include "geographical indicators," meaning they tell buyers both what the product is and where it was made. Here, the European Union explains that it seeks to ban the American practice of adding "style" or "type" to names of consumables, such as the "cheese-type food" that may be on your delivery pizza. In its statement, the European Union magnanimously offers to allow Mexico exclusive use of the term Tequila.

Okay, suppose we cut a deal with the Euros and let them have their little Cognac in return for "geographical indicators" protecting United States originals. What would America get out of this deal? Cheesesteak would become a protected term that could only be used in Philadelphia; only people in Los Angeles could make a Tommy's (a hamburger with chili); Deep Dish would be a protected term used only in Chicago; only people in New England could mix a Frappe. TMQ sees this as a slippery slope, obviously.

## Note to Accountant, This Item Justifies the Tax Deduction

Yours truly attended the Cowboys at Ravens game, and can report that Baltimore fans invariably stood and loudly cheered whenever it was third down for the other team, but were seated and silent when it was third down for the Ravens. That is, they were pumped about the team's defense and trying to avert their eyes from its offense.

## Officiating Mood Swing

Earlier in the season yours truly complained that officials seemed to be over-enforcing the new rule on defensive contact, calling too much pass interference. Now in my opinion the pendulum has swung the other way. In recent weeks I've noticed several obvious pass interference penalties that have not been flagged. Last night, Kansas City trailing 17-10 with 54 seconds remaining in the first half, the Chiefs had third-and-goal on the Flying Elvii 9. Tiny Gonzalez was open in the end zone, Trent Green delivered a perfect pass; not one but two New England defenders grabbed Gonzalez while the ball was in the air; the Patriots intercepted, ending the half, and the Chiefs went on to lose by a touchdown. There was nothing arguable about the pass interference, yet zebras just looked on. Officials sometimes say they don't want to be the ones to decide games, and officials can be prone to favor a defending champion, if only subconsciously -- assuming that if a team is a defending champion, that must be because it plays better than other teams. But failing to call pass interference on a decisive play near the goal line is "deciding the game" in every sense, just deciding it in favor of the team that committed the penalty. Players will

tell you that if you lose on your own, you accept defeat. If you match the defending champs on the field and lose because the officials let the champs commit a decisive penalty at the goal line, it hurts in a way that's hard to describe.

### **Best Use of TMQ**

A *Chicago Tribune* article, pointed out by Ryan Weinstein, at a law student at Stanford, says that after Bears defensive end Michael Haynes scored a touchdown, he declared, "The football gods were on my side."

### **Schadenfreude Via Satellite**

Satellite radio increasingly looks like a hit. TMQ recommends Sirius Satellite Radio, which offers exclusive live radio coverage of all NFL games, but its competitor XM Radio also has many fine features. Sirius and XM are both working on new gizmos that function through in-dash navigation systems and display up-to-the-minute traffic info about any problems between you and your destination. Already, both broadcast continuous general traffic reports for major cities. A neighbor of TMQ's keeps his satellite radio set to the New York City traffic channel -- though the neighbor lives in Montgomery County, Md. He finds consolation in knowing that however bad the traffic may be where he is driving, at least he's not stuck in a two-hour backup for the Lincoln Tunnel.

### **Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!**

Dallas was so sure Baltimore would big-blitz on obvious passing downs that at one point on a third-and-8, the Cowboys brought an extra offensive lineman onto the field, lined him up as a tight end and had him block. But no blitz came: both teams shunned the blitz for the entire first half. The result was a low-scoring game, since nothing lights up the scoreboard like blitzing. But with 4:38 remaining in the third quarter, Dallas lost its ability to resist. Baltimore leading 7-0 and facing third-and-10 on the Cowboys 31, it's a blitz! Seven gentlemen cross the line. Easy touchdown pass to Kevin Johnson, and what to that point had been a close anybody's-game turns into a Baltimore rout.

### **In Praise of Running Up the Score**

TMQ normally crusades against running up the score, but this Sunday saw a rare instance in which it was justified. Playing at Chicago, Indianapolis opened the second half ahead 27-3. On three drives in the third quarter the Colts went no-huddle, frantically passing in hopes of running up the score; the result was a 41-3 margin when the third quarter ended. Why was this justified? As TMQ noted last week, the Lucky Charms were saddled by schedule-makers with the league's toughest assignment in 2003: a Sunday road game, followed by a Thursday road game on Thanksgiving. By running up the score to a 41-3 at the end of the third, Tony Dungy was able to take out his starters for the final period, giving them some hope of being able to perform on Thursday. Peyton Manning and most other Indianapolis starters left the game at the beginning of the fourth quarter, and the Colts did not attempt a pass in that period.

### **Crazy Pass Watch**

Aaron Brooks of New Orleans, who two weeks ago threw a crazy lateral under tackle toward an offensive lineman -- resulting in a fumble and an opponent's touchdown in a Saints loss -- this week outdid himself. New Orleans trailing Denver by 20-3 and facing third-and-7 on its own 17, Brooks, under tackle, flipped an underhanded pass toward no one except Bronco Al Wilson, who returned the interception for a touchdown. TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

### **Best Play by a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Be in San Diego**

While Eli Manning got pounded in his first start and high-priced holdout Philip Rivers was nailed to the Bolts' pine, Drew Brees executed a perfect quarterback draw for a 9-yard touchdown in San Diego's win over Oakland. I don't wish to alarm you, but the Bolts are 7-3 and Brees remains the league's third-rated quarterback.

**We're All Professionals Here**

The Rams and Bills combined for 26 penalties.

**We're All Professionals Here No. 2**

Committing three consecutive offensive penalties, the Washington Redskins ended up with fourth and goal on the Philadelphia 30.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk of the Frozen North**

In the CFL on Sunday, the 92nd Grey Cup game was won by the Toronto Argonauts, possessors of the most literary team name in sports. Earl Gordon of Vancouver, British Columbia, notes that trailing 27-19 with two minutes remaining and facing third-and-8 -- only three downs in the CFL -- the BC Lions punted! Needless to say, they never touched the ball again. A Canadian reader lauds the Grey Cup in haiku, but also adds that while the game was on he paid most attention to Packers-Texans:

Canada's Grey Cup:  
B.C. beat up by Argos,  
Jason would be proud.

Grey Cup on T.V.,  
Canadians watch Green Bay!  
NFL still tops.  
-- Chris Polehoykie, Sudbury, Ontario

**Cheer-Babes of the Frozen North**

In recognition of the 92nd Grey Cup, here are cheerleaders from each side, nominated by Joe Wagner of Oil City, Pa., who is an Argonauts fan. Jorie of the Argos cheerleaders is a student at York University studying psychology, which means your lines would not work on her. Alycia of the B.C. Lions is a dance teacher. And you'd think it would be too cold in Canada for skimpy two-piece outfits, but you'd think wrong. Here is Adriana of the Argos, a dance instructor who hopes to go into public relations, on the sidelines of a CFL game.

**By the Hammer of Grabthar, He Was Avenged!**

Last spring the Rams cashiered special-teams coach Bobby April. On Sunday, April's new team faced St. Louis. The Bills scored a punt-return touchdown, recovered a Rams fumble on kickoff and had 241 kick return yards.

**The Spacely Sprockets Company Rejected Fallows' Idea as Too Far-Fetched**

Remember in late 1980, when Japanese interests were buying up New York skyscrapers and the Japanese economy was said to be an unstoppable juggernaut? At that very time TMQ's friend and *Atlantic Monthly* colleague Jim Fallows wrote a much-overlooked book, *More Like Us*, asserting the Japanese economy was about to tank. Japan's economy had become ossified, Fallows argued in his book, published in 1990 at the height of Japan-worship; Japan would look for its salvation toward the freewheeling, wide-open United States. Instead of Americans wishing they were more like Japanese, Fallows predicted, Japan would wish it was "more like us." Practically everything Fallows predicted came to pass during Japan's very long recession. It would be nice if the same talking heads on media shows who in the 1980s told us Japan was unstoppable would mention *More Like Us* as a visionary book.

I bring this up because two years ago Fallows published another book, *Free Flight*, which predicts that small, super-efficient jets are about to cause a new kind of transportation -- jet air taxis. Rather than going to monstrous airports and being wedged into middle seats of overcrowded planes of Cattle Call Airlines, then routed through hubs far out of their way, travelers would go to small "general aviation" airports and hire an air taxi. The small jet would take them directly to their destination -- say,

Poughkeepsie directly to Cincinnati, rather than drive from Poughkeepsie to Albany, get on Cattle Call Airlines and change planes in Pittsburgh. Advanced technology would make the small jets affordable, Fallows wrote.

Crazy? Comes now the word that Donald Burr, founder of the old People Express airlines, and Robert Crandall, former CEO of American Airlines, hope to start an air taxi company using a new super-efficient small jet called the Adam A700. The company plans to fly four people from wherever they are to exactly where they want to go, at a much lower cost than today's corporate jet charters, though still about the cost of first class on a commercial airline. And will the price fall further? Many consumer categories start off as luxuries for the rich, and eventually become standbys for everyone. Cars were once luxuries for the rich; portable phones were once only for the rich; perhaps it will turn out that private air travel, now only for the rich, becomes affordable for millions.

Now let me warn you that Fallows, who's consistently right about events before they happen, thinks the big innovation that will allow jet taxis to progress to general affordability is that they will become *automated* -- flown by computer, saving the cost of pilots. The whole flight deck, he thinks, will be replaced by extra passenger seats. You'll get a great view up front, looking out the cockpit window as a hidden machine flies you toward a thundercloud. Relax and enjoy your peanuts.

Already many airliners are capable of executing entire flight cycles, from takeoff to landing, without pilots touching the controls. Fallows, who has a pilot's license, thinks eventually it will be perfectly acceptable, and safe, to step into a personal jet with no pilot and roar off through the skies. I wish I could laugh and say this guy's been wrong before.

### **Rats to Be Renamed "Home Delivery Squab"**

Locusts have descended this year on Egypt and Australia. Michael Bourn points out that Australian government officials have declared locust "sky prawn" and are recommending that Australians sweep them up and grill them.

### **Game Being Played in TMQ's Nightmares**

The Browns in their international-orange jerseys displayed Sunday versus Seattle in its monochrome sheldrake-blue worn Sunday. The former made Browns players look like walking safety-warning pylons; the latter made Blue Men Group players look like they'd just fallen in to a pot of finger paints.

### **Cheer-Babe Signs and Portents**

It was 45 degrees at kickoff at Arrowhead, you could see the breath of players, yet the Chiefs' cheerleaders still came out in miniskirts with bare midriffs. For the second half they donned light jackets, but the miniskirts stayed. Owing to this outstanding example of cheerleader professionalism, the night seemed sure to belong to Kansas City -- but New England prevailed. TMQ is deeply troubled by this omen. The football gods remain restive. Watch for omens such as water running uphill. Something mighty is in store.

## **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

### **Obscure College Score of the Week**

Wisconsin-La Crosse 37, Saint Norbert 23 (Division III playoffs). Located in La Crosse, Wis., the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse has "Towers of Excellence" on its campus. You can watch videos about the Towers here.

### **Bonus Obscure College Score**

Dickinson State 30, Montana Tech 13 (NAIA playoffs). Located in Dickinson, N.D., at Dickinson State University, all dorm rooms get cable television plus "our own Residence Life Channel.". TMQ tried unsuccessfully to watch the Residence Life Channel, which I speculate consists mainly of disclaimers.

### College Sportsmanship Watch

Oklahoma coach Bob Stoops has taken heat in this space, and elsewhere, for running up the score; in 2003, the Sooners ran up scores and a week ago, Oklahoma kept its starters on the field almost the entire game in a 30-3 pasting of Nebraska, frantically trying to run up the score. At least this year it can be said in Oklahoma's defense that the team is trying to stay ahead of Auburn in qualifying for the BCS title bowl, and victory margins help its standing in the media polls. (They shouldn't, but they do.) This week, however, Stoops did the sportsmanlike thing. He lifted his starters for the fourth quarter of a 35-0 win over Baylor, saying "I choose sportsmanship over BCS points." Bravo! May the football gods scatter scented rose petals in the path of Oklahoma.

Ah, but what of Pittsburg of Kansas? Several TMQ columns this year have noted the Gorilla frantically trying to run up the score when ahead in the fourth quarter by huge margins; at one point this season, Pittsburg of Kansas ran a fake punt when leading 63-7 in the fourth. Saturday, the Gorillas beat the Colorado School of Mines in the Division II playoffs, winning 70-35. Pittsburg of Kansas threw four times in the fourth quarter, including a pass when ahead 70-28 with less than two minutes remaining. There is a term for this, and the term is bad sportsmanship.

### Cutting Edge Final Score Predictions

Michael Peterson of Mobile, Ala., notes that *USA Today* is 0-159 so far this season in its attempt to predict NFL exact final scores.

### Reader Animadversion

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

In the continuing razzle over "alternate" uniforms, Gareth Aubrey of Manchester, United Kingdom, points out that the new EA Madden NFL 2005 offers teams, including Atlanta, in official home, official away, retro home and retro away. Many readers, including Jody Pillard of Knauertown, Pa., disagreed with last week's reader who maintained that Philadelphia calls its new black jerseys Midnight Green; Midnight Green is now the team's standard green, replacing the old Kelly green, and the black jerseys are called black. Mike Boucher of Lunenburg, Mass., adds this Pennsylvania green-black tidbit: "The once-great Pennsylvania Railroad painted their locomotives Brunswick Green. If you saw one, you couldn't tell it was anything but black. According to one history book, "Pennsylvania Railroad locomotives were uniformly painted in a color called Brunswick Green but known to the railroad as Dark Green Locomotive Enamel. This was an effectively black paint that contained a high proportion of copper oxides. These gave it a very slight greenish tinge that became more pronounced over time and with wear as the paint further oxidized. Dark Green Locomotive Enamel is often described as being indistinguishable from black when fresh unless next to a pure black paint." Maybe the Eagles' alternate jerseys are coated with copper oxide, and will gradually turn green as players wear them.

Kevin Brannigan of Rocky River, Ohio, notes that many garish and eye-painful new uniforms -- the Bengals' Halloween-costume apparel, the Bills' road uniforms, which look like toddlers' pajamas -- may have an evolution basis. He writes, "Darwin observed the presence in nature of a phenomenon known as disruptive coloration. Large 'eye spots' on butterfly and moth wings can fool potential predators into thinking that the prey is larger than it is, or may cause the predator to misdirect an attack away from the more sensitive parts of the body. Bengals uniforms may serve to draw attention away from the flight of the football. The Arizona Cardinals' all-red uniforms can potentially induce nausea in opponents, if not also spectators. Poisonous caterpillars and nudibranchs often have garish coloration to warn of danger to those tempted to eat them. This scheme has led via natural selection to the adaptation of mimicry -- as shown by the corn snake attempting to look like the dangerous coral snake, or the Cleveland Browns trying to look like football players."

Last week's column quoted the Oscar Wilde play *Salome*. Tammy Hepps of New York City notes *Salome* was performed on Broadway in 2003. She writes, "You and your fellow traditional males would have enjoyed it. During many performances, Marisa Tomei was so transported by the Dance of the Seven Veils

that, in an entirely unscripted gesture, she ripped off her top."

Last week's column mentioned Friends University of Kansas and mourned that its sports teams are not called the Fighting Friends. Drew Powers of Cincinnati points out that the school's teams were once known as the Fighting Quakers, which pretty much is the ultimate team name. John Kearbey, a Friends alum, reports that at the center of the school's basketball court is a giant painted FU, and Friends students are known to chant "FU! FU!" during football games. Kendal Boyd, a professor at Loma Linda University in California, notes that when Friends plays Bethel of Kansas, the matchup pits a Quaker school against a Mennonite school. He writes, "Isn't a little odd that two institutions associated with pacifist denominations would play the violent game of football? Once I spent a year in Newton, Kan., home of Bethel College, and attended the Friends-Bethel game. I was expecting to see conflict mediation between linebackers and running backs, but instead saw some hard hitting, topped off by an unnecessary roughness penalty."

Last week, a reader noted New England role-switching by players and asked, "What's next, will Tom Brady kick a field goal?" Ginger LaSalle of Westerly, R.I., reports that Brady punted once in 2003, for 36 yards. Bob Everhart of Bedford, N.H., a Patriots' season-ticket holder, says he received his invoice for playoff tickets -- payable by Dec. 2, 2004 -- on a day when New England was 7-1. Everhart wonders whether a 7-1 team that sends playoff invoices is tempting the football gods.

Paul Carr of Topeka, Kan., notes that on Saturday in the Division III women's soccer final four, Wheaton of Illinois plays Wheaton of Massachusetts.

Noting the Bears' overtime victory via safety, last week's column supposed that the ultimate football game would end 2-0 in overtime. Fahd Hakeem of Birmingham, England, reports that he played in a 2-0 overtime game! In this 2003 match in the British Collegiate American Football League, the Leeds Celtics beat the Lancaster Bombers 2-0 in overtime as a snap sailed over the Lancaster quarterback's head and was recovered by the offense in the end zone for a safety. Hakeem writes, "There followed a moment of confusion as half the team ran onto the pitch to celebrate the victory while the other half stood around waiting for the second possession NCAA-style, unaware we'd won the game."

Bryan Fernandez of San Antonio, Texas, was among several readers to point out that the Vikings cheerleader who models the uniforms for fans to vote on is Laura, not Acacia as last week's column said. According to her team bio, Laura is a communications major at the University of Minnesota. Note this correction creates a perfectly legitimate excuse to re-show her modeling the minimalist outfits. Laura must be Amazonian in stature: she towers over the Vikings cheerleader group portrait.

### **This Week's Challenge**

This week's Challenge is to wait until the Challenge resumes. I'm putting the item on a brief hiatus as the approach of the holidays overloads my schedule, cutting into the time I would use to scan Challenge entries along with my panel of judges.

### **Next Week**

George W. Bush revives the Monroe Doctrine, calls it "throwback foreign policy."



## Secrets of the Abandoned Quarry Offense, and sports medicine in ancient Rome!

*By Gregg Easterbrook*  
*Special to NFL.com*

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Nov. 30, 2004) -- Not only is Peyton Manning on a pace to break Dan Marino's record for touchdown passes in a season, the Colts are on a pace to break the NFL record for total touchdowns in a season. With 51 touchdowns, Indianapolis has 12 more touchdowns than the next-best team in the NFL, and *more than twice as many* touchdowns as the majority of the league's teams. And they really, really love touchdowns in Indianapolis, because while the Colts' offense is scoring touchdowns as fast as scorekeepers can record them, the Colts' defense, ranked second-last, is also allowing lots of touchdowns. All told there have been 77 touchdowns in the Colts' 11 games. Spectators certainly are getting their money's worth -- an average of seven touchdowns every time Indianapolis takes the field! Frank Easterbrook, an Official Brother of TMQ and a federal appeals court judge, proposes this explanation: "Indianapolis must be taking advantage of the new NFL rule allowing teams to allocate players between offense and defense, as long as the total equals 22. The Colts are evidently playing offense with 13 men and defense with nine men."

Later in the column, yours truly christens the Colts' attack the Abandoned Quarry Offense and offers an idea for stopping Indianapolis. NFL defensive coordinators should pay me vast sums in gold bouillon for this idea, but you get it at no charge. And my idea comes with the ironclad guarantee that applies to everything in this column: All Predictions Wrong or Your Money Back. Reading NFL.com is free, get it? So if my prediction about stopping the Colts by some fluke turns out to be correct, you would receive -- oh, never mind.

In other NFL news, in the swirling snow at Denver on Sunday night, the Broncos wore high-voltage electric orange jerseys while the Raiders wore white jerseys with silver pants, no bright colors anywhere. This meant Denver players were easy to spot while Oakland players blended in with the snow as if wearing camo. No wonder the Raiders pulled out the victory!

And in other NFL news, this column is 7,665 words. Tuesday Morning Quarterback averages 7,500 words -- not only the longest column in sports but the longest column anywhere, period. And the longest column anywhere appears on NFL.com, not in the *New York Review of Books!* Even, however, in a 7,665-word column, space constraints prohibit me from discussing all the scoring plays in the Cincinnati-Cleveland game.

### Stats of the Week

There were 13 touchdowns and five field goals in the Cincinnati-Cleveland game.

### Stats of the Week No. 2

Cleveland scored 48 points and gained 462 yards, and lost.

### Stats of the Week No. 3

Peyton Manning has thrown 10 touchdown passes in his last six quarters, a rate that equates to 106

touchdown passes in a season.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Carolina has won three straight, Buffalo has won five of its last seven -- and both still have losing records.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

Joe Gibbs coached the second-highest-scoring NFL team ever, the 1983 Washington Redskins, who averaged 34 points per game. This season under Gibbs the Redskins are last in the league in scoring at 12.5 points per game, and their highest-scoring performance is 18 points.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

On Sunday, Dante Hall had more return yardage than the offensive yardage of five entire teams (Miami, Pittsburgh, San Francisco, Seattle and Washington).

#### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

Priest Holmes has not played in three weeks, and still has more touchdowns than the entire Washington Redskins.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 8**

After 200 consecutive starts, Brett Favre's game log requires 14 years of receiving statistics to list his one career catch.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

The Rams gained 452 yards, and lost.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 10**

Peyton Manning has thrown more touchdown passes than the total number of touchdowns scored by all means by any other team in the NFL.

#### **Pilot-Cheerleader of the Week**

Literary Cheerleader of the Week temporarily suspended while we recognize cheerleader with other serious credentials. Peter Smith of San Diego nominates Jany of San Francisco, who is a U. S. Navy officer and a pilot of the P-3 Orion anti-submarine aircraft. Her team bio says Jany is Brazilian-Portuguese by birth and has completed Navy survival training. The requirements of Navy survival training are here; note the warning, "Do not bring any items you do not wish to lose." Jany is currently working on her master's of science in operations research at the Naval Postgraduate School in Monterey. Smith, an alum of that program, notes that the course load is demanding; check this class in Stochastic Models and Semi-Markov processes. Now and then TMQ has beheld cheer-babes attractive enough to drop a bomb on you. Jany actually could drop a bomb on you!

#### **Sweet Play of the Week**

Leading by a mere 34-27 in the third quarter, Cincinnati had first-and-10 on its own 36. The Candy Corns ran the flea flicker, the running back starting up the middle and then pitching back to the quarterback. Cleveland defender Robert Griffith came through unblocked and seemed about to flatten Carson Palmer, who rolled right and connected with T. J. Houshmandzadeh for a 20-yard gain; Cincinnati scored a touchdown on the series and was well on the way to a lead that 48 points could not overcome. On a flea flicker, the quarterback is supposed to end up standing by himself in the middle of the

backfield; Palmer's ability to turn the play into a roll-out was sweet. A team scores 58 points, it has to come first in Sweet Plays, right? Note: after the clock showed naught but zeros, trauma counselors were called in to reassure Cincinnati fans that it was, in fact, a victory. Many in Cincinnati feared the Bengals could score 58 points and still lose.

### **Sweet Play of the Week No. 2**

Leading 7-3 in the second quarter, Green Bay faced third-and-11 on the St. Louis 29. Donald Driver ran "motion in," Jerry Rice's favorite play -- he went in motion right, then did a quick square-in. Completion and the first down. Now it's second-and-6 on the St. Louis 7. This time tight end Bubba Franks runs the same action, coming in motion right and then doing a quick square-in, touchdown. The Rams seemed surprised when the Packers sent a tight end on an action usually reserved for a speed guy; that was sweet.

### **Sweet Play of the Week No. 3**

Scoring to make it New England 15, Baltimore 3 on the first play of the fourth quarter, the Flying Elvii went for two. They lined up with a spread formation with a passing play called. The Nevermores responded with a spread-out dime defense, no linebacker in the middle. Tom Brady noticed and audibled to a run up the middle, where there were five offensive linemen blocking four defenders. Deuce conversion, New England has a lead the low-voltage Baltimore offense lacked the ability to overcome, and TMZ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

### **Sweet Play of the Week No. 4**

Leading 24-3, Buffalo faced fourth-and-1 on the Seattle 30 early in the fourth quarter. The Bills came out heavy with extra tight ends. Drew Bledsoe faked a quarterback sneak, then stood up and fired an overhand lateral wide to Willis McGahee, who went the distance for the icing touchdown. Note: the Bills have outscored their last two opponents by a combined 75-26.

### **Sour Play of the Week**

Game tied at 14 with 27 seconds remaining in regulation, the Carolina Panthers had first-and-10 on the City of Tampa 40, holding one time-out. Where oh where might the pass go -- *maybe up the field!* Yet Keary Colbert was single-covered on the deep fade, no safety anywhere in sight; 40-yard touchdown pass, and the Bucs' attempt to revive their season appears over.

### **Sour Fourth Quarter of the Week**

Denver came into the weekend with the league's seventh-ranked defense, yet could not hold an 11-point fourth quarter lead at home -- Denver's home being the place where opponents usually gasp for breath in the fourth quarter. Denver leading 24-19 with 3:01 remaining and Oakland backed up on its 27, Ronald Curry caught a 63-yard pass, running a post pattern from the left slot. What kind of incredible move did Curry make to get open? He just ran down the field and no Bronco made any attempt to cover him. Four plays later on fourth-and-goal from the Denver 5, Jerry Porter ran a square-in, and much-hyped corner Champ Bailey simply watched him go by, making no attempt to cover the gentleman. Bailey stood watching, covering no one, as Porter caught the winning pass.

### **Sweet 'N' Sour Play of the Week**

Leading 3-0 in the swirling snow, Denver faced second-and-7 on its 15 with 56 seconds remaining in the first half. The Broncos had run on first down, and Oakland immediately called time out. The Raiders had two more timeouts, and were assuming Denver would run twice more, they'd call time out twice more and get the ball back for a heave-ho to end the half. Instead Denver play-faked left and Jake Plummer rolled right -- fifth time the Broncos had used that action in the first half. Rod Smith broke deep, Plummer threw before Smith turned around and hit him in stride for an 85-yard touchdown. That was sweet.

Then a long kickoff return put the ball into Denver territory. The Raiders faced third-and-1 on the Broncos' 42, with one timeout. Oakland had run on the previous down. Denver assumed Oakland would run again, and brought its defense up. Instead Jerry Porter went deep for a 42-yard touchdown reception, safety John Lynch furiously racing backwards to try to get himself into the play. This means that *less than a minute* after Denver fooled Oakland by throwing deep in the snow when a run was expected, Oakland fooled Denver by throwing deep in the snow when a run was expected. That was sour.

### Sweet 'N' Sour Play of the Week No. 2

Game tied at 13, Minnesota had second-and-goal on the Jacksonville 2. Randy Moss lined up right and ran the stutter-slant -- quick slant, half stop, resume slant. The Jaguars double-covered Moss and the pass clanged incomplete. Now it's third-and-goal on the 2. Once again Moss lined up right and ran the stutter-slant, once again Jax double-covered him, now it's a touchdown. Sometimes calling a play that just failed is a smart call, since defenses assume a team won't run the same play on consecutive downs. For Minnesota, calling the same play twice in a row was sweet. For Jacksonville, being unable to stop a pass to a double-covered receiver -- and a pass from the 2, meaning Jax had very little area to defend -- was sour.

### Alexander the Great, the Authors Reveal, Also Coached Tee-Ball

I recently finished *Out of the Flames* by Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone, a fascinating account of the life of Michael Servetus, one of the greatest minds humanity has produced. Servetus, a Spanish physician and theologian, discovered pulmonary circulation, wrote books advocating religious tolerance and in 1553 was burned at the stake by John Calvin for the crime of advocating religious tolerance.

Why do I mention Michael Servetus? First, this is Tuesday Morning Quarterback -- I don't have to have a reason. Second, *Out of the Flames* details the notion that Servetus' discovery of the pulmonary system was the greatest medical breakthrough since the Roman physician Galen, born in the year 130. The Goldstones spend a chapter on the medical significance of Galen, and they offer this incredible tidbit about career paths during the second century of the common era, in the place that is now called Turkey: "After Galen finished medical school in Alexandria, he returned home and got his first break when he was assigned as head of sports medicine at the local gladiator school."

Head of sports medicine at a gladiator school! What a resume line. These days many orthopedists, podiatrists and other physicians who deal with joints and muscles are calling what they practice "sports medicine." This sounds classy and appealing, especially to Boomer patients: you're not aging, you just have sports injuries. Now we learn there were sports-medicine jobs almost 2,000 years ago. Imagine this scene in Galen's office:

GALEN: What seems to be the problem?

GLADIATOR: When I try to plant on my left foot, spin fast and cut someone's head off, it really hurts.

GALEN: Could be a high ankle sprain.

GLADIATOR: Can you put me on injured reserve?

GALEN: Sorry, we're playing the Lions tomorrow. Here, let me wrap that ankle in opium, turpentine, wine, barely and plant extracts. [Note: substances actually used by Galen to treat wounds.]

RECEPTIONIST: Doctor, the HMO rejected his number.

GLADIATOR: Every year the Emperor changes insurance carriers, and there's always some foul-up!

GALEN: That's okay. You can pay me in salt.

### **Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk**

Not once, not twice, but three times this season -- in columns here, here and here -- Tuesday Morning Quarterback has documented the Seattle Seahawks' puzzling tendency to launch field-goal attempts rather than go for it when behind, or boom mincing fraidy-cat punts in opposition territory. "The Seahawks have become awfully fraidy-cat on kicking decisions, and this has corresponded with their losing streak," TMQ noted last week.

What happened Sunday? Trailing Buffalo 7-0, the Blue Men Group faced fourth-and-1 on the Bills 49. Better to try and fail -- which sends players the message that their coach is challenging them to win -- than wimp out with a fraidy-cat kick. Boom goes the punt, and it takes Buffalo just two plays to pass the point where the ball would have been if the Seahawks had gone for it and failed.

Now trailing Buffalo 10-0 in the second quarter, the Blue Men Group faced fourth-and-goal on the Bills 1. Seattle was playing at home before a raucous crowd; entered the game at 6-4, badly needing a win to improve playoff odds; and has the league's number-one rusher in its colors. Why not show a little guts and go for it? The worst that can happen is that a failed try pins the Bills against their own goal line; better to try and fail, which sends players the message that their coach is challenging them to win the game, than wimp out with a kick. Boom goes the field goal, making it 10-3 and announcing Seattle was playing not to lose rather than playing to win. Seattle would not knock on the Buffalo goal line again until it was 38-3 in garbage time.

Consider what happened when the opposite strategy was employed. Leading 10-3, Buffalo had third-and-goal on the Seahawks 3 with 10 seconds remaining in the first half, the Bills out of timeouts. Taking the field goal in this situation seemed like the smart thing, and it's what yours truly would have done. The Bills ran a play -- engaging the risk of a tackle on the field that ends the half, since they can't stop the clock. Touchdown, a 17-3 halftime lead and Buffalo never looked back.

### **Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk No. 2**

Trailing Miami 7-3 with 2:21 remaining in the first half, San Francisco faced fourth-and-2 on the Ventral Fins 47. Boom goes the punt. *You're 1-9, what do you have to lose?* Still trailing 7-3, San Francisco faced fourth-and-1 on its 34 in the third quarter. Boom goes the punt. *You're 1-9, what do you have to lose?* And now you are 1-10.

Consider what happened when the opposite strategy was employed. Leading 3-0, the Steelers faced fourth-and-1 on the 30 of the Potomac Nanticokes. Boom a punt? Heavy formation, run for the first down; Pittsburgh scored a touchdown on the drive and never looked back. Teams that want to win take reasonable risks.

### **Best Play by a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Be in San Diego**

While Eli Manning was wishing he had not demanded to be traded to the Giants and high-priced holdout Philip Rivers was nailed to the Bolts' pine, Drew Brees threw two perfect fourth-quarter touchdown passes to Antonio Gates in San Diego's comeback win. Brees also got a block on Eric Parker's 38-yard run. I don't wish to alarm you, but the Bolts are 8-3 and Brees remains the league's third-rated quarterback. Last week's column opined, "Note to NFL defensive coordinators, you seem very slow to adjust to the fact that when the Chargers get to the red zone, Gates is going to get the ball." The Chargers reached the red zone three times in the fourth quarter Sunday, and two of those times Gates got the ball.

### **The Football Gods Chortled**

Jersey/A trailing Philadelphia 7-3 in the second quarter, Jeremy Shockey made a 26-yard catch to the Eagles 20. He leapt up and performed a version of the bird dance Terrell Owens has been doing lately. Shockey had not scored a touchdown, nor was his team in the lead -- it was just a routine catch with his

team trailing, yet Shockey felt the time had come to indulge his ego by dancing. The football gods grind slow, but they grind exceeding small! On their next possession the Giants had first-and-goal on the Eagles 3, threw to Shockey and it was intercepted.

### **Best Tactics Ere the Clock Struck Midnight**

Snowing like the dickens in Denver means you can't throw, right? Essential fact about snow games: while snow falls it is impossible to mount a pass rush, because rushers can't get footing and are easily muscled aside by the 350-pounds-plus gentlemen who form modern NFL offensive lines. In the snow the Raiders threw 45 times for 339 yards. During the second half, Kerry Collins consistently had six or seven seconds to scan the field, because pass rushers had no traction. Denver threw only 23 times for 245 yards, and it was the difference in the game.

Style points note: after Ronald Curry scored a touchdown for Oakland with 6:18 to play, he dropped to the ground and made a snow angel. When the Patriots beat the Raiders in the Snow Bowl playoff game three years ago, they celebrated by dropping to the ground and making snow angels.

### **Why Are You Punting???????**

Trailing 34-9 in the middle of the third quarter, Detroit faced fourth-and-7 on its own 27. Boom goes the punt. Punting when behind 34-9 in the third quarter is yet another example of an NFL coach playing to hold down the margin of defeat rather than playing to win. When Steve Mariucci's performance review comes at the end of the season, he doesn't want one of the strikes against him to be, "We lost to Indianapolis by 50 points." So Mariucci punted for the sake of restraining the margin of defeat, rather than gamble for the chance of winning, however remote that chance had become. You're 4-6, you're down by four touchdowns to the highest-scoring team in the league, *what have you got to lose?* And now you're 4-7.

### **Why Are You Punting?????? No. 2**

Trailing 31-17 with 6:22 remaining, Les Mouflons faced fourth-and-17 on the Green Bay 37, and had only one time-out left. Boom goes the punt. *Why are you punting?* Sure fourth-and-17 is a long shot, but you're down by two touchdowns with the game almost over, and are in opposition territory. With only one more chance to stop the clock, your odds are not good of getting the ball back with time to score twice. Indeed, St. Louis did not see the ball again until only 1:52 remained. Mike Martz seemed to order this punt with the goal of holding down the margin of defeat, rather than playing to win. The football gods punished him with two quick Green Bay touchdowns at the end, making the margin of defeat an embarrassing 45-17.

### **The Curse of that Tasteful Name, Gregg**

The tastefully named Gregg Williams is doing an excellent job coaching the Washington Redskins defense. The 'Skins defense ranks second in the NFL, though star linebacker LaVar Arrington has missed most of the year, and though team's offense ranks 30th in the league, which means the defense must constantly trot back onto the field. Yes, the tastefully named Gregg Williams sure can coach defense. But wait, last season Williams was the boss at Buffalo -- which finished second on defense and 30th on offense. Does anyone sense a pattern here? Everywhere Williams goes, defense is great and offense is cover-your-eyes awful. Maybe Williams takes advantage of the new NFL rule -- you know, the one allowing teams to allocate their players between offense and defense, as long as the total equals 22 -- to play 13 men on defense and nine on offense.

### **Sometimes the Smart Move Is To Do Nothing**

Jersey/A and Arizona were a combined 9-9 when their coaches decided to change quarterbacks; the teams have gone 0-4 since. The Giants at 5-4 were still in the playoff hunt, considering that 9 wins should buy an NFC postseason invitation this year. (Over in the AFC, it's possible there will, like last year, be a team with 10 wins that does not advance.) The Cactus Wrens at 4-5 were starting to look like a serious team for the rest time in years. Both clubs have taken huge steps backward since quarterback changes.

Now the word is Arizona will switch again to rookie John Navarre, who's never taken a snap in the NFL. Last August in my NFC preview, I wrote, "Quite a bit is riding on Dennis Green's declaration that Josh McCown is the man at quarterback, considering the new coach passed on Philip Rivers and Ben Roethlisberger in the draft." In the month before being benched, McCown won three of four starts, which is a New England-like streak by Cardinals' standards. Now McCown is benched, his confidence shattered and his learning opportunity ended, in order to accomplish -- what, exactly?

### **Crazy Pass Watch**

Trailing 24-21 at the two-minute warning, the Flaming Thumbtacks had first-and-10 on the Houston 44, holding a timeout. This is a pretty manageable situation -- no need to do anything rash. Steve McNair threw a *crazy* pass into triple coverage, interception; the Moo Cows scored the icing touchdown two plays later.

### **Travel Agent Watch**

East Coast teams flying to the West Coast often fare poorly, as do West Coast teams flying to the East Coast. Miami's schedule called for the Ventral Fins to play at Seattle a week ago Sunday, then at San Francisco this Sunday. Rather than hike to the coast, hike back to Florida then travel to the coast again, the Dolphins simply stayed in California for Thanksgiving. The tactic worked as Miami defeated the Niners and avoided the stigma of the league's worst record.

### **The Reindeer Coach Probably Calls Passes on Third and Short, Too**

Tomorrow night CBS airs TMQ's all-time favorite Christmas show, the Claymation *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, first broadcast in 1964. It even has a sports angle! Rudolph tries out for the Reindeer Games, where yearlings compete to see who joins Santa's team. The coach buck, who wears a baseball cap and has a whistle, favors handsome-jock yearlings, is prejudiced against the red nose and declares, "We won't let Rudolph join in any Reindeer Games." Boo! Hiss! Boo!

Watch for the point near the end, after Yukon Cornelius appears to have plunged to his death with the abominable Bumble monster, when Rudolph is standing with his mother and his beloved Clarissa on the cliff and the narrator says, "They figured they better get the women back to Christmastown." They aren't women, they're reindeer! All the music in this special is by Johnny Marks, 1909-1985, who spent a lifetime writing Christmas songs -- not a bad way to spend a lifetime. From his *Holly Jolly Christmas*: "Ho ho, the mistletoe/hung where you can see/Somebody waits for you/kiss her once for me."

### **TMQ Proposes a Moratorium on Praising Brett Favre**

Brett Favre is a fabulous player and a lot of fun to watch. Green Bay is a favorite team of yours truly: not long ago I wrote in this space, "If TMQ were arriving on Earth aboard an alien starcruiser, after checking out the NFL, I'd pick the Packers as my team to love." But enough, already, with the media worship of Favre. First, he's not a "hero," nor is any professional athlete a hero for accepting millions of dollars to chase a ball. Heroism requires risk and sacrifice in a larger cause; heroism is, for example, volunteering to serve in Afghanistan. Second, while Favre performs very well, he's also benefiting himself in the process, through pay and by acquiring the prominence that brings his endorsement income. There's nothing wrong with earning high income or achieving celebrity, but the media suggestion that Favre is some kind of simple country boy motivated solely by love of sport actually sells him short: he's shown a sophisticated understanding of how to manipulate the modern media. Hagiography of Favre is now excessive, and may even backfire by making people sick of him. Favre is a charming guy who plays football really well. It is enough to say that, and save our hero-worship for those who act in service to others.

### **How to Stop the Colts**

Why is Indianapolis scoring so much? Obviously top-flight offensive personnel helps, and obviously Peyton Manning is a gifted player at the height of his powers. Great blocking helps -- the Colts have allowed a mere six sacks, though everyone knows Peyton Manning is going to pass. All five Indianapolis offensive line starters have been with the Colts their entire careers, a rarity in today's free-agent-wacky

NFL. Offensive linemen get better the longer they play together, as they learn each other's instincts about who to block when; each of the last three seasons, the Lucky Charms' line starters have played better than the season before. Yet even when Colts' blockers go out injured, the results are the same. Note that both Indianapolis starting guards missed the Thanksgiving game with injuries, and no Detroit defender ever got close enough to Manning to ask for his autograph.

The Indianapolis offense doesn't have a catchy name, but let's list what the Colts do that is distinctive. First, they run no-huddle more than anyone else, and it's a fast-pace no-huddle designed to snap the ball quickly, not just to call plays at the line. Second, Manning frequently performs what this column calls a chicken dance, flapping his wings up and down the line, moving people around and shouting either audibles or fake audibles. (Hint that I can't understand why defensive coordinators don't get -- when Manning points to the tailback and tells him to change positions, it is almost always a run.) Third, the Colts use the "stretch" handoff almost exclusively, meaning lots of rushing plays look, for the first instant, like roll-out passes, which seems to cause defenses to hesitate. Finally, Indianapolis play-fakes more than any team in the league. About two-thirds of its passing downs are play-fakes, a very high percentage. The Colts play-fake extensively even in the first quarter, when they have not yet established the run. Rolling these things together, TMQ will dub what Indianapolis does the Abandoned Quarry Offense. This site catalogs the many abandoned limestone quarries of Indiana, some of which may be converted to parks.

The Abandoned Quarry Offense obviously works, but the question remains why. Tuesday Morning Quarterback thinks the answer is that NFL defenses are playing the Colts wrong. Dial your brain back the to the 1991 season of the Buffalo Bills, last NFL club to use the snap-fast version of the no-huddle for an extended period. For most of 1991, the Bills scored unstopably, a 29-point-per-game average on the year. Worried about their charges getting caught out of position when at the quick-snap, defensive coordinators used vanilla tactics against the Bills, which was a mistake -- players racing back to their base positions and staying there, so they wouldn't be caught moving when the ball was snapped. Defenders did little or no shifting around before the snap. As a result, when Buffalo quarterback Jim Kelly scanned the defense as he made his no-huddle call, he could be sure that where the defenders were when they took their stance was where they would still be when the play started. If a talented quarterback is sure where defenders will be, he can cut up a defense pretty good.

Then, in the 1991 AFC title game, the Denver Broncos did not use a vanilla defense -- the Broncs had players jumping around like crazy before the snap. Kelly became confused and the Bills were held to three points on offense, winning only on an interception return. The Washington Redskins used the same jump-around-like-crazy technique to take a 17-0 halftime lead over Buffalo in the Super Bowl that followed, and again Kelly went from looking invincible to confused. What TMQ thinks defenses must do to stop Peyton Manning is start moving extensively before the snap. Right now the Colts have every defense in that back-on-the-heels, retreating mindset as if it's the last two minutes of the game. Defenses should wait until Manning does his chicken-dance calls, and then move around. It worked against the last high-scoring no-huddle team, it may work against the high-scoring Colts.

If it doesn't, the weather may stop Indianapolis. The Colts' pass routes and timing are based on playing in perfect conditions, which Indianapolis has indoors in its dome, and usually gets against its AFC South division foes. Each time Peyton Manning has taken his act outdoors in cold weather in January, he has faltered. This leads to the key difference between the 1991 Bills and the 2004 Colts. Buffalo that year was a no-huddle running team -- the Bills rushed on 60 percent of their snaps, constantly catching defenses in nickel or dime looks and then running against those looks. This year's Colts are a passing team, throwing on 55 percent of their snaps. That's fine indoors. Outdoors in January it may not be fine. (Yes, I know I said earlier that snow favors passing, but snowfall is a special case; routine January cold-and-wind conditions favor rushing.)

### **Imagine the Ratings for the Series Finale of *Series Finale***

Last spring saw the television series finales of *Friends*, *Frasier* and other standbys. TMQ thinks the new big idea in television should be -- a show that's called *Series Finale*. Here's the concept. Every week you see the final episode of a series. That's right: the show has no run, just a finale. Everything's accelerated now anyway. Viewers go straight to the knowing looks, weepy scenes and sentimental references of the final show, skipping the series itself and all the tedium of watching the same stories lines re-packaged year after year. (Rachel and Ross broke up and got back together so often the seventh Friend should

have been a live-in psychiatrist.) Each week's episode of the incredible show *Series Finale* will be a television event, complete with multi-million-dollar beer ads and drawn-out final camera shots on some special props. And think of the benefits to time-stressed modern audiences! No years of watching a show waiting for the emotional last scene, just go straight to the series finale on *Series Finale*. Hollywood moguls: contact Tuesday Morning Quarterback Enterprises so that we can hammer out a deal.

### **And Then There Was One**

Over the weekend the Rams waived punter Sean Landeta, making Doug Flutie the last former USFL player still performing in the NFL. But then, the USFL did fold *19 years ago*.

### **As You Age, Buying Time Looks Better and Better**

TMQ counted one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three, one-thousand four, one-thousand five, one-thousand six, one-thousand seven, one-thousand eight, one-thousand nine as Michael-Mike Vick danced around in the pocket, buying time before tossing the winning touchdown pass to Alge Crumpler -- that's Algernon to you -- with 1:47 to play. TMQ counted one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three, one-thousand four, one-thousand five, one-thousand six, one-thousand seven, one-thousand eight, one-thousand nine, one-thousand ten and Daunte Culpepper danced around in the pocket, buying time before throwing a 17-yard completion on third-and-12, sustaining the drive that led to the touchdown that put Minnesota ahead for good against Jax in the second half.

### **Disclaimer Watch**

Many readers including Christine Karnisky noted the new Jeep volcano commercial disclaimer. Chris Lane of Halifax, Nova Scotia, writes: "A faraway volcano explodes and moments later, a Jeep lands in front of the camera with rubble falling all around it. The Jeep puts on its wipers and drives away. While the Jeep is falling from the sky, thrown miles by a violent detonation, the disclaimer at the bottom of the screen reads DO NOT ATTEMPT."

### **The Fallacy of Early Stats**

Three weeks into the season, Seattle had the league's number-one ranked defense and had allowed just 13 points. Since then the Seahawks' defense has dropped to 21st-ranked and allowed 26 points per game. As TMQ annually points out, statistics don't really tell anything until at least a month has been played.

### **Uniform Praise!**

Yours truly constantly groans about garish new NFL uniforms and annoying "alternate" livery. But the Bears looked great in the 1946 high-voltage electric-red throwbacks they wore on Thanksgiving. Where did they hide the transformers on those jerseys volts? Chicago should switch to its 1946 apparel on a permanent basis.

### **This Week's Star Trek Complaint**

The *Enterprise* crew believes that terrorists who bombed the Earth embassy on the planet Vulcan are hiding in a huge desert where electromagnetic storms cause all technology to fail. So Captain Archer and T'Pol, the Vulcan mega-babe, set out on foot, without weapons or radios -- and apparently carrying only one canteen -- to search a desert described as hundreds of miles across. Since they have no weapons or radio, what do they expect to do if they find the terrorists? It turns out the people hiding in the desert are reformers, not terrorists, and are being framed by the evil Vulcan government. How do Archer and T'Pol discover this? Because almost immediately after entering an expanse hundreds of miles across, they bump into the group's leader and he befriends them. What are the odds that two parties of people walking on foot would bump into each other in a desert the size of the Sahara? About the odds that two spaceships cruising the inexpressible enormity of the galaxy would cross each other's paths by chance, as happens constantly in science fiction.

Bonus Star Trek complaint: Though the episode takes place in a scorching desert, T'Pol wears a heavy uniform. Here the plot creates a perfectly legitimate reason for a mega-babe to disrobe, and no clothes are shed. Don't tell me that 150 years in the future, no one will want to gawk at mega-babes!

Bonus Star Trek analysis: TMQ dislikes the time-travel plots that have taken over the serial, time-travel being the most suspicious thing about science fiction. Ed Gedeon of Kokomo, Ind., recommends the book *The Theory and Practice of Time Travel* by Larry Niven, which concludes that time travel is highly improbable because even if possible on a physical basis, someone would use a time machine to go back into the past to prevent the invention of time travel.

### **Best Use of TMQ**

Jason Freidt of Temecula, Calif., notes that Marty Schottenheimer said before San Diego's trip to Kansas City, "Let's hope... the football gods smile upon us."

### **Best Ignoring of TMQ**

Last week TMQ noted that when teams drop defensive ends into coverage on a zone blitz, "Defensive coordinators don't expect a defensive end in coverage actually to defend the pass, they just want the quarterback to hesitate about the slant pattern, giving blitzers time to arrive." (Ends drop into the slant-lane area where quarterbacks like to throw quick anti-blitz passes.) This Sunday, game tied at 7, the Panthers called a zone blitz against the Bucs, Julius Peppers dropping into the right slant area. Peppers intercepted the pass and returned it 46 yards for a touchdown.

### **Detroit -- Little to Be Thankful For**

Though a traditionalist on some matters such as the women should show more skin than men, Tuesday Morning Quarterback doesn't like the NFL tradition of Detroit and Dallas getting all the Thanksgiving Day home games. Home Thanksgiving dates should rotate equally among all clubs. Sean Sutton of Detroit points out that the Lions even manage to derive no benefit from playing at home against a visitor that must travel on three days' rest. The Detroit Peugeots are now 33-30-2 all-time on Thanksgiving, a winning record of .507, versus an overall home performance of 268-208-10, a winning record of .551. "The bottom line is that Detroit's done worse on Thanksgiving than the rest of their home games," Sutton writes. He thinks the Lions should keep their home exclusive as a humanitarian gesture.

### **TMQ's Christmas List**

No Flying Elvii fan's stocking can be complete without this officially licensed New England Patriots die-cast Stealth bomber model. But hurry, it's "produced only in limited quantities." Aren't all products produced in "limited" quantities? Limited to the number that sell.

### **Important News from the Sports-Cheesecake Boundary Line**

Reader Greg Strauss of Victoria, British Columbia, reports that the University of Alberta women's volleyball team, currently 19-7, is causing a splash in Canada by changing from warm-ups to game jerseys at courtside, briefly flashing crowds a view of their sports bras. But didn't soccer star Brandi Chastain already flash her sports bra on international television, and on the cover of *Sports Illustrated*? Sports bras show less than swimsuit tops, after all. The University of Alberta women's volleyball team also wears sprayed-on shorty-shorts. According to this article in Canada's *National Post*, "In the late 1990s, the Federation Internationale de Volleyball adopted new standards that shrunk the inseam lengths of both shorts and tops worn by women's teams. Beach volleyball shorts are to be no more than five centimeters wide at the hip, while inseams of indoor volleyball shorts were also hiked up." So in Canada, female volleyball players are *required* to show skin! Ah, those lusty frostbacks.

### **Pennsylvania Resplendent!**

Below are the current NFL state standings. Note the old-economy Northeastern states continue to beat up on the Sun Belt.

Pennsylvania: 20-2  
 Massachusetts: 10-1  
 Georgia: 9-2  
 Indiana: 8-3  
 Colorado and Minnesota tied at 7-4  
 New Jersey: 13-9  
 Washington State and Wisconsin tied at: 6-5  
 Maryland at 10-12 tied with New York at 5-6  
 Texas: 9-13  
 California: 13-20  
 Arizona, Carolina, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan and Tennessee tied at 4-7  
 All above states further tied with Missouri and Ohio at 8-14 and Florida at 12-21

### **Playoff Bracket in TMQ's Nightmares**

Jersey/A in its red alternate jerseys shown Sunday versus Kansas City in its red jerseys, the winner to play the winner of Houston in its red alternate jerseys shown Sunday versus Arizona in its red jerseys.

### **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

#### **Obscure College Score of the Week**

Carthage 14, Wooster of Ohio 7 (Division III second round). Located on Lake Michigan in Kenosha, Wisc., Carthage College allows students to play video games on the school's official web site. Umm, Carthage, probably it is not necessary to encourage college students to play more video games.

#### **Bonus Obscure College Score**

West Chester 48, East Stroudsburg 38 (Division II quarterfinal). Located in West Chester, Pa., West Chester University offers "an emphasis on participatory learning, thorough advising and personalized faculty interaction." TMQ isn't sure he would want "personalized faculty interaction."

#### **Double Bonus Obscure College Score**

Furman 49, Jacksonville State 7 (Division 1-AA first round). Located in Greenville, S.C., Furman University is sponsoring an alumni voyage on the *Queen Mary 2*.

### **The Football Gods Waxed, All Right**

Last season, Nebraska fired coach Frank Solich -- 9-3 in 2003, 58-19 overall with the Cornhuskers -- after Nebraska athletic director Steve Pederson denounced the 9-3 finish as "mediocrity." Oh, how they are longing for mediocrity of that sort in Lincoln now! The team just finished 2004 with a 5-6 record, despite the football-factory advantage of playing more games at home than on the road. Last year when Nebraska cashiered Solich for the sin of only winning 9 games, TMQ noted, "Bill Parcells's all-time winning percentage is .586; Solich's figure of .752 was a firing offense at Nebraska." Yours truly further noted of the absurdity of firing a coach for going .752, "The football gods may wax wroth. Mr. Pederson, the football gods are preparing a lightning bolt for you right now, and it's not going to be pleasant." The bolt has hit, and Nebraska is a smoldering hulk. Canny management moves you make, Mr. Pederson. How come Solich was fired instead of you?

### **Reader Animadversion**

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Cheryl Bowens, a Ravens fan, objected to my observation that Baltimore home fans are eerily silent when the team's offense is on the field -- as if too frightened to look -- whereas boisterous and noisy when the defense is out: "Surely you realize that the noise is created when the defense is on the field to

keep the visiting quarterback from calling a last minute audible, and the crowd is silent when the offense is on the field to allow Kyle Boller to make a last-minute change in the play-calling." Many Ravens fans including Lance Davis of Austin, Texas, objected to my saying the Toronto Argonauts have the most literary team name in sports. The Ravens' name nods, of course, to Edgar Allen Poe.

Ryan Gray of Hollywood, Calif., notes that this year the Bishops of Ohio Wesleyan University defeated the Lords of Kenyon College, "in what must have been a crisis of faith." Adam Team notes that until 1999, sports representatives of Elon University were the Fighting Christians; maybe they should have played the Bishops-Lords winner. Gray is moved to haiku:

Bishops best the Lords.  
When priests beat that which they seek,  
the Devil chortles.  
-- Ryan Gray, Hollywood

Last week TMQ chortled that the bikini pictures of Indianapolis cheer-babes appear to incorporate "non-Hoosier beach scenes." Actually, noted Matt Moriarty of Southern Pines, N.C., the pictures were taken by the lambent waters of Lake Michigan. Indiana Dunes State Park has a popular beach, in addition to nature preserves.

Many readers including Susan Moore of Pinellas Park, Florida, noted that last week when NFL.com showed old-fashioned logos as part of the Thanksgiving classics observation, every team had an old logo on display except the Bucs. Apparently anything that reminds of the 0-14 orange years is just too painful! A reader noted in haiku,

NFL turns clocks  
back; Buccaneers still pewter.  
They despise that orange!  
-- Ron Salahub, Winnipeg, Manitoba

Of Manning's chicken dance at the line of scrimmage, Dominic Legaspi of Concord, Calif., reports that in the EA Madden 2005 game, the electronic Manning flaps his wings and gestures madly at the line of scrimmage. If that game is total realism, every time the electronic Manning points at his running back before the snap, you'd have to hand off.

On the Dutch Rock and Pop Institute, Randall Liss, who describes himself as a Packers fan and a "loyal subject of Queen Beatrix," says this statement on the Institute's web site -- "*Het NPI is opgericht in 1975 en wordt sinds 1977 gesubsidieerd door de rijksoverheid*" -- means, "the Dutch Pop Institute was founded in 1975 and has been government-subsidized since 1977." Liss notes that the top tax bracket in the Netherlands is 52 percent, and reports he isn't happy about his tax money subsidizing rock music, which is supposed to be anti-establishment anyway. Michiel Boele of Amsterdam reports the Dutch government also subsidizes the dance and techno scenes, with the result that "two of the four top global DJs are Dutch." Is there some kind of BCS poll for DJs? If anyone knows, let me know.

Apropos last week's item mocking the European Union for insisting that Cognac can only come from the Cognac region of France, and advocating other geographical restrictions on food product names, Michael Hahn of Cherry Hill, N.J., points out that the United States is no country to talk since we do this too. Bourbon, he notes, can only come from Kentucky; Jack Daniels is marketed as "Tennessee whisky."

Patrick Burke of Nashville, Tenn., notes that in light of the high-tech razor wars, TMQ once referred to the place where the Patriots play as Next One Will Vibrate Field. He asks, "Now that the next one *does* vibrate, what is your mole in the Gillette organization telling you about the future?" Lately I have been calling that facility Next One Will Have Five Blades Field. Burke maps out the future of the high-tech razor in haiku:

Penultimate had  
Four blades; the latest vibrates.  
Hands-free razor next?  
-- Patrick Burke, Nashville, Tenn.

Finally a reader proposes that the 49ers are playing so poorly, they should be renamed the 24.5ers. In haiku,

Dismal one and 10.  
The "Twenty Four Point Fivers"  
is their proper name.  
-- *Jim Reynolds, Annapolis, Md.*

### **This Week's Challenge**

This week's Challenge is to wait until the Challenge resumes. I'm putting the item on a brief hiatus as the approach of the holidays overloads my schedule, cutting into the time I would use to scan Challenge entries along with my panel of judges.

### **Next Week**

Just 24-7 shopping days left till Christmas!



## TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

### Ayurveda comes to the NFL, and I foresee the annual anti-psychics column!

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Dec. 7, 2004) -- One reason many coaches prefer the NCAA to the NFL is that job security in college is traditionally higher. Football factory schools have recruiting advantages and easy dates against second-tier teams, so it's simply easy to post a winning record at a big college than in the NFL. Thus big-college coaches rarely get shown the door, but this year things are different. Ron Zook, Tyrone Willingham, Gary DiNardo, David Cutcliffe -- yesterday, yours truly typed the search terms "university coach fired football" into Google News and got back 3,460 entries. Google News, bear in mind, logs only recent stories. Cutcliffe of Mississippi was fired just a year after going 10-3. But what have you done for us lately!

What may be happening is that colleges are beginning to emulate the NFL practice of firing the coach whenever the season is unsatisfactory. Big schools may assume that since NFL fires coaches at the drop of a clipboard, therefore firing the coach must be a sound, professional practice. But NCAA athletic directors, I'll let you in on a little secret: The NFL has no idea what it's doing!

Allow me to explain by way of example. I write books for Random House, which is the New England Patriots of publishing. The epitome of success and professional know-how. Editors and management personnel at Random House are smart, skilled and well-informed; they do a fabulous job of acquiring, editing, publishing and promoting. Several other major New York publishers are also astute and super competent. But they all share a little secret. A very important person in New York publishing (not someone from Random House) once motioned me to lean close and whispered, "Gregg, we have absolutely no idea what's going to sell." Super competence in editing, publishing and marketing is one thing, but no publisher can predict which books will strike the match with readers. Unheralded manuscripts become blockbusters; heavily advertised mega-hyped books go straight to the remainder pile. The best a publisher can hope for is to prepare the book well, then ship cartons to retailers with fingers crossed.

Just as publishers do not know what's going to sell, NFL teams do not know which decisions produce wins. That's what I mean when I say the NFL has no idea what it's doing. Most coaching and front-office people in pro football are smart, skilled and well-informed. Most do a good job of acquiring players, preparing them to play, presenting the club and promoting the games. But if an NFL general manager took you into his confidence he would whisper, "We have absolutely no idea who's going to win." Some things -- what books will sell, what teams will win -- cannot be known. And even the best professionals cannot know that which cannot be known.

This is why big colleges should not emulate the pros, because the pros are guessing, too. Sometimes firing the coach leads to a turnaround; sometimes the next year is worse and firing the coach is seen as a blunder. Whatever else they do, college athletic directors and boards of regents should never think, "They fire coaches like crazy in the pros, so this must be a good idea." Now, with its latest coach firing, even Notre Dame has in effect said that ratings and victories matter more than education. Colleges, stop imitating the pros.

In other football news, Steve Coll of the *Washington Post*, one of the country's top newspaper journalists, has written a powerful two-part series on the death in Afghanistan of Pat Tillman, and on how the Pentagon has lied about what happened. See more on this below.

In NFL scheduling news, next week's *Monday Night Football* game pits 4-8 Kansas City against 4-8 Tennessee. The following week *MNF* will showcase the Miami Dolphins, who may be 2-11 at kickoff. Please networks and league contract-meisters, finalize a way to make December Monday night games flexible, okay?

And in non-football news, once a year Larry King features on his show a psychic who does live call-in mind reading. Annually, Tuesday Morning Quarterback reviews the transcript to see how the psychic fared. This year's psychic deconstruction follows below. But wait -- *you already knew that* didn't you?

### **Stats of the Week**

Indianapolis is on a pace to score 575 points, breaking the all-time season scoring record of 556 points, held by Minnesota.

### **Stats of the Week No. 2**

Seattle scored 39 points, gained 507 yards ... and lost.

### **Stats of the Week No. 3**

Carolina has won four straight, Buffalo has won six of its last eight -- and still neither is above .500.

### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Carolina and Buffalo, a combined 4-13 until three weeks ago, are a combined 6-0 since and have outscored opponents 205-103.

### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

Arizona and Jersey/A are a combined 0-6 since their coaches decided to change quarterbacks. Up until that point, they were a combined 9-9.

### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

Under Kurt Warner, the Giants were 5-4 and outscored opponents by an average of 21-18. Since Eli Manning took over, the Giants have gone 0-3 and been outscored 72-23.

### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

Miami quarterbacks have thrown seven interceptions that were returned for touchdowns. A.J. Feely has thrown eight touchdown passes to his teammates and five touchdown passes to the opposition.

### **Stats of the Week No. 8**

Wide receiver Troy Brown of New England, pressed into duty as a nickelback, recorded his second interception of the season.

### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

In four games against the NFC North, Peyton Manning threw 19 touchdown passes -- more than the total number of touchdown passes thrown in all games by all but seven other NFL quarterbacks.

### **Stats of the Week No. 10**

The team of the West Coast offense, the San Francisco Squared 4.949s -- see below -- gained just 160 yards and recorded nine first downs.

### Stats of the Week No. 11

The AFC East is on a combined streak of 11-1, the NFC West on a combined streak of 1-12. In the streaks the sole AFC East loss has come when two division teams played each other, while the sole NFC West win has come when two division teams played each other. (Stat submitted by reader Werner Pizar of Beijing, China.)

### Stats of the Week No. 12

The 41 points in the first quarter of Tennessee at Indianapolis game exceeded the total points scored in the majority of the week's 15 other games.

### Biologist-Cheerleader of the Week

Literary Cheerleader of the Week is temporarily suspended while we recognize cheerleader with other serious credentials. Ben Lea, a librarian at the University of Missouri-Rolla, nominates Allison of the Philadelphia Eagles, who has a degree in biology and works as a biologist at the pharmaceutical firm Merck & Co. A cheer-babe who helps make prescription drugs -- Allison, are you working on anything that subtracts 20 pounds and 20 years from middle-aged columnists? According to her team bio, Allison says what she likes best about Philadelphia is, "Although I am from a small town, I still feel at home in the city with its friendly atmosphere." Only when the Eagles are winning! Obviously, Allison joined the squad after the current playoff streak started.

### Best Play Ere the Clock Struck Midnight

At 11:59 p.m. ET, Seattle guard Steve Hutchinson pulled left and led the fourth-and-1 power run that created Shaun Alexander's 32-yard touchdown and appeared to ice the game for the Seahawks. Dallas had 10 defenders in the box, and Alexander made it to the end zone untouched. Rarely will you behold better blocking.

### Worst Play After the Clock Struck Midnight

At 12:07 a.m. ET, Dallas trailed 39-29 and faced first-and-10 on the Seattle 34, with 1:54 remaining. Old, creaky Vinny Testaverde danced around in the pocket buying time; TMQ counted one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three, one-thousand four, one-thousand five, one-thousand six. Testaverde stepped toward the line as if to run; Seattle nickel safety Michael Boulware bought this and abandoned the deep zone, coming up toward the line. Let him run! He is no threat! The one thing you cannot do is let a receiver get to the end zone! Keyshawn Johnson got behind safety Terreal Bierria -- touchdown -- and suddenly the Blue Men Group was in trouble.

Think about what happened: Seattle is ahead by 10 points and less than two minutes remain. Dallas *must* throw to the end zone, and Dallas' best receiver got behind everyone. As Johnson made his catch, Bierria was the sole Seattle defender within 15 yards. All other defenders were far upfield, having left the end zone undefended -- and the *only* way Seattle could have blown this game would have been to leave the end zone undefended at that point. If Dallas takes short gains, that's fine because the clock will expire. The one thing a defense must not do in this situation is allow a receiver to get behind everyone, and that's what Seattle did. TMQ found it hard to grasp that a Ray-Rhodes-coached defense could play so stupidly in a situation where the tactics were totally obvious.

### Sweet Play of the Week

Leading 17-14 in the fourth quarter, underdog Chicago faced third-and-goal on the Minnesota 5. The Bears did a "jumble" -- the skill players all lined up on one side, then shifted to the other side, then shifted a third time and set. Who-dat reserve fullback Jason McKie went in motion right as if to block; just-in-off-the-street quarterback Chad Hutchinson rolled right. McKie suddenly turned up the field and caught the touchdown pass that put the Chicago Mingdingxiong ("bears whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Mandarin) in command. Coming into the game, McKie had three career receptions. The play was to McKie all the way, and he was ignored by the Vikings defense. Designing a critical-situation play for a

gentleman with three career receptions was sweet.

### Sweet Play of the Week No. 2

Eagles leading 14-0, Philadelphia faced third-and-1 on the Green Bay 41. The Nesharim lined up heavy right and play faked; Brian Westbrook ran an out-and-up from tailback slot, touchdown reception and the rout was on. TMQ preaches running on short-yardage situations. But if you're going to pass, go for the home run, not for some dinky 3-yard curl thing. This play was designed to score a home run, and it did. Later, Philadelphia ahead 41-3 in the third quarter and looking for the knockout punch, the Eagles faced third-and-9 on their own 24. Westbrook ran a quick center-of-the-field pattern catch-and-run for 50 yards; Philadelphia scores a field goal on the series and all but immediate family members head for the parking lot. On the 50-yard play, did Westbrook beat some plodding linebacker? Not in the least. He blew past Green Bay Pro Bowl safety Darren Sharper.

### Sweet Play of the Week No. 3

Tennessee leading 10-3, Indianapolis faced second-and-7 on the Titans 24. The Colts faked a running play left, with the right guard pulling left to add to the realism; Marvin Harrison jogged left as if to block; then Harrison broke toward the flag in the right corner of the end zone. Harrison was five yards behind the sole defender when Peyton Manning's 42nd touchdown pass (of the season, not the game) arrived. As usual, space constraints prohibit TMQ from discussing all Indianapolis scoring plays. Note, however, that all three Manning touchdown passes came off play fakes. The Colts continue to play fake more than any team in the NFL, and also to score more than any team in the NFL. Is there, perhaps, a message here?

### Sour Play of the Week

Carolina leading 6-0, New Orleans had second-and-7 on its own 21. The call was off tackle right to Deuce McAllister from a strong formation right. At the point of attack were the Saints tight end, the Saints fullback and a pulling guard coming from the left. *None* of them made any attempt to block the man in the hole, Panthers linebacker Brandon Short, who drilled McAllister and caused a fumble. On the next play, Carolina threw a touchdown pass, and the rout was on.

### Sour Play of the Week No. 2

Earlier in the Vikings-Bears game, Chicago faced third-and-6 on the Minnesota 15 with 27 seconds remaining in the first half and was out of timeouts. Chicago is in field-goal position but cannot stop the clock. So where oh where might the pass go? *Maybe up the field!* Yet David Terrell is single-covered as he runs a simple "up" to the end zone. No safety anywhere in sight, touchdown, and Chicago takes a surprising 17-14 halftime lead. Especially sour tactic: The Vikings blitzed on the play, meaning no safety was there to guard the end zone, though given the situation, Chicago was all but certain to call a fast-release pass.

### Into the Breech, Dear Friends!

(This new item is the reverse of Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkk and lauds great daring.) Knowing he was playing a team on a pace to be the highest-scoring in league history, Tennessee coach Jeff Fisher ordered not one, not two, but three onside kicks in the first quarter. The Titans recovered two, leading to 24 first-quarter points for daring Tennessee. The rest of the game did not go so well -- a 51-25 Indianapolis win -- but the football gods will remember this audacious attempt.

### The Football gods Chortled

Late in the third quarter, Baltimore intercepted a pass on its 15 and returned the ball for a touchdown on a wild play that included a Nevermores fumble recovered by another Raven. That made it Baltimore 20, Cincinnati 3, and Ravens defenders danced and celebrated wildly -- including dancing on the field during the runback. Oh ye mortals, trifle not with the football gods! From that point everything went the Bengals' way, with Cincinnati scoring 24 points in the fourth quarter to win. On the decisive series, the

Candy Corns trailed 26-24 and faced second-and-18 on their 26 with 1:18 remaining. Carson Palmer was flushed out of the pocket and rolled left; Baltimore safety Will Demps abandoned his man and came up toward Palmer, who threw a perfect 32-yard strike to that man, T.J. Houshmandzadeh.

Four plays later, Cincinnati faced second-and-10 on the Baltimore 31 with 30 seconds remaining. Where oh where might the pass go? *Maybe up the field!* Yet Chad Johnson, Cincinnati's best receiver, was single covered as he ran a simple up pattern -- and as Baltimore corner-blitzed. Completion to the Ravens 9, and the stage is set for the last-second field goal that wins it. Even if you are up 20-3, even if you have retired broadcaster Deion Sanders on the sidelines dancing madly and encouraging the younger Ravens to play to the cameras rather than play the game, never start celebrating when there remains an entire quarter.

### **Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk**

Trailing Detroit 20-12 on the first play of the fourth quarter, the Arizona Cactus Wrens faced fourth-and-1 on their own 45. *You're 4-7, what do you have to lose?* Better to try and fail -- which sends players the message that their coach is challenging them to win -- than wimp out with a fraidy-cat kick. Boom goes the punt. It took the Lions just two plays to get back to the point where they would have been, had Arizona had gone for it and failed. *You're 4-7, what do you have to lose?* And now you are 4-8.

### **Namaste, Namaste, I Am Open, Throw My Way**

Ricky Williams says that rather than return to the NFL next season, he will study holistic medicine at the California College of Ayurveda. Ayurveda is a 5,000-year-old philosophy of mind-body balance and "self-realization therapies through herbs, diet, exercise, yoga, massage, aromas, tantras, mantras and meditation." The California College of Ayurveda "offers the only U.S. training program that is formally endorsed by India's most prestigious Ayurvedic college, Gujarat Ayurveda University in Jamnagar, India," the college says. Full-time students "can expect 10-20 hours of study per week," which is surely more than was expected of football players at the University of Texas! Annual tuition, plus yoga, is \$8,950, which means Williams' effective price for the year of study, plus yoga, comes to \$13,608,950 -- considering the \$8.6 million he owes the Dolphins and his \$5 million in lost pay for 2004. But watch out, Ricky, the California College of Ayurveda says, "Due to the concentrated nature of instruction in the program, attending each class, being on time and completing all course requirements" are mandatory. Another difference from Texas! This also makes it seem a Dolphins-like disappearing act would be frowned upon by Ayurveda instructors. So is Ricky actually attending class? p>

### **Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!**

Leading 16-14 with 1:38 remaining, Jacksonville had Pittsburgh on its own 42 and out of timeouts. The Steelers had not scored on the Jaguars in the second half to that point, so prudence seemed in order. Instead, it's a blitz! Six gentlemen cross the line, including *two* defensive backs. Easy completion to the Jax 40, and the Steelers are just two snaps away from being in range for the winning field goal.

### **Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 2**

San Diego leading 14-7 with 50 seconds remaining in the first half, the Bolts faced second-and-10 on the Denver 17. The Broncos big-blitzed and the pass was incomplete, but safety John Lynch was called for roughing the quarterback, positioning San Diego for the short field goal that proved the winning margin in a 20-17 contest. I can't prove this, but think roughing-the-quarterback penalties are more common on big-blitzes than on other plays, because the blitzers, especially defensive backs, are so intent on the highlight-reel moment of hammering the other team's leader.

### **Non-Preposterous Punt**

Leading 35-32 with 3:15 remaining, Buffalo faced fourth-and-5 on the Miami 35. All season yours truly has chided the Bills for punting in opposition territory -- but I've chided them for punting in this situation early in the game, or when trailing. At the endgame, a Maroon Zone punt can make sense. The punt pinned the Ventral Fins on their own 2, and three snaps later an interception sealed the contest.

### Preposterous Punts Avoided

At last Seattle did what TMQ has been begging the team to do -- went for it in opposition territory, instead of launching mincing fraidy-cay kicks as the team has so many times this year. Leading 14-12 in the second quarter on *Monday Night Football*, the Blue Men Group faced fourth-and-1 on the Dallas 39. A run, fumbled center-quarterback exchange and Dallas it's ball. But it's better to go for it in this situation and fail, which sends players the message their coach is challenging them to win the game, than boom a passive punt. Then, leading 32-29 with 2:53 remaining and facing fourth-and-1 on the Dallas 32, Seattle went for it again, rather than boom a field-goal attempt. Thirty-two yard touchdown run by Shaun Alexander, a 10-point late lead at home, and a 10-point late lead at home would win the game for almost any team. Well, almost any team that does not have the Seattle defense.

With the two fourth-and-1 calls, Mike Holmgren challenged his offense to win the game, and his offense responded by scoring 39 points. His defense was another matter. From the point at which it had a 10-point lead at home with 2:53 remaining, the Seahawks defense surrendered 121 yards and two touchdowns. Twice this season the 'Hawks defense has collapsed at the end of home games in which the offense had built big leads (Last night and Week 5 against the Rams). If the Blue Men Group could do as little as hold big, late leads at home, they would be 8-6 and sitting pretty.

### Why Certain Teams Are 2-10

Buffalo defensive tackle Pat Williams picked off a deflected pass at the Miami 20 with 2:05 to play. Williams, who is listed at 317 pounds, but let's just say is being coy about his weight, began -- well, running isn't the word ... let's just say began moving toward the Miami goal. With their team trailing by only a field goal, no Miami player made more than a half-hearted effort to run down one of the league's slowest gentlemen. At the 5, Ventral Fins quarterback A.J. Feeley had a clean shot at Williams -- and actively stepped out of the way.

### Why Tactics Matter

Trailing 7-0 at the beginning of the second quarter, Atlanta had first-and-goal on the City of Tampa 1. Michael-Mike Vick dropped back to pass. A play fake on first-and-goal can be a smart play, since the defense is usually expecting a run. But it wasn't a play fake, rather a conventional drop back, Vick sprinted backwards to the Bucs 9 and then threw an interception into double coverage. Conventional passes almost never work at the goal line, because the defense has so little territory to protect. (Later Vick threw another interception at the Tampa 1, but this came when the Falcons were down 20-0 and desperate.)

### Why Tactics Matter No. 2

Trailing 20-17 with 3:45 remaining and two timeouts, Denver reached first-and-goal on the San Diego 7. Time is no issue; the Broncos can call anything from their playbook. Field-goal position is secured, so the worst that could happen seems a tie. Run? Roll out? Crazy-looking fade to Rod Smith, who's double-covered; interception, and the rest is filler. TMQ thinks NFL teams are now calling entirely too many fade patterns and jump-ball plays at the goal line. And this year defenses, knowing this action is coming, are stopping it.

### Thong-Based Breaking News

According to this *Houston Chronicle* story by Joy Sewing, Rice University students Beau Carpenter, Chris Harris and Marcus Brocato have invented a battery-powered thong that glows. "To test out GloThong, they took their product to a topless bar," Sewing writes. She quotes the students as saying, "'The women liked the product so much that they lined up to give us their real names and cell numbers.'" So Rice University students have come up with a perfectly legitimate reason to huddle with the dancers at a topless bar -- they are conducting market research! Beau Carpenter, Chris Harris and Marcus Brocato, TMQ's hat is off to you. Read more about their creation at [www.glothong.com](http://www.glothong.com).

### Curious Tactics, Dr. Watson

Green Bay's 2003 season ended when Brett Favre heave-hoed a wild deep pass in overtime in the playoffs at Philadelphia, resulting in an interception. Now it's 2004 and the Packers are back at Lincoln Financial, and there's no score yet in the first quarter. Favre heave-hoes a wild deep pass that is intercepted by safety Brian Dawkins, the same gentleman who made the previous theft.

### **TMQ's Christmas List**

Maybe Santa will bring me National Geographic Home Collection furniture. Perhaps this lovely National Geographic venetian sofa for \$849 and matching table for \$459. According to the high-end Belfort Furniture chain, "The National Geographic Home Collection, crafted by Lane, includes bedroom, dining room, living room and home entertainment furniture inspired by the National Geographic explorers who have, for more than a century, traveled the world in search of its wonders." Explorers searched the world and what they found was -- branded furniture!

### **"Mr. Robiskie, Here at the Temp Agency We Just Don't Get That Many Calls Seeking Short-Term Head Coaches"**

Replacing the departed Butch Davis, Terry Robiskie of Cleveland wore the headphones as "interim head coach" for the second time in his career. Robiskie also as a late-season fill-in when Norv Turner was fired in Washington in 2000.

### **NFL Disaster Looming**

Except during strike years, there has never been a team with a losing record in the NFL postseason. Brace yourself: It could happen next month. When Dallas won last night to improve to 5-7, NFL.com's homepage declared the Cowboys "in the thick of the playoff hunt in the NFC." Ridiculously, this is true. If the postseason began today, 6-6 Seattle would get the final NFC wild card; a scenario in which a losing team gets the final NFC wildcard is not out of the question. Over in the AFC, if the playoffs began today, 7-5 Denver would not be invited. On current trends, there is a strong chance a 10-6 AFC team will not make the postseason. It's possible *two* 10-6 AFC teams will not make the postseason. If 10-6 teams are shut out of the playoffs in one division, while an 8-8 or even losing team makes the playoffs from the other division, this will be a disaster of the first magnitude for the NFL. Right now the NFL is hurtling towards its first-ever unfair postseason. Let's hope something changes in the next month to avoid that outcome.

### **Best Play by a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Be in San Diego**

While Eli Manning's offense was failing to score against Washington and high-priced holdout Philip Rivers was nailed to the Bolts pine, Drew Brees threw a perfect 30-yard fade completion to Eric Parker, setting up San Diego's first touchdown. I don't wish to alarm you, but the Bolts are 9-3 and Brees is the league's fifth-rated quarterback.

### **Larry, I See -- Wait -- I See Calls to My 900 Number!**

In July, Larry King featured psychic Char Margolis on his show. Margolis, who specializes in contacting the departed, explained her powers to King thusly: "I connect people to the spirit world on one level. I believe that we don't die and that love never dies. And that  $E=MC^2$ . Energy has to go somewhere. And I believe that energy, of who we were, that we all have our own energy thumbprint and when we die we are still that individual, and that we still have a consciousness, but on another plane." Wait a minute,  $E=MC^2$  means that energy equals matter times the speed of light of light squared. TMQ believes that too, but what does it have to do with eternal consciousness?

Margolis proceeded to attempt to demonstrate her incredible powers by reading the mind of people calling into the Larry King. She said she could determine the names of the person on the caller's mind. To be charitable, TMQ assumes that no call-screener was whispering information about the callers into Margolis' earpiece. Here are highlights of what followed:

CALLER: Hello.

MARGOLIS: Okay, hello. Do you have somebody who is an A or M initial connected with you?

CALLER: No.

MARGOLIS: Anyone deceased or living? Think.

CALLER: No.

MARGOLIS: Okay, who is that? That's right, an M-A. Like a Margaret or Mary or Ann?

CALLER: No.

MARGOLIS: It's a common name or a middle name like this?

CALLER: No.

MARGOLIS: You know what? I'm sorry I'm not picking up on you.

CALLER: Okay.

MARGOLIS: I'm not picking up on you, I'm really sorry. {Caller is disconnected.}

LARRY KING: That happens, right?

MARGOLIS: Yes, I guess. Or maybe she's not thinking.

So if the psychic can't read the caller's thoughts, it must be the caller's fault! Here is the very next attempt to demonstrate incredible psychic powers, in which Margolis *guesses the same letters*.

LARRY KING: Salt Lake City. Hello.

MARGOLIS: Hi. Do you have somebody that's an A or M connected to you?

CALLER: Yes.

MARGOLIS: Which letter, an A or an M?

CALLER: Yes.

MARGOLIS: Spelled M-A.?

CALLER: Yes.

MARGOLIS: R?

CALLER: Yes.

MARGOLIS: Mary?

CALLER: Yes!

MARGOLIS: Is it your mom or grandma?

CALLER: No, my aunt.

MARGOLIS: Your aunt. Is she deceased?

CALLER: Yes.

MARGOLIS: I think her spirit is around you. Have you had some health concerns recently?

CALLER: Yes.

MARGOLIS: Have you been put on a medication?

CALLER: No.

MARGOLIS: Is the doctor talking about putting you on a medication?

CALLER: No.

MARGOLIS: I'm not allowed to give out medical advice, but I have a feeling there's something that's going to put you on to control something. Did you have any problem with your leg or your back?

CALLER: My back, and yes, and my foot.

MARGOLIS: And your foot. Okay. I almost said foot.

"I almost said foot." Margolis guesses Mary, the most common female name, and then declares that she *almost* mind read the caller's problem. And she played the percentages by asking about the caller's back. Years ago when TMQ's former boss Charles Peters, founder of *The Washington Monthly*, was a young politician in West Virginia, an old master politician advised him: If working a room and pretending you remember people, ask about their backs. Since the majority of adults experience back complaints, it's hard to miss. Apparently, there is even back pain in the spirit world! Here's the next caller:

LARRY KING: Tarzana, Calif.

MARGOLIS: Hi. Is there somebody who's an S or M connected to you?

CALLER: Not that I know of.

MARGOLIS: Anyone deceased or living?

CALLER: No. My father was an H.

MARGOLIS: Don't say the name.

CALLER: He passed away.

MARGOLIS: He starts with an H?

CALLER: Yes.

MARGOLIS: Don't say the name. Is it spelled H-A?

CALLER That's what it starts with.

MARGOLIS: Like Harry or Harold?

CALLER: Yes.

MARGOLIS: Okay. I think he's around you but there's also an S. Do you know if there was a Sam or a Saul or a Sarah or something like this?

CALLER: Not that I know of. I have a friend of mine starts with an S.

MARGOLIS: Is it S with a T in it, your friend?

CALLER: No, just S-A.

MARGOLIS: He's not Sam or Sarah?

CALLER: Sam is a friend of mine.

MARGOLIS: Sam is a friend of yours. Okay.

CALLER: My father's name started with H.

MARGOLIS: I think Harry's probably around you. You feel him around you, don't you?

CALLER: I think sometimes I do even though he's been dead for like 23 years.

MARGOLIS: That's okay, because love is a bridge that connects us to the other side. I do think he's around you. And I don't know what this is with Sam. Are you thinking of -- do you work with Sam at all?

CALLER: No, we're just good friends.

MARGOLIS: Are you thinking of making a change with your work?

CALLER: No, I'm not.

MARGOLIS: Is Sam?

CALLER: No, Sam is a married guy with three kids.

Note the psychic never actually determined the first letter of the name -- the caller told her, then had to remind her. *If you guessed that this caller was cut off, perhaps you have psychic power!* Another call produced this exchange:

LARRY KING: Chesapeake, Ohio. Hello.

MARGOLIS: Hi. Do you have someone who's an R or a B?

CALLER: Yes.

MARGALIS: Which letter?

CALLER: Both.

MARGOLIS: Is it a male R?

CALLER: No.

MARGOLIS: Or a female R?

CALLER: Female.

MARGOLIS: Is it spelled R-O?

CALLER: No.

MARGOLIS: Or R-E like Renee?

CALLER: Rebecca.

MARGOLIS: Don't say names. Is that family to you?

CALLER: Yes.

MARGOLIS: Is that your daughter or your granddaughter? Who is that?

CALLER: My sister.

MARGOLIS: Oh, it's your sister. Okay, I'm not sure -- are you supposed to be seeing her soon?

CALLER: I see her all the time.

MARGOLIS: She lives near you?

CALLER: Yes.

MARGOLIS: Okay, which one of you -- are you worried about her or you with your health?

CALLER: No.

MARGOLIS: Or is someone else?

CALLER: Not that I know of.

MARGOLIS: I'm mixed up about this one. I'm so sorry. Who has the bad leg or limps? A bad leg or foot? Is that you or her?

CALLER: No.

MARGOLIS: Okay.

KING: Maybe it's the B.

MARGOLIS: Oh, yes, maybe it is the B. Is the B a male?

CALLER: Yes.

MARGOLIS: Is it B with an R in it or Bill or Bob?

CALLER: Bill.

MARGOLIS: Bill. Does he have a bad leg or foot?

CALLER: No.

MARGOLIS: Can I just say something, though? Sometimes things like this happen, and like two weeks later there's a problem with the leg. Or Bill's on the phone with her now saying, "I have a bad leg or foot."

So although the incredible psychic was totally wrong about this caller, maybe sometime in the future she'll be right. Just try to prove Bill won't someday have a problem with his leg or foot!

Another caller:

LARRY KING: Birmingham, Ala. Hello.

MARGOLIS: Is there somebody who's a K or C connected with you?

CALLER: No.

MARGOLIS: Or an S or C.?

CALLER: No.

MARGOLIS: Okay, think of people living and deceased. No?

CALLER: I'm thinking of one person in particular.

MARGOLIS: No, you've got to be open-minded about everybody. You're trying too hard; you're going to mess me up. You're going to make me look like I don't know what I'm doing.

CALLER: All right. A, K or a C?

MARGOLIS: Let me move on to something else because your mind's not there.

"You're going to make me look like I don't know what I'm doing." And note that once again the caller has to tell the psychic the letter she is trying to guess. Through the course of an hour-long show and exchanges with 27 callers, on 17 tries Margolis failed to guess any name after repeatedly tossing out common letters, and on 10 tries did guess a name. Eight of the 10 she did guess were James, John, Joseph, Tom or Mary -- the most common names. Try this as a parlor game: Throw out two or three common letters, then see if there's anyone at the party who *doesn't* know someone with one of the letters in his or her name. Next, declare yourself a psychic.

TMQ's favorite moment of the show was Margolis failing to come even close to guessing a caller's problems. Margolis told King, "I'm much better with the dead than I am with the living." But the dead haven't called in!

On Margolis' own website, where she declares, "As a child I was able to see spirits, read thoughts and foresee events." She must have lost that gift or she would have foreseen how often she would be wrong on Larry King Live! You can arrange a 45-minute personal phone conversation with Char Margolis for just \$500. In 45 minutes, she's sure to guess your name, especially if you tell her. TMQ would be glad talk to you on the phone and guess your name for just \$400 for 45 minutes -- a huge discount compared to the professional psychic. Maybe I should start a price war with her! *Wait, I can see something -- you watch football, don't you? Yes, you watch football on television. Am I right? You watch with someone named J or L or M or B or T or N or G or D, am I right? When you watch you drink -- is it -- you drink beer, don't you? Someone close to you complains when you spend all day watching football and drinking beer. Could it be -- your wife?*

### Harmonic Convergence Plays

Leading 13-7 at the start of the fourth quarter in what was, until the end, a tense contest, Jersey/B faced second-and-goal on the Houston 5. The Jets lined up heavy right with two slots right and tailback Curtis

Martin deep in the backfield. At the snap, both slotbacks went straight up the field, taking defenders with them. Martin ran a classic "flare" route at a right angle to quarterback Chad Pennington, and the only Moo Cow available to cover Martin was linebacker Jason Babin, who really plays defensive end in the Texans' hybrid front. Touchdown reception by Martin, and suddenly Houston is in trouble.

Meanwhile, in the late third quarter of the Kansas City-Oakland game, the Raiders leading 20-17, the Chiefs faced second-and-goal on the Long Johns' 10. Kansas City lined up heavy right with a tight end and two receivers next to him in a "bunch" alignment. At the snap, all three shot up the field, taking defenders with them. Tailback Larry Johnson ran a classic "flare" route at a right angle to quarterback Trent Green, and the only Raider available to cover him was linebacker Napoleon Harris. Touchdown reception, and suddenly Oakland is in trouble. Note: Kansas City gained 500 yards of offense and still needed a last-minute touchdown to win.

### **Forward Into the Past!**

To start his return season, Professor Dumbledore (Joe Gibbs) had the Redskins run the same plays as in the team's 1980s golden years. In the opener against City of Tampa, rushing plays involved lots of pulls and traps; the old counter-deuce and counter-trey, where two or three offside linemen pulled in unison, resurfaced. In the opener, Clinton Portis ran for 148 yards and Washington won. But then the Skins lost and Portis looked blah in Week 2. The Redskins abandoned their old golden-days plays and went to the sort of quick cut-blocks that Portis ran behind at Denver. Week in, week out, the whole team has looked blah using rushing actions that aren't the favorites of Gibbs and his braintrust.

Sunday, the Redskins returned to their old system -- lots of wide plays with line pulls, including the counter-trey, and Portis again ran for 148 yards in a Washington win. Coach Gibbs, just use your old system! Nobody could stop it 20 years ago, and rest assured, players haven't gotten any smarter since then.

### **Comic Relief of the Week**

Leading 23-7 and facing second-and-goal on the New Orleans 7, Carolina lined up defensive end Julius Peppers as a wideout and threw him a fade to the corner of the end zone. Pass incomplete.

### **Arrest Mother Nature!**

Jack Shafer of Arlington, Va., points out an *Associated Press* article, which reports that the No. 1 source of air pollution in Washington state is Mount Saint Helens.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Won Than Never to Have Rushed At All**

Trailing 39-36, Dallas faced third-and-8 on the Seattle 33 with 51 seconds remaining. It's got to be a pass, right? Julius Jones off tackle for 16 yards. Now it's second-and-10 on the Seattle 17 with 37 seconds left, Julius Jones up the middle for the winning touchdown. How could Seattle have known the Cowboys would run in these expected-passing situations? Trailing 14-12 with 35 seconds remaining in the first half, Dallas faced third-and-goal on the Seattle 8. Julius Jones on the draw, touchdown. The Cowboys must have come in with a game plan of running in obvious-passing situations. Seattle got fair warning at the end of the first half. No Seattle coaches appear to have remembered when the end of the second half rolled around.

### **Born for This Work, Just Born for It**

A *New York Times* article concerns the problems caused for truckers by the incredible increase in cargo coming through the ports of New York and New Jersey. The article quotes a spokesman for Maher Terminals, the leading company that handles cargo containers arriving in New York and New Jersey. The spokesman's name? Sam Crane.

### **Best Play by a 39-Year-Old**

Pressed into service, Chris Chandler threw a perfect 22-yard touchdown pass to Torry Holt. It was the eighth NFL team for which the gentleman has tossed a TD pass.

### Special Teams Notes

Note 1: The Potomac Nanticokes pulled away from Jersey/A with a blocked punt that led to a touchdown and a 21-0 lead. Washington rushed seven. As TMQ noted a few weeks ago, most NFL teams rush only two or three gentlemen against punts, dreading the roughing penalty. Sometimes, all that's required to create a block is to send more than a token number.

Note 2: Trailing 24-12, the Minnesota Hyperboreans did not rush 11 men against the Bears punt with 15 seconds remaining. At that point, the Vikings' sole hope, however faint, was to block the punt, score a touchdown on the block, then recover an onside kick. Instead, the Vikings set up a return, which even if totally successful would have resulted in a touchdown as the clock expired. The return man was tackled on the Minnesota 18, ending the game. Why don't teams "pull the goalie" against a punt in the fading seconds?

Note 3: Trailing Indianapolis 41-24 late in the third quarter, the Flaming Thumbtacks lined up to punt from the Colts 35. Now, really. Who is going to believe a punt from the opponent's 35 when trailing by three scores? Certainly not the Colts, who expected a fake. Tennessee ran a high-school play with five guys on the line of scrimmage left, two guys off the line right, two on the line at the middle of the field and two behind the line at the middle. Long-snapper Ken Amato, an outside man in this formation and hence eligible, snapped and then ran down the field for a pass; the punter threw incomplete to Amato, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook. This play reminds me of one of football's most fun obscure rules: Anyone on the line of scrimmage can snap the ball, it is only by tradition that the center is in the center. Because Indianapolis was expecting a fake, Amato was *double covered*, and now becomes the only center in NFL history to be double-covered on a passing play.

### Cheer-Babe Professionalism

It was 55 degrees at kickoff in Philadelphia with a 14 miles-per-hour wind, but the who-needs-clothes Eagles cheerleaders came out in their two-piece summer outfits. Needless to say, their team was crowned with a huge victory. How soon until the Eagles cheerleaders take the field in nothing but the GloThong? Meanwhile, Frank Chmielewski of San Francisco reports that the highly aesthetic Raiders cheer-babes took the field in scanty outfits, and their team jumped out to a 20-7 lead. Then the Raiderettes disappeared into the locker room -- 50 degrees is practically a snowstorm by California standards -- and returned clad in windbreakers. From that point on, it was all Kansas City, the Chiefs rallying to win.

### Another Argument Against "Alternate" Uniforms

As pointed out by Mark Francoeur of Saint John, New Brunswick, on Sunday night the Jaguars wore their all-black look for the second time ever; the first was in 2002. Both games were losses to the Pittsburgh Steelers.

### The Death of Pat Tillman

Steve Coll of the *Washington Post* reveals that Tillman was killed by friendly fire, not enemy action; that command blunders caused his platoon to be split up and ordered to maneuver in a manner that made the units likely to mistake each other for hostile; that Tillman called out his own name over and over again as his fellow soldiers fired toward him; that the Army covered up the circumstances of the tragedy, beginning to admit the truth only after inquiries by Tillman's mother and by Arizona Senator John McCain, a Vietnam veteran. The Army, Coll continues, concocted phony accounts of Tillman's final moments so that the media, including me -- and the NFL, in its many formal tributes to the fallen player -- would say Tillman had died in soldiers' glory. "The records show Tillman fought bravely and honorably till his last breath," Coll writes. "They also show his superiors exaggerated his actions and invented details as they burnished his legend in public, at the same time suppressing details that might tarnish Tillman's commanders."

Horrible errors happen in war. U.S. forces have, by accident, killed many innocent Iraqi and Afghan civilians, and no military has ever conducted large combat operations without accidentally killing some of its own. It is strange that in this and in other friendly-fire incidents during the media era -- Vietnam, then both Iraq wars -- Pentagon leadership has assumed there is something disgraceful about a friendly-fire death, and thus all information about such deaths must be covered up by official lies. (See C.D.B. Bryan's 1977 book *Friendly Fire*, which concerns in part the efforts of Norman Schwarzkopf, when a colonel in Vietnam, to get the Pentagon to admit the truth about friendly-fire deaths.) That Tillman died at the hands of his own comrades is heart-rending, but does not in any way diminish his valor. Tillman renounced millions of dollars to serve his country in a distant place. He died in a just cause; whatever you may think of the invasion of Iraq, the U.S. campaign against al Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan is a just cause, unless there are no just wars. Tillman showed courage "till his last breath."

But his family deserved to know what happened in the moments when he died, just as the families of all who fall deserve to know what their beloveds saw and heard in their final moments. Equally, the American public deserves to know the true cost of wars -- in civilian deaths on the other side, in accidental deaths of our own. The Pentagon insults the American people when it assumes we must be fed sanitized PR make-believe about the fates of soldiers. To learn that Tillman died because of an awful mistake does not subtract from his memory or the honor that he earned in life; his heroism remains exactly the same, and his memory will live forever. To learn that the Army lied about Tillman's last moments certainly detracts from the honor of the Army, though.

## **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

### **Obscure College Score of the Week**

Sam Houston State 35, Eastern Washington 34 (Division I-AA quarterfinals). Located in Huntsville, Texas, Sam Houston State offers majors both in construction management and dance.

### **Bonus Obscure College Score**

Mount Union 38, Carthage 20 (Division III quarterfinals). Located in Kenosha, Wis., Carthage College says that on its campus, "students can get to know each other, exchange ideas, or just socialize." Wow, what a plan! Reader Brian Gordon of Andover, Conn., suggests that Mount Union's battle cry for this game was to quote Cato the Elder: "Carthage must be destroyed."

### **College Sad Loss**

As noted by many readers, including Jeff Frew of Williamsburg, Va., TMQ's favorite college postseason event, the Humanitarian Bowl, has been renamed the MPC Computers Bowl. Yours truly always loved the Humanitarian Bowl concept -- plastic-clad warriors slamming into each other in the name of world peace. At least the game will still be played on the blue turf at Boise State.

### **Surely the Vulcans, Using Logic, Could Have Done a Better Job of Picking Bowl Pairings**

Tuesday Morning Quarterback dislikes the contemporary affectation of referring to people as "humans." For instance, the *Washington Post* wrote in August of college-aptitude tests, "Testing experts predict that machines eventually will help grade the SAT, because computers cost less money and work faster than humans." Klingons work fast, why not have them grade the tests? The *New York Times* recently editorialized that the jury choosing designs for the 9-11 memorial was composed of "good and decent human beings." Were aliens ever seriously considered? Now the *Washington Post* declares of the BCS selections, "This season, the opinions of humans carried more weight than those of computers."

Looks like the BCS should have skipped consulting humans and called in the Taelons. California, 10-1 with its sole loss to No. 1 ranked USC, plays on Dec. 30 while *three* teams with 8-3 records appear on New Year's Day. At this point, we should just give up on the BCS and go back to the old system. Advertised as rationalizing bowl selections, the BCS instead has produced fiasco after fiasco. Under the old system, at least it was official that bowl administrators were picking whatever pairings they thought would maximize revenue, regardless of the merit of the teams. That's still what the BCS does, except it pretends to be doing something else. Go back to the old system.

### Reader Animadversion

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Steve Hawryluk protests that logos have snuck their way onto the black below-eye stickers that are the modern substitute for lampblack, and that for fashion reasons, players now wear the stickers indoors at dome-stadium games. He haikuizes,

The eye black sticker  
protects from slanting sunlight.  
Not too much in domes.  
-- *Steve Hawryluk, Winston-Salem, N.C.*

Joe Vancura of Atlanta notes that the place that Florida State University plays is now officially Bobby Bowden Field at Doak Campbell Stadium. So the field itself is named for Bowden while the walls are named for Campbell? Why not name the spectator seats for FSU grad Fred Biletnikoff, then call the place Bobby Bowden Field and Fred Biletnikoff Stands at Doak Campbell Stadium.

John Brassil, who works at Vanderbilt University, says there is, in fact, a BCS poll for DJs, and it's here. Nos. 1 and 3, Tiesto and Armin Van Buuren, are Dutch, he reports. So the Netherlands' policy of subsidizing rock-and-roll and the dance scene, ridiculed here last week as a waste of tax money, is in fact a brilliant strategy! But doesn't it bother anyone that *government officials in Amsterdam are scheming for world domination of the techno DJ industry?*

Amy Leisenring of Santa Fe, N.M., writes of TMQ's proposal for a moratorium on praise of Brett Favre: "During the Green Bay-Houston game, one of the guys on ESPN said the world would be a better place if everyone spent 15 minutes sitting down and talking to Brett Favre. Gimme a break -- he's an athlete, not Gandhi! I find myself rooting for the Packers less because of excessive praise of Favre. Thanks for putting this in perspective." Sharai Pollock of River Falls, Wis., adds a strikingly similar sentiment, "I find myself, a lifetime, diehard Packers fan, saying 'Enough already! He's just a football player, not a saint!' "

A recent column discussed a cheerleader who said she had a bilingual dog, and asked how a dog would bark in Spanish. Ron Echeverri of San Jose, Calif., reports, "The Spanish onomatopoeia of choice for a dog's bark is 'guau,' roughly 'gwow' in English." Michael Evans of Newmarket, Ontario, pointed out this on a Georgetown website, which lists the sounds many kinds of animals are said to make in numerous languages. It's the kind of website any young child will delight to see.

Many zoologically adept readers, including David Moody Jacksonville, Fla. - who chants "ERRR-nest WILLL-ford, ERRR-nest WILLL-ford" during Jags games -- pointed out it is the king snake, not the corn snake, that mimics the coloration of the coral snake. What does this have to do with football? You'll just have to read the previous column.

Last week, I lauded my all-time favorite Christmas show, *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer*, but objected that the narrator refers to Clarice and Rudolph's mother as "women," when they are not women, they are reindeer. Jeff Goldberg of Bardonia, N.Y., writes, "Funny that you would think this is inaccurate, but have no issue with the fact they can talk and fly." Of course they can talk and fly, they're Santa's reindeer! Many readers, including Sacha Zohn of San Francisco, pointed out that Rudolph's love interest is named Clarice, not Clarissa as last week's column said.

TMQ continues to wince about the Bengals' new yikes-stripes look. John Bohannon III, a professor at Butler University in Indianapolis, writes: "The Bengals' new helmet and shoulder patches resemble the World War I naval camouflage scheme known as 'dazzle,' where wild contrasting stripes were painted on warships and cargo vessels. One might think dazzle make ships easier to see as they stand out against the background. However, it proved terribly difficult to get an accurate visual range on an object with this coloration. That defenders cannot see the Bengals properly may be a factor in Cincinnati's sudden offensive outbursts."

Laren Richardson of Long Beach, Calif., notes that the alternate jersey worn by Cleveland in Week 11 was not "international orange," as TMQ said: "International Orange is the deep orange-red of the Golden Gate Bridge, not the garish traffic-cone of the NFL's representatives in northern Ohio." Richardson agreed that the Browns' orange jerseys made them look like walking traffic-safety pylons.

Last week's column declared, "NFL defensive coordinators should pay me vast sums in gold bouillon" for my idea on how to stop the Indianapolis offense. Bob Goudreau of Cary, N.C. asks, "Perhaps TMQ could enlighten us loyal readers about what you're planning to do with large quantities of yellow broth." Bob, I'm a realist, the best offer I'm likely to get for my idea is soup! Bullion is the correct spelling where element 79 is concerned. This indicates the danger of relying on computer spell-checkers -- once, my Word spell-checker changed a misspelling of "undue influence" to "undo influence." A reader haikuizes,

Bullion's what you meant.  
Colts' opponents are the ones  
now in the bouillon.  
-- Sherry Graham, Raleigh, N.C.

Andrew Elliott of Denver offers this proposal: "I agree with Jim Reynolds' idea that you temporarily rename the 49ers the 24.5ers. However, to remain with your 'Squared Sevens' theme, you should rename them the Squared 4.949s." Mr. Data, make it so!

### **This Week's Challenge**

This week's Challenge is to wait until the Challenge resumes. I'm putting the item on a brief hiatus as the approach of the holidays overloads my schedule, cutting into the time I would use to scan Challenge entries along with my panel of judges.

### **Next Week**

Why do psychics have to ask for your credit-card numbers -- wouldn't they already know?



## TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

### Hillary Clinton's Christmas album, and the football gods smite Pittsburg of Kansas

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Dec. 14, 2004) -- It's fun to win by a huge margin, but running up the score may come back to haunt you. Just ask Pittsburg of Kansas, the No. 1 ranked Division II team. The Gorillas' frantic efforts to run up the score, documented in previous TMQs -- earlier this year Pittsburg of Kansas ran a fake punt while ahead 63-7 -- sent them into the playoffs as the highest-scoring college team in history, averaging 60 points per game. But on Saturday in the Division II championship, Pittsburg of Kansas honked out, losing to Valdosta State. Had Pittsburg of Kansas won its earlier games by smaller margins, the team would have stood a much better chance of winning the title it coveted.

Consider teams that have self-destructed by running up the score. Last season, number-one ranked Oklahoma ran the score up to 77-0 against undermanned Texas A&M. From that point in the season the Sooners imploded, shortly afterward losing the Big 12 title game to underdog Kansas State, then losing in the BCS championship to underdog Louisiana State. Running up the score not only placed Oklahoma's name on a list of those to be punished by the football gods, but broke the team's sense of sportsmanship. Later, when the pressure was on, the Sooners had no steadfastness to fall back on.

Or think of the game that this column calls the most disastrous event in the history of the Jacksonville Jaguars -- the team's 62-7 victory over Miami in the 1999 divisional playoff round. Jax ran up the score in the fourth quarter, and Jaguars' players openly taunted the Miami sideline where stood the great Dan Marino, playing his final contest. The football gods promptly exacted vengeance by handing Jax defeat the following week in the AFC Championship Game, held on Jacksonville's field. Years of losing ensued as more punishment; only this season have the Jaguars begun to recover from the calamitous disaster of winning by 62-7.

Sportsmanship is not just an empty term, though obviously many invoke this term in empty ways. Sportsmanship has both to do with how you honor your opponent and how you manage your own inner fears. Teams that seek to humiliate opponents by running up the score lose the ability to respect their opponents -- and pay dearly when they line up against an equal. Teams that run up the score gain experience laughing at the other sideline, but learn nothing about calling on character under duress. At the deepest level, sportsmanship is about finding out who you, yourself, really are. What you want to find out about yourself is that you respect others and possess character. Teams that run up the score, disdaining sportsmanship, neither respect others nor build their own character.

Pro football coaches seem to understand this dynamic better than college and high-school coaches. TMQ has many complaints about NFL coaches -- if I see one more punt inside the opponent's 40! -- but lauds them for rarely running up the score. The Jacksonville 62-7 game was an exception; usually NFL teams ahead by 20 or more in the fourth quarter do little but grind the clock. Of course in the NFL all that matters is winning; there are no polls, like in college and high school, where many voters have never seen the teams perform and cast ballots based partly on winner's point margin. But NFL coaches also seem to understand that running up the score rarely benefits the victor.

Note: This season, Oklahoma renounced running up the score and tried to hold down its final total against overmatched Baylor, even knowing the BCS voters reward big victory margins. Because the scales have fallen from the eyes of Sooners' coach Bob Stoops, TMQ now expects the football gods to

favor Oklahoma over USC in the national collegiate championship at the Orange Bowl.

In other football news, experts say that Americans are chronically sleep-deprived, in part because we watch too much television. An important book just released in paperback maintains that our sense of well-being would rise if we would just go to bed one hour earlier each night, and turn off the television one hour before that. But if you went to bed ere the clock struck midnight last night, you missed four touchdowns! Kansas City and Tennessee scored 31 points after midnight Eastern. Maybe *Monday Night Football* games should kick off even later.

In NFL news, here are cautionary notes about playoff-bound Atlanta and Philadelphia. In its last two outings, Philadelphia has thrown 83 times and rushed 38 times. This is, as ecologists are wont to say, not sustainable. And Michael-Mike Vick is Atlanta's leading rusher, with 821 yards running on 109 carries. This is, as ecologists are wont to say, not sustainable.

And in other NFL news, what would the Founding Fathers say about the disaster that is looming for the pro football postseason? See below.

### **Stats of the Week**

Indianapolis scored 23 points -- its lowest output of the year.

### **Stats of the Week No. 2**

Pressed into service again as a nickel back, Troy Brown of New England recorded his third interception of the season.

### **Stats of the Week No. 3**

Josh McCown started at quarterback for the Cardinals at Buffalo in October, then Luke McCown started at quarterback for the Browns at Buffalo in December: their teams lost by a combined 75-21, while the McCowns were sacked a combined 11 times.

### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Arizona and Jersey/A are a combined 0-8 since their coaches decided to change quarterbacks; before that point, they were a combined 9-9.

### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

St. Louis had seven points and seven turnovers.

### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

Cleveland averaged minus-0.4 yards per pass attempt.

### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

Chris Chandler of St. Louis has attempted 56 passes this season and eight have been intercepted.

### **Stats of the Week No. 8**

San Diego, Carolina and Buffalo are on a combined 16-0 run.

### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

If every pass a quarterback throws clangs to the ground incomplete, his NFL passer rating is 40. In the

Pittsburgh-Jersey/B game, both Ben Roethlisberger and Chad Pennington finished with a 33.6 rating.

### Stats of the Week No. 10

Tennessee gained 542 yards, and lost.

### Stats of the Week No. 11

Atlanta is the league's top-ranked rushing team, yet has no one in the top 10 for rushing.

### Capitalist-Cheerleader of the Week

Literary Cheerleader of the Week temporarily suspended while we recognize cheerleaders with other serious credentials. Numerous readers have nominated Kim of the Dolphins, whose team bio says she is the owner of a human resources outsourcing firm. This appears to mean Kim's profession is helping companies offload workers with high pay and benefits, replacing them with temps. How long until there are temp cheerleaders hired on a game-by-game basis? Maybe someday Kim will be a fantastic success in business, buy the Dolphins and replace the players with temps from Bangalore, India.

Any mention of the Miami cheer-babes creates a perfectly legitimate excuse to link to their swimsuit calendar, first NFL calendar to feature both cheesecake shots of cheerleaders and beefcake shots of players. Check also the team's videos section, where Dolphins' cheerleaders, wearing bikinis on a South Florida beach, are interviewed about their lives. Wouldn't *you* wear a bikini to an interview?

### Sweet Play of the Week

Tense game tied at 3 in the fourth quarter, Pittsburgh faced third-and-3 on the Jersey/B 10. The Steelers lined up with an extra offensive lineman reporting as a receiver, so it must be a heavy-package run, right? Jerome Bettis took the handoff on a sweep; all Pittsburgh linemen including tight end Jerame Tuman blocked "down" in his direction; Tuman then slipped straight up the field to the end zone; Bettis stopped and heaved the option pass that proved the winning points. Halfback passes and receiver passes are supposed to be coached to this rule: throw only if the man is totally unguarded by anyone, otherwise just run out of bounds and we don't care if you take a loss. No one at all covered Tuman, so Bettis did the smart thing by throwing. Surely if Tuman had been covered, Bettis would have done the smart thing by running out of bounds; see below.

### Sweet Play of the Week No. 2

Tennessee leading 7-0 in the second quarter, the Flaming Thumbtacks had second-and-1 on the Kansas City 42. Tennessee lined up with two receivers left, then fullback Robert Holcombe ran a flare pattern into the left flat. To the defenders at this point, the play looked like a flare left to Holcombe. Receiver Drew Bennett set a pick, trying to screen two defensive backs away from Holcombe. Picks are illegal, put NFL receivers set them constantly. Suddenly Bennett broke from his pick and shot right on a short crossing pattern. The Kansas City defense forgot about him, and he took a short catch-and-run 42 yards for the touchdown. This play was a *fake pick!* Bennett faked doing something illegal, the defense believed he was doing something illegal and decided to ignore him.

### Sour Play of the Week

Trailing 27-23 with 2:16 remaining, Minnesota faced first-and-10 on the Seattle 20. Playing at home with the crowd roaring at military-afterburner decibels, the Vikings had just moved smartly down the field and seemed poised for the go-ahead score. You would have said the wind was at Minnesota's back, if the game had not been in a dome. And there was no hurry; the Hyperboreans had ample time to score and, ideally, exhaust the clock in the process. The call was an end-around pass by Randy Moss, who heave-hoed a *crazy* toss into double coverage, interception. Halfback passes and receiver passes are supposed to be coached to this rule: throw only if the man is totally unguarded by anyone, otherwise just run out of bounds and we don't care if you take a loss. Instead Moss threw a silly pass that ended Minnesota's chances.

## Sour Play of the Week No. 2

Jax leading the Bears 13-3 on the first snap of the fourth quarter, Chicago faced first-and-10 on its own 4. What did Bears quarterback Chad Hutchinson do? Sprint backwards into his own end zone -- yet another instance of a phenomenon Tuesday Morning Quarterback has been complaining about all season, NFL quarterbacks sprinting backwards into their own end zones, an action that often comes to woe. But that's not the sour part of this play. Chicago's offensive line totally bungled the blocking call. *All five* Bears' offensive linemen blocked "down" left as if it were a running play, with right tackle Qasim Mitchell blocking so far to the left he stood where the center snapped the ball. The result was Chicago's two running backs blocking the two Jacksonville defensive linemen coming from the offensive right, and Hutchinson dropped for a safety. Right tackle Mitchell stood like topiary never making contact with anyone, and never so much as glancing to his right as two Jacksonville defenders coming through his hole directly toward his quarterback. TMQ constantly marvels that, if you break down a disaster play, you find one or more gentlemen standing around doing absolutely nothing at all on the team that is struck by the disaster.

## Grade Inflation Strikes Quarterback Ratings

Reader Michael Donnelly points out that in 2002 only one full-year starting quarterback, Chad Pennington, finished above 100 in the NFL passer rating; in 2003 only one, Steve McNair, managed this feat. Currently four -- Peyton Manning, Daunte Culpepper, Donovan McNabb and Drew Brees -- are above 100. Manning, at 126.3, appears on his way to the all-time best passer rating, the current mark being 112.8 by Steve Young. Donnelly asks, "Has the five-yard contact rule really changed NFL offense this much?" No, it's Manning's magic umbrella! See below.

## What Peyton Manning Has In Common With Mary Poppins

Reader Lysa Whitt notes, "Remember Mary Poppins, how just about everything she did or said was darn near perfect? How it was difficult to find fault with her, except that she was too perfect?" Lysa haikuizes,

"Practically perfect  
in every way:" Peyton,  
NFL's Poppins.  
-- *Lysa Whitt, Cincinnati*

## In England, Lifeless Plastic Models Are Often Mistaken for Members of the House of Lords

Hundreds of British callers reported seeing a skydiver fall into the ocean. He turned out to be an action figure tied to balloons by a child.

## Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk

Trailing 10-3, the Redskins faced fourth-and-2 on the Philadelphia Nesharim 46 near the end of the third quarter. In trotted the punting unit. Better to try and fail -- which sends players the message their coach is challenging them to win -- than wimp out with a fraidy-cat punt on a short-yardage play in opposition territory. And yes, Washington has a good defense, but a defense can't hold a deficit, if you catch my drift. At some point the offense must take a lead for the defense to hold! Boom went the punt, and Philadelphia needed just three snaps to pass the point where the ball would have been had the Redskins gone for it and failed. Emboldened by the Skins' mincing fraidy-cat punt, the Eagles drove the length of the field for a touchdown that made it 17-7 and provided their winning margin.

This wimp-out an exception? Reader Vincent Nordhaus of Middlesex, New Jersey, notes that in the first quarter, game scoreless, Washington punted on fourth-and-6 from the Eagles 35. Philadelphia needed just two plays to pass the point where the ball would have been had the 'Skins gone for it and failed. *You're 4-8, what do you have to lose?* And now you are 4-9.

## Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk No. 2

Trailing 17-7 in the third quarter in the snow at Buffalo, the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1) faced fourth-and-10 on the Bills 41. Sure fourth-and-10 is hard, but you're 3-9, *what do you have to lose?* Better to try and fail -- which sends players the message their coach is challenging them to win -- than wimp out with a fraidy-cat kick. Boom goes the punt. Emboldened by Cleveland's mincing fraidy-cat play, the Bills marched the length of the field for the figgie that turned the game into a runaway. *You're 3-9, you have an acting interim provisional coach, what do you have to lose?* And now you are 3-10. Note: Buffalo's 154 points in its last four games is the best in club history over such a span, exceeding any four-game output by the no-huddle offense of the team's Super Bowl years.

### **Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk No. 3**

Trailing 28-25 with 1:05 remaining, the Arizona Cactus Wrens faced fourth-and-goal on the San Francisco 4. In trotted the field goal unit; Arizona tied, and went on to defeat in overtime. You're 4-8, one shot to gain four yards wins the game, *what do you have to lose?* And now you are 4-9.

### **Best Play by a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Be in San Diego**

While Eli Manning was causing people to whisper the "b" word in New York and high-priced holdout Philip Rivers was nailed to the Bolts' pine, Drew Brees hit a perfect arcing 79-yard touchdown pass to Eric Parker. I don't wish to alarm you, but the Bolts are 10-3 and Brees is the league's fourth-rated quarterback.

### **Two Reasons 31 NFL Teams Wish Charlie Weis All the Best at Notre Dame**

Leading 21-14 with 25 seconds remaining in the first half, New England faced second-and-goal on the Cincinnati 4. The Flying Elvii had lost a yard on a rush attempt on the previous play, so it must be a pass, right? Weis called Kevin Faulk off tackle, touchdown and the defending champions never looked back. Now leading 35-28 with 2:04 remaining in the game, New England faced second-and-10 on its 46, Cincinnati having used its final timeout. Normally in this situation the team with the lead runs to grind time -- but since the scoreboard read 2:04, Weis knew the clock would stop after the next snap regardless. So he called a play-fake with the Bengals clearly expecting run; 20-yard completion to Troy Brown, and the rest was kneel-downs.

### **How About a Computer Voice That Says, "Dis Is Bruno. Waddaya Want?"**

Yours truly love to ride Amtrak but hates "Julie," the computerized voice on the Amtrak 800 number. "Julie" seems to exist exclusively to prevent callers from talking to a real agent. Once I tried to ask "Julie" out, and she replied, "I'm sorry, I didn't understand your question." Well, I got that a lot when I was dating.

Now we learn "Julie" is a real person -- you'd never guess it from the authentic way she imitates a soulless machine -- named Julie Stinneford, profiled in this article. Stinneford is "a professional voice talent," the article reports; Amtrak claims 90 percent of callers like Julie, which I find about as credible as the railroad's latest budget request. Everyone yours truly knows who rides Amtrak HATES Julie and tries desperately to get past her to speak to a real person. Why, exactly, did Amtrak *hire a person to imitate a computer?* And remember, Amtrak used your tax money to hire a person to pretend to be a computer. Tuesday Morning Quarterback suggests having fun with Julie by calling the Amtrak number, 800-USA-RAIL, and trying to confuse her. I did, and part of the conversation sounded like this:

JULIE. How many people will be traveling?

ME. It's a big country. How should I know how many people will be traveling?

JULIE. That sounded like you said, "One adult."

ME. I was being evasive. But I refuse to tell you why I was being evasive.

JULIE. My mistake. How many people will be traveling, and please be sure to say if there will be

children or senior citizens.

ME. Of course there will be children. Children are our hope for the future.

JULIE. That sounded like you said, "Eight children."

ME. Do you have children, Julie? I'm starting to worry that machines will have children.

JULIE. You need to say what kind of adults will be traveling.

ME. The dashing, irresistible kind. It's me, after all. I'm sort of a 1940s-movie handsome-stranger-on-a-train kind of guy.

JULIE. I'm having trouble understanding you.

### **NFL Disaster Looming, Part Two**

Last week the Arizona Cardinals sent their seasons-ticket holders invoices for playoff tickets, since although the team was 4-8, it was still possible the Cards would not only make the NFC postseason but *win their division* and thus host a playoff game. Woe, woe may be approaching, for there continues a chance that not one but two 10-6 teams from the AFC will be denied the postseason, while an 8-8 or even a losing team from the NFC earns a playoff bid. If strong winning teams from one division stays home while weak teams from the other division receive playoff invitation cards, this will be, as yours truly said last week, a "disaster of the first magnitude."

But it would not, as yours truly also said last week, be "the first unfair NFL postseason." As numerous readers pointed out, there have been unjust postseasons before. Andrew Murdoch of Wolverhampton, United Kingdom, noted that in 1991, Jersey/B made the playoffs with a non-winning record of 8-8; John McClean of San Diego added that in 1991 San Francisco and Philadelphia, both 10-6, were shut out of the playoffs. (Jennifer McClean previously had a comment published in TMQ, making Jennifer and John the first husband-wife team to appear in the column.) Joe Pritchard of Eau Claire, Wisc., added another grisly detail: in 1985, Cleveland won the AFC Central at 8-8 and thus made the playoffs while Denver at 11-5 won neither its division nor a wild card, and was sent home. Tom Kegel of Round Lake, Illinois, adds that Washington at 10-6 also failed to make the playoffs in 1985. Don Burton of Miamisburg, Ohio, goes still farther back. In 1967, the Colts stayed home with a record of 11-1-2, while Green Bay at 9-4-1 and Dallas and Cleveland at 9-5 advanced to the postseason. In 1968, Minnesota made the playoffs with an 8-6 record, while the Rams stayed home with a record of 10-3-1. (You can look up NFL season results by going here and selecting the desired year.)

Those are all bad outcomes, though not necessarily as bad as the disaster the NFL is hurtling toward now. Why? Expansion of the playoff field. In the 1960s only division winners made the playoffs, so it was accepted that if one division had two strong teams, the second-best would lose out on postseason play. That was why the wild cards were created: had the current system applied to 1967 and 1968, there would have been no unfairness. In 1985, only five teams from each conference made the postseason, versus today's six; had the current system been in effect, Denver at 11-5 and Washington at 10-6 would have advanced. By 1991, six teams from each conference went to the postseason, so only that year stands out as really troubling. The system in place in 1991 caused the 8-8 Jets to advance while the Eagles and Niners at 10-6 stayed home, and that system remains in place today. Note that 1991 was the flip side of what looms this season, since that year a weak AFC team advanced while strong NFC teams did not.

Should football lovers accept an outcome in which weak teams advance and strong teams clean out their lockers? In reader Don Burton's view, "Unfairness is just the trade-off you get from sparking fan interest with regional divisions, and really no more 'unfair' than North Dakota having the same number of senators as New York." But wait – Tuesday Morning Quarterback would take away one of North Dakota's senators! Population discrepancies among the states are now so much greater than in the Framers' day that a constitutional amendment to reorganize the Senate is justifiable. Today California has 56 times as many residents as North Dakota, yet the same representation in the Senate. When the Constitution was adopted in 1789 the most populous state, Virginia, had 13 times as many residents as the least

populous, Delaware. (These figures are for total population, counting each slave as a person, not as "three fifths of a person," the legal bias of the time.) Surely the Framers did not anticipate that population disparities among the states would grow to today's level, since they could not have anticipated a technological nation supported by high-yield agriculture and antibiotics. If the Framers came back and heard of North Dakota getting 56 times as much representation in the Senate as California, the Framers would surely consider that anti-democratic.

Okay, set aside redrafting the Constitution – the small states will never ratify an amendment that reduces the power of the small states. But changing the NFL playoff system does not require a vote of three-fourths of state legislatures. More on the possibilities of a new playoff system as we hurtle closer to the looming postseason disaster. Hurling-toward-disaster watch: If the postseason began today, the Panthers at 6-7 would be in, while the Broncos at 8-5 and the Bills and Jaguars at 7-6 would be out.

### **Worst Play Ere the Clock Struck Midnight**

Game tied at 14 with 15 seconds remaining in the first half, the Flaming Thumbtacks had first-and-10 on the Chiefs 22, holding no timeouts. They're already in field-goal range, so where oh where might the pass go? *Maybe up the field!* Yet Drew Bennett is single-covered as he runs a simple fly pattern to the end zone, safety William Barteel doesn't even enter the picture until Bennett has caught a touchdown as the half ends. This season, as the end of the first half approaches, TMQ has noted a number of NFL defenses mentally trotting to the locker room while there are still ticks remaining on the clock.

### **Best Play After the Clock Struck Midnight**

At 12:41 Eastern, Tennessee led 38-35, there with 37 seconds remaining, Kansas City had first-and-goal on the Flaming Thumbtacks 9. Trent Green executed a perfect play-fake, then hit Eddie Kennison on the flag route to the corner of the end zone for the winning points. But why, TMQ wonders, did the Flaming Thumbtacks bite on the play-fake? The Chiefs were out of timeouts, making it likely they would pass in this situation.

### **Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! (Roughing Edition)**

Last week TMQ supposed that "roughing-the-quarterback penalties are more common on big-blitzes because the blitzers, especially if defensive backs, are so intent on the highlight-reel moment of hammering the other team's leader." Jacksonville leading the Chicago Mingdingxiong 10-3 in the early third quarter, the Jaguars faced third-and-7 on the Bears 21. Corner blitz, incomplete pass; but Bears' corner Charles Tillman is called for roughing Byron Leftwich. Tillman hit way late in the quest for that highlight-reel moment of hammering the other team's leader. Jacksonville gets a first down and a field goal on the series, and never looked back.

### **Worst Call After Midnight (Roughing Edition)**

On the play before Kennison's 12:41 A.M. touchdown, the Titans were called for roughing. The call not only advanced the ball to the Tennessee 9 but, equally important, stopped the clock -- Kansas City was out of timeouts, and its runner had just been tackled inbounds. Referee Tom White announced "hit to the side of the head" as reason for the penalty, but replays showed defender Travis LaBoy hit quarterback Trent Green on the shoulder, not the head. "Blow to the shoulder" is no penalty. LaBoy looked like he was going to whack Green's head, then pulled his arm down at the last instant. When someone looks like he's going to commit a penalty but doesn't, officials should simply pick up the flag.

### **Best Purist Drive**

Leading 21-3 at the start of the third quarter, Atlanta staged a 16-play, nine-run drive that took nine minutes off the clock and made it 28-3, putting Oakland into panic mode. The Falcons actually snapped the ball 21 times on this drive, but five plays were nullified by penalties. Later, leading 28-3, Atlanta took over on its 10 late in the third quarter. The Falcons staged a 14-play, 11-rush drive that took seven minutes off the clock and resulted in a touchdown that iced that game at 35-3.

## Best Purist Drive No. 2

Leading Houston by 20-14, Indianapolis took possession on its 25 with 5:33 remaining. The Lucky Charms staged a 10-play, seven-rush drive that took the game down to the two-minute warning and resulted in the game-icing field goal. Best play: with 3:11 remaining and Indianapolis facing second-and-11, Peyton Manning rolled right and handed back to Edgerrin James running left. Meanwhile tight end Marcus Pollard came *behind the formation* from the right and kick-blocked left. James gained 14 yards and a first down, and Houston's goose was about to be cooked.

## Equal-Time Beefcake

Here's another in the series of portrait shots, by *Seattle Post Intelligencer* photographer Scott Eklund, of Blue Men Group players shirtless -- in this case receivers Koren Robinson, Bobby Engram and Darrell Jackson.

## Crazy Pass Watch

Leading 28-14 early in the second quarter, New England faced second-and-8 on its 38. Cincinnati blitzed; male-model-esque Tom Brady fell down onto his keister (this is a technical term); from his keister, Brady flicked a completion to who-dat reserve fullback Patrick Pass. New England scored a touchdown on the possession, and the rest was filler. But this counts as an attempted crazy pass. Plays like this almost always backfire: Tom, don't ever think about doing this again.

## Why Certain Teams Are 4-9

Atlanta leading 14-3 with 1:25 remaining in the second quarter, Falcons' defensive tackle Rod Coleman intercepted a deflected pass on the Oakland 39 and -- well, run isn't the right word, let's just say began moving toward the Raiders' goal line. Just three of the 11 Oakland players made any attempt to chase him down, despite the fact that Coleman was one of the slowest gentlemen on the field at that moment. Touchdown, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

## This Never Happened in the Days of Tang

Last week NASA said the space station is running low on food, and ordered the two astronauts aboard to cut 300 calories a day from their intake. There's the next diet fad -- the space station diet! According to NASA, space station crew are required to fill out a weekly FFQ -- Food Frequency Questionnaire. Analysis of recent FFQs showed that astronauts Leroy Chiao and Salizhan Sharipov were eating more than they are supposed to -- just like everybody down below in the United States and Russia! How many of us, I wonder, would like to see the results of a Food Frequency Questionnaire on our own intake? NASA's plan is that an automated Russian supply vessel will dock at the station on Christmas Day, bringing new supplies. If the supply vessel doesn't get there within 30 minutes after launch, the dehydrated pizza is free!

## See, I Told You Highbrow Cheerleader Swimsuit Pictures Was Possible!

Last week in the *Macon Telegraph*, writer Joe Kovac Jr. referred to Tuesday Morning Quarterback as "semi-highbrow". That sounds dangerously like being semi-tough!

## Scoring Complaint

The official Game Book scored the Jax safety as, "Hutchinson sacked in End Zone for -4 yards, SAFETY." It should be scored as, "D. Smith, SAFETY," crediting the player who caused the safety, not the ballcarrier who was the victim. When an offensive player scores a touchdown, the scoring line gives the man who made the points -- not the name of the defender who was burned. That is, Reggie Wayne's touchdown reception Sunday was scored as "Wayne 12 pass from Manning," not as "Robinson burned for 12-yard reception." Listing the man tackled in the safety score line, rather than the man who makes the tackle, gets the credit all wrong.

## The Eagles' Cheerleaders' Christmas Album Will Have One Song for Every Thong on Their Lingerie Calendar

Last year TMQ supposed the ultimate Christmas album would be "Rosemary Clooney's Jersey Turnpike Christmas," one song for every rest stop on the New Jersey Turnpike. I received loads of email from people asking where they could buy "Rosemary Clooney's Jersey Turnpike Christmas." Maybe I should have produced the album! Here are other possible seasonal specialty albums:

- "John Ashcroft's Throw Away the Key Christmas," one song for every maximum security penitentiary in the federal system.
- "Kofi Annan's 10 Percent Christmas," one song for every bribe United Nations officials took from Saddam Hussein.
- "Dick Cheney's Christmas at an Undisclosed Location," one song for every cost overrun by Halliburton.
- "Hillary Clinton's Vast Snow-Covered Conspiracy Christmas," one song for every time the Clintons changed their story. (Multi-album set.)
- Duet album: "Terrell's & Nicollette's Nothing But a Towel Christmas," one song for every apology for that skit.
- Choral album: "The San Francisco Forty-Niners' We'll Be Home for Christmas Christmas," one song for each Niners' loss this season.
- "Tuesday Morning Quarterback's Gold, Frankincense and Myrrh from the Football Gods Christmas," one song for every wrong prediction in this column.

## New England Commits Error!

The Patriots leading 35-14 late in the third quarter, Cincinnati faced fourth-and-5 on the Flying Elvii 11. Holder Kyle Larson, the Candy Corns' punter, took the snap and ran off-tackle left for the touchdown that made it in interesting game. The play was a rare New England tactical mistake. Given a 21-point deficit with a quarter to go and fourth-and-5 being a make-able down, the situation suggested fake kick, yet the Patriots were not in a fake-kick defense and lazily watched Larson roar past.

## TMQ's Christmas List

How about a lovely, historically accurate 16th-century battle axe with back spike, made of high-carbon steel, for just \$115? It's at Museum Replicas, which offers "historically accurate battle-ready swords, daggers, axes and helmets." In the catalog are a wide range of true-bladed fighting swords, falchions, dirks and claymores. Some are modeled on historical periods -- \$225 gets you a replica of the swords used at the battle of Towton in 1461 -- while others are replicas of swords from the Lord of the Rings, the Robin Hood sagas and other works of imagination. Bear in mind these are real swords and battle axes. The catalog also features an extensive selection of apparel, including knights' mail, medieval vests and jerkins, medieval ball gowns, monks' robes, and for the lady who isn't quite sure of the intentions of her escort, a lovely bodice dagger. Plus a complete replica of the 15th century Duke of Burgundy's armor, 225 pounds and "an UNBEATABLE price" of \$2,496. TMQ hasn't priced suits of armor lately, so I'll assume that is unbeatable.

## TMQ's Christmas List No. 2

TMQ hopes to find in his driveway a new Nissan Altima, whose California models now bear the designation Partial Zero Emission Vehicle. Math majors may be scratching their heads over the concept of Partial Zero: turns out that for the Altima, Nissan has eliminated one category of pollution, "evaporative" emissions, and California regulators wanted the reward the company with a special label. But will there soon be a Divide by Zero Emission vehicle? (Warning: math-major joke.)

## Tastefully Named Gregg Williams Watch

Who are Ryan Boschetti, Ryan Clark, Demetric Evans, Lemar Marshall, Antonio Pierce and Ron Warner? All undrafted free agents or waiver-wire acquisitions who have started games this year for the defense of the Washington Redskins, currently ranked second in the NFL. The high defensive ranking of the Skins is remarkable owing to the number of who-dats who have seen significant playing time; to the fact that the

Washington offense is cover-your-eyes awful, meaning the defense constantly trots back onto the field; and that the team's two defensive stars from 2003 (Champ Bailey, traded and LaVar Arrington, injured) have played no role. Ye gods, the tastefully named Gregg Williams can coach a defense. Honestly now, how many Redskins' defensive starters can you name without looking?

### **Draft Choice Investment Returns Watch**

Six weeks ago offseason prospects looked great for Dallas, which holds Buffalo's No. 1 choice in April -- Bill Parcells seemed a genius for banking that pick on the assumption the Bills would have an awful year. Now the Cowboys' investment appears more like a bank CD that pays only 1.5 percent interest. But the future looks upbeat for San Diego, which holds the Giants' No. 1 pick in April. Bolts fans should raise a banner that reads: THANKS FOR PUTTING ELI IN.

### **Get Your *New York Times*, Now Delivered in Plain Brown Wrapper, Part 2**

This *New York Times* story by Mireya Navarro details the proliferation in Manhattan of "upscale" strip clubs that are becoming socially acceptable destinations. Clientele has shifted toward men in suit and tie, couples on dates and even -- perhaps inevitably, given sociological trends -- all-female couples on dates, the *Times* reports. Navarro quotes "Dave Manack, associate publisher of Exotic Dance Publications," who is identified as an "expert" on stripping, as saying the key to marketing modern upscale exotic dancing is appeal "not just to men." Think of this job description -- expert on stripping. Obviously I should have chosen my major more carefully in college.

Now, bear in mind that there is a huge, vital distinction between stripping and "upscale" stripping. In the former, women take off their clothes while customers gawk. In the later, women take off their clothes while customers gawk, but the bill is higher.

Navarro reports that high-end exotic dance establishments with brand names are arriving in major cities, crowding out -- I am not making this up -- the "mom and pop" strip establishment. Let's hope mom wasn't the one stripping! She quotes "Angelina Spencer, national director of the Association of Club Executives, a trade association of strip clubs," as saying that nationally-based exotic dance establishments are expanding because they have professionalized the stripping business -- improving the treatment of dancers while rendering the customer's experience more like that of entering a nice restaurant, just one where the waitresses are naked. The *trade association of strip clubs*. Imagine what its lobbying policies must be! The Association of Club Executives even offers of page of dry-as-dust academic studies showing that no harm is caused to neighborhoods by well-run topless dance establishments.

Finally, Navarro quotes "Edniz Riveria, 23, an aspiring lawyer from Brooklyn" who works as a topless dancer in one of the new upscale clubs. Riveria says, "The clients are classier and have more money, and the girls tend to be more educated and business-savvy." TMQ has always favored educated, business-savvy strippers. And if I need a lawyer, I'll be hiring Edniz Riveria! Fun *New York Times* note: in its print edition, the paper accompanied this story with a tasteful photo of a woman on a date contemplating the ambiance as she entered a fancy strip club. On its Web site, the *Times* illustrated the story with a photo of a dancer wearing a thong and go-go boots. Some Gray Lady!

### **Why the Smart Play Is Sometimes Just to Throw the Ball Away**

Game tied at 21, City of Tampa had first-and-10 on its own 26 against San Diego with 4:18 remaining and all its time-outs. Nothing to panic about, and the situation favored the Bucs. On first down, Brian Griese forced the ball into double coverage, intercepted and returned for the touchdown by Donnie Edwards, Bucs go on to lose 31-24. When there's plenty of time, it's first down and no one is open, just throw the ball away.

### **The Globalization Who Stole Christmas**

Why is it impossible for parents to buy hot-demand new PlayStation2? Because a month ago an oil tanker became jammed in the Suez Canal, closing the waterway for the first time in 40 years and blocking several cargo ships bearing containers of electronic toys bound to stores for the holidays. The

trade publication *EuroGamer* calls the situation "grave". Sony has reacted in globalized terms by chartering Russian-built Antonov cargo planes to fly to China and pick up game consoles from the factory, then ferry them to the United States and European Union. Each plane can hold 40,000 PlayStation2 consoles, but apparently even deliveries of 40,000 consoles per plane will not meet Christmas demand. Meanwhile Nintendo is also leasing aircraft to fly more of its impossible-to-find DS handheld game from the factory in China to the United States. Imagine trying to explain to Chinese peasants living in shacks whose tin roofs are held in place by stones that children in the United States are crying because a global airlift cannot bring them video games quickly enough.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All**

Yes, St. Louis has injury problems at tailback, but you've got to at least try to run. Playing at home on Sunday, Les Mouflons attempted just 21 rushes, while passing 29 times, and six of the 29 were intercepted. By the fourth quarter, Carolina wasn't even bothering to honor the run. Panthers leading 20-7 with 8:58 to play, the Rams faced second-and-7 on their own 45 -- with this amount of time remaining in the game you could call anything from the playbook. At the snap Carolina middle linebacker Dan Morgan immediately backpedaled, so sure it would be a pass he didn't even glance to see if it was a run. Interception by Morgan, and fans begin heading for the parking lot.

### **Mega-Babe Commerce**

Supermodel/fitness buff Kathy Ireland has put her name on a collection of lamps and sconces. Now all supermodels are going to tell their agents they want wall sconces named after themselves!

### **Oh, the Weather Outside Is Frightful -- and Outside Is Where They're Going to Make You Play**

Rarely have the late-season limitations of dome teams been on display so graphically as Sunday in the Detroit at Green Bay collision. Game time temperature 33 degrees with intermittent snow, the dome-based Detroit Peugeots jumped to a 13-0 halftime lead. The Packers scored all of the second half's 16 points to win, as the Lions gradually lost the ability to move the ball in the cold. (Detroit had 155 yards of offense at the half, but just 73 following intermission.) Game tied at 13 with 3:42 remaining, Detroit faced second-and-8 on its 23, pass for the first down dropped by a Lion. Now it's third-and-8, pass for the first down dropped by a Lion. Detroit punts, and Green Bay receivers catch the ball in the cold on the Packers' drive for the winning field goal with five seconds remaining.

### **Game Being Played in TMQ's Nightmares**

The Bengals in their new home uniforms that look like Halloween costumes versus the Bills in their new road uniforms that look like toddlers' pajamas. Oh wait -- that game will occur in Cincinnati next Sunday.

### **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

#### **Obscure College Score of the Week**

Valdosta State 36, Pittsburg of Kansas 31 (Division II championship). Located in Valdosta, Ga., Valdosta State currently has 1,586 more undergraduate women than men, something Southern high-school senior boys might want to take into account when contemplating college.

All season long Tuesday Morning Quarterback has been warning the football gods would exact vengeance on Pittsburg of Kansas for running up the score. I noted that Pittsburg of Kansas was still throwing when ahead 70-28 and opined, "There is a term for this, and the term is bad sportsmanship." I noted a game in which the Gorillas passed on three consecutive plays when ahead 52-7. Yours truly noted two other games in which Pittsburg of Kansas kept throwing when ahead by seven touchdowns, or more, in the fourth quarter. That last column asserted, "the football gods will surely smite the Gorillas" as punishment for lack of sportsmanship.

And lo it came to pass that Pittsburg of Kansas entered the Division II championship undefeated and the highest-scoring team in NCAA football history, having recorded 775 points during the regular season,

besting the mark of 765 points set by Harvard in 1886. Pittsburg of Kansas became the highest-scoring team in NCAA history by frantically running up the score. In the Blazers of Valdosta State, the Gorillas met an equal opponent -- and one that did not run up scores -- and were smote down. Oh, were they smote. A reader offers this haiku,

Pittsburg runs up scores,  
Blazers sportsmanlike and win.  
Football gods avenged!  
-- Tom Holder, Atlanta

Sportsmanship is not just an empty term, though obviously many invoke this term in empty ways. In repeatedly trying to humiliate opponents by posting runaway scores, Pittsburg of Kansas lost the ability to respect opponents -- and paid dearly when it lined up Saturday against an equal team. By failing to teach sportsmanship, Pittsburg of Kansas coaches did not prepare their players for the resilience and determination that are required when things go poorly, and fear rises in your spirit. The Gorillas had a lot of experience laughing at the other sideline; they had no experience calling on their own characters under duress. Teams like Pittsburg of Kansas that shun good sportsmanship should expect punishment by the football gods.

### **Bonus Obscure College Score**

Mary Hardin-Baylor 38, Mount Union 35 (Division III semifinal). Located in Benton, Texas, Mary Hardin-Baylor University offers students a "first contact" system. First contact -- isn't that what happened between Earth and the planet Vulcan in 2063 on *Star Trek*?

While we're on the point of the corrosive effects of running up the score, consider Mount Union, which coming into the Mary Hardin-Baylor game had won 120 of its previous 122 outings, including six of the past eight Division III titles. In 2003, Mount Union frantically ran up the score, winning twice by 66-0, winning once 68-13. Leading 49-0 in the fourth quarter of a 2003 playoff game, Mount Union kept passing, frantically trying to run up the score. How did the football gods respond? When Mount Union met underdog St. John's of Minnesota in the 2003 Division III championship, the Johnnies won. Mount Union had a lot of experience laughing at the other sideline; players had no experience calling on their own characters under duress. TMQ detailed the 2003 crash-and-burn of Mount Union here.

So what did Mount Union learn for the 2004 season? Once again the team frantically ran up the score on undermanned opponents, winning one game 57-0, another game 59-10, passing while ahead 55-0 in the fourth quarter of this contest. In repeatedly trying to humiliate opponents by posting runaway scores, Mount Union lost the ability to respect opponents -- and paid dearly when it lined up on Saturday against an equal team.

### **Double Bonus Obscure College Score**

James Madison 48, William & Mary 34 (Division 1-AA semifinal). Well, of course an entire team beat one guy and one woman! Located in Harrisonburg, Va., James Madison University offers a graduate degree in General Kinesiology and Recreation Studies.

### **Triple Bonus Obscure College Score**

Linfield 52, Rowan 0 (Division III semifinal). Previously Glassboro State College, Rowan University changed names after Henry and Betty Rowan gave the school \$100 million. TMQ believes that, pace William & Mary, the school should have renamed itself Henry & Betty.

### **Cutting Edge Final Score Predictions**

Many readers including Jocelyn Delvin of Miami pointed out that Peter King of *Sports Illustrated* attempted not only to predict the final scores of the weekend's games, but exact player statistics. King predicted that Corey Dillon would rush 29 times for 129 yards, Julius Jones rush 27 times for 168 yards, that Peyton Manning would throw three touchdown passes and Josh McCown would throw three

interceptions. Dillon ran 22 times for 88 yards, Jones ran 23 times for 88 yards, Manning threw two touchdown passes and McCown threw one interception.

### **Preposterous Punt (College Coach Edition)**

Paul Perl of Washington, D.C., points out that in the Notre Dame-Boston College game, the Irish led 20-17 in the fourth quarter and faced fourth-and-5 on the B.C. 30. Tyrone Willingham ordered a punt – from the opposition 30! Notre Dame went on to lose 24-23. Yea, verily, this may have been enough to turn the football gods against Willingham.

### **Mercenary Coach (College Coach Edition)**

If a player demanded to be traded on the eve of a playoff game, he'd be denounced. So how come coaches can walk out on their teams on the eves of bowl games? Two years ago, Washington State coach Mike Price walked out on his team on the eve of a bowl game, in order to take more money at Alabama. Price proceeded to implode and ended up fired without ever coaching a game for the Tide. Bama boosters lamented, "How could we have known this guy cared only about himself?" How indeed -- you'd just hired a man who broke his promises to his previous employer!

Now, on the eve of Utah's appearance in the Fiesta Bowl, biggest bowl date in the school's history, Urban Meyer walks out to take more money at Florida. Utah won its Fiesta bid, and Meyer immediately began negotiating for more money for himself at other schools. Meyer broke the team's concentration and his promises to kids he recruited to play for him at Utah -- whether the coach is staying can be a big factor in prospects' decisions -- putting his lusts for publicity and money ahead of loyalty and promise-keeping. Congratulations, University of Florida, you have handed the keys to a coach who considers his own wallet more important than the team. If Meyer implodes, don't come back and say, "How could we have known this guy cared only about himself?"

### **Heisman Note**

Congratulations to Matt Leinart, but as TMQ noted last year, there's no way John Heisman himself would be considered for the modern Heisman trophy. Heisman was a small-college offensive lineman. Since today only quarterbacks and running backs of Top 10 schools are even considered, TMQ maintains the award should be renamed the Heisman Trophy for the Football Factory Offensive Backfield Player Who Receives Most Publicity.

### **Reader Animadversion**

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

On the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1) gaining just 17 net yards at Buffalo, a reader haikuizes,

Seventeen yards offense:  
Browns (Release 2.1) now  
Browns Beta version.  
-- *Reed Crofoot, Chicago*

Last week yours truly noted that Florida State now plays at Bobby Bowden Field at Doak Campbell Stadium. Doug Keegan of Austin, Texas, notes that UT's main football location is now Joe Jamail Field at Darrell K. Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium. Matt Meyers of Charlottesville, Va., notes that UVA plays at The Carl Smith Center, Home of David A. Harrison III Field at Scott Stadium. This unspeakable name, in the literal sense, is "no longer just a vision," the school's website reassures.

Katherine Hebert of Chicago writes that during the Dallas at Seattle Monday night game, the local ABC affiliate twice broke into the broadcast to report that everyone was safe in the Chicago skyscraper fire. Interrupting *football* to report that all is well? What misplaced priorities, she sighs.

Stacey McManus of San Diego was among many readers to note that I lauded the Titans for three onside kicks against Indianapolis, said they scored 24 points in the first quarter, then later said the game's final was 51-25. Obviously the football gods awarded a bonus point for valor! In a reader's haiku,

Twenty-four in first.  
 Football gods laud onsides kicks,  
 add one ere all-naughts?  
 -- *Michael C. Donlon, Buffalo, N.Y.*

Last week's column remarked on the shipping-containers company whose spokesman is named Sam Crane. Dave Anderson of Alexandria, Va., who once worked for a crime-victims rights group, reports that he once met with an expert on hotel security. And here is the man -- one Norman Bates.

Kwadwo Burgee of Philadelphia points out that the new ESPN NFL 2K5 video game has a feature that tracks the calls a player makes and creates scouting report on the player's tendencies. If you play against the computer while your tendencies are tracked, then call up that profile as your opponent, you can play against your own personality. What if the computer does a better job of being you than you do?

Amy Coyle of Portland, Ore., reports she once saw a sign directing attendees to a meeting of psychics. She asks: Wouldn't they just know where to go? A Blue Men Group devotee offered this lament, fitting as the Vikings raced down the field for their almost-comeback:

Wounded defense stalls.  
 Seahawks cannot stop the run:  
 Please, guys - not again.  
 -- *Heidi Brigham, Walla Walla, Wa.*

Many readers including Amelia Trumaine of Eugene, Ore., pointed out that in quoting the bard's "once more into the breach" speech, I made it "into the breech." As in, your breeches. Reader Peter Segal, host of NPR's delightful "Wait, Wait, Don't Tell Me", offers this haiku:

Leaping towards the "breech:"  
 A frantic dash to the rear,  
 much like the Dolphins.  
 -- *Peter Sagal, Chicago*

### **This Week's Challenge**

This week's Challenge is to wait until the Challenge resumes. I'm putting the item on a brief hiatus as the holidays overload my schedule, cutting into the time I would use to scan Challenge entries along with my panel of judges.

### **Next Week**

Santa tries offensive linemen as reindeer replacements, finds they are too heavy to get off the ground.



## TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

### The All-Unwanted All Pros, plus the NFL hurtles toward disaster!

*By Gregg Easterbrook*  
*Special to NFL.com*

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Dec. 21, 2004) -- As this column has been warning, the NFL is hurtling towards disaster -- namely a losing team in the playoffs, while winning teams stay home. Except in the 1982 strike season, when everything about the National Football League went wobbly, there has never been a losing team in the playoffs. Yet if the postseason began today, Carolina would be in at 6-8, while three teams with 8-6 records would be denied. Things are so out of whack that Arizona, at 5-9, is alive to win its division and host a playoff game, while Buffalo at 8-6 has only the faintest hope of making the tournament. It is possible that three 10-6 teams will be denied playoff berths, while an 8-8 or even 7-9 team advances. Should something like this happen it will be, as Tuesday Morning Quarterback has been asserting for weeks, "a disaster of the first magnitude."

Yes, last season 10-6 Miami stayed home -- but every team that advanced was at least 10-6, there simply was not room on the card for the Dolphins. You've got to go back to 1991 to see an outcome in which a 10-6 team was denied the postseason while a non-winning team advanced; that year the Jets qualified at 8-8 while the Niners and Eagles stayed home at 10-6. In 1990, Pittsburgh and Seattle stayed home at 9-7 while New Orleans advanced at 8-8; in 1999, two 8-8 teams advanced while one 9-7 team did not. There have been other cases in which postseason invitations left something to be desired. But there's never been a case of what the NFL is hurtling toward now -- the triple whammy of a losing team in the playoffs, or three 10-6 teams not in the playoffs, or a combination of both.

The NFL may be all-about-winning to excess, but if you win, you are rewarded. That's why it will be such as disaster if a losing team makes the postseason, or if multiple strong teams are sent home while weak teams advance. The NFL's core promise to spectators -- to present very best possible action -- will be violated.

The problem has nothing to do with AFC-NFC balance, which always ebbs and flows. This year the AFC is significantly stronger than the NFC, but in 1991, the last fouled up postseason, the NFC was significantly stronger than the AFC. The problem is the wild-card formula, with allots two at-large bids to each conference. If the season ended today, 6-8 Carolina would get an NFC wild card, while only one AFC card would be available to the four AFC teams currently at 8-6. The whole point of the wild-card system was to prevent skewed finishes that reward weak teams over strong ones! Yet in 1991 the system rewarded a weak team over strong teams, and appears fated to do so again.

The solution is obvious -- make the wild cards league-wide. Maintain the existing eight division championships with their automatic bids, even though this will cause skewed results. (If the season ended today, Seattle at 7-7 would win the NFC West and host a playoff game while the best the 8-6 AFC teams could dream of is road dates.) The eight-division setup gives the league scheduling structure and annual rivalries; division are necessary. The wild-card slots, on the other hand, serve no function other than as admission tickets to the playoffs, having nothing to do with rivalries or scheduling. These tickets should go to the deserving.

If the wild-card system was league-wide, the result this year could be four NFC teams and eight AFC teams in the postseason. But that's the *desired* result, since it rewards victory and presents fans with the best possible action. The 1991 result would have been four AFC teams and eight NFC teams in the

playoffs, which that year would have been the desired result for best-possible action. In future years a league-wide wild-card might result in five teams from one conference versus seven from another advancing, or in the current six-and-six anyway. In 2001, for instance, a league-wide wild card would have resulted in six-and-six.

With league-wide wild cards, no rivalry games are altered, while better teams advance and the best possible playoff action is presented to audiences. Where is the downside? Postseason disaster hurtles ever-closer; a major embarrassment for the NFL may be in store. Let's start working on a league-wide wild-card system now, to ensure this does not happen again.

In other NFL news, shortly before New England's Week 14 game against Cincinnati, Charlie Weis was hired to coach Notre Dame. As TMQ noted last week, immediately the Patriots did something they had not done in two years -- committed an obvious tactical error. Attention lagging? Last night against Miami, it was tactical error after tactical error by the defending champions: the absurd pass with less than two minutes remaining, the absurd seven-man blitz that allowed Miami's winning touchdown. Last night New England looked like a distracted team. No matter how hard Weis is trying to keep his thoughts focused on the Patriots, it's just human nature that you think ahead to the next job, especially if the next job makes you the boss. Suddenly New England looks like a normal football team susceptible to normal human error. Suddenly Pittsburgh has the inside track to home-field advantage throughout the playoffs. And suddenly, the Miami franchise will be to this column not the Ventral Fins but, once again, the Dolphins.

In more NFL news, on Wednesday the Pro Bowl squads will be announced. Or as TMQ calls them, the Eighty-Eight Percent All Pros. The Pro Bowl attendees are chosen after 14 of the 16 games have been played, 88 percent of the schedule. Why isn't performance in the final two games taken into account? Tuesday Morning Quarterback believes Pro Bowl voting should not close until the regular season is complete. Wednesday's squads will include lots of first-round draft choices and gentlemen who were subjects of megabucks bidding wars. But there's another kind of player, the kind who turns out to be a top NFL performer despite never being drafted, or being waived in his initial attempts. These Tuesday Morning Quarterback calls the All-Unwanted All Pros. You'll find my list of All-Unwanted All Pros later in the column. I would play them against the official Pro Bowl squads any day, and I bet my guys would win -- my guys would have the motivation.

In still other NFL news, what's going on with the Denver Broncos? They're collapsing down the stretch, yet are, statistically, the strongest team in the league -- see more below. Possibly Denver incurred the wrath of the football gods; more on that below, too. At any rate, Broncos' backers are in a tizzy. Quarterback Jake Plummer told a packed news conference the team planned to "make a gesture" to its fans!

And in still more NFL news, somebody finally took TMQ's advice of a month ago and defended Indianapolis by jumping around like crazy before the snap. Baltimore defenders moved, moved, moved while Peyton Manning was doing his chicken dance at the line of scrimmage. Sometimes four or five Ravens moved simultaneously, and at the last instant they stepped into unorthodox positions, such as an eight-man front on an obvious passing down. Manning looked confused and flustered, did he not? And on the Colts' own field, Baltimore held Indianapolis to 20 points, its lowest output of the season. Note to NFL defensive coordinators: Please wire my payment to the Swiss bank account number.

### **Stats of the Week**

Six days after they gained 542 yards and lost, the Titans gained 527 yards and lost.

### **Stats of the Week No. 2**

Detroit gained 463 yards, and lost. Denver gained 402 yards, and lost.

### **Stats of the Week No. 3**

Combining the 2003 and 2004 seasons, Jersey/A is 8-6 before November begins and 1-15 from the first week of November on.

**Stats of the Week No. 4**

The Cleveland Browns (Beta Version) have given up 158 points in their last four games.

**Stats of the Week No. 5**

Chris Chandler of St. Louis has attempted 62 passes this season and nine have been intercepted.

**Stats of the Week No. 6**

In 2001 there were 10 shutouts, in 2002 there were seven and in 2003 there were 12. So far in this season of the five-yard contact rule, there have been three shutouts. Stat submitted by Corné Hoogendoorn, Werkendam, The Netherlands.

**Stats of the Week No. 7**

In the Oakland-Tennessee game there were 824 yards passing and 118 yards rushing.

**Stats of the Week No. 8**

On Saturday, first-overall pick Eli Manning was beaten by lower-picked Ben Roethlisberger. Five of the last six meetings between rookie quarterbacks drafted in the first round have been won by the lower-drafted player. Stat from Mark Maske of the *Washington Post*.

**Stats of the Week No. 9**

In its last five outings, Buffalo has scored 187 points -- more than Indianapolis in its last five outings.

**Stats of the Week No. 10**

The four AFC division winners are on a collective 27-1 streak. Reader stat submitted by Nate Sceiford.

**Stats of the Week No. 11**

AFC teams are on a combined streak of 47-18, while NFC teams are on a combined streak of 13-21.

**Literary Cheerleader of the Week**

Only cheerleaders who list serious books or authors as their favorites are eligible. This week's is Desiree Valverde of the New England Patriots, who says her favorite book is *The Count of Monte Cristo* by Alexandre Dumas, and whose name sounds as if she herself is a character from *The Count of Monte Cristo*:

THE COUNT: (Swings down to Patriots' sideline.) Desiree, my dearest, I have come to carry you away from these 68,436 Boston-area fans who are thinking impure thoughts about your feminine charms!

DESIREE: Oh Edmond, you make me swoon! (She swoons.)

SECURITY GUY: Hey over there -- you can't bring a sword to an NFL game.

THE COUNT: Have at you! (They scuffle.) Till we meet again, my love! (He buckles his swash and swings away.)

PATRIOTS' TRAINER. She'll be okay. It's only a second-degree swoon.

Also according to her team bio, Valverde works as an administrative assistant and hopes to become a paralegal. She has 20 years of ballet, jazz and hip-hop dance training. Her favorite pop artists include Justin Timberlake -- perhaps best not to mention that if the Patriots go back to the Super Bowl. Patriots' cheerleaders note: if you were wondering if NFL cheer-babes can really dance, check this photo. Kicking your leg to the perpendicular takes years of practice.

### **New England Analysis Special!**

Tuesday Morning Quarterback's AutoText can practically write this item -- which is a sign of how badly the once-perfect Patriots botched their tactics last night. First, Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All. Leading 28-23 with 1:52 remaining, the Flying Elvii faced third-and-9 on the Miami 21, the Dolphins down to two timeouts. Run the ball, force them to burn another timeout, and then you're punting back to a low-voltage offense which to that point had sputtered to gain just 210 yards at home. Doesn't that scenario favor the Flying Elvii? Instead Charlie Weis called a pass. Second, Crazy Pass Watch. Last week Tom Brady threw a pass whilst positioned on his keister (this is a technical term). The sports world praised Brady as charmed but yours truly said, "Plays like this almost always backfire: Tom, don't ever think about doing this again." With 1:52 remaining last night Brady threw from his keister once more, and this time the result was an interception. Third, Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! Now it's Miami facing fourth-and-10 on the New England 21 with 1:29 showing. Is Romeo Crennel distracted too? For two years during the Patriots' mega-streak, he has resisted the urge to call silly big blitzes. Now Crennel calls a silly big-blitz, sending seven gentlemen after A.J. Feeley; touchdown pass, and Miami wins. Ay caramba! Ye gods! Yumpin yiminy! Good golly Miss Molly!

### **Sweet Play of the Week**

Green Bay was not doing that poorly against the rush overall this season -- not at least until a Florida team came into Lambeau on a minus-3 windchill day! The biggest play of this contest occurred with the score Jacksonville 21, Green Bay 17 early in the fourth quarter, Jax facing third-and-8 on the Packers' 40. The Jaguars lined up shotgun; the Packers were expecting pass; the crowd was roaring, feeling the comeback was about to begin. But what would Curly Lambeau do in this situation? What would Vince Lombardi do? Pass? Please! Handoff on the draw to Fred Taylor for a 15-yard gain.

### **Sweet Play of the Week No. 2**

The second biggest play of this contest occurred five downs later, Jacksonville facing fourth-and-goal on the Green Bay 1. The Jaguars lined up heavy; all Packers' eyes were on Fred Taylor; Jax handed off up the middle to who-dat rookie Greg Jones, touchdown, and the Packers had that dazed and confused look that precedes defeat. On this series, Jacksonville had second-and-goal at the 1. What would Curly Lambeau do in this situation? Handoff up the middle. Then third-and-goal at the 1. What would Vince Lombardi do? Handoff up the middle. Then the touchdown up the middle that makes it 28-17 on fourth-and-goal. When it faced the same choices in the same game, why didn't Green Bay, team of Lambeau and Lombardi, simply hand off up the middle? See below.

### **Sweet Play of the Week No. 3**

Trailing 7-0, Pittsburgh faced third-and-goal on the Jersey/A 7. The Steelers lined up NFL the shotgun with "slash" man Antwaan Randle El to the right of quarterback Ben Roethlisberger. All defensive eyes were on Randle El. At the snap, Roethlisberger quick-pitched to Randle El going right; the entire Giants defense went with him; immediately Randle El threw a shovel pass underneath to who-dat third-string running back Vernon Haynes, who danced into the end zone untouched. The ball was in Randle El's hands for at most a second -- perhaps the fastest touchdown pass in NFL history.

### **Sweet Play of the Week No. 4**

Leading 7-0, Atlanta faced third-and-31 on the Carolina 34. The Falcons lined up with Michael-Mike Vick as a slotback left; the ball was direct-snapped to tailback Warrick Dunn, who faked a pitch left to Vick; Dunn then ran up the middle for 15 yards, putting the Panthers into position for a field goal on the next play.

### Sour Play of the Week

Game scoreless in strong wind at Soldier Field, the Chicago Mingdingxiong faced fourth-and-6 on the Houston 35. In trotted the field goal unit. Now, who is going to believe it will be a 52-yard field goal attempt into a strong wind? The Texans were expecting a fake; kicker Paul Edinger's pass was intercepted by Aaron Glenn, who went down at the 17. Note: had Glenn simply knocked the ball down, the Moo Cows would have taken over on the 35. But defensive-back pay scales are driven by interception numbers, so corners always play for the interception.

### Sour Play of the Week No. 2

Game tied at 21, the Detroit Peugeotts had the Minnesota Hyperboreans facing third-and-2 on the Lions 11, with 1:43 remaining. Detroit expected run; the Lions put eight men in the "box," between the tackles and close to the line of scrimmage; Moe Williams ran 11 yards for the touchdown, not even touched until he reached the Detroit 3.

### Sour Play of the Week No. 3

Game tied at 3, Baltimore faced third-and-9 on the Indianapolis 26 at the two-minute warning of the first half. Kyle Boller was sacked out of field goal range, and the Nevermores punted. Baltimore bungled its line call, left tackle Jon Ogden turning inward to double-team the Colts' defensive tackle and completely ignoring Colts defensive end Dwight Freeney, who only leads the league in sacks. Ogden stood doing nothing, blocking no one, as Freeney took Boller to the ground. As yours truly noted last week, "TMQ constantly marvels that, if you break down a disaster play, you find one or more gentlemen standing around doing absolutely nothing on the team that is struck by the disaster."

### Sweet 'N' Sour Play

Leading 24-14, Jersey/B had first-and-10 on the Seattle 43. The Jets lined up with quarterback Chad Pennington wide left; the ball was direct-snapped to reserve tailback LaMont Jordan; he faked to Curtis Martin sweeping left; then Jordan ran right for 33 yards, setting up the touchdown that turned the game into a walkover. The deception was sweet. But think about the fake to Martin; if he'd taken the ball going left that would have made Pennington, on the left, his *lead blocker*. What are the odds? Yet the Blue Men Group defense went with the fake left; that was sour.

### Why Hasn't Donovan Darius Been Suspended Yet?

In football there is nothing more dangerous than the banned "clothesline," in which a defender extends his arm and strikes an offensive player in the neck at full speed. On Sunday, Jacksonville safety Donovan Darius clotheslined Packer Robert Ferguson, who ended up motionless on the Lambeau turf for several minutes. Darius was ejected; as of yesterday Ferguson was hospitalized, but expected to recover. What Darius did was far outside the bounds of the rules: he risked breaking Ferguson's neck! *Everybody* who plays football knows the clothesline tackle was banned because it can break a player's neck. There must be consequences for Darius, to make certain other defenders don't even think of using this banned technique. If the league does not suspend Darius, this will send the message that the clothesline tackle will be quietly tolerated -- and that, in turn, will lead to someone lying on the turf who does not get up.

### Football: A Fragile Ecosystem

Here are continuing cautionary notes about playoff-bound Atlanta and Philadelphia. In its last three outings, Philadelphia has thrown 118 times and rushed 66 times. This, as ecologists are wont to say and as TMQ warned last week, is not sustainable -- especially now that there is no Terrell Owens to pass to. Overall on the season, Michael-Mike Vick has rushed 117 times and been sacked 44 times. This is, as ecologists are wont to say, not sustainable. Plus who are Jake Plummer, Aaron Brooks, Tim Rattay, Joey Harrington and Jeff Garcia? Quarterbacks with better passer ratings than Vick.

### School Board Members Don't Go to School, So Why Should Subway Board Members Ride the Subway?

Recently TMQ noted that the man in charge of the Washington, D.C., mass transit system drives to work because driving is more convenient. Comes now word from Lyndsey Layton of the *Washington Post* that the majority of the board members of the Washington, D.C., mass transit system rarely or never ride the bus or subway. When they attend board meetings, they drive and park in taxpayer-financed parking spaces -- though the meetings are held at MCI Center, one of the easiest places in the nation's capital to reach via public transportation.

### **Gregg Easterbrook: Founder, President, CEO, Chairman and Managing General Partner of Tuesday Morning Quarterback Enterprises**

Former Defense Secretary William Cohen has a great new job, he's chairman and CEO. Of what? Of the Cohen Group, a company he started and named after himself. Perhaps in his role as chairman, he chose himself to serve as CEO: following, surely, an exhaustive executive-search process.

Cohen is hardly alone. Political figures naming consultancies after themselves, then awarding themselves glorified titles, is a trend in Washington. Former National Security Advisor Brent Scowcroft is now "founder and chairman" of the Scowcroft Group. Lawrence Lindsey, former director of the White House's National Economic Policy Council, is now President and Chief Executive Officer of the Lindsey Group. Lindsey even awarded himself capital letters!

What do these outfits do? The Cohen Group reports that its clients are mainly "late-stage technology firms," which sounds like some kind of disease. Cohen Group says this is its specialty: "Mastering the complex and often veiled dynamic where government, politics, media, and business intersect requires a rare combination of knowledge, skills and experience." In other words the Cohen Group does behind-the-scenes arm-twisting, but lobbyists always deny they are lobbyists. Here, Cohen Group claims success stories. These are the first two listed: "Advised and assisted U.S. company in working with U.S. Government officials and the Coalition Provisional Authority in securing major contract related to Iraq reconstruction. Developed a winning strategy and message campaign that enabled a global security firm to win several multi-year, multi-million dollar contracts for background screening of government personnel." In other words, helped big companies make off with taxpayer dollars! In return for a fee. The Scowcroft Group is "an international business advisory" that offers "a wide range of services and area expertise tailored to meet individual client needs". The Lindsey Group's "mission is to help key decision makers navigate an increasingly complex environment by giving them timely, concise, and decisive analyses of economic and political events that will affect their business." Since the Lindsey Group appears to have only three employees, maybe it needs to hire the Cohen Group to help it land a cushy government contract.

### **Bengals Management Promised to Bring in Big-Name Players**

Check the depth chart for the Cincinnati Bengals -- T.J. Houshmandzadeh requires two lines.

### **Seattle Kicking Watch**

All season long, TMQ has been riding the Seahawks for kicking field goals on fourth-and-short while trailing. Finally on Sunday they listened to me! Down 30-14 at the end of the third quarter, the Blue Men Group faced fourth-and-goal on the 1-yard line of Jersey/B. Kicking here would be like reading a concession speech! Better to try and fail than to wimp out. Seattle took my advice and went for it. Now the Hawks are acting bold, now their fortunes will change, now -- let the record reflect, Mr. Chairman, that I never advised Shaun Alexander to fumble.

### **I Plan to Hire "Pew Pals" to Sit in Church for Me on Christmas Eve**

Can't spare the time to string those holiday lights? Why not hire Christmas Decor, "providing professional holiday and event decorating services since 1986." Christmas Decor will deck the exteriors of homes or businesses; "we also offer complete takedown and storage services." Gwendolyn Bounds of the *Wall Street Journal* reported that Christmas Decor charges a few hundred dollars for simple home lights, but has billed as much as \$30,000 to decorate mansions of the rich. Hey rich people who live in mansions: if you have \$30,000 to spend on Christmas lights, Jesus would tell you to give the money to the poor. ("Whatsoever you do to the least of them, you do unto me" -- not that Jesus has anything to do with



For the second time this season, Carolina lined up defensive end Julius Peppers as a wideout and threw him a fade to the corner of the end zone. For the second time this season, pass incomplete.

### **Best Play by a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Be in San Diego**

While Eli Manning was ringing up a 103.9 passer rating but not winning and high-priced holdout Philip Rivers was nailed to the Bolts' pine, Drew Brees arced a perfect 72-yard touchdown pass to Antonio Gates in the swirling snow. I don't wish to alarm you, but San Diego is in the playoffs and Brees is the league's third-rated quarterback.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All**

Trailing 21-17 against a Florida team in frigid Wisconsin cold, Green Bay reached first-and-goal at the Jacksonville 3. The crowd was roaring at experimental-screamjet decibels. The Packers have the 10th-ranked rushing attack. Why not pound, pound, pound? On first down Brett Favre rolled right, sprinted backwards and heave-hoed into double coverage, interception and the Jaguars control the remainder of the game. The sports-commentary world holds the Packers and their quarterback in awe. But this was a terrible call by Green Bay coaches, and a novice-level blunder by Favre.

### **Tuesday Morning Quarterback All-Unwanted All Pros**

To qualify, a player must have gone undrafted, been waived or left a team in free agency when his employer made no bona-fide attempt to keep him. (Free agents whom their original team wanted to retain, but could not for salary-cap reasons, don't qualify.) Players traded for the purpose of getting rid of them are eligible, whereas those traded because their original teams were seeking what they received in exchange are not eligible. Those who are double-unwanted -- waived more than once, or undrafted and then let go once or more -- are noted with an asterisk. On my squad are numerous San Diego designees. One reason for the Bolts' worst-to-first transition is an unusual number of undrafted or waiver-wire players who are outperforming the megabucks athletes of competing teams.

This season TMQ introduces to the All-Unwanted All Pros a special category for any gentleman whose team just invested the fourth-overall pick of the NFL draft on a player who was supposed to replace him. What could make you feel more Unwanted than that? Hmmm -- this category appears to apply only to Drew Brees, who as an original San Diego draft choice would not otherwise qualify for the All-Unwanted All Pros. To make things equitable, I will allow this category for any future player whose team just invested the fourth-overall pick in the NFL draft on a player who was supposed to replace him.

And this year, Tuesday Morning Quarterback introduces a new trophy, the All-Unwanted Lifetime Achievement Award. This year's goes to tackle Ray Brown of the Washington Redskins, who not only has played well this season at the age of 42, but has been let go *five times* in his lengthy career. Brown was also selected in the eighth round of the 1986 draft; later the draft was reduced to seven rounds, so by today's standards, he went undrafted. Brown played in the official Pro Bowl in 2001. Now he earns a much greater honor, the All-Unwanted Lifetime Achievement Award.

### **2004 All-Unwanted All-Pros first-team offense:**

Offensive line: Joe Andruzzi, New England; Pete Kendall, Jersey/B; Roman Oben, San Diego; Jeff Saturday, Indianapolis; Casey Wiegmann, Kansas City.

Tight end: Antonio Gates, San Diego. (Note: did not play football in college.)

Wide receivers: Joe Horn, New Orleans; Jimmy Smith, Jacksonville.

Fullback: Lorenzo Neal\*, San Diego (Note: cut five times!)

Running backs: Corey Dillon, New England; Priest Holmes, Kansas City.

Quarterback: Drew Brees, San Diego.

Placekicker: Adam Vinatieri, New England.

Kick returner: B.J. Sams, Baltimore.

**First-team defense:**

Defensive tackles: Sam Adams\*, Buffalo; Kelly Gregg, Baltimore. (Note: tastefully named!)

Defensive ends: Bertrand Berry\*, Arizona; Simeon Rice, City of Tampa. (Note: Berry was cut from the CFL.)

Inside linebacker: Antonio Pierce, Washington.

Outside linebackers: James Farrior, Pittsburgh; Steve Foley\*, San Diego.

Cornerbacks: David Barrett, Jersey/B; Shawn Springs, Washington.

Safeties: Rodney Harrison, New England; Lawyer Milloy, Buffalo.

Punter: Brad Maynard, Chicago. (Note: most punts downed inside the 20, despite home stadium having league's second-worst wind conditions.)

Special teamer: Nick Ferguson\*, Denver.

**Second-team offense:**

Offensive line: Hank Fraley, Philadelphia; Chris Liwienski, Minnesota; Chris Naeole, Jacksonville; Steve Neal, New England; Trey Teague, Buffalo.

Tight end: Jermaine Wiggins, Minnesota.

Wide receivers: Drew Bennett, Tennessee; Brandon Stokley, Indianapolis.

Running backs: Ahman Green, Green Bay; Reuben Droughns\*, Denver.

Fullback: Nick Goings, Carolina. (Note: did not start in college.)

Quarterback: Brian Griese\*, Tampa

Placekicker: Neil Rackers, Arizona (Note: leads league in touchbacks.)

Kick returner: Eddie Drummond, Detroit.

**Second-team defense:**

Defensive tackles: La'Roi Glover\*, Dallas; Pat Williams, Buffalo.

Defensive ends: David Bowens\*, Miami; Kimo von Oelhoffen, Pittsburgh.

Inside linebacker: Jamie Sharper, Houston.

Outside linebackers: Mark Fields\*, Carolina; Mike Vrabel, New England.

Cornerbacks: . Aaron Glenn, Houston, Atlanta; Willie Williams, Pittsburgh. (Note: William was let go by Pittsburgh, then let go by Seattle, now is back at Pittsburgh -- unwanted *and* recycled!)

Safeties: Ryan Clark, Washington; Jerry Wilson\*, San Diego.

Punter: Brian Moorman, Buffalo. (Note: good placement stats despite home stadium having league's worst wind conditions.)

Special teamer: Brendon Ayanbadejo, Miami.

### **Maroon Zone Play of the Day**

Leading 10-5 with 6:43 remaining, Houston faced fourth-and-7 on the Chicago 31. Given wind and cold, a field goal was a long shot. Here was a classic Maroon Zone dilemma -- it's too far for a field goal attempt but too close to punt. The Texans went for it with a simple buttonhook pattern to Corey Bradford; inexplicably, cornerback Charles Tillman was way backed off. The Moo Cows scored a touchdown on the possession, and the rest was filler. Note: on the snap before the fourth-and-7, Houston sent its punter on the field and dawdled. Chicago declined a delay of game penalty, thinking the Texans wanted a better angle to punt for the corner. The penalty declined, Dom Capers sent his offense back onto the field. Lovie Smith convinced him to go for it!

### **Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!**

Having scored 21 fourth-quarter points to take a 31-24 lead, the Panthers had the Falcons facing second-and-10 on their 41 with 3:13 remaining in regulation. Michael-Mike Vick was having a terrible game passing; to that point, he had netted only 81 passing yards. All the momentum was on Carolina's side. Just play straight defense and -- it's a blitz! Seven gentlemen cross the line. Almost effortless 54-yard completion to Dez White to the Panthers 5-yard line, Atlanta scores and goes on to win in overtime.

### **Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! No. 2**

Kansas City leading 14-0, Denver faced third-and-16 on the Chiefs 22. Since the average NFL pass attempt yields about seven yards -- anyway, it's a corner blitz! Easy touchdown pass to Rod Smith -- honorary mention for the Tuesday Morning Quarterback All-Unwanted All Pros -- and suddenly it's a game.

### **Why Certain Teams Are Now Assured of Their 14th Straight Year Without a Winning Season**

Game tied at 7, Buffalo's Jason Peters blocked a Cincinnati punt. Peters, who is listed at 328 pounds, began, well, running isn't the word, let's say began moving toward the live ball. No Bengal chased him. All alone, Peters recovered the rock in the end zone for a touchdown, and the rout was on.

### **In An Era of Free Agency, Why Shouldn't Cheer-Babes Be Free Agents?**

Reader Joe Ippolito of Buffalo, N.Y., points out that the team bio of Daniela, a cheer-babe for the Buffalo Bandits lacrosse team, reports that if she won the lottery, the first thing she would do is "move out of Buffalo."

On the subject of free-agent cheer-babes, reader Ken Atzingen of South River, N.J., points out the personal website of Aubrey Aquino, who was a cheerleader for the Raiders and then the Cardinals, appeared on ESPN's *Beg, Borrow and Deal* and now works as a traffic reporter in Phoenix. Here is her current Cardinals page.

### **Hidden Play**

Hidden plays are ones that do not make highlight reels, but stop or sustain drives. In New York, which for NFL purposes is located in New Jersey, Seattle jumped to an early 7-3 lead. The Jets faced third-and-

2 on the Blue Men Group 40. Play-fake and a flip to reserve running back Jerald Sowell, who motored 34 yards to the Seattle 6. Touchdown three snaps later and the home team begins to assert control.

### **Disclaimer Watch**

Mike Ulrich of Evansville, Ind., notes the Visa commercial which says that merely using your Visa card enters you into a contest whose prize is all your 2004 purchases free retroactively. At the end of the commercial, the disclaimer announces, NO PURCHASE NECESSARY TO ENTER. Ulrich asks, "What do you win if you don't purchase anything?"

### **Worst Crowd Reaction**

Jerry Orr of Shippensburg, Pa., notes that when the Indianapolis Colts, leading 20-10, took possession on the Baltimore 4 with a minute remaining, they did the right thing and knelt. But the home crowd booed. Oh ye throngs of spectators, trifle not with the football gods! If the Colts had run up the score, they might have paid a price: see below. Also memo to the Indianapolis crowd -- there is no sweeter play in football than watching your team kneel on the ball.

### **I Have Often Walked Down This Street Before, But the Pavement Was Never Covered With Wood Shavings Before**

On a trip TMQ stayed in this Marriott in Saratoga Springs, N.Y.. Note the address --- 11 Excelsior Avenue. A street named after wood shavings!

### **"That Item Was Almost Clever, Clint!"**

"That was almost picked off!" announcer Jim Nantz declared as Will Peterson reached around Antwaan Randle El to deflect a pass at the goal line on Saturday. In fact, that was nowhere close to being intercepted; Peterson barely tipped the ball away with his left hand at an awkward angle; there was no chance he would intercept. One announcer tic that gets to yours truly is that seemingly every time a defender comes near the ball, bobbleheads declare it was "almost" picked off. Few plays described in this manner are close to interceptions. This announcer tic must be driven by the desire to make every down seem incredibly ultra-exciting -- usually unnecessarily, since most NFL games are plenty exciting as it stands. What's your least favorite announcer tic? Start thinking, as that will be the subject of the future Challenge.

### **TMQ's Christmas List**

Money to burn? Look into the Dixie Chopper Xtreme, a 32-horsepower, \$10,200 riding lawn mower that goes 15 miles per hour. They're the SUVs of lawns! Or consider the faux-antique CIXX wall faucet from Sonoma Forge, which has been hammered and dented to make it appear hundreds of years old, and costs just \$1,400. They're the Rolexes of faucets!

### **TMQ's Christmas List No. 2**

In a world where millions go to bed hungry each night and nearly a billion people subsist on a dollar a day, you'll want to make sure your dog has plenty of Christmas presents. Perhaps this lovely \$199.99 innerspring mattress for dogs -- monograms available! Entire families may sleep on the streets of Calcutta, but your dog needs an innerspring mattress. And why expect your dog to climb mere wooden steps instead of carpeted dog steps? A bargain at \$119.99 -- an amount that could feed an African village for a week. And what about the \$195 cashmere dog sweater from Burberry? It's imported, probably from a country where most parents can only dream of having \$195 to clothe their children. Hey anybody who can afford a \$10,200 lawnmower or \$1,400 faucets or Burberry dog sweaters -- give the money to the poor!

### **Should There Never Be Fumbles?**

Late in 1998, Seattle played at Jersey/B and suffered one of the worst calls in NFL annals -- officials gave

the Jets a touchdown on the game's final play, though the runner clearly never crossed the goal line. The defeat cost the Seahawks a playoff spot, and helped lead to the re-introduction of replay review. Now it's late 2004, Seattle at Jersey/B. Curtis Martin is credited with a touchdown when he sure didn't seem to get cross the goal line. On another play Seattle picks up a Jets' loose ball and runs it back for a touchdown, only to have officials rule there was no fumble because the runner's forward progress was stopped as he released the ball. Wait -- by that standard there could never be a fumble! Every ballcarrier stops making forward progress at the instant he lets go of the ball. Once again Seattle loses at Jersey/B on dubious officiating, and falls to 7-7. Which, considering Seattle is in the NFC, gives it the NFC West lead and inside track to host a playoff game!

### **Worst Tactics Ere the Clock Struck Midnight**

At 11:57 p.m. Eastern, game tied, 1:30 remaining in regulation, Carolina had first-and-10 on its 32, holding one timeout. The Panthers had thrown well in the contest -- 314 net yards passing to that point. Yet Carolina coaches called a pitch right to fullback Nick Goings, a slow-moving gentleman; Goings lost six yards and was tackled inbounds, meaning the clock kept moving. Then Carolina jumped offside on the next snap. Now back on their 22 with 1:01 remaining and one timeout, Panthers coaches decided to make no attempt to win in regulation, handing off up the middle twice and taking their chances in overtime. Their chances weren't good. How soon they forget! Last February in a certain Super Bowl, the score was tied and the Patriots got the ball back with 1:01 remaining in regulation and worked down the field at full throttle for the wining figgie with seconds to play. When the ball is in your hands at the end of a tie game, better to go all-out to win than passively accept the 50/50 chance of victory in the fifth session.

### **The Denver Mystery**

Denver, once 7-3, has lost three of its last four and was just blown off the field by the Kansas City Chiefs, an eliminated team. Yet coming into Week 15, the Broncos were the league's No. 1 team in combined offense-defense performance. By this barometer, the lower the number the better, and Denver had the league's lowest number at 9 -- defense fourth, offense fifth. The next lowest numbers were possessed by Jersey/B and Philadelphia, both at 19 -- the Eagles offense seventh, defense 12th, the Jets the mirror image at defense seventh, offense 12th. Yes, these figures are for yards rather than points, and they don't take into account special teams, which are harder to quantify statistically. But still, on paper, Denver looks mighty. On the field, Denver looks snake-bit.

Could this have something to do with Mike Shanahan's bizarre decision to fire defensive backfield coach David Gibbs during the team's bye week? At that point, the Broncs were 6-3; they are 2-3 since the Gibbs firing, having beaten only two cellar-dwellers, Miami and New Orleans. Before Gibbs was fired, Denver's pass defense looked pretty good; since, it has looked awful. (Yes, Denver has injuries -- but this is December, every NFL club has injuries.) There's never been a public explanation for Shanahan's firing of Gibbs, nor has he been accused of having any personal problems nor doing a poor job: most of the rumors say bureaucratic power-grabbing was the issue. But what do you suppose the football gods thought of firing a position coach when his players were doing well and the team winning?

Plus, Denver has been making some mighty odd tactical decisions lately. Consider Sunday. It's Kansas City 21, Denver 7, the Broncos facing fourth-and-2 on the Chiefs' 41. Denver came into the game with the league's fifth-ranked rushing attack -- can you take that hint? Yet not only is the call as pass, it's a *seven-step drop* pass that requires Jake Plummer to sprint back, back, back when all the team needs to gain is two yards. Plummer was flushed from the pocket, then tackled on the 42 when he tried to scramble for the first down; Kansas City took the ball, scored to make it 28-7 and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook. Seven-step drop on fourth-and-2?

### **Cheer-Babe Professionalism**

Kickoff temperature 37 degrees, the who-needs-clothes Philadelphia cheerleaders came out with bare midribs and sprayed-on leotards. Needless to say, the football gods granted their team its late comeback win -- though fans may wish the cheerleader-created karma had been used to protect Terrell Owens instead. At Indianapolis and Arizona, cheer-babes in revealing Santa's-naughty-elf costumes were significant factors in home-team victories. And in Miami on last night, cheerleaders sported revealing Santa's-naught-elf outfits despite a kickoff temperature of 52 degrees. They stayed in the minimalist

outfits as the clock approached midnight and temperature fell. Outstanding cheer-babe professionalism was crowded by outstanding victory.

## RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT

### Obscure College Score of the Week

Linfield 28, Mary Hardin-Baylor 21 (Division III championship). Located in McMinnville, Ore., Linfield's class of 2008 includes 32 students who were editors of their high school newspapers. This may not be the ideal college at which to do something scandalous you would prefer to have covered up!

### Bonus Obscure College Score

James Madison University 31, Montana 21 (Division 1-AA championship). Located in Harrisonburg, Va., James Madison has a Parents Council with 36 parent members. When yours truly went to college, a few parents were present on campus for Homecoming, otherwise most had nothing to do with students' collegiate life. Now parents are as much a presence on college campuses as professors. If you're paying \$30,000 a year, you want to know where the money goes!

### Running Up the Score: Afterward

Last week's column dealt on how teams that run up the score are punished by the football gods. Gbenga Ajilore, a professor of economics at the University of Toledo and a Cal alum, points out that the good deeds of the sportsmanlike may not go unpunished. On the day before the BCS pairings were finalized, Cal beat Southern Mississippi 26-16; the Golden Bears were on the Southern Mississippi 22 with a minute remaining, and took two knees to end the game. Pundits later said Texas was chosen for the Rose Bowl over Cal because the Golden Bears did not beat Southern Mississippi by an impressive enough margin. He laments to the football gods in haiku,

Cal Bears take a knee.  
Sportsmanship unrewarded:  
Texas to Rose Bowl.  
-- *Gbenga Ajilore, Toledo, Ohio*

Of TMQ's contention that Oklahoma claims, at least, to have seen the light about not running up the score -- and thus may be favored by the football gods in the national title game against USC -- Jeff Anderson points out this. Leading Notre Dame 34-10 with seven minutes remaining, the Trojans staged a fake punt and then immediately threw deep, frantically trying to run up the score. Oh ye mortals, trifle not with the football gods.

Meanwhile Ted Warin of Omaha, Neb., notes that the coach of Pittsburg of Kansas was named Division II coach of the year. The Gorillas spent the season showing poor sportsmanship by running up the score, then lost the Division II title game when they met an equal opponent. Give that man an award! Further, Warin notes, the coach of Mount Union was named Division III coach of the year. The Purple Raiders spent the season showing poor sportsmanship by running up the score, then lost the Division III title game when they met an equal opponent. Give that man an award! Two gentlemen who taught poor sportsmanship, then lost when the pressure was on, are Coaches of the Year because they ran up points against undermanned teams. Sadly, this demonstrates that many coaches run up the score at the college and high-school levels because they are rewarded for doing so. Polls-voters and awards committees seem more impressed by runaway victories over weak teams than close wins over strong teams.

Postscript: Bill Boyd of Port Murray, N.J., notes that five times this season, the Pittsburgh Steelers have taken kneel-downs in the opponents' red zone in the final moments of games. Critics have been carping that 13-1 Pittsburgh is not winning by big margins, but this, Boyd notes, is because the Steelers are not running up the score. Surely we should posit that the football gods will smile upon the team that spells its name with an "h" at the end of Pittsburgh.

## Reader Animadversion

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Last week I lauded Jennifer and John McClean of San Diego as the first husband-wife team to have comments published in TMQ. Now I learn that E. Scott Horsfall of Sacramento, Calif., who a couple years ago had a haiku published as by "Eddie Scott," is the father of Ryan Horsfall, who suggested naming the Seahawks the Blue Men Group. That makes them the first father-son team in TMQ. Further Barb Yau and Kate Urquhart of Eagan, Minn., who have each had haiku in past editions of the column, now report that they are the first nontraditional couple to appear in TMQ. First nontraditional female couple to write poetry for a National Football League website: is that a made-for-TV movie waiting to happen, or what?

Christina Clark of San Francisco, who also hates "Julie" the computer voice of Amtrak -- see last week's column -- like TMQ finds it hard to believe, as Amtrak claims, that a poll found 90 percent of callers had a favorable reaction to "Julie." Clark writes, "They must have told 10 Amtrak employees to call, and then asked each one, 'Which would you rather do, drive a railroad spike through your head or talk to Julie?'"

In the holiday spirit, here's a haiku on Randy Moss' ill-advised pass against the Blue Men Group:

Randy's errant toss:  
Better to receive than give?  
Moss gathers no points.  
-- *Diane Firstman, Brooklyn, N.Y.*

Dan Hans of Louisville, Ky., writes of a common concern of TMQ readers -- decline in national productivity on Tuesday afternoons, as vast numbers of Americans plow through this column at work. (This week's column is 8,371 words; a typical nonfiction book is 100,000 words, but lacks cheerleader pictures!) Hans writes, "I was pondering the virtues of reading TMQ at home vs. at work. By reading TMQ at home, I am able to improve my productivity at work AND share the TMQ experience with my wife. I am moved to haiku:"

Praise the football gods  
for providing TMQ  
printable version.  
-- *Dan Hans, Louisville*

Finally Josh McDonald of Fort Worth, Texas, and a former Texas Christian University student of lit professor Neil Easterbrook, an Official Brother of TMQ, notes that the world has begun to catch on to Aaron Schatz and the Football Outsiders, often lauded here. Note this *New York Times Magazine* article that praises Schatz's work. Football Outsiders, by a huge margin the best indie football web site, is here. And if any newspaper, magazine or big-company web site out there is looking for a football columnist who takes the high-IQ approach to the sport, yours truly suggests that Schatz is the one to call.

## This Week's Challenge

A reader asks in haiku, TMQ Challenge --  
like Priest Holmes and the Giants,  
done for the season?  
-- *Larry Wilson, Gainesville, Fla.*

No sirree! This week's Challenge is to wait until the January 4, 2005 column, when the Challenge resumes.

## Next Week

I'll be here. Tuesday Morning Quarterback extends holiday wishes to all space aliens, mega-babes and

football enthusiasts. Bells are ringing all across the local star cluster!



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## Nick Saban undecided about kissing Cindy Crawford, and Merry Spendmas!

*By Gregg Easterbrook*  
*Special to NFL.com*

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Dec. 28, 2004) -- If Nick Saban was offered a glass of Dom Perignon 1970, would he take three days to decide whether to taste it? If Cindy Crawford wanted to kiss Saban, would he agree to the kiss "in principle," then spend days putting her off?

Nick, you've been handed a reported \$4.5 million per year to assume one of the prestige coaching assignments in all of sports. Try to show just a tiny bit of enthusiasm. Thanks for making up your mind in the 2004 calendar year! And consider that the ambivalent Saban has been made coach and put in charge of player personnel. The Dolphins have a general manager, but Saban gets veto over those decisions, which suggests the general manager will become an empty suit.

The track record of combined coach/executives is poor, and this is not a carefully guarded secret. For example, the Seahawks were floundering until Mike Holmgren gave up his front-office role and concentrated on coaching, at which point the team promptly made the playoffs two straight years. Coaches should only coach and somebody else should have the job of screaming at players' agents over telephone.

In other football news, Philadelphia didn't even try to win on *Monday Night Football*. Will the team try to win its season finale against Cincinnati? After that, the Nesharim have a bye week. If they don't go all-out to beat the Bengals, it will be almost month -- from Dec. 19 to Jan. 15 or 16 -- between games that matter for Philadelphia. That is not good karma.

Teams that have locked up their best possible finish, as Philadelphia had before Week 16, always face a dilemma in how to handle the end of the regular season. TMQ says play to win. Recall that going into its regular-season finale last year, Denver had locked its best finish; the Broncos made a half-hearted effort and got blown out 31-3 at Green Bay. A week later in the playoffs, the Broncos got blown out 41-10 at Indianapolis. Not trying to win disrupted Denver's karma. In Week 17, Indianapolis goes to Denver with the Colts having already locked their best finish. Learn from what you witnessed last season, Colts -- play to win!

And in still more football news, millions of fans must have spent the week fingering their worry beads because the NFL is now less like to hurtle toward the disaster of a losing team in the postseason. But it still may not be pretty. The likelihood is there will be at least one 8-8 team that makes the playoffs while three teams with winning records do not. Also, there is a strong chance a 10-6 team will be kept out while one or more 8-8 teams are in. Last week yours truly proposed a way to change to the NFL playoff system to prevent this from happening again. See below for reader's reactions to the TMQ proposal.

There is no sure way to switch from levity to seriousness, but the loss of Reggie White at age 43, coupled to the loss of untold tens of thousands in the Indonesia earthquake, should remind us of the Roman saying *memento mori* -- bear in mind, you too shall die. It may happen tomorrow, it may happen in 50 years from now, but it will happen. White was an active Christian. Jesus taught, "If the householder had known in what part of the night the thief was coming, he would have watched." One meaning of this teaching is that the end of life may come without warning; live every day prepared for it to be the last. That may sound bleak, but is the reverse. Approaching every day prepared for it to be the last raises

your spiritual awareness, allows you appreciate the daily miracle of the sunrise, reminds you to show love, helps you to behave morally. Life is fragile and distressingly short. Keeping this in mind is an aid to doing good, and living fully in the one brief chance we are permitted. Surely, White knew the teaching about the thief and the householder, and when the end came for him in the night, we can hope his heart was ready. If the end came for you tonight, would you be?

**Stats of the Week** Buffalo and Carolina opened a combined 1-11 and since have gone a combined 15-3.

**Stats of the Week No. 2** The Dolphins staged a 12-play, 6:51 drive that ended in a punt.

**Stats of the Week No. 3** After gaining 1,068 yards in its previous two games, Tennessee gained 153 yards at home.

**Stats of the Week No. 4** Green Bay has four field-goal victories this season -- twice by a final of 34-31 and twice by a final of 16-13. Stat submitted by Matt Budenz of Cleveland.

**Stats of the Week No. 5** Jerry Rice and Emmitt Smith, who had a combined 44,972 career yards from scrimmage going into their Cardinals at Seahawks meeting, added another 65 yards.

**Stats of the Week No. 6** In its last six outings, Buffalo has scored 228 points -- more than Indianapolis scored in its last six outings, and just 15 points fewer than the Bills scored in all of 2003.

**Stats of the Week No. 7** The last time Washington won at Dallas, Heath Shuler was the Redskins' quarterback.

**Stats of the Week No. 8** In the Cleveland Browns (Beta Version) at Dolphins game, there were two fumbles and an interception on the same play. See the Gamebook at 10:32 of the third quarter .

**Stats of the Week No. 9** If every pass a quarterback throws clangs to the ground incomplete, his rating is 39.6 under the NFL's cryptic system. In Week 16, San Francisco starting quarterback Ken Dorsey finished with a 26.7 passer rating and was lifted for Cody Pickett, who finished with a 18.8 rating.

**Stats of the Week No. 10** Minnesota had possession of the ball for 52 seconds in the second quarter and scored three offensive touchdowns. Stat submitted by Sig Bedder of Burkhardt, Wisc.

**Stats of the Week No. 11** Dominic Rhodes of Indianapolis had more kickoff return yards (236) than the yardage of entire San Francisco offense (189) or the entire Tennessee offense (153) or the entire Jacksonville offense (126).

**Stats of the Week No. 12** In the first half against Philadelphia, the Rams rushed more times than they had in either of their two previous entire games.

**High IQ Cheerleader of the Week** Literary Cheerleader of the Week suspended again in order to recognize Lynly of the Chargers, nominated by Cameron Perry of Corpus Christi, Texas. Lynly belongs to the American Mensa Society, which has only "one qualification for membership, a score in the top two percent of the population on a standardized intelligence test." (You can take the Mensa test for a \$30 fee.) Lynly holds a degree in business administration from Santa Clara University, and says her goal is to be a small business owner. TMQ urges traditional males to click on her swimsuit thumbnails on her team bio page. Also, TMQ notes the San Diego cheer-babes are officially the Charger Girls. Yours truly is more than happy to gawk, but unless they are all under the age of 18, they should be the Charger Women.

**Best Plays by a Quarterback Who Has Won 26 Consecutive Starts Stretching Back to College** Game scoreless, Ben Roethlisberger looked left and then threw right to Plaxico Burress on the zed-out pattern. End result -- touchdown. Pittsburgh and Baltimore tied at 7, Roethlisberger looked right and then threw left to Antwaan Randle El on the zed-out. End result -- 33-yard gain setting up a field goal. The Hypocycloids now leading the Nevermores 10-7 in the third quarter and facing third-and-goal on the 2, Roethlisberger turned to attempt a play fake only to discover both running backs had gone the wrong way -- there was no one to fake to. Roethlisberger rolled left and hit tight end Jerame Tuman on the

chip-delay for the touchdown. (Tuman blocked for a moment, then turned out into the end zone.) The rest was filler as the Steelers won home-field advantage in the AFC.

**Sweet Play of the Week** Leading Jersey/B 16-0 at the beginning of the fourth quarter, New England faced second-and-goal on the Jets' 6. The Flying Elvii set up a fake screen right, complete with offensive linemen pulling right. Deion Branch lined up right as a wide receiver, started in as if to block for the screen, then did a dancer's "turn out" spin to the corner for the touchdown reception, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2** Leading 24-16 at Indianapolis, San Diego faced third-and-1 on the Colts' 38. Drew Brees faked the quarterback sneak then flipped the ball to LaDainian Tomlinson for a 14-yard gain. The Bolts scored a touchdown on the series to take what seemed at the time like a commanding lead.

**Best Purist Drive** These days sports commentators talk about throwing all the time as a radical strategy, but actually the pass-wacky approach has become so common that running all the time is now what's radical. On Monday night, Les Mouflons opened the game with an all-rushing drive, handing off on 10 consecutive snaps for 73 yards and a touchdown. Eagles defenders looked befuddled, as if they were witnessing some far-out, revolutionary tactic.

**Instructions: Insert Head** Viewers who squint notice that NFL helmets have warning labels on the back. Here is what the label on an NFL helmet says:

INSTRUCTIONS: Insert head. Obey coach. When you notice everyone has left the stadium, remove helmet. Repeat sequence until you are waived for a player with a lower salary-cap number.

WARNING: Pain and fatigue are normal during use of this product. You must sign the waiver before using this helmet. Please do not read the waiver, just sign it. Manufacturer not responsible for points scored, bonuses received for crowd response. Lighting bolts, bird talons or other mythological imagery painted on the helmet do not confer superpowers on wearer. If ringing in ears persists more than five years after you retire, consult a doctor. And if you really are so incredibly dense that you did not know until reading this disclaimer that football can be dangerous, then congratulations! You are the ideal football player.

**Sour Play of the Week** Game scoreless, Atlanta faced third-and-8 on its own 3. Michael-Mike Vick had just been given a \$37 million bonus plus the day off. ("Okay, Michael-Mike, here is our final offer -- \$37 million plus one day off.") Backup quarterback Matt Schaub took the snap and sprinted backwards into his end zone, where he was tackled for the safety that set the New Orleans win in motion. As TMQ continues to point out, this season an awful lot of NFL offensive coordinators have had their quarterbacks sprint backwards into the end zone, where quarterbacks often come to woe.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2** Seattle leading 24-14 with 2:39 remaining, the Arizona Cactus Wrens had first-and-10 on the Blue Men Group 29. *Where oh where might the pass go? Maybe up the field!* Yet Larry Fitzgerald, Arizona's most dangerous receiver -- he'd caught a touchdown pass from the Seattle 29 a few minutes earlier -- was single-covered as he went long to the end zone once again with no safety anywhere in sight. Touchdown, and suddenly it's a tense endgame.

**Next Up, Our Celebrity Sex Doctor** There is actually a cable TV show called *Celebrity Justice*, and the other day TMQ saw Catherine Buia from the show introduced on CNN as "our celebrity justice correspondent."

**Sour Tactics of the Week (Offensive)** Houston leading 7-0 in the second quarter, Jacksonville faced fourth-and-1 on its 40. In trotted the punting unit. In situations like this, it can be better to try and fail -- by trying, the coach tells his players he is challenging them to win the game -- than to launch a mincing fraidy-cat punt. Emboldened by Jax's timid play, the Texans took the punt and marched the length of the field for the touchdown that made it 14-0; Houston required just two snaps to pass the point where the ball would have been had the Jags gone for it and missed. From the punt on the home team was never in the game again with its inside track to the playoffs now derailed.

**Sour Tactics of the Week (Defensive)** Leading 14-7, Oakland had Kansas City facing third-and-goal



drink one beer a day and men should drink two daily, Tufts researchers found. TMQ says: Make it mandatory!

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All** Dallas 3, Washington 3 with 3:23 remaining in the first half and the Redskins faced third-and-1 on their 10. Pass incomplete, punt, and the 'Boys drive the other way to kick of field goal as time expires. TMQ can understand a pass on third-and-1 if it's an attempt for a home-run play, but this was dinky square-out thing that would have gained three yards at most. Can't anybody just run up the middle for a yard anymore?

**If Anyone Reading This Column Finds 85 Percent of the Universe, Please Return It** As Tuesday Morning Quarterback has pointed out before, physicists claim to be able to explain the Big Bang Theory, the very beginning of existence itself, but cannot locate most of the universe. Evidence suggests that about 85 percent of the universe is "dark matter" and "dark energy" that defy detection. The galaxies move as if being acted upon by far more gravity and other forces than could be produced by the matter and energy in all stars and planets, suggesting there must be another category of substantiality, called dark because it's hard to locate. Though "dark matter" and "dark energy" appear to permeate the firmament, no test has ever detected the stuff.

The latest on this front is this report from the annual meeting of the American Physical Society, the professional group of physicists, at which researchers disclosed that the newest, most advanced search for "dark matter" has drawn a blank. The Cryogenic Dark Matter Search, super-sensitive detectors buried deep in an iron mine in Soudan, Minn., ran for two months and failed to detect so much as one particle of dark matter, though trillions of such particles should be flowing through any area the size of a toaster. So we can't find 85 percent of the universe -- but trust us, we're experts!

**Harmonic Defensive Breakdowns** Washington leading 10-6 with 37 seconds remaining, Dallas had the ball on the Redskins' 39 and was out of time outs. *Where oh where might the pass go? Maybe up the field!* Yet Washington cornerback Shawn Springs -- who during the week reacted to not making the Pro Bowl by claiming himself the best cornerback in the NFL -- simply let receiver Patrick Crayton run past him on the fly pattern, touchdown, and the Cowboys win. Springs stood doing nothing, covering no one, as he watched Crayton go by.

At the end of the San Diego at Indianapolis game, Bolts defensive backs collectively seemed to decide to do nothing; just stand around and watch receivers. San Diego leading 31-23 with 1:09 in regulation, Bolts corner Quentin Jammer simply watched Marvin Harrison run past him for an 18-yard reception on the out pattern; Jammer covered no one on the play. Now the Colts are on the Bolts' 21. Brandon Stokley lines up in the slot left and runs a post; San Diego nickel back Jamar Fletcher simply watches Stokley run by, making no attempt to cover anyone. Stokley catches Peyton Manning's 49th touchdown pass -- of the season, not the game -- and the deuce conversion forces a fifth session. Now it's overtime, Bolts corner Drayton Florence simply watches Reggie Wayne run by, making no attempt to cover anyone, 35-yard reception positions Indianapolis for the winning field goal. On none of these late passes that keyed the Colts comeback did the receiver beat or outrun a defender. Each time a defender simply watched the receiver go by.

At the ends of both their losses, Washington and San Diego may have shifted to "Cover Two," but that means the corners get safety help -- not that the corners are supposed to do nothing at all! As TMQ has been pointing out lately, "If you break down a disaster play, you find one or more gentlemen standing around doing absolutely nothing on the team that is struck by the disaster."

**Disclaimer Watch** Toyota is running television ads for its Tundra pickup truck that display the disclaimer PROFESSIONAL DRIVER. CLOSED COURSE. What is the truck doing as the disclaimer says this? Going down a suburban driveway.

**Why Certain Teams Have Lost Eight Straight** Cincinnati trailing 22-17, Jersey/A had the Bengals facing fourth-and-10 with 1:51 remaining. As Jon Kitna threw the deep out to the left sideline to T.J. Houshmandzadeh, Giants nickel and dime backs Will Peterson and Terry Cousin simply stood in the center of the field watching, making no attempt to run over and participate in the play. First-down reception to the Jersey/A 5, and Cincinnati scored the winning touchdown two snaps later.

**Merry Spendmas Proposal** There was a dispute this season about whether Christmas is being driven out of the public sphere. Yours truly heard WTOP, the news radio station of the nation's capital, note "rising controversy over whether religious symbols like Christmas trees should be shown in public places." Christmas trees are not a religious symbol! Flashing lights, Santa, elves, magic reindeer -- these have nothing to do with Christianity. True, they are keyed to Christmas Day, but popular culture added Santa, the tree and the rest; theology mentions nothing about this. Christmas day itself was arbitrarily chosen as Dec. 25, since no one has any idea what day Jesus was born on. (Dec. 25 is the traditional birthday of the Persian god Mithras, and was a winter feasting day in antiquity.) While many concerned about the separation of church and state don't like Santa displays or Christmas trees on public property because this implies endorsement of religion, there are some Christians who at this point don't like the Santa and materialism emphasis, as it has totally overwhelmed the spiritual meaning of Christmas. Americans spent \$220 billion on the holidays this year. That is five times the GDP of Ecuador, according to the National Retail Federation. If instead of spending \$220 billion on gifts for ourselves, had we spent \$220 billion on Ecuador, we might have wiped out poverty in an entire nation. Doesn't that sound like a wonderful way to observe Christmas? Well, we spent the money on ourselves.

TMQ's proposal: Christmas should become exclusively a secular holiday that celebrates consumerism, spending, presents and credit card debt. The birth of Jesus will be celebrated on some new day arbitrarily chosen, while the Christian religious year will return to being centered on Easter. Until the rise of Christmas parties and gift giving in the 19th century, the Christian religious year was centered on Easter, which is 10,000 times more important than Christmas theologically. The new tinsel-and-presents national holiday for Dec. 25th will be called Spendmas.

**Hurling Toward Disaster Watch** Last week yours truly proposed that the wild-card slot should be made league-wide. The eight division winners would get their playoff slots, and the four best remaining teams would advance, regardless of conference. Such a system would this season grant three or possibly all four wild cards to the AFC. (There would need to be new league-wide tiebreakers, so it's unclear what would happen to the Vikings under my proposal.) But in some past years, three or four wild cards would have gone to the NFC. The effect of my proposed system would be to allow the strongest clubs to advance regardless of conference, while keeping losing teams out of the postseason. Isn't the whole point of the postseason to pair the strongest against the strongest?

Reader reaction broke along three lines. First, many noted that the reason there are many losing teams lingering around the standings this year is that there are also many teams with excellent records. Going into last weekend, the top six NFL clubs were a combined 71-13, best combined record for the top six this late in the season in NFL annals. So if the top teams soak up victories, other teams must get Ls. True enough. But my objection is not to the presence of losing teams. My objection is the danger that a team with a weak record will make the playoffs while teams with strong records stay home.

Second, many readers, including Richard Terzo of Atlanta, protested that league-wide wild cards would make it possible two AFC or two NFC teams would meet in the Super Bowl. One reader haikuized,

League-wide wild card works?

Super Bowl has tradition:

Two old leagues compete.

-- *Bobby Schneider, Knoxville, Tennessee*

Does the AFC-NFC structure of the Super Bowl really matter anymore? Once it did. In the 1970s when the AFC surged ahead, the football world was fixated on this. In the 1980s when the NFC counterattacked, traditionalists leapt with joy. But since then the old-leagues rivalry has seemed less and less important. Do you even know which conference is ahead now? (It's NFC 21, AFC 17.) At this point the old-leagues rivalry seems minor. What matters is the best possible matchup. The Super Bowl is now regarded as the NFL championship, not as a conference-to-conference exhibition. That championship should pit the two best possible teams.

A much stronger objection to my proposal came from numerous readers, including Alicia Jenkins of Raleigh, N.C. She noted that the conference-based wild cards keep weak teams mathematically alive late in the season, boosting fan interest. Going into last weekend, only six teams had been mathematically eliminated. That meant fans could stay excited about the chance, however slight, their favorites would earn the postseason invite. Conference wild cards cause several games this coming weekend to have

significance they would not have under league-wide cards; the Saints-Panthers collision, for example, will pair two teams with a chance of finishing the day in the playoffs, whereas under my system it would pair two teams that have been eliminated. I admit this is a solid objection -- keeping as many games as possible significant is desirable. But I still think that placing the strongest teams into the postseason matters more. So you will not be surprised to learn that I continue to favor my own proposal.

Finally Sarah Winski of Philadelphia, founding city of our democracy, noted that my proposed reform -- simultaneously change the wild-card system and restructure the United States Senate to take one senator away from small states -- could never work. Article 5 of the Constitution says representation in the Senate cannot be altered without the consent of every state whose representation would change, and obviously small states would never consent to a reform that reduces the power of small states. In order to convince small states to join the republic proposed in 1789, at a time when small states feared domination by Virginia, the Constitution was worded such that the composition of the Senate could only be altered unanimously, not by the three-fourths vote required for other amendments. Winski notes, "It appears the sole way to change this would be if two-thirds of state legislatures called for a second constitutional convention at which the Constitution itself could be scrapped and a new one written." That doesn't sound so good. Okay, about my Senate idea, never mind.

**If Halliburton Had an Ad Agency, It Would Demand Years of Government Funding to Study the Socks** According to the *Wall Street Journal*, an actor who plays Ronald McDonald once got himself out of a traffic ticket by insisting to the police officer that, when in costume, he actually was Ronald McDonald and thus could not give his real name. "In 1999," Shirley Leung and Suzanne Vranica of the *Journal* wrote, "McDonald's ad agency Leo Burnett hired a Los Angeles stylist to refashion Ronald's wavy red hair, and it spent months studying whether to increase the width or the red stripes on his socks." *Months* to study the width of a stripe on socks -- billing all the while, of course.

**Comic Relief of the Week** For the third time this season, Carolina lined up defensive end Julius Peppers as a wideout near the goal line. Twice the Panthers have thrown incomplete to Peppers from this formation; this time he was a decoy as the pass went the opposite way for a touchdown.

**TMQ's Annual Complaint About Sunday Ticket** Wow -- look at the monster games on the Sunday card -- 11-3 San Diego at 11-3 Indianapolis, 12-2 New England at 10-4 Jersey/B. Practically playoff games! Which of these marquee matchups was on television in the nation's capital, where yours truly lurks? Neither.

The NFL prides itself on showing lots of games free on network television, but there are two separate issues: One is showing lots of games, which the NFL invariably does, and the other is showing the top games, where the NFL often stumbles. On Sunday, viewers in our nation's capital saw Baltimore at Pittsburgh, which had local appeal; Atlanta at New Orleans; and Washington at Dallas. So the interests of home-team fans were seen to, but not the interests of those who wanted to watch the NFL's marquee matchups that day.

In theory, those who want to watch the headliner games can sign up for NFL Sunday Ticket, pay \$169 a year and tune in any game (except blacked-out home contests), switching around to their heart's content. For football enthusiasts, Sunday Ticket is heaven on Earth with an onion slice. The rub is that Sunday Ticket is an exclusive of DirecTV, the satellite service. When I object to this arrangement, people misinterpret me as complaining about DirecTV. Actually my complaint is with the NFL itself for marketing Sunday Ticket only via satellite, rather than universally via cable. For its part, DirecTV is terrific; everybody I know who gets DirecTV bends my ear about how fantastic it is. For example Neil Easterbrook, the Official Brother of TMQ, is a satisfied customer of DirecTV. If I could get DirecTV, I'd sign up in a minute. But my house cannot receive the signal, and neither can the homes or apartments of many Americans. Antennas for the satellite signal require line-of-sight to the southern sky. If your dwelling has trees or hills or tall buildings to the south, you're out of luck.

Recently, the NFL renewed the Sunday Ticket satellite exclusive through the 2010 season. Business decisions involve tradeoffs. DirecTV offered a spectacular amount of money to maintain the exclusive, and it is hard for a business to say no to a spectacular amount of money. The revenue increase from DirecTV will help the NFL remain financially solid, which insures stability and is the interest of fans. Having Sunday Ticket remain its exclusive will help DirecTV stay in operation, providing competitive price pressure on cable. That is a pro-consumer outcome. So the league's decision has points in its favor.

But the effect of keeping Sunday Ticket on satellite, rather than offering it to anyone via cable, is to make it impossible for many Americans to opt out of standard broadcasts and pay to see the best matchups. Now that the NFL has locked in this situation, it is incumbent upon the league to improve game choices for standard broadcasts. If many Americans cannot pay the fee to watch any NFL game, there must be a better system for insuring that over the air, the NFL shows not just games but the top action.

**Crazy Pass Watch** On Jersey/B's first possession, Chad Pennington, known for avoiding interceptions, threw a *crazy* pass toward a spot where there was one Jet and four Patriots -- interception. At the start of the fourth quarter, New England leading 16-0, Pennington threw a *crazy* pass toward a spot where there was one Jet and three Patriots -- interception.

**Worst Crowd Reaction** A week ago the Indianapolis home crowd booed when the Colts, game in hand, knelt on the ball in Baltimore territory in the final minute. Now it's San Diego 17, Indianapolis 6 in the first half with the Lucky Charms facing fourth-and-1 on the Bolts' 5. In came the field-goal unit: the smart move considering TMQ's immutable law, Kick Early, Go For It Late. Again the home crowd boos. The Colts were 11-3, Peyton Manning was setting records left and right -- but what have you done for us lately? Note that following the immutable law of Kick Early, Go For It Late put the Colts into position to force overtime in the endgame. Note, also, that home crowds booed when the Seahawks and Cowboys took short field goals at the end of the first half in accordance with Kick Early, Go For It Late. Both teams also went on to win.

## RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT

**Obscure College Season's End** The lights have gone off at small-college stadiums around the country. Collegiate teams that play the season's remaining contests tend to be pretty well known. But TMQ finds solace in the knowledge that small-college football will resume next fall, and for autumns uncountable to come. Long after you and I have shuffled off this mortal coil and are trying to scalp tickets to meet the football gods, plastic-clad gentlemen will still slam into each other on Saturday afternoons at little schools all across the country, while guys try to get coeds' phone numbers and car alarms go off in the parking lot.

In order to ease your adjustment to the end of the Obscure College item for the season, Tuesday Morning Quarterback provides the following guide to obscure colleges of Pennsylvania -- the commonwealth known as the Cradle of Obscure Colleges. This guide was written by reader Chris Momberger of Pittsburgh, who is stipulated as having expert status on the subject as he is a graduate of Indiana of Pennsylvania, TMQ's favorite obscure college. Momberger provides the following notes on other little schools of Pennsylvania:

Acadia University in Glenside, Pa. Recently changed its name from Beaver College, ending a long, storied history of bad jokes. Yet "www.beaver.edu" is still the school's Web address. Beaver note: TMQ recently stayed, at someone else's expense, at the Fairmont Hotel in Montreal, where an elegant dinner was available at "the legendary Beaver Club."

California of Pennsylvania. The sports teams are the Vulcans -- named for the Roman fire god, though the Star Trek aliens might be more appropriate. Proposed school motto: Live long and prosper.

College Misericordia. Since it's located in Dallas, Pa., this school could rename itself Dallas of Pennsylvania. It would have trouble going up against California of Pennsylvania and Indiana of Pennsylvania in athletics, however, since the college, founded by an order of nuns, has a three-quarters female student body. Misericordia fields no football team but does boast cheerleaders.

East Stroudsburg. It's located north of Stroudsburg.

Edinboro University. The recruits they get from Loch Ness High are phenomenal! The sports teams are known as the Fighting Scots -- check their menacing whose-kilt-you-lookin'-at logo.

Geneva College. Very neutral school where the crowd always roots for a tie. Great accounting program.

Gwynedd-Mercy College. Makes Bryn Mawr, also of Pennsylvania, seem easy to pronounce.

Immaculata College. You're accepted without applying.

Indiana of Pennsylvania. Center of the obscure college universe! Sports teams are still Indians, a subject of controversy, though the logo has been changed to an unidentifiable ursine-like figurine.

Seton Hill College. They save a fortune in merchandising costs by buying up surplus Seton Hall apparel and hoping nobody notices.

Slippery Rock. The joint is jumpin' in Slippery Rock! See this school press release, SLIPPERY ROCK FARMERS MARKET SELLS FRESH PRODUCE EVERY SATURDAY.

Thanks, Chris, for this rundown. And note, Chris sent me the draft of this item more than a year ago. But just like that long, long queue of Chinese container ships waiting for their turn to dock and unload at Long Beach Harbor, there's always a long line of items waiting to run in TMQ.

**Obscure College Fun Fact** At a ceremony "complete with punch", Mary Washington College changed its name to the University of Mary Washington. Following protests from alums, the school then changed the name of its main campus to Mary Washington College at the University of Mary Washington. So if Indiana University-Purdue University at Indianapolis played Mary Washington College at the University of Mary Washington, that would be the IUPUI at MWCUMW game.

**Obscure College Fun Fact No. 2** Colby is Division III in all sports except alpine and Nordic skiing, where it's Division I. Does this mean Colby has wealthy boosters and recruiting scandals in the *skiing* department? Are they using faking transcripts and phony SAT scores in order to enroll guys named Claude from Switzerland?

**Obscure College Feat** In a game this fall, tailback Marquis Malcolm of TMQ's alma mater, Colorado College, rushed for 344 yards and four touchdowns -- second-best rushing performance in NCAA football in 2004. (Best was 410 yards by Andrew Terry of Ferris State.)

**Cutting Edge Final Score Prediction** Reader Michael Peterson of Mobile, Ala., points out that Peter King of *Sports Illustrated* predicted an exact final score (Seattle 24, Arizona 21) while *The Associated Press* predicted an exact final score (Buffalo 41, San Francisco 7). Reader Tom Madgers of Columbus, Ohio, notes the *Sporting News* correctly forecast Indianapolis 34, San Diego 31. It's a Christmas miracle! Or a Spendmas miracle.

**Reader Animadversion** Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Angela Jorgesen reports, "My husband doesn't have Internet at work, which makes him more productive than me on Tuesdays. He insists that I must print out Tuesday Morning Quarterback and bring it home so he may read it at night. I get into big trouble if I read the column myself and forget to print it for him."

Endlessly TMQ laments that the Buffalo Bills gave up on red, white and American flag blue which, not to put too fine a point on it, is "the single most successful color scheme in world history." Joseph Herder of New York City counters that considering China, McDonalds, Kodak and many others use red and yellow, which seems to be the world's most successful color scheme. A reader notes the Zen-like factoid that TMQ's term for the atrocious new Bills' uniform color, Nineteenth Century Rusting Russian Dreadnaught Aft Bulkhead Cyanic, is itself a haiku. As in,

Nineteenth Century  
Rusting Russian Dreadnaught Aft  
Bulkhead Cyanic.  
-- Robert Childress, McLean Virginia

Daniel Kuhn of Brockport, N.Y., notes that sportscasters constantly use the terms strange, wild, crazy and weird to describe the NFL season. As in, "It's been a wild season, Clint." But they use these terms every year. And every year, Kuhn says, cannot be strange and wild, or else those would represent norms, and hence be neither strange nor wild. TMQ longs to hear someone on ESPN's *NFL Prime Time* calmly say, "Things are going pretty much as expected."

Holly Hollingsworth of Highlands Ranch, Colo., and many other readers complimented me for being quoted in a George Will column in the *Washington Post*. Will called me "acerbic" -- at least he didn't call me anemic!

Kevin Sanford, a math teacher at Roscoe Central High School in Roscoe, N.Y., and a Giants fan, proposes a new parity-based scheduling structure he feels is appropriate to the talents and abilities of Jersey/A. Here is his proposed Giants' schedule for 2005:

Week 1 Miami  
Week 2 San Francisco  
Week 3 Miami  
Week 4 San Francisco  
Week 5 Miami  
Week 6 San Francisco  
Week 7 Miami  
Week 8 San Francisco  
Week 9 Bye  
Week 10 San Francisco  
Week 11 Miami  
Week 12 San Francisco  
Week 13 Miami  
Week 14 San Francisco  
Week 15 Miami  
Week 16 San Francisco  
Week 17 Miami

**This Week's Challenge** This week's Challenge is to wait until next week, when the Challenge resumes after its holiday hiatus, which overloaded my schedule, cutting into the time I would use to scan Challenge entries along with my panel of judges. Note: reader Anne Schuette of Manitowoc, Wisc., inquires, "When you scan your panel of judges, how much skin are they showing?" Anne, I have asked the NFL for a panel of scantily clad cheer-babes to help me review Challenge entries. But strangely, the NFL has not yet acted on my request.

**Next Week** Playoff pairings are complete and we find out: does disaster strike?



## TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

### Why Charles Darwin would like the playoffs, and exigency strikes the NFL!

*By Gregg Easterbrook*  
*Special to NFL.com*

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Jan. 4, 2005) -- As 12 teams enter the NFL playoffs, consider this -- 11 of them will end their seasons in bitter defeat, players kicking locker doors and fans tearing up their placards and ticket stubs, even sobbing. In a playoff-bracket system, only one team concludes its year in victory. The work, effort and dreams of all others come to crashing termination in defeat. Charles Darwin would feel right at home with the NFL playoffs.

Which makes me pause to wonder, is the college bowl-mania system really so bad? This year, 56 big-college teams appeared in 28 bowl games, and 28 teams ended their years with dancing and celebration. For 28 groups of players and 28 sets of extended family and fans, the final memory of the season will always be a happy one. Whereas for 11 of the 12 NFL playoff teams, and their extended families and fans, the final memory of the season will always be unhappy.

This survival of the fittest format sure can be brutal. Maryland, where my kids go to high school, has a 16-team state football championship tournament, which I've come to know well because our high school made it to the second round this season. But the 16-team format meant 15 sets of boys, coaches, families, friends, cheerleaders, poms, bands, managers and schoolmates ended their seasons sobbing, left with a bitter final memory. Or think of the NCAA men's basketball tournament, which now takes 65 entrants; 64 of them end their seasons on sour notes.

Maybe the bowl setup isn't so bad after all -- less Darwinian, more humane, certainly more scenes of happy victors, fans and families. Maybe the NFL should just stage a bunch of bowl games after the season, allowing half the playoff teams to end their years happily. Or maybe the ideal NFL club to root for is one that gets a big victory in its final game but does not make the postseason, allowing the last memory of the year to be a pleasant one. So congratulations, fans of the New Orleans Saints! It's better this way, trust me.

In other NFL news, Anthony Cotton of the *Denver Post* notes that since 1999, playoff-bound teams seeded Nos. 1 through 4 that won in the final regular-season week were 25-5 in their first playoff tests, while playoff-bound teams with the same seeding that lost in final week were 6-4 in their first postseason games. That sounds like an airtight argument for playing to win, even if your seeding is already locked. On Sunday, seven teams entered their regular-season finales with seeding locked. What did they do? Green Bay, New England, Pittsburgh and San Diego played to win; Indianapolis and Philadelphia did not try to win; Atlanta offered a medium effort. For the Patriots, Tom Brady was in until the fourth quarter began, and his team won; for the Steelers, even the practice squad players played to win -- see more below -- and their team exited victorious. Working simply from the historical record of seeded teams that do or don't win their regular-season finales, TMQ predicts that Green Bay, New England, Pittsburgh and San Diego will fare well in the playoffs, while Atlanta will struggle and Indianapolis and Philadelphia make early exits.

And in other NFL news, the postseason is finally here -- the moment all football nuts have been waiting for. But as TMQ annually points out, at the very moment the postseason arrives, fan interest begins to decline. During the season, no matter how your favorite team stumbled, there was always next week. Now, for 20 of the league's 32 teams, there is no next week. The stadium lights have been turned off,

and grandfatherly guys with names like Sparky are helping players toss the junk out of their lockers. Already backers of the eliminated teams are turning their attention to the draft, free agency and the spring minicamps. By this time next week, 24 of the 32 teams will be eliminated, meaning only one-quarter of the league's fan base will still have dogs in the hunt. It is a paradox but it is true that each season as we reach the playoff climax, interest declines.

And in still other NFL news, annually Tuesday Morning Quarterback warns at this point: just 11 more games to go. Count 'em and weep -- four wild-card round games, four divisional round games, two championship games and then that Super Bowl thing you might have heard about. Just 11 NFL contests remain for this season. Savor them.

### **Stats of the Week**

The Jets and Vikings lost and made the playoffs; the Jaguars, Ravens and Saints won and were eliminated.

### **Stats of the Week No. 2**

Buffalo and Carolina opened a combined 1-11, then went a combined 15-3, then closed a combined 0-2 - both losing at home on a day that a win would have put them into the playoffs.

### **Stats of the Week No. 3**

Counting penalties, Minnesota snapped the ball seven times inside the Washington 8 yard line, and came away with only a field goal.

### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Detroit gained 434 yards, and lost.

### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

Kansas City gained 443 yards, and lost.

### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

Miami's three quarterbacks combined to throw eight interceptions returned for touchdowns.

### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

Miami was the sole NFL team that did not have a 100-yard rusher this season.

### **Stats of the Week No. 8**

The last four losing Super Bowl entrants (Giants, Rams, Raiders, Panthers) have had losing seasons the following year.

### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

Seattle and St. Louis made the playoffs despite being outscored by their opponents; Buffalo did not make the playoffs despite outscoring its opponents by 111 points.

### **Stats of the Week No. 10**

Atlanta finished first in rushing, though its highest-rated runner finished 15th.

**Stats of the Week No. 11**

Kansas City scored 483 points, a 30 points-per-game average, and finished with a losing record.

**Stats of the Week No. 12**

Minnesota and St. Louis made the playoffs at 8-8. All previous 8-8 teams to make the NFL playoffs lost in the first round.

**Stats of the Week No. 13**

Jersey/B and Minnesota enter the playoffs on a combined streak of 8-13.

**Stats of the Week No. 14**

No team ranked in the bottom 10 for offense made the playoffs. Four teams ranked in the bottom 10 for defense made the playoffs (Green Bay, Indianapolis, Minnesota and Seattle).

**Engineer Cheerleader of the Week**

Literary Cheerleader of the Week remains suspended for more recognition of cheer-babes with other serious credentials. This week consider Rachel Arruejo of the San Diego Charger Girls, who has a degree in electrical engineer from the University of California at San Diego, an on-the-rise school, and who works as an R&D engineer. Arruejo has both dance and gymnastics training -- you don't find all that many dancing engineers -- and was the Chargers' cheer representative to last year's Pro Bowl. Yes, there are Pro Bowl cheerleaders, and whether a lot of it is reputation, publicity and who you know, like on the players' side, is a good question. When the 2005 Pro Bowl cheerleaders list comes out, I'll scan it for snubs, and sports columnists always do with the players' selections.

**Sweet Play of the Week**

Game tied at 7 in the second quarter, Green Bay had first-and-10 on the Chicago 38. Brett Favre faked a handoff up the middle, while a receiver came from the left as if to take an end-around. Every NFL team now runs the action where there's a back headed up the middle while a receiver comes for the end-around, and the defense's challenge is to guess which of the two gentlemen will get the ball. Answer this time: neither. Fullback William Henderson snuck into the right flat (underneath where the end-around guy came from), and then shot up the field for a touchdown reception.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2**

Leading 10-7 in a must-win, Denver faced third-and-goal on the Indianapolis 2. The Broncos lined up in a power-I set with two extra tight ends on the field, including tight end Patrick Hape lined up as a fullback. Play-fake and Hape runs into the right flat, uncovered, for the touchdown reception: Denver cruises and the hopes of Jacksonville, plus of Spenser, the Official Youngest of TMQ and a Jax fan, are dashed. Note to defensive coordinators: Hape is no Antonio Gates, but Denver looks for him at the goal line. Hape has eight receptions this season, four for touchdowns.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 3**

Game tied at 7 in the third quarter and New England playing to win, the Patriots faced second-and-4 on the San Francisco 8. New England came out with two wides left, and Tom Brady saw that one of the Niners' defensive backs was way off the line, practically lined up in the end zone. Brady audibled to a quick hitch to slot receiver Deion Branch -- note to defensive coordinators, the Patriots like the quick hitch at the goal line. David Patten, the other receiver on that side, blocked the man covering Branch, and Patten outran the backed-off corner to the end zone. Later, at the end of the third quarter and New England still playing to win, the Flying Elvii faced fourth-and-2 on the San Francisco 17. New England came out in a spread formation with four wide receivers -- then Brady simply went straight up the middle

on a sneak, first down and TMQ wrote the words "San Francisco season over" in his notebook. Often when teams set up in multiple-receiver spread formations the middle of the field is left soft for a run, but few teams take advantage of this, seeming to think that if you bring four or five receivers out then you must heave-ho to someone.

### **Sour Play of the Week**

Leading 21-18 with 1:12 remaining and needing a win to maintain playoff hopes, New Orleans faced third-and-5 on the Carolina 43, the Panthers out of time outs. Run, then boom a punt into the end zone with maybe 40 seconds left? Aaron Brooks sprints backward 10 yards and tosses at the sideline to Ernie Conwell, who promptly steps out of bounds for no gain, stopping the clock.

### **Sour Play of the Week No. 2**

The Cleveland Browns (Beta Version) leading 22-7 with 2:10 remaining and seeming poised actually to win one for their acting interim provisional coach, Houston had first-and-10 on the Betas 32. Why blitz now and invite the Texans to score? Seven gentlemen crossed the line, David Carr dodged the blitz and ran to the 12; Houston scored a touchdown and Cleveland survived only by recovering the onside kick.

### **Revenge of the Practice Squad!**

It's Brian St. Pierre handing off to Willie Parker as Chucky Okobi blocks -- who are these guys? They are the unknown Pittsburgh third-stringers who bested the Bills' first team in the fourth quarter, denying Buffalo the playoff slot it would have earned with a victory. Buffalo led 17-16 at the beginning of the fourth quarter, and at that point Steelers' starters departed the game; Pittsburgh had already locked up home-field advantage throughout the playoffs. St. Pierre came in at quarterback: until Friday he was on the Steelers' practice squad, and had never appeared in an NFL game. St. Pierre led Pittsburgh on a clock-killer fourth-quarter drive of 14 plays and 8:53, against the Buffalo defense, which finished ranked second in the league. Running back Willie Parker had a total of 83 career yards rushing coming into the game, and ran for 101 yards in the second half -- though in the fourth quarter, the Buffalo defense knew Pittsburgh would rush on every play. (All 13 non-kicking plays of the game-icing drive were runs.) Okobi had five career starts in four years coming into the game, and there he was plowing the road in the fourth quarter, joined by tackle Max Starks, who has never started an NFL game. Other Pittsburgh who-dats outplayed the Buffalo first team on its own field.

When the Pittsburgh regulars made their mass exodus at the start of the fourth quarter, you could sense Buffalo players and coaches starting to celebrate on the sidelines: assuming the game was over, they were mentally listening to *Sportscenter* announcers extol their astonishing comeback from 0-4 to the playoffs. The next thing you knew, Pittsburgh was ahead 29-17 at the two-minute warning. Oh ye mortals, trifle not with the football gods!

Buffalo rebound note: though the Bills sure made the second half of their season interesting, on the year they only beat two teams that finished with a winning record. Buffalo had boasted about scoring more points than Indianapolis over the previous six games, but yet the Buffalo offense recorded only seven points in the second half as starter after Pittsburgh starter bowed out of the contest. Buffalo has boasted a lot about its highly ranked defense, but in the club's three meetings with elite teams -- New England twice, then Pittsburgh -- the Bills surrendered 89 points. Anyway if you can't hold a lead against the other team's practice squad in the fourth quarter at home with a playoff invitation on the line, you do not belong in the postseason.

### **Disclaimer Watch**

Dave Fisher of Cañada Flintridge, Calif., reports that Carl's Jr., the West Coast burger chain, is running a TV ad that touts drive-through service. A car smashes into a Carl's Jr. and drives through the restaurant, as the crawl on the bottom says DO NOT ATTEMPT.

### **Burger Watch**

In addition to not driving into the store, DO NOT ATTEMPT eating the new Carl's Jr. Breakfast Burger, a hamburger topped with fried egg, bacon, cheese and hash browns. This morning madness holds 830 calories and 46 grams of fat, substantially more than the 530 calories and 30 grams of a Big Mac. Meanwhile Hardee's, a burger chain owned by the same parent company as Carl's Jr., has introduced the Monster Thickburger -- two-thirds of a pound of beef, four bacon slices, three slices of cheese, mayo and "butter flavored shortening," weighing in at 1,417 calories and 107 grams of fat. The "shortening" here will be shortening of your lifespan -- the Food and Drug Administration recommends no more than 65 grams of fat per day, imagine almost twice that amount in a single sandwich. Doesn't Hardee's want its customers to survive long enough to return and order again? TMQ's fast-burger recommendation: the new Angus Steak Burger at Burger King. It's delicious, top-quality beef with lettuce, tomato, onions and a "corn dusted bun," and has 570 calories and 22 grams of fat, which are good numbers for a hefty-sized fast-food sandwich.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All**

Baltimore leading 30-21, the Marine Mammals faced third-and-goal at the Ravens 1. Play-fake, Sage Rosenfels sprints backward 10 yards -- Sage, the goal line is the other way! -- then throws a crazy pass, interception. Can't anyone just run up the middle for a yard anymore?

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed at All No. 2**

Now it's Baltimore 30, Miami 23 and the Dolphins face third-and-2 on the Ravens 28 with 4:09 remaining. Play-fake, Sage Rosenfels sprints backward 14 yards -- Sage, the goal line is the other way! -- sack, and Miami punts and goes on to defeat. Can't anyone just run up the middle for a yard anymore? Remember, since this was third-and-2 with the game on the line, Miami should have been thinking in two-down terms: gaining even a yard on third down would have been good.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All (Playoff-Bound Collapse Edition)**

Leading 17-16 at the end of the third quarter at home with Steelers' starters leaving to take comfortable seats, the seemingly playoff-bound Bills faced third-and-1 on the Pittsburgh 11, on a day when Willis McGahee averaged 4.4 yards per rush. Run up the middle? Instead pass, offensive interference against Buffalo. A third-down gain brings the ball back to the same point, but now it's fourth-and-1. Run up the middle? If you fail the opponent's third-string gentlemen are pinned deep in their own territory with the crowd roaring at experimental-scamjet decibels. Instead field-goal attempt, missed from 28. These two mincing fraidy-cat calls on third-and-1 and fourth-and-1 are promptly punished by the football gods with 10 lightning points for Pittsburgh.

Now it's Steelers 26, Bills 17 early in the fourth quarter, with Pittsburgh practice-squad guys populating the field. Buffalo faces third-and-1 on the Steelers 48. Run up the middle? Instead attempted trick play, loss of yardage. On fourth-and-6 from midfield, Buffalo punts, even though *the whole season is on the line and you're playing against third-stringers*. Emboldened by this mincing fraidy-cat failure to seize the day, the Pittsburgh third-stringers staged their clock-killer drive, and the home team did not get the ball back until almost the two-minute warning. For everything else that went wrong for the Bills on Sunday, had Buffalo simply run up the middle on even one of three late-game short-yardage downs, the Bills would likely now be preparing for the playoffs.

### **Cheer-Babe Solidarity**

Seen any good hockey games lately? As the NHL continues its self-destruction -- hockey players demanding more millions from a failing league is like USAir employees staging their Christmas sickout to protest that too many people are flying on their planes -- Jesse Derris of Washington, D.C., suggests showing solidarity by gawking at the Ice Girls of the New York Islanders. They aren't cheerleaders, rather, figure skaters. And you'd think it would be too cold on the ice to wear revealing outfits, but you'd think wrong, Derris reports. During last holiday season the Ice Girls appeared in minimalist Santa's-naughty-elves outfits. Of course, during last holiday season there were hockey games to appear at. On the Ice Girls bios page, click any skater and then scan to the bottom, where each recounts the worst pick-up line she has heard from spectators.

### **The New York Giants of Hackensack Does Have a Certain Ring, Though**

The Anaheim Angels are now officially the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim, though Anaheim is 26 miles from Los Angeles, according to MapQuest. (Actually, 26.18 miles, in the modern computer-based hyper-specificity that TMQ loves.) Surely many in California are already musing that Los Angeles means "the angels" in Spanish, so the team name is now the Angels Angels of Anaheim. Aha, but what does Anaheim mean? It is a concocted word built from the German *heim*, for home, and the Spanish word Ana from the Santa Ana River. So the team's new name means the Angels Angels of River Home. "Let's go Angels Angels of River Home!"

### **Best Plays Ere the Clock Struck Midnight**

Jersey/A trailing 16-14 in the fourth quarter on Sunday night, the Giants faced third-and-goal on the Dallas 3. Eli Manning pump-faked the corner fade that so many teams now call in this situation, then flipped a middle screen pass to Tiki Barber for the touchdown. Later, as the clock approached midnight -- and the regular season had to end by midnight, the NFL's fairy godmother said so -- the Giants faced first-and-goal on the Dallas 3 with 16 seconds remaining and no time-outs. Jersey/A came out in a spread formation, then Manning handed off to Barber up the middle for the winning touchdown. As a wise man once observed, "Often when teams set up in multiple-receiver spread formations the middle of the field is left soft for a run."

### **NFL Hurtles to an Exigency!**

Purists breathed sighs of relief that the NFL did not hurtle into any of the possible disasters of a losing team in the playoffs, a 10-6 team denied the playoffs or a combination of both. But the outcome still leaves much to be desired. Two 8-8 teams, Minnesota and St. Louis, are in the postseason while three 9-7 teams, Baltimore, Buffalo and Jacksonville, are not. In one previous season, 1999, two 8-8 teams made the playoffs while a winning team was denied. But in that year only one 9-7 team, Kansas City, was shut out. This year we have *three* winning teams denied a postseason invitation while two non-winning teams advance. This, TMQ feels, represents not disaster but exigency -- "the quality or state of being exigent; a state of affairs that makes urgent demands" (Miriam-Webster).

The solution to this exigency is the one TMQ has been pushing, namely, make the wild cards league-wide. What effect would that have had this season? All division winners would remain as they are; I don't propose tampering with the division alignment. Minnesota and St. Louis, the 8-8 NFC cards, would be disinvented. Baltimore and Jacksonville would advance at 9-7, while Buffalo at 9-7 would stay home based on likely tiebreakers. (In a league-wild system there would need to be a new league-wide tiebreaker hierarchy.) A playoff field with two more 9-7 teams and no 8-8 clubs is simply stronger, and isn't the whole point of the regular season to place the best teams into the playoffs?

### **Throw Now, Run Later**

Trailing 17-14, the Blue Men Group reached first-and-goal on the Atlanta 3. TMQ's immutable law of the goal line dictates: if you're going to play-fake do it on first down, when the defense is thinking run, not on second down when the defense has just stuffed a run and is thinking pass. First down play-fake, touchdown pass to the uncovered tight end and the Seahawks are poised to stagger their way to winning the division. Somehow I have never gotten around to naming this immutable law. Let's call it Throw Now, Run Later. Remember, this applies only at the goal line.

### **Curious Tactics, Dr. Watson**

The scoreboard in St. Louis had flashed the news of the Bills defeat, which not only put the Jets into the playoffs but assured Jersey/B of the fifth seed regardless of the outcome of the game they were still playing. So when the Jets reached Les Mouflons 9 yard line with six seconds remaining in regulation, trailing by three, why did Herman Edwards order the field goal? Why not one shot at the end zone to win or lose? At that point Edwards knew the Bills had lost, and should have been prepared enough to know that meant his team's seeding just locked. Yet Edwards sent the game to overtime, and the Jets played almost another full period. What did Edwards accomplish except tiring his charges, in advance of a certain road trip to the West Coast? (The fifth seed was assured of playing at San Diego.)

In the regular season finale of 2003, the Ravens went to a meaningless overtime in the final game, despite having locked their best seeding; then looked tired in the first-round playoff game, and lost. It's good for a postseason-bound team to play to win in the regular-season finale, but when overtime and exhaustion loom, call it a day. Not only did Edwards wear out the Jets for nothing; he did so knowing his charges might be assigned a Saturday kickoff, which, a few hours later, they were. Why didn't Edwards just go for it at the end of regulation, and win or lose?

### **What Was the Colts' Secret Agenda?**

At kickoff of the late game in Denver, the Colts knew from the early scores that if they lost, the Broncos would be in the playoffs; if they won and Jacksonville won, the Broncos would be out and Jax would be in; if they won and Jax lost, the Broncos would be out and the Ravens in. Since the Colts were already locked at the third seed and the final entrant had to be the sixth seed, that meant that at kickoff, Indianapolis was in a position to determine who would come to its field the following weekend in the playoffs. By winning, Indianapolis would have guaranteed it would not play Denver again; by losing, Indianapolis guaranteed a return date with Denver. Knowing this, Indianapolis made no attempt to win -- in effect choosing Denver as its first-round opponent. Yes, the Colts beat the Broncos 41-10 in the playoffs at Indianapolis last season. Even so, methinks the football gods have been tempted here.

### **Movie Disclaimer Watch**

The disclaimer box for *The Aviator* warns of "a crash sequence." No doubt this comes when the investors get a look at the box-office receipts! The flick, about the life of Howard Hughes, is directed by Martin Scorsese. Yours truly hasn't seen *The Aviator* and so has no idea how closely it cleaves to history, but can tell you that Scorsese's *Gangs of New York*, promoted as grim historical truth, was heavy on fiction. For instance, the 1863 New York draft riots are presented as an atrocity in which Union troops cold-bloodedly murdered women and unarmed men in the streets. There's no evidence this happened, soldiers not arriving in the city until the third day of the riot, when the deaths -- mostly lynchings of black men -- had already occurred. *Gangs of New York* even shows Union warships firing broadsides into Manhattan, an absurd fictional touch. Maybe in *The Aviator*, the Spruce Goose breaks the sound barrier!

### **Best Purist Drive**

Chris Datres of Ocala, Fla., nominates Navy's 26-play, 94-yard, 14:26 drive that sealed its bowl game against New Mexico. The drive ended only in a field goal, yet chewed up and spat out so much time that New Mexico's hopes were lost.

### **If Brad Pitt Changed His Name to Raghavendra Rau, That Would Not Make Him Smarter**

This study by Purdue University management professor Raghavendra Rau finds that mutual funds that change their names to include buzz words like "growth" take in more cash from customers than those that do not change their names, regardless of the actual management of the funds. Rau told the *Wall Street Journal*, "If I change my name to Brad Pitt, that shouldn't make me more attractive to women." Hey, why not try? From now on let's make this column the Sexy, Clever, Important Tuesday Morning Quarterback by Brad Pitt.

### **Take One Till the Fourth**

Scoring to make it Jets 26, Rams 21 late in the third, Jersey/B went for two; incomplection. TMQ's immutable law holds: Take One Till the Fourth, unless way behind. Forget what those "coaches' cards" say about margins, until the endgame it is impossible to know what scoring combinations will matter -- a 99 percent chance of one point is almost always better than a 40 percent chance of two points. Had Jersey/B done the straightforward thing and taken the singleton, its last-second field goal would have won the game, rather than forcing an overtime that the Jets lost.

### **Best Play by a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Be in San Diego**

While Eli Manning was finishing his first season 1-6 as a starter, high-priced holdout Philip Rivers finally

got off the Bolts' pine and Drew Brees was catching rays on the sidelines, 42-year-old Doug Flutie threw for a touchdown and ran for a touchdown. I don't wish to alarm you, but the Chargers finished 12-4 and Brees finished as the third-rated quarterback in the league.

### **Attack of the Gambian Pouched Rat!**

In October yours truly saluted the Gambian giant pouched rat for its noble efforts in sniffing out land mines from the Mozambique civil war. But now, reader Matt Peterson points out, some Gambian giant pouched rats have found their way to the Florida Keys and are eating everything that is not nailed down. Apparently if well-fed, the rats grow so large that cats just shrug and let them pass.

### **Ernest Wilford Play of the Week**

"ERN-est WIL-ford, ERN-est WIL-ford" yours truly and Spenser, the Official Youngest of TMQ and a Jax fan, chanted as Wilford made an incredible one-handed leaping 46-yard catch to set up the touchdown that proved the winning points for the Jaguars. On the season, Wilford totaled 19 catches, two of them game-winners -- Spenser and I will root for a different Jax gentleman next year.

### **Repeat of Last Week's Complaint -- Since the Problem Repeated**

Wow, look at the monster games on the Sunday card! Jets at Rams and Saints at Panthers: Both essentially playoff contests, pitting two teams in must-win situations to advance to the postseason. (Jersey/B ended up losing and advancing because Buffalo also lost, but the Jets started the game assuming they were in a must-win situation.) Which of these monster contests, both of which went down to the final tick of the clock, was shown on television in our nation's capital, where yours truly lurks? Neither. But we did see the meaningless Cowboys at Giants collision, combined record 11-19 at kickoff.

As Tuesday Morning Quarterback said last week when none of Sunday's big games were shown in Washington, the league and the networks must come up with a better system for deciding which games air. And the problem isn't just Washington -- only 46 percent of the country saw Jets-Rams, the marquee matchup of the day. The NFL spares no expense to stage monster games of tremendous interest, then often makes it impossible for most viewers to see the monster games. The paid service Sunday Ticket is the solution for those who can receive satellite signals, but for those who don't or can't, which is the majority of Americans, choices regarding what airs over regular broadcast television simply must improve.

### **Philadelphia Omens and Portents**

The Eagles just let themselves be blown out by Cincinnati. The week before that, they let themselves be trampled by the Rams. The week before that, Philadelphia struggled to beat a weak Dallas team. The week before that, Philadelphia struggled to beat a weak Washington team. And now the Eagles get a bye. When they take the field again on January 16th, it will have been almost *six weeks* since their last impressive victory, on Dec. 5 against Green Bay. This is such bad karma, not even nearly naked cheerleaders may be able to save the Eagles. Two sloppy wins over second-echelon opponents; then two games which Philadelphia didn't even try to win; then a bye. And note that after Terrell Owens went down against Dallas while the team was locking home-field advantage, that meant the Eagles had two no-pressure outings in which to try to establish a running game. What did they do? On Sunday, the Eagles threw 54 times and rushed 16 times. Philadelphia might as well have punted on first down! TMQ has a bad, bad feeling about all this.

### **Cheer-Babes Professionalism**

As many readers noted, for Sunday's game at Lincoln Financial Field, the who-needs-clothes Eagles cheerleaders came out in bare midriffs and sprayed-on leotards, despite a kickoff temperature of 43 degrees. But seeing their champions immediately falling behind 17-0 and making no attempt to win, the Eagles cheerleaders jogged back into their locker room and put on track suits. Who can blame them?

Meanwhile Jeff Zielonka of State College, Pa., was at Ralph Wilson Stadium, where he witnessed the Bills

defeat by the Steelers junior varsity. Zielonka provides this account: "During the first half the Buffalo Jills wore heavy suits of the sort that would not appease the football gods. Result at halftime: Steelers 16, Bills 10. After the intermission, the Jills came out in much nicer short skirts that attracted my attention from my seats near the top of the stadium. What happens? Interception returned for a touchdown, Buffalo 17, Pittsburgh 16. Now we're approaching the end of the game, and the Bills have a chance to win if they recover the onside kick. The Jills had just gone back to the locker room and returned to the field wearing ponchos. End result: Steelers 29, Bills 24."

### Specialized Magazine Report

A shockingly long time ago, TMQ got his start in journalism at a trade magazine actually called *Waste Age*. It was about the handling of toxic wastes, and I like to think it was the very best magazine about toxic wastes out there! (Free samples were a big bennie of the job.) Anyway this placed into my heart a soft spot for specialized and trade magazines.

My current favorite is *Advanced Rescue Technology*. The magazine is for firefighters and emergency-services personnel -- the sort of relaxing reading you flip through in the staff lounge while waiting for something to explode or sink. I first encountered this magazine in a ranger's office at Denali National Park in Alaska; rangers apparently sit flipping through *Advanced Rescue Technology* while waiting for calls regarding stranded climbers on Denali, also known as Mount McKinley. Calls about stranded climbers come with distressing regularity. During climbing season, you can check here to see how many climbers on are Denali and nearby Mount Foraker. For the 2004 climbing season, the success rate of reaching the summit was 51 percent at Denali and 25 percent at Foraker.

One recent issue of *Advanced Rescue Technology* contained an article headlined -- I am not making this up -- CEMENT TRUCK ROLLOVERS, A PICTORIAL ESSAY. Accompanying the photo-essay were 10 lovely, high-quality photographs of rolled-over cement trucks surrounded by EMS teams. The article's cryptic byline: "David Powers, AHS, NREMT-P, runs the Museum of Unnatural History in South Carolina." The cover story of another recent issue was, LARGE ANIMAL RESCUE.

As interesting as the stories in *Advanced Rescue Technology* are the ads. SEARCHCAM EYELINK CAN BE YOUR EYES AND EARS IN A HAZARDOUS SITUATION, promises one ad showing a man in a moon suit holding a gizmo. SHOULDN'T YOU USE THE NT RES-Q BAG? asks another, in this case a two-page four-color spread, so the NT Res-Q Bag must be a hot seller. And you'll want to make sure you own Rescue Randy, the "Official Manikin of the Firefighter Combat Challenge." Firefighter *combat* challenge -- are they shooting at each other as they try to save the manikin? Check out Rescue Randy and his pal Rescue Rudy at the website of Simulaid. TMQ notes the heaviest Rescue Randy weighs 165 pounds -- apparently for training purposes, fire departments don't take into account expanding national waistlines. Surely some who live in cities where highways have carpool-only lanes have been tempted to buy a Rescue Randy and seat him as a simulated passenger, though the \$995 pricetag may be a deterrent.

The subscription price for six issues of *Advanced Rescue Technology* is listed as \$12.50, but when you order, \$5.95 for "shipping and handling" is added. So it's really a \$18.45 subscription. Charging "shipping and handling" to make magazines seem less expensive is a trend in marketing. For instance *Vogue* currently offers 12 issues for \$12, but another charges another \$4 to mail them. Presumably, you can save that \$4 by driving to *Vogue's* office each month and picking up your issue in person.

### In Another Environmental Gesture, the Jets Will Recycle Game Plans

The Jets continue to pursue a \$1.4 billion proposal to build in Manhattan the world's first self-powered environmentally friendly stadium, complete with 25,000 solar collectors and 34 wind turbines. On an *exclusive* basis, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has learned that secret plans call for the wind turbines to run in reverse whenever the visiting team has the ball, creating an artificial tornado.

Now as everyone knows, for NFL purposes, New York is located in New Jersey. Suppose the junior Jersey team succeeds in returning to any of the five boroughs of New York. This would present TMQ a problem: What to call the clubs yours truly currently designates Jersey/A and Jersey/B? An obvious new nomenclature would be New Jersey Giants and New York Jets. But I refuse to take the simple way out! TMQ's marketing department is considering Hudson/West and Hudson/East as the new cognomen. A

reader expresses the dilemma in haiku:

TMQ would hate  
Jets' move: Jersey/B no more,  
just plain old New York.  
-- John Karp, Palo Alto, Calif.

### **On the Other Hand, If Gravity Is Malfunctioning, That's Good News for Ted Washington**

Joel Pliskin of Oakland, Calif., points out this *Los Angeles Times* story on a researcher who has shown that the two Pioneer deep-space probes -- the only artificial objects to have left our solar system -- have begun moving in ways that are impossible if standard theories of physics are correct.

Is something wrong with gravity? Is some unknown force acting on the probes? This seems another indicator of my own pet theory that science has barely begun to grasp what's going on in the universe, and that in centuries to come, people will chortle regarding what we consider knowledge, in the same way we today chortle about those of past centuries who thought the Earth was flat or the air was full of phlogiston. (Conversation in the year 2105: "Can you believe that in 2005, people at Harvard actually thought the entire universe emerged as an explosion of a point with no dimensions?")

### **Hats Off to Jim Irsay**

The sports commentary world has not given sufficient due to the fact that just before Christmas, the Colts signed a 30-year agreement to remain in Indianapolis. A new stadium will be built with a mix of public and private financing; the stadium will feature lots of club and box seats, these being essential to modern NFL team financing because premium seat revenue is the one major form of income that NFL teams do not share amongst themselves. TMQ, who is anti-gambling, is not thrilled that some of the public money for the project will come from allowing slot machines in Indianapolis and taxing the proceeds; but yours truly is impressed that the deal includes a provision that 6,000 seats at the new stadium be reserved for \$25 tickets, so average people can afford to attend a game. The Colts could have high-tailed it to the glamour, sun and beach babes of Los Angeles: instead they showed loyalty to the small-state local fans of Indiana. Loyalty -- I thought that went out of style!

Congratulations to the Colts for doing the right thing.

### **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT Disaster Play Law -- College Bowl Edition**

LSU leading Iowa State 25-24 with 9 seconds remaining, the Hawkeyes pinned on their 44, receiver Warren Holloway ran a fly pattern from the middle of a trips set. The LSU corner across from Holloway made no attempt to cover him, or anyone, simply standing there like a piece of topiary as Holloway went deep for a 56-yard touchdown pass as time expired. As TMQ has been pointing out lately, "If you break down a disaster play, you find one or more gentlemen standing around doing absolutely nothing on the team that is struck by the disaster."

### **Reader Animadversion**

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

A recent item noted a Saratoga Springs, N.Y. hotel on Excelsior Avenue, and marveled at a street named after wood shavings. Adam Martignetti of Newburyport, Mass., reports there is an expensive restaurant in Boston named Excelsior, where the wacky food includes Berkshire pork rack with maple-ginseng lacquer and truffle-potato puree for \$34. "A restaurant named after wood chips," Martignetti joins me in marveling. But many readers including Alyssa Richard of Seekonk, Mass., explained that excelsior means "ever upward" and is the state motto of New York. She also points out that in one of the Star Trek movies, Sulu commands the starcruiser *Excelsior*: "Do you really think Sulu captained a ship named after

wood shavings?"

My computer spell checker got its revenge again last week when I referred to the San Diego team as the Lighting Bolts. A reader notes in haiku,

Lighting Bolts a team --  
Fluorescent or halogen?  
Spellcheck strikes once more.  
-- *David Hamilton, Arcata, Calif.*

Regarding my complaint that neither of Week 16's marquee games, San Diego at Indianapolis and New England at Jersey/B, were shown on television in the nation's capital, Bob Chesteen of Belgrade, Serbia, writes to advise Washington, D.C., residents to move to Serbia. Both those games, he reports, aired live there. Last week's related item about NFL Sunday Ticket prompted many including Matt Sampson to ask what readers always ask -- if I can't get Sunday Ticket, how can I see every play of every game? Let me offer the two-word answer that is the only thing I ever say about this: Trade secret.

To last week's eerie list of correct predictions of exact final scores, Donna Valko of Mesa, Arizona, adds that the *Arizona Republic* correctly predicted the final of Seahawks 24, Cardinals 21. How to explain so many correct final score predictions in the same week? A starcruiser from "Kurt Warner's" homeworld must have been in orbit above Earth and exhausting anti-muons, which, as everyone knows, alter time-space causality. By the way, the alien entity that was once "Kurt Warner" has pretty obviously jumped hosts and is now "Ben Roethlisberger."

Last week yours truly noted that Christmas trees, Santa Claus, elves and the rest, while obviously associated with Christmas, are not themselves religious symbols -- you don't find a lot of flying reindeer in the Bible. Many readers including Crista Morrow of San Francisco countered that Santa "is a modern day reinterpretation of the Bishop of Myra, Saint Nicholas," who lived in Asia Minor in the fourth century. TMQ proposed that Dec. 25 be renamed Spendmas and "become exclusively a secular holiday that celebrates consumerism, spending, presents and credit-card debt." Some other date would be chosen to observe Jesus' birth, since Dec. 25 was picked arbitrarily in the first place. Michael Swartwout of St. Louis suggests religious Christmas could be Jan. 7, the feast of Epiphany, which symbolizes the moment the celestial nature of the baby Jesus was revealed to the three Magi, and is already the day on which the Russian Orthodox Church observes Jesus' birth. The revelation to the Magi occurs in the Gospel of Matthew, which presents one of the two, mutually incompatible scripture birth accounts for Jesus. I have always preferred the birth story in the Gospel of Luke, for it is the account in which the heavenly host announces the Redeemer's arrival to shepherds watching over their sheep. This is very powerful: penniless shepherds camped in a field, not kings, are asked to receive the divine child into history. Anyway, here's the refined proposal. Dec. 25 becomes Spendmas, a totally secular national holiday based on worship of Best Buy. Jan. 7 becomes religious Christmas but is a regular day for offices and schools -- people would go to church on their own and expect no favors from government.

Lee Bienkowski of Jacksonville, Fla., notes that the animal in the Jaguars' team logo has a blue tongue -- maybe from too many last-second finishes this year. He haikuizes,

Jag with a blue tongue.  
Gasping for breath -- Cyanic  
Cat, not Cardiac.  
-- *Lee Bienkowski, Jacksonville, Fla.*

Greg Johnson of Kansas City, Mo., reports he has begun to use standard Tuesday Morning Quarterback strategy -- rarely blitz, run on short-yardage downs, pass only on first down at the goal line, don't punt in the Maroon Zone -- when playing EA Madden football. His winning record has shot up, he says. In haiku,

Playing PS2  
with TMQ strategy  
means fewer losses.  
-- *Greg Johnson, Kansas City, Mo.*

Apropos my item on Julie, Amtrak's hated computer voice, José Arana of Hollywood, Florida, says his local Pizza Hut inflicts on callers Sally, a computer voice that takes delivery orders. "After 10 minutes of responding YES and NO, I nevertheless got the wrong pizza," Arana reports. José, at least the wrong pizza arrived: you're lucky Julie and Sally did not get together to ship your wrong pizza to another city via train.

### **This Week's Challenge**

Elizabeth Whitman of Bangor, Maine, writes to protest this football announcer cliché, used after a quarterback throws an interception: "He wishes that he had that one back." Whitman says, "You think?" She suggests this Challenge -- name the worst announcer cliché. Use the link at Reader Animadversion.

### **Next Week**

Darwinian forces exert selection pressure on the playoff teams. Which ones will fall extinct?



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## Why football is the most emotional sport, and there she is, Miss Cue!

**By Gregg Easterbrook**  
**Special to NFL.com**

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Jan. 11, 2005) -- As he walked across the field to congratulate victorious Rams players, the lampblack under Seattle quarterback Matt Hasselbeck's eyes was streaking downward -- because this grown man was crying. Which makes Tuesday Morning Quarterback wonder: Why is football the most emotional of sports?

All athletes want to win, of course. Tennis players want to win; swimmers want to place first; even curling as become ruthlessly competitive. But for sheer emotion, nothing tops football. In football, the highs are as high as it gets, and the lows are as low as can be. A football victory can mean complete jubilation for players and spectators. It is not unusual for football fans to remember every thrill -- not to mention many stats! -- of a big triumph decades in the past, nor unusual for grown men to say that winning a particular high school football game was among the highlights of their lives. In turn, football defeat can mean utter despair for players and supporters. After a big loss fans may not sleep for days and may remember particular defeats with bitterness for decades. Last month the football team of my kids' high school lost in the second round of the state playoffs, a last-second defeat on the field to the defending state champion. Afterward, half the boys -- tough kids who'd just finished a great season -- were sobbing.

Every football enthusiast has a story of elation and a story of wretchedness -- of wild celebration, of helpless fist-pounding. I grew up in Buffalo, N.Y., and still recall the feeling of misery that seized me as a boy as I sat in the old War Memorial Stadium, watching the Bills go down to defeat in the 1967 AFL title game, thus losing the right to play in the first Super Bowl. No other sport brings highs that are so high or lows that are so low. But why is football unusual in this regard? Here are the reasons football inspires emotion like no other sport: Because it involves more people than any other sport, and because there are so few games.

First, people, Football requires the largest of sports teams; football games are the most elaborate and difficult to stage. This means large numbers of people become emotionally involved. For every player in pads there is at least one, and often two others, closely involved in fielding the team -- not just coaches and trainers, but everyone from front-office personnel in the pros and athletic director office people in college, to moms who cook team breakfasts in high school. Fielding so much as a decent high school team requires 100 people willing to commit substantial time and energy. Meanwhile, up in the stands, football is, in the United States at least, the biggest of draws, meaning more people are present for the games and thus emotionally involved than in any other sport. Meanwhile, on the tube, in the United States at least, more people are watching football than any other sport, and engaged in the outcome.

Having so many people involved in football means there are large numbers amplifying each other's emotions. When something good happens, everybody's really joyful and the joy gets amplified by bouncing back and forth among lots of people. When something bad happens, sadness enters the emotional echo-chamber and intensifies. Suppose your school's wrestling team wins or loses -- most people in the school won't even know whether the wrestlers won or lost. But if the football team wins or loses, everybody knows, and half the people have some personal connection to someone who felt the win or loss keenly. So the emotions amplify.

It's often said that football games are taken as metaphors for the success or failure of groups: That if a football team wins, those who root for the team think this is an omen their lives will go well, while a loss is seen as a bad portent. But why are football games seen as omens? Because so many people are involved. It is impossible to field a football team without a lot of people working together cooperatively. In that, football is like real life and engages emotions in a way other sports do not. A basketball team can win if one star throws in 50 points; a baseball team can win if one slugger hits two home runs; a football team simply cannot win unless everyone cooperates. This makes football a metaphor of the larger world, where for the typical person, everyday life is a cooperative effort.

Second, football games are so affecting because they are so few. If your favorite baseball team loses, there's always tomorrow -- they may even play again today! Your favorite pro football team has a maximum of 19 tries per year to win, and usually less. The numbers are smaller for college and high school. All the effort and emotion of the large groups of people involved in fielding a football team get compressed into the small space of just a few chances to play, and the result is magnified emotion. The highs are really high and the lows are really low. In the United States at least, no sport can touch football for feeling.

Yet, though we take football so very seriously, it is just a game. *Football is just a game* -- I can't believe I wrote that! Commissioner Tagliabue, I will report for the therapy sessions immediately.

In other NFL news, Seattle led the league in dropped passes in 2003, led the league in dropped passes in 2004 and lost a playoff contest when Bobby Engram dropped a pass in the end zone on fourth down with 27 seconds remaining. Ye gods, the "clang" sound echoes through the Emerald City! Thus, TMQ now formally changes the Seahawks' cognomen. Rather than the Blue Men Group, henceforth the 'Hawks will be known to this column the Dropped Passes Group.

In eve more NFL news, I'll give you a wagering tip if you promise not to wager. TMQ's compromise with my Baptist upbringing is to be pro-topless but anti-gambling. It's harmless to put a few bucks in an office pool. But for those who wager in serious ways, gambling brings only sorrow. Bettors as a group lose, or else casinos and bookies couldn't stay in business. Gambling is much more likely to bestow upon you debt and troubles than the big splash that gamblers fantasize about. Nobody should care if Donald Trump-types blow chips at fancy casinos, but most gambling victimizes the poor and those in dire straights for money -- offering the illusion of any easy fortune, then actually making things worse. Government run lotteries are just as bad as the illegal stuff. Few things are sadder than to be in a convenience store on a Friday night, payday, and see people who are pressed for money asking again and again for \$5 scratch-off lottery tickets in the hopes of bringing home a wad of cash to show their wives or husbands. Instead, they bring home empty pockets and woe.

These points against gambling made, are still looking for a sure thing? Try the home teams in the NFL divisional round this weekend. Home teams in the NFL divisional round are the surest sure thing in sports. Since the current playoff formation was adopted in 1990, home teams in the divisionals are 45-11, an .803 winning figure. The home teams have just finished a bye week and relaxing in hot tubs as their opponents are out in the cold while being pounded. Usually the reason the home teams had byes in the first place is that they are better than the wild-card round teams. Home teams dominate the NFL divisionals, so check-mark them in your office pool. You don't even need to know which team is playing! Just go for the home team in the divisional round.

A week later at the championship round, the home advantage dissipates. Since 1990, home teams in conference championships are 16-12, a .571 winning figure. That is nearly identical to the rate at which home teams win all games: During the 2004 regular season, home teams went 145-111, a .566 winning figure. At the championship round, nobody's had the previous week off and the Super Bowl is just one "W" away. Players leave everything on the field at championship contests. So at the next step the home team won't necessarily be the favorite. This week, look homeward. (Of course, if visitors win this weekend, remember the Tuesday Morning Quarterback motto: All Predictions Wrong or Your Money Back.)

It is TMQ's thesis that the farther you advance in the playoffs, the more important coaching and game plans become. In the regular season, details of the game plan and intensity of the psyche-up may not matter that much. In the postseason, every iota of edge matters. So see special playoff analyses below.

Finally, league spokesman Greg Aiello announced that if Denver plays at Indianapolis yet again in next season's playoffs, a series of "mercy rules" will be put into effect. The Colts will have only 10 men on the field, Denver will get five plays to make a first down and Peyton Manning will be required to pat his head and rub his tummy simultaneously before each snap.

Note: After last year's playoff humiliation at Indianapolis, the Broncos vowed to improve. They did! Denver lost by 31 points at Indianapolis last postseason, and this year lost by only 25 points. At the current rate of progress, the Broncos will be able to defeat the Colts at Indianapolis in the year 2010.

**Stats of the Week** Indianapolis, which now plays at New England, is 2-6 in outdoor playoff games in the past decade.

**Stats of the Week No. 2** Minnesota and St. Louis became the first 8-8 teams ever to win in the postseason.

**Stats of the Week No. 3** Seattle has not won a postseason game in 21 years.

**Stats of the Week No. 4** Marty Schottenheimer, 5-12 in the postseason, has not coached a playoff victory in 11 years.

**Stats of the Week No. 5** The Colts' trip to New England will be their third game there in 13 months. And during the 2005 regular season, Indianapolis plays at ... New England.

**Stats of the Week No. 6** At halftime, Reggie Wayne of the Colts had 167 yards of offense; the entire Denver team had 103 yards of offense.

**Stats of the Week No. 7** The AFC playoff teams are a combined 21-3 versus the NFC; the NFC playoff teams are a combined 11-13 versus the AFC. Stat submitted by Brian Dvorak.

**Stats of the Week No. 8** The Seahawks gained 413 yards at home, and lost. The Chargers gained 408 yards at home, and lost.

**Stats of the Week No. 9** Not only did Peyton Manning set a record for most touchdown passes by a quarterback in a season, but the league set a record for most touchdown passes in a season with 732.

**Stats of the Week No. 10** Over six days, the Jets played nine and a half quarters of football.

**Stats of the Week No. 11** Daunte Culpepper in his last five games against the Packers: 16 touchdown passes, no interceptions.

**Stats of the Week No. 12** Combined postseason record of the coaches still in the playoffs: 30-24. Combined championship-round record of those same coaches: 4-8.

**Stats of the Week No. 13** Brett Favre is 1-4 in his last five outings as a playoff starter.

**Public Health Official Cheerleader of the Week** Literary Cheerleader temporarily suspended while we recognize other cheer-babes with serious credentials. Today's is Kim Kennedy of the Falcons cheerleaders, a public health officer for a Georgia government agency. According to her team bio, Kennedy is a graduate of Howard University and holds a master's in public health from Emory University. She has trained in jazz dance, ballet and tap since age three -- Kim, isn't that too late to start by modern child prodigy standards? She's even got a serious favorite book, *Mama* by Terry McMillian. See more on the seriousness of Atlanta cheer-babes below.

**Why Are You Punting???????** Before going to our Sweet and Sour plays, we will pause to ask the Denver Broncos: Why are you punting? Let's rephrase: WHY ARE YOU PUNTING????!!!!!! It's Indianapolis 7, Denver 0 in the middle of the first quarter. Denver faces fourth-and-1 on its own 41. Denver is playing the highest-scoring team in the league, as the Lucky Charms averaging 33 points per

game. To win, the Broncos must score freely themselves, since there is no chance of a defensive struggle. Yet instead of going for it on fourth-and-1 from midfield -- with a roughly two-thirds chance of success -- Denver punted. As the Broncos' punt unit trotted onto the field, 9-year-old Spenser, the Official Youngest Child of TMQ, declared, "It's crazy for them to punt on fourth-and-1. The only way to beat Indianapolis is to score a lot!" Maybe it's a fake, yours truly replied. As the punt boomed, Spenser prophesied, "They're doomed!" So they were. Indianapolis took the punt and rapidly made it 14-0; the rout was on. TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook *in the first quarter*.

Note: Now it's Indianapolis by 21-0, and the Broncos are facing fourth-and-6 on the Colts' 14. You're down by 21 to the highest-scoring team in the league, you must go for it! Field goal. Wow, hooray -- now you're only down by 18 points. Indianapolis required just two snaps to make the count 28-3. Mike Shanahan seemed to order this field goal to insure he couldn't be accused of being shut out.

**Sweet Play of the Week** St. Louis 7, Seattle 3 -- Les Mouflons faced first-and-10 on their own 45. Marc Bulger looked to his left, then pump-faked toward the middle, then threw deep on the right side to Kevin Curtis for a 50-yard completion. The Rams scored a touchdown two plays later. Everybody on the Dropped Passes Group defense looked toward the offensive left when Bulger looked left, then ran toward the middle when he pumped middle. Quarterbacks never look off two different ways! This time one did.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2** Facing third-and-goal on the Denver 2 with the game scoreless, Indianapolis lined up in a shotgun with Edgerrin James on Peyton Manning's right and reserve tailback James Mungro on Manning's left. Indianapolis likes to hand off to James running left on this down-and-distance. James started left; a guard pulled left; Manning faked to James; Mungro, whom Denver thought would be the lead blocker, sprinted out to the right behind the Colts' formation. Mungro was all by his lonesome in the flat for the touchdown reception.

**Sour Play of the Week** Game scoreless, Les Mouflons faced third-and-14 on the Seattle 15. The Rams lined up empty backfield with trips left and two wides right. Torrey Holt was in the slot right and ran everyone's favorite touch football pattern, the down-and-in. Rookie nickel back Jordan Babineaux, who has never started an NFL game, was lined up across from Holt. At the snap, Babineaux ignored Holt and made the high school mistake of "looking into the backfield," watching Marc Bulger -- as if Bulger would take off running on third-and-14? Touchdown to Holt. Lining up a rookie against the other team's best receiver was sour. Ignoring the other team's best receiver was as sour as a Mega Warhead.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2** Green Bay trailing 24-10 at Lambeau Field at the end of the first half and the Packers had third-and-6 on the Vikings 8. Brett Favre rolled right, ran right, then flipped underhanded to Javon Walker in the end zone. Penalty for illegal forward pass because Favre was on the Minnesota 5 when he threw. Illegal forward pass is a loss of down; ball goes back to the 10, missed field-goal attempt, and suddenly Lambeau's January mystique is in jeopardy. Sports commentators have yakked, yakked, yakked about how the penalty erased what would have been a highlight-reel touchdown. TMQ's reaction -- *Brett, why didn't you keep running!* Favre would have made it to the 4, or maybe the 3, setting up either a shorter field goal or a monster fourth-down attempt. Did Favre want to avoid being hit, or had he totally lost track of where the line of scrimmage marker was? In either case, it was a sour play.

**Sour 'N' Sweet Sequence** Facing fourth-and-goal on the Jets 2 with 24 seconds remaining in regulation, the Chargers came out with an empty backfield and five wide. Yours truly exclaimed, *Aaaiiiiiiiyyyyyyeoooooooooooo!* No way this works at the goal line, where defenders have so little territory to defend. At the goal line, power runs, play fakes and roll outs from power formations work, but not pass-wacky stuff. The first Bills-Cowboys Super Bowl turned from a tense game into a rout when Buffalo went five wide on fourth-and-goal from the Dallas 1, and failed. San Diego failed here; Drew Brees having no one open, threw an incompleteness. But the Jets were called for roughing, and now it's first-and-goal on the 1 with 16 seconds with San Diego out of time outs. This time the Bolts lined up heavy, which is what to do at the goal line. A slotback ran in short motion left as Antonio Gates shifted from the standard tight-end position to slightly split right. Brees play faked and Gates ran a simple quick out. Amazingly, given Gates' proficiency at the goal line, he was not jammed by Jets safety Erik Coleman. Touchdown, overtime. The first San Diego goal-line call was sour, the second was sweet.

**Worst Tactics Ere the Clock Struck Midnight** Now it's overtime at 11:53 Eastern, and the Chargers get a first down at the Jersey/B 22. The look on Herman Edwards' face said: I am beaten. But on a rainy

night when footing was bad and a short field-goal attempt had already honked, why would San Diego settle for a kick from this spot? Thrice the Jets lined up in an "overstack" run defense, against which the play fake or bootleg are effective, and thrice San Diego ran into the line, netting a loss of a yard. Rookie placekicker Nick Kaeding then honked a 40-yard attempt, and the Jets drove the other way to win. On each of the first two snaps when San Diego plowed into the line, the Jets had eight gentlemen in the "box," making a rushing gain impossible, but fairly crying out for a play fake or bootleg. On the third-down snap, the Jets put *nine* men in the box, a tactic rarely seen. Brees might have bootlegged for a big gain. On that play Eric Parker was the sole wide receiver -- and in the television picture you can't even see who's covering him, as his man was completely backed off. A simple hitch to Parker might have gained the yards needed for a short field-goal attempt. Instead, on third down, the Chargers plowed straight into the overstack. Then the clock struck midnight on San Diego's magical season.

**For English Teachers, There Would Be the Miss Spell Pageant** One of the perks of writing TMQ is that it confers a perfectly legitimate reason to gawk at cheerleader swimsuit photos. It's my professional obligation! More perfectly legitimate reasons to gawk would ensue if Tuesday Morning Quarterback sponsored a beauty pageant. My beauty pageant would consist entirely of swimsuit, fitness and evening-gown events, though contestants would be required to answer a trick question about world peace. The theme of the pageant would, of course, be football. And the pageant name? The Miss Cue competition.

Here are some other possible beauty pageants, by profession. For politics: the Miss Statement competition. For journalism: the Miss Quote competition. For law enforcement: the Miss Demeanor judging. For the missile defense program: the Miss Guided contest. For beauty pageants that don't fit other categories: the Miss Cellany crown.

**Minnesota at Green Bay Analysis** The previous three meetings between the teams were all won by Green Bay, but by a combined score of just 98-89 as all three went down to the wire. Since the Vikings have been playing the Packers close, you figured the law of averages would even things out.

Green Bay has shown a tendency to play fake and throw deep on the first snap of a possession -- for example, doing this repeatedly in last year's playoff game at Philadelphia. Minnesota coaches must have noticed, because twice in the wild-card game, Brett Favre play faked and threw deep on the first snap of a possession, and both times Vikings defensive backs were deep and intercepted. TMQ's immutable law of interception holds, Two's the Limit. A team can throw two interceptions and still win; anything more and you are toast. After intercepting only 11 passes in the entire regular season, Minnesota intercepted four this time, and going over the immutable limit of two meant Green Bay's goose was cooked. (A goose-on-toast metaphor.) Minnesota seemed well prepared for exactly the kind of passes Favre has thrown in the last year and a half. He has been cautious and accurate short, while heave-hoeing crazy throws deep into coverage -- a crazy heave-ho deep into coverage doomed Green Bay last season in its Philadelphia playoff contest. The Vikings' victory seemed an example of a game plan winning the game -- specifically, a defensive game plan.

As for the Packers, they have lost playoff games at Lambeau in January in two of the last three seasons. This seems like saying Anna Kournikova has been turned down by two of the last three men she asked out to dinner. At least Anna looks a lot better than the Packers at the moment. Check the Gamebook -- while the game was still close the Packers had a sequence of drives that ended interception, missed field goal, interception, punt, interception. Say it ain't so, Curly! Green Bay's home playoff invincibility, among the most venerable mystiques in sports, is now -- over? Say it ain't so, Curly! But maybe it was always unrealistic to expect the Pack to do well this postseason. Though Green Bay went 10-7, it did not post a single victory over a team that finished the regular season with a winning record.

Note: Did you catch the Dickensian fingerless gloves Mike Sherman was wearing on the Green Bay sideline? Assuming this gentleman is still around next year, TMQ will take to calling him Coach Cratchit.

**Best Blocks** On Reggie Wayne's 42-yard touchdown catch-and-run off a hitch screen, Colts center Jeff Saturday made the key block on the Denver 5. That's right -- the play began on the 42, and a 293-pound lineman hustled all the way to the 5 to throw the key block. On Daunte Culpepper's 27-yard scramble that put the Hyperboreans on the Packers 9, guard Adam Goldberg did what TMQ wishes more offensive linemen were coached to do: After knocking his man down, Goldberg jumped atop the gentleman so that he could not possibly get back into the play. And TMQ tends to dislike Randy "Linc" Moss, but notes that on Moe Williams' 68-yard catch-and-run touchdown, Moss threw a fantastic seal

block, driving Al Harris into the ground as the runner made his break. In the duel of the hairdos -- Harris' shoulder-length locks versus Moss' Mod Squad Afro -- Moss utterly outplayed Harris.

**This Is TMQ Item Number 4976-44T-238654930728862040403-Y** Excessively long account numbers are proliferating. TMQ's account number with Comcast, for example, is 15 digits -- though nine digits are all that is required to assign a unique number to every person in the United States. Social Security numbers are nine digits, and there are enough unused nine-digit combinations to last the Social Security Administration for decades. So if nine digits are the maximum needed to identify an American, why do cable companies, power companies and others insist on much longer numbers? This spring I'll teach political science for a month at my beloved Colorado College. Colorado College just assigned me a "department code." The code is 22 digits long.

Credit card companies use account numbers that are quite long because the numbers are generated by proprietary algorithms; this renders it hard to guess a credit card number. So credit card companies have a reason for long account numbers -- they want to combat unauthorized use. But why does Comcast need 15 digits? If someone guessed my account number, presumably they could only use it to pay my bill for me. TMQ can't help but feeling that cable companies and power companies use extremely long account numbers to harass consumers, causing people to make mistakes in copying the long numbers onto checks, which the companies can then claim were credited to the wrong account.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!** Trailing 7-0 in the second quarter, the Jets had second-and-8 on the San Diego 13. Chad Pennington saw a blitz coming and audibled. Seven gentlemen crossed the line. Tight end Anthony Becht did a simple turnout into the left flat where no one was available to guard him because so many Chargers were blitzing. Touchdown.

Note: This coming weekend, TMQ will perform my annual charting of every play in every game in order to prove, as I annually prove, that on average, offenses gain more yardage against the blitz than against straight defense.

**Globalization Strikes Back** Like so many males, yours truly receives most of his wardrobe as Christmas or Father's Day presents. In recent years while unbuttoning and taking off backing papers of new shirts for first wearing, I've noticed that not only do the number of straight pins in shirts seem to be increasing, they are placed at ever-better-concealed positions. It's now hard to open brand-new shirts without sticking yourself on a hidden pin, and sometimes the position of the pins seems to bear no rational relationship to making the shirt look desirable on a sales shelf, which is presumably why pins are there.

Then it hit me: the shirts are made in Bhutan or Senegal or Surinam. Textile workers in these places earn 27 cents an hour and know the shirts will be purchased by people who drink \$3 cups of coffee and own SUVs used to pull power boats. So alienated developing-world workers are deliberately hiding pins as a small revenge on the affluent of the West. Thus, I propose a new form of product -- Fair Trade certified shirts. Modeled on Fair Trade coffee, these shirts would be made by developing-world workers who receive a living wage. Anyone could buy the shirts with a clear conscience. The shirts' big selling point? No straight pins.

**Who-Dat Sweet Plays** Game tied at 20 with four minutes remaining, Les Mouflons faced third-and-2 on their 32. Seldom-used wide receiver Shaun McDonald lined up in the backfield, then simply ran a flare route into the flat. No one covered McDonald, who took a short reception and ran 31 yards. Two snaps later it's third-and-3 at the Dropped Passes Group 17. The Rams play faked, while seldom-used backup tight end Cam Cleeland -- seven receptions and no touchdowns in 2004 -- ran a "seam" route straight down the field. No one covered him; touchdown reception and the winning margin.

**Cheer-Babes in the News** In an *Atlanta Journal Constitution* article by Michelle Hiskey, pointed out by Rand Arwady of Kalamazoo, Mich., numerous Falcons cheerleaders have serious professions. One, Jamilia Turner, is a civil engineer who works "as an assistant project manager overseeing parts of Fulton County's wastewater system overhaul." Another, Kristy Coyle, majored in industrial engineering at Texas A&M and "helps builds DSL platforms for businesses." The Falcons only hire cheerleaders who are either full-time professionals or college students. Hiskey reports, "Stephanie Blank, wife of the Falcons owner Arthur Blank, advocated professional requirements for the team's cheerleaders so the public would view them, 'in a positive light, not promoting sex or anything but a class act.'" Please, they're serious, they're

professional, they're educated -- but let them promote sex too! Life is distressingly short, and pleasure is rare.

**Why Not Pull the Goalie?** With 27 seconds remaining in the first half, the Jets faced fourth-and-7 from their 47 and lined up to punt. San Diego had a man back to receive the kick. Why not rush all 11 in this situation? San Diego sent a normal rush and the Bolts fair-caught it at their own 9, where it was too late to do anything.

**This Is Too Efficient** The Seattle-St. Louis game ended at 5:54 p.m. Pacific time. NFL.com posted the official Gamebook at 6:03 p.m. Pacific time. That's, um, spooky.

**Disclaimer Watch** My Christmas stocking included one of those snazzy Mag-Lite flashlights. On the instructions, in the section advising you to insert three C-cells, was boldly stamped, DO NOT ALLOW CHILDREN TO INSTALL BATTERIES UNSUPERVISED.

### Revenge of the Monday Night Football Snubbed!

Yours truly is rooting for an Atlanta-Pittsburgh Super Bowl. Why? Neither appeared on *Monday Night Football*. Annually Tuesday Morning Quarterback predicts that the team goin' to Disney World will be a Monday night reject, and two of the last four years, I've been right. (Three of the last five years, the Super Bowl winner was a non-Monday night team, but I only made the prediction in the last four years.) Here is my 2004 prediction, citing Atlanta and Pittsburgh as Super Bowl contenders; at the time, everyone was forecasting a losing season for the Steelers. Sure, my prediction was a generic one. But the reason neither team was scheduled for a Monday night curtain call is that the league braintrust thought both would have bad years. This just shows what TMQ endlessly contends, that no one has the slightest idea who's going to win NFL games. A reader notes in haiku,

No Monday night game?  
Steelers and Falcons will play  
Super Bowl instead.  
-- Ned Moraghan, Clark, N.J.

### Rams at Seahawks Analysis

One reliable trick of high-school football is to bring in some guy who never plays, whom the defense will ignore, and throw him the bomb. St. Louis knew the Dropped Passes Group would be concerned about super-productive receivers Torry Holt and Isaac Bruce. So the game plan called for pumping toward Holt and Bruce, then throwing to little-used Kevin Curtis, Shaun McDonald and Cam Cleeland. The latter combined for 155 receiving yards. There seems a direct relationship between when St. Louis has a clever game plan and when Les Mouflons win. Saturday, St. Louis had a clever game plan.

As for the Seahawks, Mike Holmgren is considered a guru coach, but he has not won a playoff game in this century. True, coaches cannot catch passes: Had everything else been the same except Seattle receivers held the ball, the Dropped Passes Group likely would have prevailed. But coaches make the tactical decisions, and Holmgren made the decision to go pass-wacky. At home -- and it's usually easier to run at home -- Seattle coaches called 43 passes and 20 runs; the visiting Rams coaches called a balanced 32 passes and 27 runs. Holmgren allowed the Me-Shaun Alexander nonsense to become a distraction during the week, then seemed to punish Alexander in a silly way, by not including him in short-yardage formations. The Dropped Passes Group basically never tried to establish the run, content to rely on short pass after short pass, as Holmgren's West Coast offense theory dictates. But how many January outdoor games has the West Coast offense won in any stadium north of San Francisco? A couple, for Philadelphia. But no championship north of San Francisco.

### Tragically Misplaced Network Priorities

On Saturday, ABC -- network of *Desperate Housewives* -- offered only two ultra-brief sideline shots of the aesthetically appealing San Diego Charger Girls. Despite a kickoff temperature of 55 degrees, the Girls wore minimal two-piece summer outfits; coaches, bear in mind, were dressed in parkas. And the Chargers cheerleaders are California beach babes! Millions are spent developing miniseries premises just

to show California beach babes. Yet ABC, network of *Desperate Housewives*, offered only two ultra-brief sideline shots of the beach-based San Diego cheerleaders. Hey ABC, you're *supposed* to look at the cheerleaders! Here from the Chargers web site are the sort of sideline shots that the network of *Desperate Housewives* would not show. Also, TMQ advises traditional males to go to the team's cheerleaders bio page, choose anyone, and click on the swimsuit thumbnails.

The next day, CBS, network of *Survivor* -- where, during a recent episode, there was a perfectly legitimate reason the women had to put on bikinis and be tied up -- did show multiple sideline views of the aesthetically appealing Colts cheer-babes. The Indianapolis cheerleaders sported minimalist naughty-cowgirl outfits with chaps. TMQ's reaction: Giddyup! Swimsuit photos of the Colts cheerleaders may be gawked at here. We can assume Fox, network of -- well, network of Fox -- wanted to show lots of cheerleader sideline shots in its game -- Vikings at Packers. But Green Bay does not have cheerleaders.

### **Jets at Chargers Analysis**

Jets offensive coordinator Paul Hackett has been criticized for conservative play-calling -- which only landed the team in the playoffs, but what have you done for us lately? Last week the *New York Times* ran a prominent article asserting that Hackett needed to call deep passes. Apparently the Jets coaching staff reads the *New York Times* and the Chargers coaching staff does not. (The *Times* is available for home delivery in San Diego.) Jersey/B opened the game with three straight deep passes, and though only one was complete, this set an upbeat tone. The Jets continued to throw deep through the first half, and most were incomplete; but deep incompletions are not so bad if they force the defense to back off a bit and play honest. That's what the Jersey/B strategy did. San Diego came into the game with the league's third-ranked rushing defense, yielding only 82 yards per game. The Jets ran for 126 yards, partly because the Chargers backed off, worried about those deep passes. Finally, on the first Jersey/B possession of the second half, the strategy struck gold with a 47-yard touchdown pass to Santana Moss on a first-down fly pattern. Too often coaches abandon the game plan if it doesn't work immediately. Hackett stuck with his deep-passing game plan, and eventually it worked.

On the San Diego side, fun as the Bolts year was, it is going to be a long, tart offseason as supporters contemplate the team's weird overtime disinterest in improving its field position before missing a 40-yard field-goal attempt in bad weather. TMQ's theory of NFL coaching psychology is that most coaches are motivated by the desire to avoid being blamed. Of course, they don't want to read stories in the Monday newspapers about how the team lost, but what they *really* don't want to read is stories in the Monday newspapers about how the team lost because of a coaching decision. Thus coaches punt when behind. Thus coaches take the single PAT and go to overtime rather than gamble for the deuce and victory.

Scoring to make it 17-16 with 11 seconds remaining in regulation, San Diego could have gone for two and victory. The majority of NFL fourth-and-2 attempts -- what a deuce try is-- are successful. And imagine how Jersey/B would have been stunned had San Diego lined up for a PAT then ran a fake kick! But if a deuce try at the end of regulation failed, then Marty Schottenheimer would have been blamed; if he sent the game to overtime and lost, his players get the blame. Psychology like this seems to have dictated the Chargers' weird disinterest in advancing the ball from the Jersey/B 22 in overtime. If Bolts coaches had called a play-fake pass or a bootleg to get better position, and a turnover resulted, they would have been blamed for losing the game. Instead, Nick Kaeding is blamed for missing the field goal.

### **Intelligent Tactics, Dr. Watson**

Leading 14-7 in the third, the Jets faced first-and-20 on their own 36. Jersey/B threw a flare pass to Curtis Martin for 10 yards. Now it's second-and-10. They'll never throw to the same running back two plays in a row, right? Screen pass to Martin for 23 yards, and the Jets score a field goal on the series to make it 17-7. Nothing about either of these plays was flashy or memorable. Sometimes it's the well-executed routine stuff that makes victory possible.

### **"Serves Them Right for Taking My Advice, Clint!"**

TMQ gets a lot of email about network announcers, but rarely critiques them; my feeling is these gentlemen are not expected to be Roman orators. I accept that the bobbleheads will contradict themselves. But not in the same minute! Point one: St. Louis 7, Seattle 3, Les Mouflons faced third-and-

3. The Dropped Passes Group came out in the dime. Paul Maguire, who had been urging Seattle to blitz, intoned, "With six defensive backs on the field, they have got to bring at least one!" Seattle blitzed two defensive backs, leaving the wide receivers single-covered; easy slant to Torry Holt for the first down. Maguire then huffed, "Any time you leave Holt one-on-one like that, the Rams are going to go to him." Point two: Minnesota 24, Green Bay 17 in the fourth quarter. Randy Moss was hobbling to the huddle -- but Moss is smart, he knows people saw him hobbling and assumed this meant he could not run. How hobbled was Randy, really? Cris Collinsworth declared, "The Packers have got to recognize that Moss cannot go deep. Al Harris can cover Moss one-on-one. He doesn't need safety help." Two plays later, Moss was covered one-on-one by Harris during a safety blitz, and caught a 34-yard touchdown pass that iced the game. "Harris really bit on that move," Collinsworth deadpanned.

### **Pay It Forward**

In the Packers-Vikings Christmas Eve game, Minnesota handed the contest to Green Bay by ordering a crazy seven-man blitz. Sunday, as pointed out by Mark Oswood of Shoreview, Minn., and many other readers, on Moss' 34-yard icing touchdown, Green Bay handed the contest to Minnesota by ordering a crazy seven-man blitz. No help was available for Harris because the Packers had taken Collinsworth's advice and sent both safeties to blitz. When Moss caught the pass, Harris was the sole Packer within 15 yards.

### **Coaches Would Benefit from Taking Diane's Advice**

Diane Firstman of Brooklyn, N.Y., points this out: In the 2004 season, running backs were 7 of 12 passing for six touchdowns and one interception, while wide receivers were 5 of 25 passing for two touchdowns and three interceptions. So if you're going to call a trick pass, have a running back throw the ball.

### **Denver at Indianapolis Analysis**

Hmm, 529 yards for the Abandoned Quarry Offense, I'm struggling here to think of a criticism. Let's see, that 29:18 time of possession wasn't ideal. Of course, when you're only taking two or three snaps to score, time of possession won't look good. Peyton Manning play-faked on 14 of his 27 first-half pass attempts. The Colts continue to play-fake more than any team in the NFL; they also continue to score more than any team in the NFL. Coincidence?

For Denver's part, the team's defensive game plan was to use seven-man and eight-man fronts, daring Indianapolis to throw. What a brilliant idea! Denver also came in planning to big-blitz a lot, which is like coming into a confrontation with Brer Rabbit planning to toss him into the briar patch. Manning loves to throw against the blitz; how could Denver possibly have thought otherwise? The Broncos were six-blitzing on two long receptions by Dallas Clark, on a long catch by Brandon Stokley, on Reggie Wayne's 42-yard touchdown catch, on a 24-yard pass to Marvin Harrison at the two-minute warning of the first half, on a 20-yard pass to Wayne two snaps later that put Indianapolis on the 1 and made it 35-3 at halftime. Roughly half the Colts passing yardage came against blitzes, while Denver only sacked Manning once and only hurried him a couple of times. Manning finished 27 of 33 for 457 yards -- so big-blitzing let Manning have one of the best games of his career. Often Denver blitzed one or two defensive backs, and Manning immediately threw to the place they had vacated. If you can explain why Denver was blitzing so much when Manning loves to be blitzed, you have a future in sportstalk radio.

A few weeks ago, TMQ raised the Denver Mystery -- that the Broncos were the league's top-ranked team for combined offensive and defensive performance, yet were struggling. The Broncos finished fourth on defense, fifth on offense; nobody could top that combination. Then the Broncos got pasted for the second straight year in the postseason. (Denver was a top combined offense-defense team last season too, and got pasted in the first round.) In the regular season, Denver finished minus-9 in turnover differential, which some have said explains its struggles. But on Sunday, turnovers were not a big factor, nor were special teams.

So why did Denver look so good statistically, then wheeze out? The peculiar midseason firing of defensive backfield coach David Gibbs did not help. Denver was 6-3 until Gibbs was dismissed, 4-4 afterward. On Sunday, the Broncos defensive backfield looked totally uncoached -- like a bunch of skinny

guys running around staging a fire drill. (Which it was, sort of.) Manning had more passing yards at halftime Sunday than through the entire game in last year's playoff blowout of Denver. But maybe the Denver mystery is just the benefits of depleted Colorado air. The Broncos were 6-2 this season at home, 4-5 on the road. Perhaps they run up big stat margins in the mile-high atmosphere, then founder at sea level.

### **Best Play by a Quarterback Who Actually Wants to Be in San Diego**

While Eli Manning was on his couch eating genetically engineered corn chips and high-priced holdout Philip Rivers grasped a clipboard, Drew Brees went 4 for 5 and twice ran for first downs on the drive that positioned the Chargers to win in overtime. It's not his fault San Diego coaches weirdly decided to settle for a long field-goal attempt rather than work to advance the ball from the Jets' 22. At any rate, you no longer need be alarmed; the Bolts now cannot be the first team ever to go from last in the league to winning the Super Bowl.

### **Next Play by a Quarterback Who Really Doesn't Want to Be in New England**

"The entire NFL season has been, in a way, a buildup to this weekend's rematch between the Indianapolis Colts and New England Patriots," Mark Maske writes in this morning's *Washington Post*. After the Flying Elvii got away with murder in terms of pass interference in last year's AFC championship, the rules were changed. What's been the effect? Passing yards per game rose from 401 in 2003 to 421 in 2004. Also, 125 more illegal-contact and defensive holding flags were thrown this season than last. These added up to about 23 extra yards gained per contest; the typical game in 2004 had 43 points, versus 42 points in 2003.

So it wasn't a huge, earthshaking alteration, but the pendulum did swing in favor of offense. No team benefited more than Indianapolis -- where it wasn't so much the penalties called, but the space defenders gave receivers on routine plays, that helped the Lucky Charms run wild with the record book. Now Manning returns to New England, a place he is 0-6 as a starter and has thrown almost twice as many interceptions as touchdowns. Imagine the microscope the officials will be under! Just be glad *you* won't be one of the zebras calling that game.

### **What the Favre! Idea of the Year**

As an experiment, all traffic lights and traffic signs have been removed from a road in west London, on the theory that drivers will slow down to find out what's going on. Isn't this like removing all tests and grades from school on the theory that this will cause students to pay attention to find out what's going on?

## **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

### **Cutting Edge Final Score Predictions**

*Sports Illustrated's* panel of five experts was unanimous that the Bolts and Seahawks would win at home; both lost. *ESPN's* panel of eight experts were unanimous that the Bolts and Packers would win at home; both lost.

### **Reader Animadversion**

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Theresa Sullivan of Harrisonburg, Va., reports that the cryptic acronym TMQ puzzled over last week -- NREMT-P - means Nationally Registered Emergency Medical Technician, Paramedic. Greg Seher of Absecon, N.J., notes that Miami was 2-12 this season when wearing the white jerseys it prefers and 2-0 when showing its bizzaro-world uniforms of orange jerseys or aqua jerseys and aqua pants. He therefore suggests the Dolphins go all-bizzaro next season.

Recently yours truly proposed the Dec. 25 become Spendmas, a totally secular holiday celebrating presents and credit-card debt, while observation of the birth of Jesus be switched to Jan. 7, which is when the Russian Orthodox Church observes Christmas. Mostafa Sabet of Pasadena, Calif. notes that Coptics also observe the birth of Jesus on Jan. 7. Sabet reports, "I just got back from Egypt, having left Cairo on Christmas, Jan. 7. On my way to Egypt, I spent Christmas, Dec. 25, in Spain."

Last week yours truly supposed that the alien entity that once took the form of "Kurt Warner" had jumped hosts and was now calling itself "Ben Roethlisberger." Aaron Benjamin of New York City countered that the alien had jumped to "Drew Brees," who made the league's most mysterious sudden improvement in 2004. "Time for the NFL to get tough on alien cybernetic pod quarterbacks," Benjamin asserts.

TMQ noted that since *angeles* means angels in Spanish, the ridiculous new baseball team name, the Los Angeles Angels at Anaheim, translates to the Angels Angels at Anaheim. Many readers, including Inez Marana of Santa Fe, N.M., added that since Los Angeles means *the* angels, not just angels, the ridiculous new name really translates to "the the Angels Angels."

In observing that the Jax Jaguar has a blue tongue, TMQ called the team the Cyanotic Cats. Andrew Foster, a Texans' fan living in Edinburgh, Scotland, notes that Scotland's royal arms are a golden lion baring a blue tongue. Or, in the language of heraldry, "A lion rampant gules, armed and langued azure." Should this team's TMQ cognomen become the Jacksonville Rampant Azure? Mr. Data, make it so!

### Last Week's Challenge

Was to name the worst football announcer cliché. I disqualified announcer tics this column had previously complained about, such as "he's wide open!" (often said of a man who is hit one step after catching the ball), crying "double reverse!" on a single reverse, crying "reverse!" on an end-around, saying "he's giving 110 percent," declaring "that was almost intercepted!" of any pass that comes anywhere near a defender, plus intoning "this depends on where they spot the ball" (it always depends on where they spot the ball). In TMQ's nightmares, bobbleheads call out, "He's wide open on a double reverse and they're giving 110 percent!"

Mark Penney of Chicago suggested "the next level," as in, "He needs to take his game to the next level." Unless you're in a parking garage, Penney asserts, this expression has little meaning. Announcers should say, "He needs to play better." TMQ notes: Elevator operators really take it to another level!

Deirdre Buchanan of Davison, Mich., protests announcers calling people "most underrated." First, only one gentleman in the league could be the most underrated. Worse, this may be said of heavily publicized players such as Tom Brady. Deirdre, see this previous Challenge, where I asked readers to name the NFL's *least* underrated player. Ian Wilson of Georgetown, Ontario, in Canada, objected to "good success," as in, "They've had good success with that play this year." Is there any other kind of success? Bob Weinberg of Bethesda, Maryland, objects to bobbleheads gushing over guys they call a "big tight end." All NFL tight ends are big, Weinberg notes.

Karen Locascio of Boston protested announcers who comment, following a dropped pass, "He really should have caught that." She notes, "You don't say? When a receiver fails to make a big catch on third-and-long, announcers declare, 'They really needed him to catch that ball.' When does a team *not* need the receiver to make the catch?" Here, from Jeff Miller of Columbus, Ohio, is a complaint complete with stats: "For years, my wife and I have cringed to hear the commentators say 'that may come back to haunt them' after a missed extra-point kick early in the game. The implication is that the game will come down to a small margin. Since only 18 of 256 games this year came down to a one-point margin or tie at the end of regulation, the odds are a missed PAT will not come back to haunt you."

Eric Kane of Exeter, N.H., notes that "When discussing playoff possibilities, announcers sometimes say, 'Team X controls its own destiny.' But if it were truly Team X's destiny, they couldn't control it." No amount of effort can alter your destiny. Lou Anne Tindal writes, "It's not a cliché, but I think an overused statement this year was 'touchdown Colts!' I heard it at least six times a game this year." Dan Collins of Manassas, Va., reports that he actually heard this during the Auburn-Virginia Tech bowl game: "What a catch! He snatched that ball out of mid-air!"

Laren Richardson of Long Beach, Calif., objects to announcers calling players or plays "very unique" or "most unique." During the Rams-Seahawks collision, for example, Joe Theismann pronounced a play "quite unique." Since unique means "the only one of its kind," a person or thing is either unique or not; there can be no degrees of uniqueness. Richardson objects in haiku,

Unique announcers  
are those who understand what  
unique really means.  
-- Laren Richardson, Long Beach, Calif.

Chris Lucas of Arlington, Va., objects to announcers who say, after an unusual play, "Now I've seen everything!" It is unlikely you've seen *everything*, Lucas notes -- or if you really have, why continue to watch games? Paul Kennedy of Madison, Wis., objects to announcers who extol "smashmouth football," since this is not legal. Kevin Darling of Denver objects to football announcers who declare that the game is a "chess match." Tuesday Morning Quarterback adds: Why not a real chess-match version of football in which, if you capture another team's player, he is removed from the game?

Dave Yarasheski of Durham, N.C., dislikes football announcers who declare of players, "He's a warrior." Yarasheski notes, "It is a game, not a battle. Webster's definition of warrior is 'one who fights in a war.' This usage seems inappropriate at this time when the country is engaged in conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan." Every day true warriors in Iraq and Afghanistan risk their lives for fellow citizens; the main risk an NFL "warrior" takes is of a smaller bonus.

Rob Menzies of Pensacola, Fla., dislikes announcers calling everything "special" -- special player, special performance. If everything is special, then it's not special. Patrick McClanahan of San Francisco objects to bobbleheads who call football physical, as if this weren't obvious: "Announcers will say, 'The Patriots play a very physical defense.' What's the alternative, a spiritual defense?" Actually, Ricky Williams is studying that very thing!

Frank Dunkle of Columbus, Ohio, protests, "They're short of the first down so they will have to punt." Dunkle notes, "No team is ever forced to punt; they make a conscious decision. They often make the wrong decision and punt when going for it would be better. Why do announcers talk as though teams have no choice about whether to punt on fourth down?"

This week's winner is Jessica Nimmo of Lexington, Ky., who proposes the cliché, "That was a touchdown-saving tackle!" She notes, "Are not all tackles touchdown-saving?" TMQ has long been driven crazy by bobblehead constructions along the lines of, "If he hadn't been tackled, he might have gone all the way!" This could be said of runners dropped in the backfield for a loss.

In keeping with this year's Challenge policy, Nimmo's prize is shameless praise. Nimmo reports she is a Green Bay Packers fan and also the first person in her family to earn a master's degree. Her praise: "Jessica Nimmo represents the epitome of the contemporary intelligent, well-educated sports enthusiast; she is gracious, attractive and charming as well." Put that in your resume, Jessica, and just leave it that it was NFL.com that said this about out.

### **This Week's Challenge**

Last week TMQ talked about *Advanced Rescue Technology*, the trade magazine of people who strap on equipment and run toward disasters. What's your favorite specialized or trade magazine? Use the link at Reader Animadversion, providing specific examples of goofy recent articles and Web addresses, if available.

### **Next Week**

Four more manly contenders go home heartbroken. It's practically an episode of *The Bachelorette!*



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## Thanks, Patriots, for proving my point about the blitz, and beware the Pennsylvania Curse!

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Jan. 18, 2005) -- If there was any doubt, the football gods are New England Patriots fans. The snow that began half an hour before kickoff -- can you take a hint, Peyton? Yet it was neither snow nor cold that beat the Indianapolis Colts; it was Patriots' players and coaches. Rarely will you behold a game in which one good team was so totally outplayed by another, and one winning coach was so totally outcoached.

Specifics of my Colts-Pats analysis are below, but here are the highlights. First, New England had a brilliant defensive game plan. Having observed that in the wild-card round the Broncos blitzed the Colts like mad, and Indianapolis hit many big plays against the blitz -- indeed, seemed to want to be blitzed -- New England's plan was to constantly fake the blitz, then drop back into a standard defense. Man, did that work! The Patriots blitzed a grand total of once, and in so doing held one of the highest-scoring teams in NFL history to three points. Today's was previously scheduled to be my annual column that presents detailed arguments against the blitz -- see below. Thanks, New England, for supporting my theory so vividly!

The other big point about the Colts-Patriots game is that Tony Dungy made one of the worst coaching blunders in NFL annals. On the second possession of the third quarter, New England leading 6-3 and the contest statistically dead even to that moment, Indianapolis reached fourth-and-1 on the Patriots 49. Dungy ordered a punt. Above my house, skies darkened and lightning flashed as the football gods showed their displeasure. When the punting unit trotted on my nine-year-old, Spenser, cried out, "No, they're giving away the game!" And so they were. Emboldened by the Colts' mincing, fraidy-cat call, the Patriots took the punt and staged a 15-play, 83-yard touchdown drive that changed the psychology of the game in addition to the scoreboard. From the point of the Preposterous Punt, New England ran 29 of the game's next 34 snaps and scored both its touchdowns. Suddenly Indianapolis was down 20-3 in the fourth quarter and beaten.

How could Dungy have made such a timid call? Winning at New England was the great challenge of Dungy's season -- and you've got to face your challenge head on, not try to evade it. New England is the defending champion, and you can't dance with the champ, you've got to knock him down! Indianapolis has the league's best offense, yet was afraid to try for one single yard *in New England territory*? When Indianapolis punted in New England territory, Dungy handed all the impetus and energy over to the Pats. After the punt, you could practically see on Patriots' players' faces this thought: *They are afraid of us*. You cannot win a monster game unless you are willing to seize the day -- the Colts would have been better off going for it and missing, thus showing courage, than passively punting. Suppose positions were reversed and the Patriots, playing in the playoff at Indianapolis, faced fourth-and-1 on the Colts 49 and were behind. Would Bill Belichick have let his opponent off the hook by punting? You know the answer.

In other NFL news, last week yours truly said the home teams would win this weekend, and all four won. I didn't have any incredible insider information -- just the knowledge that home teams dominate the divisional round. Home teams are now 49-11 in the divisionals since the current playoff format was adopted, a .816 winning figure. Bear in mind, this advantage disappears for the conference championship round. Since the current playoff format was adopted, home teams are 16-12 in conference championships, a .571 winning figure that is almost identical to the regular-season home-field advantage.

One reason recent home teams have not done unusually well in the conference championship round is that so many games have been played in the Keystone State. Is there a Pennsylvania curse? In the last decade, the Steelers and Eagles have hosted six conference championships, losing five. Reader J.D. Harriman notes this means each should have honked an extra game or two this season, so they wouldn't have to play the championship at home. In haiku,

Steelers and Eagles  
one-and-five in home finals.  
Both should have lost more!  
-- J. D. Harriman, Los Angeles

### **Stats of the Week**

Warrick Dunn of Atlanta set a career playoff rushing high (106 yards) by the end of the first quarter.

### **Stats of the Week No. 2**

Atlanta set a team playoff rushing high (239 yards) by the end of the second quarter.

### **Stats of the Week No. 3**

Allen Rossum of Atlanta set an NFL playoff high for punt return yards (152 yards) by the end of the third quarter.

### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Coming into the New England contest, Indianapolis was averaging five pass completions per game for 20 yards or more. Against New England, the Colts had none.

### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

In nine games at the Georgia Dome, Atlanta allowed only one first-quarter touchdown.

### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

Considering three consecutive overtime games, Jersey/B played 14 quarters of football in 13 days.

### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

Jim Mora, Sr., had a 0-6 lifetime playoff record. Jim Mora, Jr., has a 1-0 lifetime playoff record.

### **Stats of the Week No. 8**

In two games and an overtime against the Steelers this season, the Jets offense did not score a touchdown.

### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

Subtracting for sacks and interception returns, Ben Roethlisberger netted only 61 yards passing.

### **Stats of the Week No. 10**

No field goal of more than 50 yards has ever been kicked at Heinz Field.

### **Stats of the Week No. 11**



### Sweet Play of the Week No. 2

Trailing 21-7, Les Mouflons had second-and-8 on the Atlanta 28. Tight end Cam Cleeland ran an out, and was forgotten by the defense. Marc Bulger pumped to Cleeland, then threw deep for the touchdown to Torry Holt. That is -- Bulger faked to a man who was completely uncovered. Only the Rams would fake to a man who's not covered! The play worked because when Atlanta defensive backs saw the tight end uncovered and Bulger turning to look at him, they abandoned Holt and frantically ran toward Cleeland.

### Sweet (If Illegal) Play of the Week

Game tense at New England 6, Indianapolis 3, the Flying Elvii faced third-and-3 on the Colts 38. Fullback Patrick Pass ran a flare into the flat, crossing behind receiver Deion Branch. Indianapolis corner Nick Harper was covering Pass. As Harper passed Branch, the latter shoved Harper in the back, sending him sprawling; Pass was then undefended and made a 14-yard catch that positioned the Patriots for the touchdown that broke open the game. This play was team spirit on Branch's part -- he shoved a defender not to get himself open, but to get his teammate open. The play was also illegal, but no flag flew.

### Sour Play of the Week

Eagles leading 21-7 late in the third, Freddie Mitchell caught a pass around the Vikings 5, then spun and madly stretched his arm forward for the goal line: he fumbled, Minnesota ball. Throughout football at the pro, college and even high-school levels, players are madly stretching their arms forward at the goal line. This is the pernicious influence of *Sportscenter* and its many imitators: players want to get their clips shown on *Sportscenter*, so they take silly risks. Had Mitchell simply gone down at the Minnesota 1, the Nesharim would have had first-and-goal with a two-touchdown lead, in excellent position to ice the game. Instead Mitchell's fumble kept Minnesota alive.

### Sour Play of the Week No. 2

The Jets had missed two field-goal attempts to win in the final moments of regulation and now the Pittsburgh crowd, assuming reprieve from yet another home playoff defeat, was roaring at experimental-screamjet decibels. Jersey/B faced third-and-13 on the first possession of overtime, the Steelers would surely get the ball back and march for the glorious -- completion, first down Jets. Total silence in Ketchup Field. Jersey/B threw an intermediate out to Justin McCareins; Steelers corner Willie Williams was so far backed off, Williams looked like he was expecting to fair-catch a punt. Had the Jets gone on to win, this sour down might have become, in Steelers lore, a moment of despair to match any Kordell Stewart interception. Did McCareins push off? TMQ thought so. On the next snap the Jets were flagged for holding, stalling their drive. A make-up call? TMQ thought so. The Pittsburgh crowd would be reprieved.

### Sour Play of the Week (Matched Set)

Game scoreless, Philadelphia faced third-and-goal on the Vikings 2. Donovan McNabb rolled right, and Freddie Mitchell ran a "pin" route right. Minnesota linebacker Keith Newman lined up across from Mitchell and was trying to cover the wideout as he scored the touchdown. No fewer than three Minnesota defensive backs were in the end zone on that side of the field, all covering no one -- just watching the linebacker try to do their job. Now it's Philadelphia by 7-0, and the Nesharim have first-and-goal on the Minnesota 7. The Eagles did a "jumble," everyone shifting like mad from side to side. Vikings defenders shifted like mad. Philadelphia ended up with two receivers split on each side, plus Brian Westbrook in the left slot. At the snap, the four wide receivers went to the back of the end zone, dragging six defenders with them. Westbrook simple did a short square-in, in front of the goal line, and only linebacker E.J. Henderson was available to guard him; touchdown. Both of Philadelphia's first two touchdowns came as linebackers were trying to do the job of cornerbacks and safeties who had taken themselves out of the play.

### Thanks for the Vote of Confidence!

Authors are told that whenever wandering through a bookstore, if you see copies of your books, offer to

sign. Booksellers like autographed volumes; a signed book usually sells. Recently I was browsing through Kramerbooks, Washington's renowned hipster bookstore where, in the café, you can imagine it is still Berkeley in 1966. I noted that Kramerbooks had the excellent good taste to display an entire stack of the new paperbacks of my *The Progress Paradox*. I found the manager and asked if she wanted me to sign. She said sure; I signed 15 books, and left. Later it struck me the manager never asked for proof I was who I claimed to be. I related this incidence to the Official Wife of TMQ, who instantly replied, "That's because she assumes no one would pretend to be Gregg Easterbrook."

### Comic Relief of the Week

The Falcons lined up quarterback Michael-Mike Vick and cornerback DeAngelo Hall as wide receivers, throwing each passes that netted a total of eight yards

### Singing Cheer-Babes in the News

Jeffrey Carlson was among many to point out this video of the who-needs-clothes Eagles cheerleaders singing the team's fight song. Speaking of those who-needs-clothes cheerleaders, Drew Syring of Minneapolis calls to your attention Eagles cheer-babe Bridget and recommends you click her calendar photo -- which TMQ can link to but not show, for thong-based reasons. According to her team bio, Bridget likes to play beach volleyball, which raises again the question of whether there are beaches near Philadelphia. Also click on her photo gallery, which displays the minimal number of ounces the Redskins-Eagles cheerleader sideline rivalry now turns on.

### Football Ecology Warning

Against St. Louis, Michael-Mike Vick ran for 119 yards and passed for a net of 70 yards. This, as ecologists are wont to say, is not sustainable. Though that 47-yard run on the first Atlanta possession sure was pretty! TMQ winces when football players run backwards; it almost never works. Spenser, my nine-year-old, asked if there is anyone in the league who his coach should allow to run backwards. I answered that last season only Dante Hall fit that description, and this season only Vick. Falcons facing third-and-2, Vick rolled right, got into trouble, ran backward 10 yards, should have taken a sack and then -- Scotty, give me warp five.

### Asked If PR People Tell the Truth, Judith Phair Replied, "No Comment"

Judith Phair, president of the Public Relations Society of America, said she was "disheartened" that columnist Armstrong Williams sold his opinions for \$240,000. You've got to go pretty far beyond the pale to offend a publicist! Read Phair's statement carefully, she never actually denounces Williams, or the federal government for using tax money to buy him off. Rather, she just says the relationship "should have been disclosed up front." So the Public Relations Society of America gave the appearance of condemning payola without actually condemning it: classic public relations! Note also the headline on the statement. Public-relations pros specialize in communication. But instead of an effective-communication headline such as PR SOCIETY BLASTS COLUMNIST DEAL, the headline is cryptic, STATEMENT ON DISCLOSURE OF FINANCIAL INTERESTS.

Judith Phair further said the public-relations firm Ketchum, which brokered Williams' payment, should have abided by the Public Relations Society of America Member Code of Ethics. This 165-word code contains hardly any provisions, but has a great-sounding name: classic public relations! When the *New York Times* asked a Ketchum spokeswoman about the payments, the spokeswoman snapped, "No comment." Ketchum is a *public-relations firm*. That is, Ketchum charges clients -- including in this case the federal taxpayer -- large fees for supposed expertise in dealing with the media. Now we learn its expertise boils down to saying, "No comment."

Note one: Williams got \$240,000 to sell out. I'd sell out for way less. Anyone willing to pay me to say the blitz always works, or cheerleaders should be fully clothed, should contact Tuesday Morning Quarterback Enterprises. Note two: hoping to break into public relations? Be sure to attend the upcoming Public Relations Society of America conference, "How to Write Microcontent."

### Hidden Plays

Hidden plays are ones that never make highlight reels, but stop or sustain drives. Game tied at 10 with 41 seconds in the first half, the Jets threw a screen to Curtis Martin, who had blockers in front and would have gotten to midfield had Pittsburgh safety Troy Polamalu not cut between the linemen and made a textbook open-field tackle. Jersey/B ended up not scoring as the half expired.

### **Best Blocks**

Guard Alan Faneca of Pittsburgh looked like the former Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB MVP he is when pulling to knock people down at the point of attack on both Pittsburgh touchdowns. Faneca knocked two people down at the point of attack on the fourth quarter shovel pass touchdown to Hines Ward, and he pulled to knock someone down at the point of attack on Verron Haynes' overtime run that converted a third-and-4 on the Steelers' winning drive.

### **Cowgirl Cheer-Babes in the News**

The Colts posted sideline photos of their cheerleaders in the naughty-cowgirl outfits worn for the Denver playoff game. Perhaps these photos will console fans through the long offseason. And again TMQ's reaction to hot babes in chaps: Giddyup!

### **If You Were Really Important, You Would Come to the Inaugural Parties Guarded by the Pittsburgh Offensive Line**

With the inauguration in two days, get ready for offensive displays of wealth by the offensively wealthy. As Jayne Clark reports in *USA Today*, Washington hotels sold inauguration packages at up to \$200,000. Especially ridiculous: for \$10,000 a night, the Fairmont Hotel will provide a suite with Dom Perignon, plus two actors dressed as Secret Service agents. That way when you attend events, people will think you are so incredibly important, you are being guarded by the Secret Service.

### **Smart Move, Matt**

Matt Leinart decided to return to USC for his senior year -- good for him! The millions will always be waiting, but the chance to enjoy college will never come back. Leinart said, "College football and this whole atmosphere, and being with my friends and my teammates ... will make me happier than any amount of money." Matt, this shows you have a sophisticated grasp of contemporary psychological research, which finds there is almost no relationship between money and happiness: but that happiness is closely correlated to friendships, family and a sense of purpose in life. Yours truly has an article on this very subject in last week's *Time* magazine, cover dated Jan. 17.

### **Disclaimer Watch**

Disclaimers for the new flick *Coach Carter* warn in part of "teen partying." As TMQ always says when encountering this warning -- oh, so it's a horror movie!

### **Maroon Zone Bad Call**

Trailing 10-3 in the second, Jersey/B faced fourth-and-5 on the Steelers 35. It's a 52-yard field goal attempt on a day with no wind, or a try for the monster first down. Instead boom goes the punt, touchback and a net of a mere 15 yards in field position. When you're in the Maroon Zone -- too far for a field goal, too close to punt -- you've got to go for it.

### **Maroon Zone Good Call**

Leading 14-7 in the second quarter, the Falcons faced fourth-and-1 on the Rams 39. Run straight ahead for the first down, Atlanta scores a touchdown on the possession and goes on to win. Note that this is nearly identical to the score differential and field position when Indianapolis punted on fourth-and-1, and went on to lose.

### Maroon Zone Bad Call

Trailing 7-0, Minnesota faced fourth-and-4 on the Philadelphia 36. You're playing a high-scoring team on its own field, you are not going to win a battle of field position! When you're in the Maroon Zone -- too far for a field goal, too close to punt -- you've got to go for it. Boom goes the punt. Emboldened by Minnesota's mincing fraidy-cat play, the Eagles took possession and marched the length of the gridiron for the a touchdown that made it 14-0.

### Jets at Steelers Analysis

Ben Roethlisberger looked quite human. As Jersey/B lined up for its last-second field-goal attempt, TMQ thought: "Fans will be calling for Roethlisberger's head and demanding a new quarterback!" After all, the season appeared over with Roethlisberger 13-1, but what have you done for us lately? Only the Jets' inexplicable tactics in the final minute of regulation rescued Roethlisberger from going 13-1 as a rookie and then spending the offseason being relentlessly criticized.

Aside from the Jets' inexplicable tactics, two things saved Pittsburgh's bacon. First, the Steelers remembered the run. To the point at which Pittsburgh fell behind 17-10 in the third, the Steelers passed 20 times and rushed 19 times. Falling behind, you'd expect them to go pass-wacky. Instead from that point on, Pittsburgh rushed 23 times and passed 11 times, taking back the flow of the game. The other big moment came when Jerome Bettis fumbled at the Jets 22 at the start of the fourth quarter, Jets leading 17-10. Pittsburgh did not panic and go blitz-wacky: the Steelers played conventional defense on all three snaps of the Jets' possession, forcing a three-and-out. Then the Pittsburgh offense staged a patient, non-panicky 12-play drive to tie the score, running on eight of 12 snaps. Resisting the urge to panic was essential.

As for this Blitzburgh business, fuggedabudditt. The Steelers blitzed 11 times on 63 Jets snaps, or 17 percent blitzing -- probably the average for a good defense -- employing only the five-man blitz, never rushing six or seven. Pittsburgh plays a base 3-4, and brings a linebacker or defensive back, causing announcers constantly to declare during Steelers' games, "It's a blitz!" But four men rushing is not a blitz. The Steelers accomplish a great deal by creating uncertainty about which four gentlemen will rush on any given play, and created a lot of uncertainty for the Jets by jumping in and out of gaps before the snap. But when it comes to actual blitzing, the Steelers don't do much. Surely this is one reason they have the league's leading defense.

For the Jets' part, here is what I wrote last week about San Diego, with references changed to Jersey/B: "Fun as the Jets' year was, it is going to be a long, tart offseason as supporters contemplate the team's weird disinterest in improving its field position before missing a 43-yard field-goal attempt on the final play of regulation." The Jets played a plucky game considering they were on the road for the third consecutive week and considering John Abraham was in street clothes. Other clubs, before you hand John Abraham many millions in free agency, remember where he was standing when his team needed him. That the Jets had a chance to get close for a sure field goal, but passively settled for a long field goal that missed, will go down in New York sports lore under the file for Worst Bonehead Errors.

### In Praise of Instant Breakfast

As Major League Baseball finally acts against steroids and related substances, bear in mind athletes are hardly the only ones conducting unsupervised medical experiments on their own bodies. Studies show that one-third of Americans wolf down herb-based nutritional or medicinal supplements that are not regulated by the Food and Drug Administration. Next time you're contemplating a bottle of some mystery stuff that promises instant magical weight loss or weight gain or hair growth or potency or arousal or sleep or cancer cures, bear in mind the mystery stuff probably has not been subjected to a clinical trial to prove its value. Nor has the quality of the mystery stuff been tested by anyone independent. Nor is there assurance that the bottle contains what the label says. Even if it does, "natural" does not necessarily mean safe. Many naturally occurring substances are deadly -- think arsenic. In animal testing on rodents, approximately 50 percent of artificial compounds register as carcinogenic. Approximately 50 percent of natural compounds register as carcinogenic, too.

Last week the Institute of Medicine, the health-care research of the National Academy of Sciences, issued

this report cautioning that herb-based nutritional and medicinal supplements are poorly regulated and may do more harm than good. Many readers of NFL.com, especially high-school kids and young men, may be tempted by the mystery compounds that promise phenomenal muscle growth, 30-second ripped abs and the like. Don't fall for it. Where are the most amazing physical specimens of the modern age found? In the National Football League, which elaborately tests for steroids and many other drugs, including many supplements. NFL players get their physiques the old-fashioned way. Those who get their physiques through chemical shortcuts may end up with long-term health consequences -- Major League Baseball better have a good health insurance plan for retirees, because there are going to be some very sick former players. If you're gulping mystery supplements, you might as well go into the forest and gulp mushrooms, hoping you haven't grabbed the poisonous ones.

Suppose you're a high-school football player, or any young athlete who needs to gain muscle mass. Here's a simple, cheap and totally safe idea: Carnation Instant Breakfast. It's packed with protein and vitamins, not calories or stimulants. (Many mysterious miracle supplements and "energy drinks" turn out to be mainly sugar and caffeine.) Instant Breakfast is convenient and readily available. You can drink as much as you want and never worry about testing positive for anything, other than corporate slogans. There's even a new zero-carb version. Protein, vitamins and hard work are the way to build muscle. Forget the synthetic androgens and the mystery compounds. Have an Instant Breakfast and a banana, then go work out.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All**

All the talk has concerned Minnesota's failed fake field goal when it was Eagles 21, Vikings 7 and Minnesota had fourth-and-goal on the Philadelphia 4. Yes, it was a sour play but also just a busted play: if something hadn't gone wrong with the signal to Randy Moss, the Vikings likely would have had a touchdown. What bothered yours truly was the play before the busted fake. Third-and-goal on the 4, you're behind by two touchdowns -- so if you gain even a couple of yards, you go for it on fourth down. Instead of a run, Vikings' coaches called pass, and Duante Culpepper sprinted backwards to the 15 before throwing the ball away.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All No. 3**

Leading 10-3 with 3:22 remaining in the second quarter, the Steelers faced third-and-3 on their own 40. Pittsburgh has the league's No. 2 rushing attack, and it's easier to run at home. Yet the Steelers came out in the shotgun and threw a dinky out-pattern thing, incompleting; the next snap is the punt returned 75 yards for a touchdown. Four times Pittsburgh went to the shotgun and passed on third-and-3 or less -- once, on third-and-1! Though some of these plays were converted, the football gods could not have liked the sight of the Pittsburgh Steelers in the shotgun on third-and-1.

### **Cheer-Babes in the News**

Damian Cabrera of Texas reports that Vikings cheerleader Laura Westberg finished second in the Miss Minnesota contest. This means the Miss Minnesota beauty pageant must be judging something other than beauty, because it is hard to imagine how any human being could surpass the Vikings' Laura in that respect -- which creates another legitimate reason to show her picture.

### **Rams at Falcons Analysis**

Let's see, in two meetings, the St. Louis defense allowed 569 rushing yards by Atlanta. That, technically speaking, isn't good. And the Rams start two recent No. 1 draft choices at defensive tackle, backed up by another recent No. 1 choice. If you've spent three recent No. 1 draft choices on defensive tackles, and give up 569 yards rushing in two meetings with a foe, that, technically speaking, is not good.

Atlanta led the league in rushing in 2004, and on Saturday gained 327 yards on the ground. Somebody in red must be doing a little blocking. Now be honest, how many Falcons offensive linemen can you name without looking? Michael-Mike Vick does get sacked a lot, but also runs backward a lot. It's time to lavish some attention on the Atlanta offensive line, which is playing very well and getting zero press. And who is coaching them? Former Denver offensive line guru Alex Gibbs. At Denver under Gibbs, numerous who-dat gentlemen played like Pro Bowl offensive linemen, while volunteers from the audience could line up

at tailback and run for 1,000 yards. Now at Atlanta under Gibbs, who-dat gentlemen are playing like Pro Bowl offensive linemen, while everyone who touches the ball looks good -- 17 carries for 142 yards for Warrick Dunn on Saturday, for instance, and Dunn is often derided as a utility back, not a pure runner.

### **This Year's Blitz Analysis**

Whenever I run items on blitzes that backfire, readers counter, "But you're not running items on blitzes that worked!" True. Of course the blitz works sometimes -- especially when it's not expected, that is, not on an obvious-passing down. Sportswriters and football announcers excessively extol the blitz, so yours truly counters by showing it is prone to backfire. My points about the blitz are two. First, on long-yardage downs, when the offense *expects* to be blitzed, blitzing usually is counterproductive. Second, while five-man blitzes now and then can mess up an offense, the big blitz, especially the seven-man blitz, is an engraved invitation for a touchdown.

To make my point in a systematic way, each postseason I chart every play of every game to see how the blitz does on average. In 2003, I charted every play of the wild-card round and found that on long-yardage (expected blitz) downs, offenses gained 10.8 yards per play against the blitz and 5.2 yards per play against conventional defense. Offenses got six touchdowns in long-yardage situations when defenses were blitzing and four touchdowns when defenses were not blitzing, though there were about twice as many conventional-defense downs as blitz downs. So in 2003, the blitz backfired totally.

In 2004, I charted every play of the wild-card round and found that on long-yardage downs, offenses gained 6.9 yards per play against the blitz and 5.4 yards per play against conventional defense. Offenses got four touchdowns in long-yardage situations when defenses were blitzing and three touchdowns when defenses were not blitzing, though once again there were about twice as many conventional-defense downs as blitz downs. That year, one defensive touchdown was scored on a blitz. So in 2004, the blitz mostly backfired, but not totally. Details of last year's breakdown are here.

Now here are the results from this year's charting of the divisional round. First, I stopped charting at the point when games became runaways -- when it was 40-17 in Atlanta, 27-7 in Philadelphia and 20-3 in New England and the Pats had the ball late. I considered a long-yardage (expected-passing) down to be first and more than 10, second-and-10 or more and third-and-5 or more. I changed my criteria slightly this year in pursuit of perfection. This year I subtracted from offensive yardage any defensive yardage gained during turnovers. The effect of this change was to push all per-play averages lower. (I've always subtracted sack yards.)

Results? On long-yardage downs, offenses gained on average 6.5 yards per play against the blitz and 4.4 yards per play against conventional defense. On long-yardage downs, offenses scored three touchdowns against the blitz and two touchdowns against conventional defense, though there were more conventional-defense downs. The blitz created four turnovers and no defensive touchdowns; conventional defense created three turnovers and one defensive touchdown. Overall these figures once again show the blitz is often counterproductive, though not by as pronounced an amount as before I began subtracting defensive yards from offensive yards.

Throughout the divisional games, there was not a single seven-man blitz, and only six blitzes with six men. Teams that know what they are doing rarely big-blitz -- and those who survive to the divisional round are generally the teams that know what they are doing. In Jets at Steelers, the one contest I charted till the final snap, there were 23 blitzes on 137 plays, or 17 percent blitzing. That's probably about the NFL average for a game, though announcers make it seem otherwise by excessively extolling the blitz.

### **Indianapolis-New England Zebra Update**

Last year in the Indianapolis at New England playoff, the Patriots were never flagged for pass interference or offensive holding, these usually the most damaging penalties. The Flying Elvii are good, but as yours truly wrote at the time, "Are we supposed to believe no New England offensive lineman ever held and no New England defensive back ever interfered?" On Sunday, the Patriots were never flagged for offensive holding or pass interference, though called once for defensive holding; the Colts were hit with two offensive holding and one defensive pass interference penalties. Several times New England

blockers wrapped their arms around Dwight Freeney; no flag flew, and the Patriots were spared a drive-killing sack or major penalty. There's no doubt the best team won on Sunday. But rules are rules, and ought to be enforced for New England the same way they are for everyone else.

### **Vikings at Eagles Analysis**

On a weekend when the theme was strange fourth-down decisions, the Vikings took the cake. Trailing by a touchdown, Minnesota punted on fourth-and-4 from the Philadelphia 36, a call that sent TMQ's head heeling. Minnesota later went for it on fourth-and-22 from the Philadelphia 31, in the third quarter when the outcome was still in doubt. So Minnesota passed on a good chance at fourth-and-4 on the 36 but took a crazy chance at fourth-and-22 on the 31. Then, on the very possession after going for it on fourth-and-22, Minnesota punted on fourth-and-2. Ay caramba!

Philadelphia had a clever defensive game plan. The Eagles kept showing blitz then backing out. Minnesota seemed excessively concerned with last-second adjustments to blitzes that didn't happen -- all the jumping around lured the Vikings into numerous unnecessary audibles. When Philadelphia did blitz, several times defensive end Jevon Kearse lined up over center and drew a double-team, while the blitzer came behind Kearse. This is what happened when Ike Reese, the man coming behind Kearse, batted a pass into the air and intercepted it at the Eagles 28, the play that turned a close game into a walkover. At Philadelphia 21, Minnesota 7 in the third, the Eagles showed big blitz. Daunte Culpepper made the hand-signal gesture he had made the week before at Green Bay, telling Randy Moss to go deep on the right side -- at Green Bay, this resulted in the touchdown that iced the contest. Sunday, as soon as Culpepper made his hand signal, a Philadelphia safety dropped back to the deep right zone. Culpepper ended up running because Moss wasn't open. The Vikings hadn't changed their signal from the previous week! Jeepers creepers.

Offensively the Eagles continued to go pass-wacky, and TMQ continues to have his doubts. At the end of the first half, Philadelphia faced second-and-goal on the Minnesota 9 with no timeouts, 10 seconds remaining, score 21-7. Just kick a field goal! Instead the Eagles could not resist throwing one more pass, which went down the middle; the receiver was tackled and the clock ticked to naughts, the scoring chance lost. Despite being comfortably ahead throughout the second half, the Eagles passed 33 times and ran only 25 times. This, as ecologists are wont to say, is not sustainable.

In addition to making numerous odd decisions on offense, on defense Minnesota plays its corners way backed off, though Carolina demonstrated in last year's NFC championship that press corners drive the Eagles receivers crazy. One reason Philadelphia spared no expenses to land Terrell Owens is that Owens can get free of press coverage. Yet the Vikings played backed off, not doing the one thing that is known to frustrate the Eagles' West-Coasty pass patterns. And backed-off corners didn't even stop the long ball -- on a 46-yard pass interference call against Minnesota in the fourth quarter, corner Ralph Brown was 10 yards off at the snap, yet still got beaten deep. All in all, Minnesota was thoroughly out-coached as well as outplayed.

### **"Underrated" Watch**

This column complains about bobbleheads describing well-known or oft-honored players as "underrated." On Sunday morning, ESPN Radio called Hines Ward of Pittsburgh "underrated." Ward has been to the Pro Bowl! And during Sunday's Colts at Pats game, Jim Nantz called Tom Brady "underrated." Brady is a two-time Super Bowl MVP!

### **That's One Small Step for a Man, One Giant Repetition for Mankind**

Congratulations to the European Space Agency, which last week put the first probe onto the surface of Jupiter's moon Titan. Since the atmosphere of Titan contains large amounts of prebiotic compounds, let's hope the ESA really scrubbed that probe to remove all microbes and DNA traces. If astronomers suddenly observe huge tentacled beasts growing around where the probe landed, that won't be cool.

Meanwhile the European Space Agency announced plans to land a manned spacecraft on the Moon by the year 2033. (Today many astronauts are women, but there's just no linguistic alternative to "manned" spacecraft.) Until recently the ESA's goal was to send a manned ship to Mars by 2030. Now the plan is

for a 300,000-mile, three-day trip rather than a 50 million-mile, year-long expedition. In 1961, at a time when prototype rockets were exploding on launch pads, John Kennedy committed the United States to putting people on the Moon, and eight years later it happened. Now in 2005, when there's a large international space station in orbit and hundreds of people have been to space and back, the European Space Agency adopts the bold, visionary plan of taking 28 years to do what the United States did in eight years. Shouldn't Old Europe save its money for building pastry factories?

### **Why Are You Free Kicking????**

Giving up a safety with 11:39 remaining, Les Mouflons trailed 40-17. St. Louis boomed a free kick; Atlanta staged a 14-play clock-killer drive that made it 47-17 at the two-minute warning. Why didn't the Rams outside the free kick? Sure that engages the risk of handing the Falcon the ball deep in St. Louis territory. But the Rams were down by 23 points in the fourth quarter. It's the playoffs, there is no tomorrow. Why are you free kicking?

### **Go East, Young Man**

Frank Easterbrook, an Official Brother of TMQ, points out that every team left standing is in the Eastern time zone. Still the old economy states continue to beat up on the Sunbelt! And the team located to the east has won six of eight playoff contests so far. "This suggests that the next NFL franchise should be granted to San Juan or, better, London," Frank notes.

### **Colts at Patriots Analysis**

In many years of watching too much football, yours truly has seen few worse decisions than Tony Dungy's punt on fourth-and-1 inside New England territory. The consequences were instantaneous. The game, even till then, instantly became a walkover. You'll just have to trust me on this, but when Indianapolis punted on fourth-and-1, TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook -- though it was early in the third quarter and the score was only 6-3. But the game ended on that punt, just as surely as if the Colts had forfeited and left the stadium.

New England's defensive game plan did not just involve endlessly showing the blitz then backing off, though this tactic was smart and worked well. The Patriots also jumped around like crazy before the snap, frustrating Peyton Manning's at-the-line arranging of his players. Much of the season, TMQ crusaded for defenses to play the Colts by jumping around before the snap. Only Baltimore tried this tactic, and the result was holding Indianapolis to 20 points -- until Sunday, its season low -- on the Colts' own field. New England coaches, the smartest in the league, either learned from the Baltimore game tape or, more likely, simply read Tuesday Morning Quarterback. At any rate the jumping around sure worked.

In addition to frustrating Manning's at-the-line choreography, the Flying Elvii's fake blitzing repeatedly inveigled Manning into calling anti-blitz audibles that did not work because there was no blitz. Several times Manning audibled to the middle screen, which works against the blitz; but there was no blitz, and New England linebackers pasted the middle screens. Several times Manning audibled to the quick slant, which works against the blitz; but there was no blitz, and the slant was not open. No defense is perfect, and the sets that New England played were vulnerable to the deep pass. But thinking he needed to unload fast to beat the blitz, Manning did not look deep. Thus the Colts took themselves out of doing the thing they do best.

On the offensive side, New England's plan was to run and throw short, keeping the Indianapolis offense off the field and making Manning press in the brief opportunities he did get. The Patriots' offensive plan succeeded -- almost two-to-one time of possession. But since trying to control and clock and keep the other team's offense off the field is a generic game plan used by many NFL clubs, what caused it to work in this instance? The Indianapolis defensive game plan was the reason.

The Lucky Charms played most of the game in an anti-passing defensive set, with linebackers backed way off. But backpedaling linebackers are ideal to run against, and New England ran 39 times. Indianapolis did not adjust, staying in a passing defense even once it became clear the Patriots intended to run. For instance, game scoreless with New England facing second-and-3, Indianapolis was in a pass

defense alignment as Kevin Faulk ran for 13 yards. The Colts showed no defensive movement or variation, lining up the same way on almost every down: and quarterbacks love defenses that always line up in the same place. The Colts, like the Pats, barely blitzed, relying on their defensive linemen for pressure. But the defensive linemen seemed to play solely for sacks, giving little heed to the run. Repeatedly, Colts' defensive linemen used the "spin" move -- which is a good pass-rush technique but takes you out of run defense. While a defensive linemen is spinning, he has no chance of making a tackle. On one play, I noted three of the four Colts' DLs spinning as a New England runner went past them uncontested. Several Indianapolis missed tackles in the backfield happened when spinning linemen could not un-spin quickly enough to get a grip on the runner.

The Colts brought an offensive game plan adjusted for cold weather -- most of the way to the Preposterous Punt, they played with two tight ends, planning to establish the run. Give Indianapolis coaches credit for that. But then Indianapolis didn't establish the run, passing 23 times and rushing 11 times in the first half. The two-tight-end set meant either Dallas Clark or Marcus Pollard was on the field instead of Brandon Stokley, one of the league's hottest players; when Stokley was seated, there was no added pressure on the Patriots' injury-depleted cornerback corps. And if you've come into the contest with a power-rush game plan, how can you not go for it on fourth-and-1 in the other team's territory?

### Hey Baby, Want a Ride in My Shiny New Stallion SX1000?

Yours truly loves car names, and many fun ones are currently on display at the Detroit Auto Show. The upcoming Ford Fusion would be the ideal ride to that new Mexican-French restaurant. Check the upcoming Honda Ridgeline which, surely, will be used exclusively in suburbia, never actually driven on a ridgeline. TMQ admires the zoomy new Saturn Sky sports car -- but the actual Saturn sky is poisonous to human beings! Sometimes car names are appropriate; the GMC Denali is approximately the size of Denali, the mountain. Sometimes car names are transparent, like the many cars that come in an SX model: gee, what's that supposed to make you think of? Pickup trucks have recently been getting great names, like the Chevy Silverado and Toyota Tundra. Some names are wacky. As Jacob Weisberg, editor of *Slate*, once wrote, "What would happen if a Mirage collided with a Charade?" Memorably, the Chevy Nova flopped in South American markets because *no va* means "doesn't go" in Spanish. (In astronomy, nova means "catastrophic explosion," so the English was never all that appealing either.) Oh well; there will never be a better car name than the Avanti. And what was the Avanti, futuristic car of 1963? A Studebaker!

### RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT

#### Reader Animadversion

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Last week yours truly referred to Nick Kaeding of the Chargers. Chris Ball of Columbus, Ohio, writes, "I'm sure Nate Kaeding is relieved that Nick Kaeding is taking the blame for missing the game-winning field goal." Last week I christened the Jaguars the Jacksonville Rampant Azure, owing to their logo's resemblance to a Scottish coat of arms. Tony Sokolow of Hilltop, Colo., writes that in heraldry, "rampant" signifies an animal rearing on its back legs. You can't see what the jaguar is doing in the Jax logo. I'm assuming it is rampant -- the cognomen sounds better that way.

Readers offer these Colts-at-Pats haiku:

Ripe for the picking?  
Football gods smite Indy: "Your  
kicker talks too much!"  
-- Maureen Long, Cambridge, Mass.

Ten mins left in third.  
Fourth and half a yard, Colts punt --  
Game over, he writes.

-- Charles Alexander, Pasadena, Md.

Like Dubya, Pats were  
misunderestimated.  
Repeat for Pats too?  
-- Maureen Long

Apropos last week's item christening Randy Moss "Linc" because of his Afro, readers including Nicole Leyba of Burlington, Vt., suggested anyone wanting a Sixties flashback should go here, scroll a page and click on the theme music from the old *Mod Squad* show. Maybe the Vikings can play this when Moss runs on the field! Maybe Moss should have said "solid, baby" when he heard about the fake field goal plan.

Judy Decker of St. Louis, a Les Mouflons fan, suggests that TMQ's new name for the Seahawks, the Dropped Passes Group, be changed to Pass Droppers Group. The team, she notes, is a group of persons (the pass droppers) not of footballs (the dropped passes). I was toying with changing it anyway, to the Skillet Hands Group. In football slang, those with skillet hands can't catch: throwing to them is like throwing the ball against a skillet. Then Greg Willis of Chesterfield, Mo., proposed TMQ call the club in question the Seattle Folgers -- good to the last drop. Mr. Data, make it so!

About this time last year, yours truly got folks in the league front office steamed by detailing, on NFL.com itself, how officials seemed to favor New England over Indianapolis. Today's column points out the same, though since this year it's definite the best team won at Gillette Field, the subject is less charged. Nevertheless this raises in issue many readers have written in about -- why does the NFL run a column that regularly hammers the NFL? Answer: because it is to the credit of a big institution to accept criticism. Aspects of the NFL drive me crazy, but not only is the National Football League the best-run professional sport, it is one of America's best-run organizations in any category. Many who operate large organizations could benefit from studying the NFL's unorthodox mix of old-fashioned values and awareness of the cutting edge of trends. Free flow of opinion is a trend, so the NFL has accepted that. Other big institutions, please take notice -- successful institutions are not afraid of being criticized. A reader haikuizes,

Gregg zaps NFL,  
yet league hosts his words. Shows league  
has integrity.  
-- Terry Stanton, Chicago

Finally last week's column supposed that blockers should be coached to jump on top of a man they have knocked down, making it impossible for the man to get up and rejoin the play. Kevin Brown of Mechanicsburg, Pa., says this is holding and that he once saw Hines Ward flagged for jumping atop a gentleman legally knocked down. Any referees in the TMQ readership know if this should be a flag?

### Last Week's Challenge

Last week's was to name amusing specialized magazines. Mathew Miller nominated *Call Center Magazine*, the trade mag of people who answer phones, often from India. This month's cover story on answering "agents" notes, "Some easy back-of-the-envelope calculating will show that in just three years, an agent will interact with 30,000 separate customers." Hey, I've gotten that agent when I tried to call AOL!

Joshua Bennett of Evanston, Ill., nominates *The Detonator*, published by the International Association of Bomb Technicians and Investigators. Members of the International Association of Bomb Technicians and Investigators, Bennett notes, receive \$10,000 of accidental death insurance. But, "some restrictions apply." Evan Reich can't wait for his copy of *Pit \$ Quarry*, which offers a monthly column of chatty gossip about blasting.

Mike Kuhse of Evergreen, Colo., votes for the *Journal of Recreational Mathematics*, whose recent issues have included such articles as, "Generating Heronian Triangles with Consecutive Integer Sides." Tim Demorest of Fairfax, Va., likes *Power Coating* magazine, which recently announced a "symposium" on power coating processes.

Jesse Olsen of Kansas City, Kan., votes for *Milling and Baking News*, which features "overviews of recently introduced ingredients, equipment and services." Recently introduced ingredients for bread? Not sure I like the sound of that.

Aaron Kuchinski of Baltimore suggests *All About Beer* magazine, which reports on "the culture of beer appreciation" and contains such news as, "Karissa Vasil, 22, of Hamden, Conn., a bartender at Delaney's Tap Room in New Haven, won second place in the Stella Artois World Draught Master Finals in Brussels, Belgium. Vasil, second only to the Belgian contender, scored higher than bartenders from 23 other countries in her quest for the global title of 'Best at Pouring Belgian Beer.'"

Stuart Reiter of San Rafael, Calif., nominates *Correctional News*, a magazine for prison guards and wardens. He notes an article about staff cuts at New Hampshire prisons, headlined, "Overtime Crunch Limits Holiday Cheer." Holiday cheer probably isn't a strong suit of prisons, anyway.

Greg Conn of New York City nominates *Cement Americas*, whose current cover story names the "holcim preheater tower" as Project of the Year. Mike of London, Ontario, lauds *Happy About Outsourcing*, which reports "lessons learned from executives that have offshored and outsourced." The same firm also publishes *Diesel Progress* and its globalized companion *Diesel Progress International*. Jason Ward of Los Angeles nominates *Professional Retail Store Maintenance* magazine, which recently contained an article headlined, "Automatic Doors: More Than You Thought You Ever Needed to Know." John Moore of Toronto points out *Mortuary Management*, where the current lead article crows that federal rules designed to reduce funeral costs have resulted in "higher pricing and profits."

This week's winner is Edward Simpkins of Richmond, Virginia, who reports, "My favorite quirky magazine is *Habibi*, about belly dancing. The magazine touts belly dancing as both an ideal exercise and a highly enjoyable activity." Apparently Simpkins subscribes! In keeping with this year's Challenge policy, his prize is a sentence of shameless praise. Simpkins reports that he is an alumnus of James Madison University, Division 1-AA football champions -- see the school's mascot wearing a crown here -- and is interested in science and philosophy. Here is his shameless praise: "Edward Simpkins is blazing new frontiers in the reconciliation of science and philosophy." Put that in your resume, Edward, and just leave out that it was NFL.com that said this about you.

### **This Week's Challenge**

Set the RCA Dome air conditioning to 10 below for home games, until the Colts learn to win in cold. That's my idea for how Indianapolis could get over its inability to beat New England. What's your idea? Propose yours using the link at Reader Animadversion.

### **Next Week**

The hype begins for that Super Bowl thing you might have heard about.



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## Load your muskets for the Democracy Bowl, and why "safe" strategy isn't safe

**By Gregg Easterbrook**  
Special to NFL.com

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Jan. 25, 2005) -- Great Caesar's ghost, Atlanta and Pittsburgh played as if they were afraid of their own shadows! Trailing by 10 points in the fourth quarter, Atlanta punted from the Philadelphia 37. Trailing by 14 points in the fourth quarter, Pittsburgh kicked a field goal rather than try for a touchdown from the New England 2. Both teams might as well have handed concession statements to the referee after these mincing fraidy-cat decisions. Which makes an important point: the "safe" strategy usually isn't.

Seven of the 10 defeats in the NFL playoffs have linked directly to teams using a "safe" strategy that proved safe only for their opponents. San Diego reached the Jersey/B 22 in overtime and, instead of continuing to try to advance the ball, did the "safe" thing by settling for a long field-goal attempt, which missed; Jersey/B then won. The Jets reached the Pittsburgh 25 with a minute left in regulation and, instead of continuing to try to advance the ball, did the "safe" thing by settling for a long field-goal attempt, which missed; the Steelers won in overtime. Minnesota trailed Philadelphia by 17 points in the fourth quarter and did the "safe" thing by punting on fourth-and-2; the Eagles won. Trailing in the second half, Indianapolis faced fourth-and-1 in New England territory and did the "safe" thing by punting; the Patriots won. Denver faced fourth-and-1 in the dome of the high-scoring Colts and did the "safe" thing by punting; Indianapolis won. And both losing championship contenders on Sunday collapsed after doing the "safe" thing at critical fourth-quarter moments. To win in the pressure-cooker of the NFL playoffs, you must seize the day. Fortune favors the bold; in every instance in this year's postseason when a team has failed to be bold at a key juncture, defeat has followed as the night follows day.

In other NFL news, it's the Democracy Bowl -- Boston versus Philadelphia. Brew the tea, fire the muskets and let the game begin! TMQ says colonial period costume would be appropriate on Super Bowl day for everyone except the cheerleaders, who should stick to contemporary scanty attire. I don't even want to think about the cheerleaders showing up in heavy frocks and five layers of petticoats.

And in other NFL news, Ben Roethlisberger closes out his rookie campaign a phenomenal 14-1 as a starter. But what have you done for us lately! Roethlisberger is sure to spend the offseason being relentlessly criticized, with Pittsburgh sports radio saying he's a bust, Ben must go, etc. Meanwhile the minkey, as Inspector Clouseau would say, is finally off Donovan McNabb's back. Go here and click "lines" to review Clouseau's classic mangled French.

### Stats of the Week

Dome teams are 0-9 in outdoor conference title games.

### Stats of the Week No. 2

Tom Brady is 8-0 as a playoff starter; Bill Belichick is 9-1 as a playoff coach.

### Stats of the Week No. 3

Bill Cowher is 1-4 in conference championship games played in Pittsburgh.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Pennsylvania teams are 2-6 in home conference championship games in the last decade.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

Atlanta's Chris Mohr launched punts of seven, 17 and 18 yards.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

Mora the Elder and Mora the Younger (see below) are 1-7 as playoff coaches.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

In two New England at Pittsburgh AFC title games in the last four years, the Steelers threw six interceptions on their own field while the Patriots threw no interceptions.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 8**

Winning three of the last four AFC title games, New England has turned the ball over just twice while recording 14 takeaways.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

Considering sacks and interception returns, in the first half Ben Roethlisberger compiled a net of minus-11 yards passing.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 10**

In two home playoff games, Ben Roethlisberger threw three touchdown passes to his teammates and two touchdown passes to his opponents.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 11**

Pittsburgh, which allowed 16 points per game in 2004 -- lowest average in the league -- surrendered 41 points at home in the championship.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 12**

Pittsburgh had allowed 40 points in its previous five home games combined.

#### **Stats of the Week No. 13**

This has practically become an afterthought, but New England has won 31 of its last 33 games.

#### **Literary Cheerleader of the Week**

Only cheerleaders who list serious books or authors as their favorites are eligible. This week's is Sarah Culter of the Broncos, who lists the Bible as her favorite book. Close textual analysis of NFL team web sites shows the Bible is the leading choice for cheerleaders' favorite book. Obviously the Bible is important literature that demands reading whether or not you decide to believe. The question for someone who calls the Bible his or her favorite book: Do you just like it, or have you really read it? The Bible, after all, is 800,000 words long. When I sat down to read the Bible cover to cover about two





readers is rising.) Endlessly TMQ chortles that the original justification for the swimsuit issue was that female athletes wear revealing suits during sporting events. They do, but on this rationalization, why doesn't the cover of *Sports Illustrated* feature a beautiful, glamorous model relaxing on a South Seas isle, dressed as a lacrosse goalie? Swimsuit bonus: here is Rebecca Romijn-Stamos, now a successful actress, in her 1996 debut as a *Sports Illustrated* bikini babe.

### The Rule of Comebacks

Tuesday Morning Quarterback's Rule of Comebacks: Defense starts them, offense stops them. Down 24-3 at halftime, Pittsburgh had a fighting chance in the second half -- the Steelers had as much time available to come back as the Patriots used to get ahead. But it was essential the No. 1-ranked Steelers defense not allow New England to score again. Instead, after the Steelers made it 24-10 and Ketchup Field was shaking, the No. 1-ranked Steelers defense allowed New England to drive the length of the field for the touchdown that put the home team in deep trouble. Then in the fourth quarter, score 31-20, the No. 1-ranked Steelers defense allowed New England to stage a clock-killing 10-play drive that made it 34-20 with eight minutes remaining. The Steelers defense saved its worst game of the year for last.

### Why Bad News Is Good Business

Last week Wal-Mart spent an estimated \$2 million buying full-page ads in the nation's newspapers, protesting that critics were unfairly saying the company mistreats workers. (Note: the ads were signed by Wal-Mart CEO Lee Scott, a graduate of TMQ's second-favorite obscure college, Pittsburg of Kansas.) Fannie Mae, Merck and Pfizer and number among other big corporations recently buying full-page ads to insist they are not bad guys. All of which makes yours truly think -- people accuse the media of liking bad news for reasons of misanthropy, but maybe the media like bad news because it's profitable! Companies that get into public-relations trouble take out expensive ads.

Whenever health-care problems are in the news, HMOs and hospital-chain companies buy ads saying they are not to blame. Whenever the greenhouse effect is in the news, automakers take out ads touting their hydrogen-powered prototypes. When Halliburton was revealed to be sticking its hands into the federal till, what did it do? Spent millions on image advertising. (Haliburton spared no expense, buying television ads -- let's hope the cost was not billed to the taxpayer.) When a defense-budget cut looms, aerospace contractors run ads describing the new Godzilla helicopter as the nation's sole hope of survival. And so on. No wonder newspapers dig up so many scandals: they have a financial incentive to compel companies to buy anti-scandal advertising.

Plus there are issue ads, and the worse the condition of the world, the more issue ads may appear. Last Friday, to cite a day chosen at random, the "A" section of the *New York Times* contained three full-page issue ads, which would have cost a total of perhaps \$200,000 to the buyers. In one, 4,000 citizens of Iceland protested their government's decision to support the war in Iraq. Why this ad appeared in an American newspaper, rather than in the *Reykjavik Daily Vodka*, *Mineral Baths and Blue Eyes Tribune*, yours truly cannot say. Forest Ethics, an environmental group based in San Francisco, paid for a full-page ad protesting that the Victoria's Secret catalog uses paper milled from Amazonian rainforest trees. Presumably Victoria's Secret could not object to the ad, since the company favors exposing as much as possible! And Christians for Middle East Peace, a liberal ecumenical organization, bought a full-page ad urging a "two-state" settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. That issue, sadly, may provide an endless source of issue-advertising revenue.

### Perhaps Men Lack the Innate Ability to Be President of Harvard

The dustup continues over Harvard president Lawrence Summers saying a reason female professors are underrepresented in science and engineering may be "innate differences" between men and women. Summers issued multiple apologies, each more groveling than the previous. Though TMQ suspects Summers' proposition is wrong, believers in academic freedom ought to find it creepy that the president of Harvard was roundly denounced for challenging the Harvard faculty to think about a controversial idea, or that there should be impermissible opinions one cannot utter at Harvard. Most reaction to Summers' statement from the Cambridge and ivory tower communities was not logical refutation of his view, rather, ritualized shouting-down of someone accused of forbidden thoughts. History teaches it is often the forbidden thoughts that society most urgently needs to hear.

Now, why Summers is likely to be wrong. Of course there are innate physical differences between men and women; Summers supposed there may also be innate (that is, genetic) mental differences. We should not close our minds to that possibility, though attempts to prove the claim seem inconclusive. For instance boys consistently score better on math tests than girls, but is this owing to differing inborn ability or because boys are encouraged to study math while girls are not? At any rate if you assert inherited mental differences, you must propose an evolutionary explanation of why they arose. This is where claims of innate mental differences falter.

The evolutionary explanation for physical differences between men and women is pretty straightforward. If men did the hunting in prehistory, no one should be surprised men are taller and stronger; women's childbearing role provides an evolutionary explanation for other physical differences. But why, in prehistory, would natural selection have favored technical thinking in males more than in females? I've never heard a convincing hypothesis, and Summers did not offer one. Primordial males needed to understand spatial relationships in order to hunt, and 200,000 years later that may translate into a flare for science. But wouldn't primordial women have needed technical thinking to understand dissection of animals, tanning, fabrics, plant types, medicinal care of infants? This seems just as likely to have translated, 200,000 years later, into a flare for science on the part of women. Or at least, if primordial evolutionary pressures caused men to be better-suited for engineering, the same evolutionary pressures should have caused women to be better-suited for medicine, and we would today expect the overwhelming majority of physicians and surgeons to be female.

All this suggests cultural factors -- the way children have been raised for centuries, past prejudice against women in technical fields -- are the more likely explanation for male dominance of science. Consider an example. As late as the 1920s, Harvard allowed women to work as low-paid aides to astronomers, but forbid women to look through telescopes. One of the great 20th-century astronomers, Henrietta Leavitt -- she discovered the law that governs cycles in the luminosity of variable stars -- was banned by the managers of Harvard College Observatory from pursuing her own theories. Leavitt, Harvard said, could only assist the male astronomers in cataloging the photographic plates that supported the men's projects. Leavitt worked her own theories almost in secret; only after her death in 1921 did others realize how much she had accomplished. This story ought to be well known to any president of Harvard!

Until such time as someone can show an evolutionary reason why natural selection would have favored technical thinking in men but not women, we should assume past prejudice is the main reason women are underrepresented in science and engineering -- and also assume that as girls are encouraged to study science and math, women's presence in technical fields will rise. These things said, TMQ chortled over this prominent paragraph from a *Washington Post* story on reaction to Summers' statement: "'I felt I was going to be sick,' said Nancy Hopkins, a biology professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, who listened to part of the speech at a session on the progress of women in academia organized by the National Bureau of Economic Research in Cambridge, Mass. She walked out in what she described as a physical sense of disgust. 'My heart was pounding and my breath was shallow,' she said. 'I was extremely upset.'" Hey Nancy! No man would react that way -- maybe women are innately emotional! You should have just gone to the podium and punched Summers out.

### **Pittsburgh-New England Zebra Update**

A week ago against Indianapolis, the Patriots were never flagged for offensive holding or pass interference, usually the two most harmful penalties. This week against Pittsburgh, the Patriots were not flagged for offensive holding or pass interference. Last season in the AFC championship game against Indianapolis, the Patriots were never called for pass interference or offensive holding. Last season in the playoff game before that, Tennessee at New England, the Patriots were not flagged for offensive holding or defensive interference. Because they are well-coached, the Patriots commit fewer infractions than other teams, and there is no doubt the best team won at Heinz Field this Sunday. But are we seriously supposed to believe that in four consecutive AFC playoff games, Patriots' offensive linemen never held and Patriots' defensive backs never interfered? Rules are rules, and ought to be enforced for New England the same way they are for everyone else.

### **Atlanta at Philadelphia Analysis**

The Eagles may be the sole NFL teams that consistently comes out ahead by blitzing -- but on Sunday

blitzed only three times. Lack of blitzing seemed to take Atlanta by surprise, though Falcons' coaches should have seen New England use the same tactic against Indianapolis a week ago. The Nesharim front seven maintained perfect discipline, staying in position and not "over-pursuing," so someone was always in place to prevent Michael-Mike Vick from snapping off a long reversed-field run.

On offense, the Eagles actually ran more (33 rushes) than they threw (27 passes) for the first time recent memory. Atlanta expected Philadelphia to be pass-wacky, and adjusted too slowly to the Eagles' running. An indicator: game scoreless, Philadelphia faced second-and-6, a running down for many teams but normally a passing down for Philadelphia. Atlanta's defensive line ran a double stunt, both tackles pulling out of their holes to twist around the defensive ends; this is a pass-rush technique. But it wasn't a pass, Brian Westbrook ran over the right guard, exactly through the place that stunting tackle Rod Coleman just vacated. Westbrook's 36-yard rush set up the first Philadelphia touchdown. For Atlanta's part, did the team ever call a design run for Michael-Mike Vick? It didn't seem so. If you're going to hang your hat on a running quarterback, better let him run. Vick seemed determined to prove he could win a game with his arm, and it looks like he can't. Meanwhile Atlanta coaches challenged the wrong touchdown. Dorsey Levens seemed stopped at the 2; when he lunged the ball toward the goal line, his knees were already down. Yet Atlanta did not challenge. Later, when Chad Lewis caught a touchdown pass that looked good all the way, Mora the Younger wasted a challenge. On defense, Atlanta surprised McNabb with a five-man defensive line on third-and-12, stopping the Eagles and forcing a punt. You know Romeo Crennel will notice that and put a five-man defensive line into the New England playbook for the Super Bowl.

### **Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!**

On a championship weekend of hardly any blitzing, there was the only one example of blitz backfire. New England leading 31-10, Pittsburgh faced fourth-and-5 on the Patriots' 30. The Pats showed blitz, then backed off, then six-blitzed. Hines Wards simply ran a short down-and-in and there was no one to cover him because two defensive backs were blitzing; touchdown.

### **Talk About Hot Wax**

Reader Chuck Hart of Denver points out this news story of a car that caught fire *while going through a car wash*.

### **News from the Sports-Beefcake Boundary**

Amy Ziffer, who produces a web site called the Marriage Files -- it's intended for married women like her, though on the Web, nobody knows what chromosome pairs you have -- points out her thoughts on women watching the Super Bowl. Ziffer is a football fan and confesses that, like millions of others, the final zeroes on the Super Bowl clock produce in her a panicked anxiety reaction: What am I going to watch on television for the next seven months? Her advice for women, and, given current demographics, nontraditional males: "I couldn't face the prospect of seven long months without football if it weren't for men's fitness magazines. If you've never taken a look at a men's fitness magazine, all I can say is that *Playgirl* never had this much beefcake." Here is the cover of the current *Men's Fitness*. Here is TMQ's gift to Amy -- another of photographer Scott Eklund's portraits of Seattle Seahawks shirtless: in this case Marcus Trufant and Ken Hamlin.

### **If Only an Airbus Was as Comfortable as a Bus**

Last week Airbus unveiled its A380 mega-jetliner last week, and released photos of a luxurious interior -- broad aisles, huge seats, a stand-up cocktail lounge. Go to the A380 web site and click on any of the interior views, but don't believe for a moment what you see. When the Boeing 747 was rolled out, airlines spoke of broad aisles, huge seats, a stand-up cocktail lounge. For a brief, forgotten interlude of air-travel elegance, the old Pan Am airline flew a couple 747s with a piano lounge and pianist. But within a few years, every conceivable square inch of every 747 was crammed with seats. Now when the flight attendants are moving a service cart you can't get up to go to the bathroom, because the aisles are exactly the bare minimum width needed for a cart. Seats are so close together that if the guy in front of you reclines his even a little, the seatback hits you in the chest. Seats on the Washington, D.C., subway system, which yours truly rides to work, are significantly larger and more pleasant than seats on today's

747s. It will be the same way with the Airbus 380 -- they'll show you broad aisles and big seats, then jam you into accommodations about the size and comfort of camp stools.

Shoe-horning in more seats allows airlines to sell more tickets, and yet average load factor on United States airlines is a little under 80 percent. That means that in order to accommodate the occasional flight for which every seat is taken, all passengers must be uncomfortable all the time. If average load factor is 80 percent, airlines could take out 20 percent of the seats, allow everyone to be comfortable and fly every plane full. Instead most planes don't fly full, but everyone is uncomfortable. Democracy in action!

### **Time to Change the Defensive Holding Call**

Defensive holding is five yards marched off, but an automatic first down; this makes the penalty an absolute killer if assessed when the offense has more than five yards to go. New England 24, Pittsburgh 10 in the third quarter, the Steelers had the Patriots facing third-and-17 in their own territory. A screen pass clanged to the ground incomplete, the crowd roared, the Steelers would get the ball back in good field position, except -- defensive holding. Set aside that the call was ticky-tacky. New England needed 17 yards for a first down; Pittsburgh was penalized five yards; New England received a first down. The Flying Elvii ended up with a touchdown on the drive, and the game changed from tense to a walkover. How about making defensive holding a simple five-yard mark-off?

### **Maybe the National Weather Service Should Start Predicting Exact NFL Final Scores**

Obviously, it was a snowstorm combined with wind, and people needed to be warned. But was it the Storm of the Century? The National Weather Service forecast five to nine inches of snow for Washington; four inches fell. The National Weather Service forecast 18 to 24 inches for New York City; 14 inches fell on Central Park. IF YOU LEAVE THE SAFETY OF BEING INDOORS YOU ARE PUTTING YOUR LIFE AT RISK, said a National Weather Service bulletin issued for New York City on Saturday morning. The bulletin ended, PREPARATIONS TO PROTECT LIFE AND PROPERTY SHOULD BE COMPLETED BY NOON. Hey, it's a snowfall, not a nuclear attack.

### **Best Blocks**

Hank Fraley, center for TMQ's All Unwanted All Pros, sure looked great pulling to lead sweeps and two successful screens.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All**

Taking over on their 20 after the Preposterous Punt by Atlanta, the Eagles had a 20-10 lead, 13:59 remaining in the fourth quarter and the home crowd roaring at experimental-scamjet decibels. Time to grind the clock. Instead Philadelphia threw incomplete on three of its next six snaps, then punted back to the visitors with a mere 2:19 taken off the clock. It turned out not to matter, but the football gods cannot have been pleased. Don't go pass-wacky when your opponent's sole remaining hope is incomplete passes that stop the clock.

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All No. 2**

Trailing 7-0, Atlanta reached first-and-goal on the Philadelphia 2. On first down the Falcons ran and lost a yard. Immediately they also lost patience -- but you've still only got three yards to go, and the league's No. 1 rushing attack. Pass incomplete on second down; on third down Michael-Mike Vick lines up in the shotgun, can't find a receiver and takes a sack; field goal on fourth down. Why didn't Atlanta just pound, pound, pound?

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All No. 3**

Pittsburgh's decision to kick on fourth-and-goal from the New England 2, trailing 31-17 in the fourth quarter, doomed the Steelers. But what came before wasn't pretty either. The Hypocycloids had second-and-goal on the New England 3, with the second-rated rushing attack in the NFL, with New England's best defensive lineman in street clothes. Pound? Pass incomplete, a crazy jump-ball attempt that the

Patriots double-covered anyway. On third down, Pittsburgh ran the ball to the 2, then the Steelers' coaches ran up the white flag by sending in the kicking unit. Why launch a goal line pass when simply pounding the ball is odds-on to produce a touchdown?

### **Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have -- Hey, They Ran**

Leading 34-20 with 4:30 remaining, New England faced fourth-and-1 on the Steelers 25. A field goal is attractive here, but a first down ices the game. The Patriots ran, converted, and the rest was filler. Recall that a week ago Indianapolis, with the league's best offense, was afraid to try on fourth-and-1 in Patriots territory. Winning teams seize the day.

### **Don't Ask Princess Anne to See Off Any Soldiers Leaving for Iraq**

Five years ago Princess Anne of the United Kingdom christened the \$375 million cruise ship *Aurora*. The champagne bottle did not break; this is an omen a ship will be jinxed. Last week the *Aurora* limped back into port after its main engines failed; aboard were millionaires who had paid fares totaling \$28 million for an ultra-luxury round-the-world cruise. *Aurora* had been scheduled to make a globe-circling tour with stops in 23 countries. Instead the ship left home port in Southampton 10 days late, got only as far as the Isle of Wight, about 25 miles away and then returned, the cruise cancelled. Note: *Aurora* has a live webcam intended to provide continuous views of its glamorous ports-of-call. Because the ship is dead in the water, the live webcam currently shows an industrial area near the docks in Southampton.

### **New England at Pittsburgh Analysis**

The Flying Elvii knew Ben Roethlisberger was shaky, and expected Pittsburgh to run. So New England spent the first half in an obvious run "overstack," daring Roethlisberger to throw. Again and again the Steelers ran straight at the overstack, with scant results. When Roethlisberger came to the line and saw a rush defense, he didn't audible to a play-fake -- for instance on one second-and-9 in the first half, New England was in a run overstack, Roethlisberger didn't audible to a pass, Jerome Bettis went straight ahead for just one yard. Pittsburgh coaches did not react to the New England defensive strategy by calling passes on first down. To the point at which the Steelers fell behind 24-3 and had to start passing, Pittsburgh ran 10 times on first down for a total of 31 yards, and passed twice on first down for a total of 47 yards. Coaches have good or bad games just like players, and Pittsburgh coaches had a terrible game -- they did not adjust to what New England was doing, endlessly calling first-down rushes. If Pittsburgh coaches had lost confidence in Roethlisberger, then he should not have been on the field. If he was going to be the quarterback, he needed the green light to take what New England was offering. Instead through the first half, Roethlisberger kept handing off into run defenses on first and second downs, then passing from the shotgun on third down. This was a coaching failure, not Roethlisberger's fault.

On the defensive side, New England had controlled the tempo against Indianapolis by passing short, so the Pittsburgh defensive game plan was to expect the short pass. Come on, this is New England, they never use the same tactics two weeks in a row! The Flying Elvii opened the game throwing deep, and Pittsburgh was caught napping, especially on the 60-yard bomb to Deion Branch, when both safeties were up short, expecting a short pass.

Bill Cowher is now 1-4 in title games played at home, and timidity is a major reason. You can't back into the Super Bowl, you must seize the day! Of his inexplicable decision to kick from the New England 2 despite being down by 14 points in the fourth quarter, Cowher said the field goal cut the margin to "just two scores." But the margin was two scores before the field goal! A 14-point margin means you must score twice, and 11-point margin means you must score twice. Really, the later means you must score three times -- a field goal, a touchdown and a deuce conversion, which the odds are against. Had Cowher gone for the touchdown, he would either have reduced the margin to one score, or failed and pinned the Patriots against their goal line in what would have been deafening noise. Instead, by kicking, he let his own team know he was quitting on the game. Again what seems at work is the psychological dynamic of NFL coaches wanting to avoid blame. Had Cowher gone for it and failed, then sportswriters would blame him for the defeat. When he did the "safe" thing and kicked, sportswriters blamed his players for not getting the ball back.

### **Parking: the Ultimate Menace to Humanity**

In the movie *I, Robot*, Will Smith drives his ultra-zoomy sports car up to a parking ramp. A mechanized arm reaches out, snags the car and loads it into a rotating cylinder of parked vehicles. Futuristic? In some tight-space areas of Manhattan, London and other cities, you already see parked cars stacked atop each other on steel shelves. Now Wöhr, a German company, is building fully automated parking systems. Wöhr even offers a home parking machine so that the European who lives on a cramped street, with only one parking space next to his or her abode, can stack two cars into that one space.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback has long feared parking space, not resource exhaustion or population pressure, will doom civilization. Already it is hard to park even in many *suburban* areas of the United States; many shopping malls are hard to park at, and the whole premise of the shopping mall is ease of access by car. Streets in New York City are clogged in part because many drivers are circling looking for places to park. In downtown Bethesda, Md., the small city near my home, it is hard to find a place to pay to park. Every year 16 million new cars, SUVs and pickup trucks are bought in the United States, but few new parking spaces are added. It's even becoming hard to park in remote areas! Grand Canyon National Park is vast, larger than all of sprawling Los Angeles, but five million cars per year now flood into this nature preserve, and all parking spaces are gone by eight in the morning. Visitors become outraged when they discover they have driven hundreds of miles to great outdoors and can't find a place to get out of their cars.

The country that is really going to collapse under the weight of cars with no place to park in China. Holding 1.2 billion people, China has far less usable land area than the United States, owing to mountains and deserts. And those 1.2 billion people crammed into less usable land than in the United States are buying cars at the furious rate. Under Communism, the Chinese masses were kept poor; as recently as the 1990s there were only five million cars in China, most held by government officials. Now there are an estimated 25 million cars; at the current rate of expansion in car ownership, around the year 2015 there will be more cars in China than in the United States. The Wöhr automated parking system may be China's last hope!

### **Cheer-Babe Professionalism**

At kickoff in Philadelphia it was 17 degrees Fahrenheit, 26 miles-per-hour wind, wind-chill factor of minus-5. Okay, in this instance and this instance alone, Tuesday Morning Quarterback forgives the who-needs-clothes Eagles cheerleaders for donning parkas. But note! They wore Marilyn Monroe-style tight sweaters for the player introductions, and sprayed-on leotards throughout the contest. And as reported by Stan Wojciechowski and numerous other readers who were at Lincoln Financial Field, for their halftime performance the Eagles' cheerleaders came out with bare midriffs. In below-zero wind chill! Needless to say, the football gods smiled on their team.

### **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

**Reader Animadversion** Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Last week TMQ declared the Seahawks' new cognomen would be the Seattle Folgers -- good to the last drop. Many readers including Stacy Pratt of Collinsville, Okla., pointed out this is the advertising phrase of Maxwell House, not Folgers. And as Mike Argento of York, Pa., wrote, "the Seattle Maxwell Homes doesn't have the same ring." Seattle cognomen back under advisement.

Two weeks ago I said an NFL team has "at most" 19 tries at victory. Readers including Kevin Cronin of Baltimore pointed out that a wild-card team that makes the Super Bowl gets 20 tries. The Baltimore Ravens, a wild-card team that performed in the big dance, finished their 2000 season 16-4.

Last week TMQ supposed that the next time Denver plays at Indianapolis, the Colts be handicapped; Peyton Manning would be required to pat his head and rub his tummy simultaneously the snap. Jim VanWinkle, a professor at Portland State University, replies that in his elaborate line-of-scrimmage chicken dancing, Manning probably already does pat his head and rub his tummy simultaneously as an audible signal. Yours truly said the Huygens probe landed on Titan, "a moon of Jupiter." Titan circles Saturn, as pointed out by numerous readers including Andrew Li of Boston. Pace Randy Moss, a reader

asks in haiku,

You misplaced Titan!  
Will TMQ now get fined  
for mooning a moon?

-- *Joe Boudreau, Waldorf, Md.*

Wendy Jobling of Brown University, protesting my protesting of announcers who call Tom Brady "underrated" when he is a two-time Super Bowl MVP, counters that Brady was underrated in the week before the Colts rematch, since all the touts and bobbleheads were saying Peyton Manning would run wild. She puts it in haiku, followed by a Colts' fan's lament of her team's demise:

Tom underrated  
by the "experts" who preferred  
lucky charm Manning!

-- *Wendy Jobling, Coventry, R.I.*

Chicken Little said,  
"The sky is falling!" Colts' dread:  
"The sky is outside!"

-- *Jen Lea, Indianapolis*

Finally as noted by many readers including Claudia Carter of Miami, I was wrong to call the coach of the Falcons "Jim Mora Jr." His father is Jim Mora, but they have different middle names. It is proper, Claudia says, to call him Mora the Younger, as in Pliny the Younger; so will he be to this column henceforth.

### **Last Week's Challenge**

Last week's was to propose ways the Colts finally could win at New England.

Rita Popot of Yonkers, N.Y., proposed that Indianapolis be prohibited from punting on fourth-and-1. Nick Swanson of Winona, Minn., proposed that the Colts could win at New England if they played the New England Revolution, the soccer team. "Lacking pads, their run defense won't be stout," Swanson wrote. Adrian Apodaca proposes that if the Denver Broncos were dressed as the Patriots, then the Colts would have no difficulty beating them.

Alex Pappas of Tempe, Ariz., suggested the Colts should simply practice outdoors, rather than using their "bubble" practice facility. That's easy for someone who lives in Tempe to say! Tom Jones suggested that the Colts relocate back to Baltimore; soon enough they would be over their fear of cold. But Tom, the Colts and Ravens sharing a stadium whose seats are purple? Brian McAllister of Toronto, Ontario, suggested Indianapolis should declare that it will only play New England when both the Patriots' starting corners, plus their best defensive lineman, are out hurt. Hmmm, that already happened. Douglas Hilderbrand of Alexandria, Va., suggested the Colts should urge their fans to burn fossil fuels, which will cause global warming, which eventually will take away New England's cold-weather advantage.

Patrick Schmidt, Blaine, Minn., agrees with TMQ's previous suggestion that the Colts should set the air conditioning in the RCA Dome to 10 below until they learn to play in cold; he adds that they should hang snowmaking machines from the ceiling. "Tell the opponent that good weather is predicted, then start the snow machines unexpectedly half an hour before the game," he proposed. Tony Sherman of Minneapolis suggests the Colts hire Superman. Once, Supe flew to the Arctic Circle to bring back an iceberg to hold over a burning skyscraper; get him to bring an iceberg to the RCA Dome.

Idan Avisar of Ramat Hasharon, Israel, was among several readers to suggest something TMQ agrees with -- that Manning should stop his chicken dance at the line of scrimmage and simply run the play that was sent in. "The Patriots defense is too dynamic to audible based on the defenders' initial position,"

Avisar notes. New England repeatedly tricked Manning into thinking a blitz was coming, then audibling to an anti-blitz play that failed because there was no blitz. Fletcher Farrington of Savannah, Ga., suggests Peyton Manning voluntarily give back much of his bonus so that Indianapolis has salary-cap space to sign some defensive help. Yes, surely a player will voluntarily return millions of -- excuse me, a pig just flew by.

Lesley Bingham suggests both that the Colts practice outside and that they start reading Tuesday Morning Quarterback. Bingham writes, "As I watched the Indianapolis at New England game, I noticed the Pats doing things you've mentioned all season in your column. I'm sure Tony Dungy has at least one assistant who can spend a little time on Tuesday checking things out." Keith Day of Anchorage, Alaska, suggests, "Maybe the Colts should take a lesson from Marilyn Monroe in *The Seven Year Itch* and keep their undies in a freezer," thus steeling themselves against cold.

This week's winner is Luis Mosqueda of Monterrey, Mexico, who suggests that to provide experience with weather, the Colts cut off the roof of the RCA Dome -- and then sell it to the Cowboys to complete the roof at Texas Stadium. In keeping with this year's Challenge policy, his prize is a sentence of shameless praise. Mosqueda reports he is an information-systems engineering student. "Look out, world of information-systems engineering -- Luis Mosqueda is on his way." Put that in your resume, Luis, and just leave out that it was NFL.com that said this about you.

### **This Week's Challenge**

Like the Heisman Trophy, the big NFL awards always goes to a quarterback or running back. Who should be the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB MVP? State your case using the link at Reader Animadversion.

### **Next Week**

An entire weekend without football! Start getting used to it. Divert yourself as I name the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB MVP.



# TUESDAY MORNING QUARTERBACK

## The Non-QB Non-RB MVP, and make plans now for Super Bowl Extra Large

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

Time to hand out the coveted distinction universally known as the "longest award in sports" -- the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP. Only non-glamour boys eligible; see below for reader nominees who also received consideration.

The second runner-up is Tedy Bruschi of the Patriots, nominated by Paul McBride of Olathe, Kan., among many readers. Bruschi was the best defensive performer for the defending champions. During the regular season Bruschi had 122 tackles and three interceptions, a lot for an inside linebacker. His forced fumble in New England's postseason win over Indianapolis, stopping a Colts' drive while the game was close, was a monster play. Bruschi did not make the Pro Bowl, but due recognition has come, as Bruschi just graced the cover of *Sports Illustrated*. Assuming this does not jinx him -- be really, really careful around the hotel swimming pool in Jacksonville, okay, Tedy?

The first runner up is guard Mike Wahle of Green Bay. Here, Michael David Smith of FootballOutsiders.com, the leading independent football Web site, argues that Wahle was the league's best guard in 2004. The Packers tied for fewest sacks allowed, while their running game, a Fuzzy Thurston-throwback based on pulling guards, was keyed by Wahle. Yet this gentleman did not make the Pro Bowl either. His better-known linemate, Marco Rivera, did, and it would be hard for electors to take two guards from the same team. Anyway having the best player at a position not make the Pro Bowl is hardly unknown. For my money the best cornerbacks in the league in 2004 were Nate Clements of Buffalo and Shawn Springs of Washington, both of whom scanned the Pro Bowl list and realized they would see those scenes of Hawaiian surfer babes strictly on television. (Clements was just added to the Pro Bowl to replace an injured player.) Fun Mike Wahle fact: this 304-pound gent originally was a wide receiver in college.

Now, the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP. He is chosen by acclamation: of roughly 700 email nominations received, roughly 600 named the same person. With my keen instincts, I sense a trend! And the gentleman is ... Troy Brown of New England, this year's Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP.

Performing on offense, defense and special teams, Brown personified Patriots' teamwork. His regular-season stats are not striking -- 17 receptions, 12 punt returns, 17 tackles, three interceptions, two fumble recoveries. The fact that he's in *all* these categories is what is notable. After injuries struck the New England secondary, Brown switched from wide receiver to defensive back. As noted by reader Andrea Jones of Baltimore, among many others, Brown basically saved New England's season. Brown wins the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP though he only started one game in 2004 -- yet in many games played offense, defense and kicking downs.

Reader Shelley MacAskill of Cambridge, Mass., reminds that last year I choose Damien Woody, now of Detroit but then of New England, as Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP, lauding him for giving up his center position, where he was all but assured a repeat Pro Bowl trip, to play guard because that's what the team needed. Similarly, when disaster befell the Flying Elvii defensive backfield, Brown agreed to a diminished role on offense in order to concentrate on his cornerback role. On offense, Brown was making highlight-reel, bonus-triggering touchdown receptions; on defense he's making tackles and knocking away passes. But he agreed because that's what the team needed, honoring the New England teamwork ethic and pleasing the football gods. Image the reaction if Terrell Owens was asked to give up offensive stats and be the nickel back! Reader Kelly Jahns of Spokane Valley, Wash., called Brown "the ultimate team player on the ultimate team." Two readers put the case for Brown in haiku; the first noting that to make the syllables work requires the compressed "w" sometimes used when signing hymns:

TMQ Award --  
WR/DB/PR Troy  
Brown for MVP!  
-- *Timothy Starr, Knoxville, Tenn.*

My MVP plays  
defense, offense, special teams:  
Iron man, Troy Brown.  
-- *Beth Shaeffer*

Cautionary note: as there is an *SI* cover curse, this award also carries a jinx. Three years back, my Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP was Alan Faneca of the Steelers, who immediately after receiving the award had his worst game of the season in Pittsburgh's AFC championship loss to New England. Two years ago my winner was Lincoln Kennedy of the Raiders, who immediately after receiving the award had his worst game of the season in Oakland's Super Bowl loss to the Buccaneers. Last season my winner was Woody, who immediately after receiving the award got injured, missed the Super Bowl and never played for New England again. Be really, really careful around the hotel pool in Jacksonville, okay, Troy?

In other football news, this is Canton selection week -- the next group of gentlemen to wear garish yellow sportscoats will be chosen. See my analysis of Hall of Fame politics below. And kickoff is at XI:XXX Eastern for that Super Bowl thing you might have heard about. Incredible Pats-versus-Eagles analysis below.

### **Cheer-Babe Special!**

To ease readers past the trauma of an entire weekend without football -- I'm still a bit shaky myself -- TMQ offers a Cheer-Babe Special. This week, a handful of cheerleaders chosen for sheer beauty, not for cooked-up rationalization having to do with seriousness.

The first is Kollette Klassen of the Denver Broncos, a student at the University of Northern Colorado. She was nominated by reader James Gribbon of Stratford, Conn., who supposes that by looks at least, Klassen was born to cheerlead.

### **Super Bowl C Will Be a Big Year for Vitamin Sales**

As we approach the rather long Super Bowl XXXIX, bear in mind next year's event will be Super Bowl XL. It's sure to be known as Super Bowl Extra Large. Headline writers might as well start working on puns now. More important, think of the marketing possibilities. Makers of enormous SUVs could pay a fee to become the official extra-large vehicle of Super Bowl Extra Large; 7-11 could pay to have its Gulp be the official extra-large drink of Super Bowl Extra Large; McDonald's, currently pushing its Double Quarter Pounder, could pay for that be the official extra-large sandwich of Super Bowl Extra Large.

Next set your eyes on 2016, when Super Bowl L will be staged. That's sure to be known as Super Bowl Lite. Marketers, start cutting your deals now to be the official light product of Super Bowl Lite. And if you're wondering how long the numerals can get, circle your calendars for the 2055 event, which will be Super Bowl LXXXIX. Yours truly hopes Super Bowl LXXXIX pits the Buffalo Bills against the Minnesota Vikings, then one of them will have to win!

Mega-burger note: Hardee's terrifying Monster Thickburger, discussed here, would be the largest candidate for official extra-large sandwich of Super Bowl Extra Large. But if you eat many you won't live to see Super Bowl Lite 10 years later. The Monster Thickburger has 1,418 calories (six candy bars) and 107 grams of fat (almost double the safe intake for an entire day). Hardee's mega-burger makes the Double Quarter Pounder with cheese seem like health food, the d-QPC having 730 calories and 40 grams of fat. McDonald's is relentlessly criticized for supersized fries and other sins. But note that with the burger chains currently battling over which can produce the heaviest sandwich -- Burger King's Double Whopper, another contender, soars well over 1,000 calories -- McDonald's entry into the mega-burger sweepstakes is within the realm of reason nutritionally. A d-QPC with a side salad instead of fries is a realistic meal in nutritional terms. McDonald's should get at least grudging admiration for not matching

its competitors by offering a calories-and-fat-gone-mad burger.

### Hall of Fame Politics

Annually, Tuesday Morning Quarterback protests that offensive linemen are underrepresented in the Hall of Fame. Canton has 43 modern-era quarterbacks and running backs but only 29 modern-era offensive linemen, though on the field there are approximately twice as many offensive linemen as quarterbacks and running backs, and though, scientists have shown, no quarterback or running back has ever blocked for himself. TMO's position is that the Hall of Fame must accept all offensive-line finalists until this inequity is rectified. So assuming five, the recent average, are chosen Saturday, my votes go to the two offensive linemen among the finalists, Russ Grimm and Bob Kuechenberg; to Dan Marino and Steve Young, automatic first-ballot picks; and to L.C. Greenwood, the sure Canton choice who's been waiting longest -- it's his 19th year of eligibility.

Though five per year has been the recent average, TMO thinks each year the Hall should take seven, the unofficial maximum. Seven were crowned in 1987, in 1990 -- why not now? There's no grade-inflation issue with the Hall of Fame, it should contain as many players as could reasonably be called great. This year numerous gentlemen who belong in Canton will be turned away, owing to the five-jacket limit the media electors have, for unclear reasons, imposed on themselves. Suppose you agree with my five choices. That leaves behind Harry Carson, Derrick Thomas and Roger Wehrli, three obvious Canton choices, plus at least another dozen Canton-class guys from this year's finalists and semifinalists. If the selectors take only five per year, they'll never get everybody in, and what's the point of that? Having all the memorable players in the Hall of Fame is good for fans and due recognition to the deserving. Not having all the memorable players in accomplishes -- what? In 2004, the electors took just four, which accomplished -- what? Plus the self-imposed five-a-year limit is the reason special teams are ridiculously absent from the Hall. Canton has just one placekicker, no punter, no kick returner and no special-teams defender. This, though one-third of field position is determined by special teams. With only five jackets per year, selectors feel they can't spare one for, say, Steve Tasker. If there were seven jackets per year, special teams could be acknowledged.

Next, what to make of Carson? He theatrically sent Canton a letter withdrawing his name from consideration. This seems a clumsy attempt at reverse psychology; Carson is mad that he hasn't been chosen yet, and now has declared he will hold his breath until he turns blue. Carson deserves to be inducted, but it is unseemly for him to throw a hissy fit about not being honored fast enough, which is what his complaint boils down to. Carson has only been eligible 10 years. Carl Eller waited 20 years, and Eller did not throw tantrums while he waited.

Maybe Carson thinks his ploy will force the electors to choose him this year. It should force the electors not to choose him -- that is, to abide by his request. Suppose the electors picked him on Saturday. If Carson is an honest man, he must refuse to attend the induction ceremony; if Carson did attend, he would be revealing himself as a phony who staged a cheap publicity stunt. Carson will be in Canton someday. But it can't happen until he writes a sincere letter retracting his previous letter.

Finally it's time to remind star NFL players what TMO likes to remind of at this time of year, that you don't get into the Hall of Fame unless you are friendly to print people. Thirty-six of this year's electors are print media, only three from the world of television. Why does Art Monk keep getting passed over? Because he was nasty to sportswriters. Why did Howie Long get in right away, ahead of Eller, Elvin Bethea and other older, qualified candidates at his position? Because Long is a charming guy who always made time for print types. Star NFL players, sportswriters are the orcs before the gates of Canton. The best way to get past them is to be nice to them.

### Arizona Missed Its Chance to Make the Logo into a Menacing Cactus Wren

Detractors called Arizona's old logo "the parakeet." Now the Cardinals have a new bird image with "decidedly more evil eyes and a menacing expression," according to the team. Sure to be dubbed the mean parakeet! Arizona vice president Michael Bidwill said of the new bird, "We've made the beak much more predatory and much more aggressive." Wait, doesn't this mean the Arizona Cardinals are *interfering in the natural evolution of logos*? After all, it was by studying changes in the beaks of finches that Charles Darwin arrived at many of his insights regarding natural selection. See the new who-you-lookin'-at Cardinal here.

### **This Year's Fad: Blame the Assistants**

Last year it was coach-a-rama as head coaches were fired left and right; this year it's assistant-a-rama as numerous offensive coordinators have changed teams. Every team that did not get as many touchdowns as the Colts seems to think the offensive coordinator must be cashiered. Speaking of media management, offensive coordinator Mike Heimerdinger, who jumped from the Flaming Thumbtacks to the Jets, had better take some beat reporters out to dinner and get on the good side of the New York press. Late in the 2003 season, the New York press started complaining about the Jets' defense; at season's end Herman Edwards fired defensive coordinator Ted Cottrell. Late in the 2004 season, the New York press started complaining about the Jets' offense; at season's end Edwards fired offensive coordinator Paul Hackett.

### **Cheer-Babe Special No. 2**

This week's No. 2 is Caroline of the Philadelphia Eagles, nominated by reader Michael Schulze of Metairie, La. Caroline, a graduate of Rutgers, lists "writing" among her hobbies, and that's pretty rare for a cheer-babe. Schulze urges others to click on her Eagles' calendar photo, which we can link to but not show for forget-her-top based reasons.

### **Fake the PAT!**

TMQ proposed that when San Diego scored to make it Jets 17, Bolts 16 with 11 seconds in regulation in wildcard round, the Chargers should have gone for two and the win. Instead they took one and went to overtime, where the clock struck midnight on their magical season. I further opined that San Diego was "likely" to have gotten a deuce. Chris Shiemke of Howell, Mich., counters that 46 percent of NFL two-point attempts succeed, so "likely" is not the word. More revealing are stats showing that 38 percent of passing attempts for two are successful, versus 62 percent of rushing attempts -- supporting TMQ's longstanding contention that teams are better off running on short-yardage downs. Anyway, perhaps Marty Schottenheimer was playing the odds by taking the roughly 50 percent chance of victory in overtime rather than the 46 percent chance of getting two points at the end of regulation. Aha, but the stats are for two-point plays run by an offense: that is, deuce tries the defense knows are coming. What about the two-pointer from a PAT kicking formation? In the cacophony that prevailed in San Diego after the Chargers scored with 11 seconds left, had they lined up to kick and gone for two off a fake, chances of victory were excellent. Since NFL coaches never go for two on the final play of regulation, the Jets surely would have been taken by surprise. Chris McGurk of Fargo, N.D., notes that on San Diego's PAT attempt, Jersey/B was so taking a kick for granted that the Jets' kick defense team was barely paying attention, with only three defenders on the offensive right. If the holder had audibled to a run right, San Diego's magical season would have continued. But the Chargers might not have a fake PAT in their arsenal. It's been so long since I've seen this tried, I would if any NFL team even practices a fake PAT? Yet faking the one-point kick might be devastatingly effective.

### **Official Brother in the News**

Not to, like, you know, boast or anything, but last week two articles touted Frank Easterbrook, an Official Brother of TMQ, as a potential Supreme Court nominee. This article from *Washington Lawyer* magazine names two "strong philosophical conservatives" whom George W. Bush should appoint, one of them Frank. The *Washington Lawyer* article is by Bruce Fein, a prominent conservative legal analyst who was a deputy Attorney General under Ronald Reagan. This article from the liberal online magazine *Slate* calls Frank "among the smartest appellate judges in the country."

Hey White House staffers, Frank Easterbrook is an eminent, philosophically conservative appellate judge; he's got intellectual firepower (he also teaches law at the University of Chicago); his decisions have an excellent record of being upheld by the Supreme Court (whether appeals judges are upheld or overturned is a basic measure of whether they really know and respect the law); though conservative on economics and tough on crime, Frank has written progressive decisions on women's equality and environmental protection; he has a bipartisan background, having been a deputy Solicitor General under Jimmy Carter; when Frank was named to the federal bench by Reagan, the Senate confirmed him unanimously. Not to put too fine a point on it, but not everyone whose name is being bandied as a possible appointee can make these claims. So what do you say, White House? Plus, Frank can get unlimited free high-level advice about football. (Good judges never campaign for appointments, and

Frank has no idea I am writing this item.)

### **Disclaimer Watch**

Many readers including Andrew Hoenig of Rockville, Md., noted that during the NFC championship, General Motors ran a commercial which shows Hummer being assembled in the factory. The crawl announced PROFESSIONAL DRIVER, CLOSED COURSE, though the Hummer had no driver and never moved.

### **Football, Sex and War**

Last month yours truly speculated on why football is the most emotional of sports. I came to the conclusion it is because mounting a football team involves more people than mounting any other kind of sports team: the many people amplify each other's emotions, making the highs of football really high and the lows really low. I also speculated that because football involves large-scale coordinated effort, it can be seen as a metaphor for group success -- if a city, school or region has a victorious football team, many believe this means the city, school or region will be successful in other endeavors as well. Numerous readers including Michael Weber of Bad Duerkheim, Germany, wrote to protest a missing possibility -- that football is so emotional because "of all major sports, it bears the closest resemblance to war," and no human activity engages more emotion than war. Comparisons between football and war are often made. Teams try to seize territory; tactics include the blitz and the bomb; the quarterback is like a general, the linemen like footsoldiers; fans of one city's team may urge their champions to "destroy" the other city's team; the players wear helmets.

There's something there, but the similarities between football and war are mainly coincidental, I think. Bomb may be a military term, but there are also countless football expressions that have nothing to do with combat, or even sound childlike. (All college and many pro teams have "waggle" plays, for example.) In every arena of life can be found some expression that suggests war -- surgeons "invade" the body, engineers use "exploded" diagrams, and on so. Plus to my mind, the action of football really isn't much like battle. Teams advance into the opponent's territory -- then immediately surrender the territory, going back to their own 30 yard lines to kick off. Even successful football teams constantly retreat, which might make football a metaphor for the French army, but not for war generally.

Similarly, some theorists maintain football is a metaphor for macho sexual dominance, owing to phrases such as "force it down their throats." But this also seems just coincidence. There are dozens of football expressions that have no possible Freudian interpretation, while Freudian allusions are found in practically all aspects of life. Writers tell the naked truth, diplomats engage in international intercourse; the sexual readings of these phrases are mere happenstance. If you over-analyze, you can even find in football what appear to be coded references to the female libido. For instance, coaches constantly tell cornerbacks, "swivel your hips." It's strictly a coincidence that this phrase also connotes female sexuality.

I think there is one way in which football does represent a mild metaphor of war, and that is its requirement for large-scale coordinated group activity. To be secure, societies must be able to succeed in war; to succeed in war, societies must have the capacity to stage large-scale coordinated group activity; football is a harmless junior version of that. Subconsciously football expresses the message, "Since we can all get together and cooperate on this, we can all get together and cooperate if we are in danger." Today the United States is by far the strongest military power in the world -- stronger relative to other nations than Rome at its peak of empire. We're also the only nation that is totally obsessed with gridiron football. I don't want to overwork this point, but there may be a small relationship between the two.

### **Wacky Food of the Week**

Reader Brian Conboy reports a jar of Wyler's Chicken Bouillon brightly labeled, "Now with 25 percent more chicken taste!" So before it only tasted somewhat like chicken?

### **A Quick, Easy Way to Be Separated from Your Money!**

Want to be in great shape without effort? Increasingly books and gizmos promise this fantasy. Recent

bestseller exercise books have included *The Once-a-Week*, *Slow Motion Fitness Revolution*, which claims that one eight-minute workout weekly is all you need, and *The Slow Burn Fitness Revolution*, which claims that a total of 30 minutes of exercise weekly is all you need. (All serious medical research says 30 to 60 minutes per day of rigorous activity is required for fitness, though it doesn't have to be tennis or kickboxing -- brisk walking counts.) Now check out the ROM home exercise machine, which promises "a four-minute complete workout" that confers "the same benefits as 20 to 45 minutes of aerobic exercise plus 45 minutes of weight training plus 20 minutes of stretching." An hour and a half of benefits in four minutes! The ROM costs \$14,615, and the manufacturer claims that "97 percent of buyers love it." But then if you paid \$14,615 for a device that promised complete fitness in four minutes, would you admit you had been a fool?

Tuesday Morning Quarterback Enterprises is preparing to market *Trapezius of Steel*, a new workout video in which scantily clad cheer-babes demonstrate exercises for the trapezius. Abs, buns, pecs -- all the glamour body parts were already taken.

### **Wacky Non-Food of the Week**

Try the We Care Spa in Hot Springs, Calif. Ben Affleck and Courtney Love have gone. The goal of attending the spa is that you fast for seven days. The cost for a single room with full package is \$3,983 - that is, \$569 a night to not eat.

### **Unpleasant Thought for the Day**

Most Americans need a stay at the We Care Spa. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, the typical American now consumes 77 pounds of fats annually, up from 66 pounds in 1990 - a 17 percent increase in barely more than a decade. At this rate, TMQ calculates, by the year 2024, the average American will be an NFL offensive lineman.

### **Cheer-Babe Special No. 3**

No. 3 is Kristine of the Miami Dolphins, a nursing student. A nurse *and* a cheerleader: male fantasy overload! According to her team bio, Kristine's favorite time of day is, "When the sun is out, perfect time to get a tan." That's the kind of insider information you get living the Miami beach-based lifestyle -- tan when the sun is out!

### **Count Your Blessings**

Yours truly has long cleaved to the belief that while it would be great to get \$1 million -- man, how I could use \$1 million! -- getting \$100 million would be an utter calamity. Sad proof of the theory comes in a *Washington Post* profile by April Witt of Jack Whittaker, the West Virginia man who won an after-tax net of \$113 million in the record Power Ball of 2002. The money, Witt reports, has ruined his life: his granddaughter died in a drug overdose after two years of high living with the wrong crowd, his marriage ended, Whittaker himself has been reduced from a respected member of the community to universally despised. Money is inequitably distributed in the United States; it would be better if average people had somewhat more while the rich had less. But don't dream of Midas wealth, which destroys those it touches.

### **This Week's Star Trek Complaint**

Not a complaint! Episodes this season have been notably more interesting than last season. Friday's was a pretty well-written play on a 1967 Captain Kirk episode. In the 1967 show, *Enterprise* is transporting hundreds of delegates to a galactic peace conference when the ship comes under attack by a mysterious starcruiser representing some faction determined to prevent peace. That episode ended without Kirk and Spock finding out who the mysterious starcruiser belonged to. In Friday's episode, it's 100 years earlier and the more modest *Enterprise* is transporting just a few delegates to a local peace conference when the ship comes under attack by a mysterious starcruiser. This time we find out that the sinister force trying to prevent peace is -- well, you'll just have to watch the repeat. But like all "prequels," there's a time continuity problem. If Jonathan Archer's *Enterprise* figured out who the mysterious attackers are, surely 100 years later Kirk, in the same situation, would have known.

## New England Versus Philadelphia Analysis

Three years ago when the Patriots asked to be introduced as a team at Super Bowl XXXVI, everybody thought it was a bit contrived. It was, instead, an expression of something most of the professional sports world scoffs at -- that average athletes playing as a team can be stronger than a flashy athletes playing as a collection of egos. For three years now New England has dominated the NFL, and done so mostly with undrafted or waiver-wire gentlemen other teams didn't want. Patriots' players are always in position -- never underestimate how important this is in football. They always execute the play or defense as drawn -- never underestimate how many plays or defensive snaps are blown because at least one guy wasn't paying attention in practice and didn't remember his assignment. New England does not have even one turnover in the playoffs: there's some luck involved, but mainly it's that every Patriot knows the plays and no Patriot is ever out of position. Finally the Patriots never complain in public about anything, surely the sole NFL team with such a distinction.

New England is on the cusp of winning three Super Bowls in four years, yet lacks any automatic Hall of Fame player. Tom Brady and Ty Law will be strong candidates; others might too based on future play, but nobody on the Pats' roster is a lock for Canton. And be honest now, how many New England linemen other than Richard Seymour can you name without looking? The Pro Bowl voters surely can't name many! Only two offensive or defensive starters, Brady and Seymour, got free trips to Honolulu. Yet Pats have won game after game after game. They win because they play as a team, and that is a tribute to their character and coaching.

It would be obvious to call this Super Bowl a battle of defenses. Philadelphia and New England tied for second-fewest points allowed in 2004, each giving up 260 points, or 16 per game. New England's achievement is more noteworthy because the Flying Elvii played a tougher schedule than Philadelphia. But the Eagles are a serious club on defense, too. Here's the point that everyone misses: New England is also a high-scoring team. The Patriots finished third in the league in scoring, and the Pats were third-best despite playing in the AFC East, the division with the league's best overall defense. The Pats played eight of their 16 regular-season games against the first-, second-, sixth-, seventh- and eighth-best defenses (Pittsburgh, Buffalo, Baltimore, Jersey/B and Miami). Yet New England finished third in scoring. The Flying Elvii do *everything* well.

Bill Belichick and his staff are masters of psychology, consistently out-thinking opponents. So how will they approach Philadelphia? Everyone assumes that with Terrell Owens a question mark, the Eagles will come into the Super Bowl planning to establish the run. So you'd expect New England to come in planning to stop the run. I suspect Belichick will leapfrog to the conclusion that since everyone expects Philadelphia to run, the Eagles will try to be clever by passing instead -- and therefore the Patriots will come into the game wanting to stop the pass. Eagles, you must run! Belichick knows Andy Reid's staff has a four-year pass-wacky record, and assumes Reid just won't be able to resist the temptation to call pass after pass in their first Super Bowl. Eagles, you must run! The run is going to be what the Patriots' defense offers.

Bear in mind also that until this year's NFC title contest, Donovan McNabb had a problem with throwing interceptions in pressure games. Belichick knows this. (Actually, Belichick knows everything, yet *still* refuses to tell us the origin of the universe.) So New England might reasonably take some risks with coverages, trying to lure McNabb into interceptions. One reason the Nesharim are finally in the Super Bowl is that they have committed only one turnover in the playoffs. Belichick knows that if McNabb throws a couple picks, Philadelphia may wilt. All the more reason why Eagles, you must run! Danger sign: Last week yours truly lauded the Eagles' title performance in which Philadelphia finally rushed more (33 times) than passed (27 times). Reader Marc Garber of Marietta, Ga., notes that three of the rushes were kneel-downs at the end, while seven others were McNabb scrambles on pass plays. "So from a play-calling standpoint, Andy Reid called 34 passes and 23 rushes, discounting the kneel-downs," Garber calculates. Philadelphia actually was still pass-wacky in the NFC championship, even though it was holding a lead at home. Eagles, you must run!

When New England has the ball, my counsel: Patriots, you must run! I don't mean this as broken-record advice, since the Patriots and Eagles have both had excellent passing games this season. I mean it as tactical planning specific to this matchup. The strength of the Philadelphia defense is its linebackers, corners and, especially, its safeties. The Philadelphia defensive line is average. Run against the Eagles, and you are attacking average players; pass against the Eagles, and you are attacking elite players. New

England has also allowed five sacks in the postseason, the sole statistical chink in its armor. Surely Eagles' defensive coordinator Jim Johnson has noticed this, and is scheming to knock the male-model-esque Brady to his keister (a technical term). Running might throw the Eagles' defense off.

In each of its previous Super Bowl-winning seasons, New England came into the big game with a reputation as a blitzing, pass-loving, five-wide club -- then played conservative defense and ran the ball. There is a pattern here. (Of course Belichick, fearing others have now sensed the pattern, may outthink the world by blitzing and going pass-wacky.) By contrast, Philadelphia has rarely varied its pattern in big games, blitzing a lot and passing too much. There's a big opportunity there for the Eagles to surprise the Patriots by doing what the Patriots have done in Super Bowl wins: playing conventional defense and pounding the ball.

### Endorsement of the Year

Goodyear Tire and Rubber paid Detroit Pistons guard Richard Hamilton a fee to shave his head in the tread pattern of the company's new Assurance TripleTred tire. This raises these questions:

- If it snows, will Hamilton shave his head in the tread pattern of a snow tire?
- Will trainers check the air pressure in Hamilton's head?
- Every 20,000 miles, will all Detroit Pistons players rotate heads?
- Who will be the first NBA player who gets a fee to grow a goatee in the shape of the McDonald's arch?

### The Dhani Factor

In the championships round, yours truly was rooting for the Steelers and Falcons. Why? Owing to my annual prediction that the team goin' to Disney World would be one that had not appeared on Monday Night Football. Neither Pittsburgh nor Atlanta played on Monday Night this season: if the Super Bowl had been a Steelers versus Falcons pairing, my prediction would have proved correct even before the game was played! Alas, it was not to be. Since my prediction was incorrect, now I don't have to make good on this column's promise: All Predictions Wrong or Your Money Back. A reader notes in haiku,

Elvii, Nesharim  
both on Monday Night Football:  
No need for refund.

-- *Tal Ayalon, Jerusalem, Israel*

In the big game Tuesday Morning Quarterback's kids will be rooting for the Eagles, because Philadelphia linebacker Dhani Jones is a graduate of their high school. Jones, who recites poetry, plays piano and recently guest-conducted the Philadelphia Pops orchestra, is something of a Renaissance Man, which is not a position in the Eagles defense. ("You block the mike man, and you pick up the Renaissance Man.") Jones comes from a Renaissance Family, if that's a term. At a sports banquet, yours truly had the pleasure of sitting with Jones' father, a retired Navy commander; his mother, an anesthesiologist; and his sister Akila, who starred for Indiana University's field-hockey team. In an age when athletes are derided as vapid airheads -- or worse, celebrated as vapid airheads -- Dhani Jones proves you can play in the NFL and still have your brain engaged. It's all because he went to the right high school!

### RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT

#### Reader Animadversion

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I may quote from your email and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Recently TMQ lamented that shirts made in the developing world are both the product of mistreated workers, and come with hidden straight pins that the mistreated workers use to exact revenge upon the

affluent of the West. I supposed there ought to be Fair Trade shirts made by workers paid a living wage, and sans pins. Matthew Perry of Loughborough, in the United Kingdom, writes to report, "I own several Fair Trade shirts, bought in a Fair Trade shop. None came with pins in! Your hypothesis is clearly correct." Here is the website of Fair Trade textiles shops available to English readers, at least.

Katharina Pollock of Point Pleasant, N.J., notes announcers often call a player "fast and quick." Yet, "According to the Merriam-Webster on-line dictionary, 'quick' is a synonym of 'fast.' So a running back called 'fast and quick' is really being called 'fast and fast.'" Speaking of Merriam-Webster, a few weeks ago that dictionary was cited in this space as "Miriam Webster." Maybe Miriam Webster was somebody I went out with in college.

Recently TMQ lamented excessively long account numbers, noting that no more than nine digits are required to create a unique number for every citizen of the United States. Peter Johnson of Alexandria, Va., writes, "I reside in Fairfax County, Va. My county library card number has 14 digits. The county has about 1 million inhabitants, so seven digits would be sufficient to describe any resident. The authorities must be expecting one heck of a population explosion."

Leo Montgomery, a Dolphins' fan in Bremerton, Wash., reports that he recently saw a Reuters story about a pod of dolphins that circled protectively around New Zealand swimmers to fend off an attack by a great white shark. Considering Miami needs exactly this kind of courage, Montgomery writes, "You wonder if the Dolphins should use their No. 1 draft pick on actual dolphins."

Debate continues over what to rename the Seattle Blue Men Group. I was going to call them the Seattle Folgers -- good to the last drop -- but that turned out to be the slogan of Maxwell House. Walter Megger of Timonium, Md., suggests switching the cognomen to the Maxwell Seahawks. Jim Lidstone, a professor at Georgia College and State University in Milledgeville, Ga., notes that the real Folgers slogan is "mountain grown," and so, keeping with Mount Rainer, the Seahawks could be Mountain Groan. Kim Nerenhausen of Cairo, Egypt, suggests the Seattle STPs, after that super-slippery stuff nothing can stick to. Tyler Smith of Indianapolis suggests the Seattle de Milos, as in the *Venus de Milo*, which lacks hands. Bud Gray of Brentwood, Tenn., suggests the Seattle Clang, as in the sound that Matt Hasselbeck's passes make when they strike the ground. Bob Ackerman of snowy Olean, N.Y., suggests the Seattle Durans, as in Roberto Duran's nickname, Hands of Stone. Andrew Ray, a researcher at the Scripps Research Institute in sunny Los Angeles Jolla, Calif., suggests the Seattle Water Torture: drop, drop, drop, drop. And it's pretty much water torture for the team's fans when they watch!

Last week I noted that mechanized parking ladders are proliferating in Europe. Dane Drutis reports that Hoboken, N.J., already has an automated parking garage where *robots* do the parking. "A GE Fanuc integrated motion control system manages 35 independently operating robots," this description says. What's creepy is that one incentive to build such garages is to avoid paying the minimum wage to parking attendants. TMQ can understand why manufacturers want machines that take the place of highly paid skilled workers; when robots begin replacing entry-level minimum-wage types, this is not a healthy sign.

Meanwhile Tom Eastling of San Diego, who lives in Tokyo, reports: "The parking-machine scene in *I, Robot* is eerily suggestive of the actual parking structure at the new Roppongi Hills development in Tokyo. Once you exit, a conveyor belt loads the vehicle into a rotating cylinder where cars are stored, 195-car capacity. To pick up your vehicle you feed the ticket into a machine, then watch through large windows as your car is automatically brought up by the cylinder mechanism and slid out by the conveyor belt. I am always disappointed that the car they give me back is not the ultra-zoomy sports car of the movie, as my wife is always disappointed that the driver she gets back is not the hunky Will Smith."

In a previous column I said an NFL team gets "at most 19" tries at victory per system. Readers countered that a wild-card team reaching the Super Bowl would get 20 games, as the Baltimore Ravens of 2000 finished 16-4. Don Sauberan of Papillion, Neb., counter-counters that while 20 games may be the max, 19 victories seems the ceiling, because a team could win 20 times only if it went 16-0 during the regular season, yet did not earn a bye. Sauberan notes, "This would require two other teams in the same conference also to go 16-0 and get the two divisional spots via tiebreaker, while the third 16-0 team plays in the wildcard round." Robin Fishbein of Chicago provides the clincher point, that three 16-0 teams from the same conference is an impossibility. They'd all have to be from different divisions, or else would have inflicted defeats on each other in their annual home-and-home meetings; yet in any group of



shameless praise. Cunningham reports she is "a medical billing analyst and one of your liberal female football fans." Here is her shameless praise: "If George W. Bush wants to fix America's health-care mess, he should put Lynda Cunningham in charge of billing analysis. Nobody understands modern health-care economics better than her." Add that to your resume, Lynda, and just leave out that it was NFL.com that said it about you.

### **This Week's Challenge**

The long, cold, lonely offseason approaches -- seven whole months without scantily clad cheer-babes and testosterone-pumped men dancing in the end zone. What is your way of surviving the football offseason? Explain using the link at Reader Animadversion.

### **Next Week**

Have the beer and chips ready at XI:XXX Eastern!



## God did not watch the Super Bowl, but everybody else did!

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Feb. 8, 2005) -- Here is what Bill Belichick should do in the offseason: 1) Determine the origin of the universe; 2) Bring peace to the Middle East; 3) Write the definitive history of the Peloponnesian Wars.

The guy has just won three Super Bowls in four years using castoffs, who-dats and low-round draft picks, so what can't Belichick do? This week football enthusiasts will be talking about whether Tom Brady is not only one of the best-ever quarterbacks, is he already *the* best-ever quarterback. Tuesday Morning Quarterback wonders if we shouldn't be asking: Is Belichick already *the* best-ever coach? And remember, Belichick was considered a failure at Cleveland, where he compiled a modest 37-45 record. During his Browns years, Belichick was widely mocked for grimacing and looking disoriented on the sideline. Then he had his weird episode of being head coach of the Jets for about three hours, and again was widely derided. Now we should be discussing whether he is *the* best-ever coach.

One lesson to learn: Know what Belichick did was he was initially unsuccessful, then widely mocked? He didn't give up.

Super Bowl XXXIX was a clinic on the difference between a team that has a smart game plan (New England) and one that merely does whatever it did last week (Philadelphia). It was a clinic on the difference between a team that reacts to what the opponent is doing (New England) and a team that does not react (Philadelphia).

On the latter point, at halftime Patriots safety Eugene Wilson, who had a dominating game in the AFC championship, went out injured. In trotted rookie safety Dexter Reid, with a grand total of two career starts. Seeing Reid, yours truly exclaimed to the gent next to me, "Immediately Philadelphia will attack this guy. Watch the Eagles set two receivers on the same side so Reid is forced to cover the slot guy, and the slot guy runs the post."

Play after play after play of the second half, Philadelphia made no attempt to attack Reid. Endlessly the Eagles ran what they always run -- outs and fades, which are patterns that go after the cornerbacks, not the safeties. No post pattern and no tight-end seam pattern, the other play that attacks the safety. Philadelphia acted as if it had not even noticed Wilson was out, though before snaps, New England veteran safety Rodney Harrison was often moving Reid around because the rookie wasn't sure where to line up.

Finally, with Philadelphia down 24-14 and less than two minutes remaining, the Eagles set two wide receivers on the left, and slot man Greg Lewis ran a post, meaning Reid had to cover him. "At last, the post!" yours truly screamed like a lunatic as the play started, engaging stares from those around me. Thirty-yard touchdown reception. Where oh where was this play until you were desperate, oh Eagles? See in-depth Super Bowl analysis below.

In other football news, the long, cold, lonely offseason is one Pro Bowl away. Non-football enthusiasts of the world might not believe this, but there are actually more months of the year when the NFL is not playing (seven) than when it is (five). There is more time every year for family outings, to attend cultural events, for scenic walks through picturesque parks, than there is for being glued to the tube for football. The NFL has not yet taken over all of the country's time! The seven calm months are upon us -- use

them wisely.

### **Stats of the Week**

New England became the first team to post back-to-back 17-2 seasons.

### **Stats of the Week No. 2**

New England committed one turnover in the playoffs.

### **Stats of the Week No. 3**

Winning nine consecutive postseason games with Tom Brady at quarterback, New England has committed only six turnovers, while collecting 24 from the opposition.

### **Stats of the Week No. 4**

Eagles defensive end Derrick Burgess had more sacks in the playoffs than in the regular season.

### **Stats of the Week No. 5**

All three New England Super Bowl victories have come by three points, all with the final margin an Adam Vinatieri field goal.

### **Stats of the Week No. 6**

Emmitt Smith, who has taped his ankles for the last time, rushed for 937 yards in his first NFL season and 937 yards in his final NFL season. (Stat from reader Ralph Robinson of Brookline, Mass.)

### **Stats of the Week No. 7**

In the past five seasons, Donovan McNabb has been intercepted only 50 times in 73 regular-season starts. (Stat from reader Bill Patzer of Yardley, Pa.)

### **Stats of the Week No. 9**

In the last period, McNabb has been intercepted 12 times in 12 playoff starts. (Stat from FootballOutsiders.com.)

### **Stats of the Week No. 10**

Of the NFL's 32 teams, only 13 have an all-time winning percentage in the regular season.

### **Stats of the Week No. 11**

Of the NFL's 32 teams, only 12 have an all-time winning percentage in the postseason since the 1970 AFL-NFL merger.

### **Super Bowl Cheerleader No. 1**

After a season seeking cheerleaders with professional credentials or serious literary tastes, TMQ now drops this pretense and will choose for the last two columns strictly on the classic basis of sheer beauty. The first Super Bowl cheerleader is Lauren of the Philadelphia Eagles, who certainly passes the test of sheer beauty, yet even has a serious credential -- she's an eighth-grade science teacher. How come no teacher TMQ ever had looked like this? I would have studied harder and brought more apples to school!

As with all Eagles cheerleaders, readers are urged to click on the tabs for Lauren's calendar picture and photo album.

### **Please Tell Me This Study Was Not Federally Funded No. 1**

Two researchers at the University of California at San Diego photographed dogs and their owners in a park, then asked college students to match dogs to masters. The researchers concluded that students usually were able to match photos of purebred dogs to masters, but, reassuringly, that "judges found no resemblance between mutts and their owners." Thus, two professors of psychology concluded, pet lovers "tend to choose a dog that looks like them, rather than owners and dogs grow alike over time." The study appeared in the journal *Psychological Science*, flagship publication of the American Psychological Society. TMQ's response: "Zo, editors of *Psychological Science*, vat deep-seated neurozis makes you zink zat how people pick dogs is ein zcientific issue, ja?" My worry: Geneva, the brainless Official Dog of TMQ, is a Chesapeake retriever, noble state dog of Maryland, and she's purebred. If I picked her because she looks like me, doesn't this mean that I look like --

### **Please Tell Me This Study Was Not Federally Funded No. 2**

A team of researchers from Harvard, Cambridge and the Universite de Provence in France have determined how a Venus fly trap closes.

### **Sweet Play of the Super Bowl**

Philadelphia has taken a 7-0 lead at 9:55 of the second quarter, and to this point the Eagles defense had dominated, holding New England to one first down. What do you do against an aggressive pass rush? Throw screens. On first down, New England screens right to Corey Dillon for 13 yards. Now, they'll never make the same call on back-to-back plays, will they? Screen left to Dillon for 16 yards. Note to Notre Dame opponents: Charlie Weis likes make the same call on back-to-back plays, which NFL defenses never caught on to. The screen pass is among the most effective plays for slowing down a rush, yet strangely NFL teams use it sporadically. Weis ended up calling four screen passes, all for first downs. A 14-yard screen completion to Kevin Faulk at the start of the fourth quarter put New England on the Philadelphia 2, whence it scored the touchdown that made it 21-14.

### **Sweet Play of the Super Bowl No. 2**

Trailing 7-0, the defending champions reached second-and-6 on the Philadelphia 19 right before the two-minute warning. New England lined up with four wides, then Corey Dillon went in motion from the slot left to wide left. Three receivers were on the right. Earlier in the game, the Patriots had shown this formation and then thrown a slant to the closest man of three on the right. This time Tom Brady pumped toward the closest man on the right and threw to the middle of three, Troy Brown, for a 12-yard gain that gave the Patriots first-and-goal. When New England came out in this set, I immediately looked toward the closest man on the right. It worked on me, and worked on the Philadelphia defense! "Series" plays are ones where one action sets up a variation for later. New England used several "series" plays; Philadelphia endlessly ran outs and fades.

### **Sweet Play of the Super Bowl No. 3**

It wasn't only the touchdown pass to linebacker Mike Vrabel. (Vrabel caught a touchdown pass in Super Bowl XXXVIII -- yet Philadelphia seemed to have no idea he might get the ball!) It was that every time New England faced a short-yardage or power-rushing situation, the Patriots gave Philadelphia a different blocking look: unbalanced right; an extra guard at tight end; a linebacker at tight end; three extra blockers, no wide receiver. Almost all of New England's short-yardage plays resulted in gains, almost always on power runs. When Philadelphia faced short yardage, it lined up in standard formations and threw. New England has won three of the past four Super Bowls in part by following this mantra: Change game plans constantly. Teams have tried to beat New England by doing whatever they did the week before. When is the rest of the NFL going to catch on?

### **Sour Tactics of the Super Bowl**

Down 24-14 with 5:40 remaining, Philadelphia *did not go hurry-up*. Play after listless play the Eagles went back into the huddle, then lackadaisically strolled to the line as the clock, now their greatest opponent, relentlessly ticked. After the 5:40 play, Philadelphia went back into the huddle and did not snap the ball until 5:10 remained. After a play at 4:19, Philadelphia went back into the huddle and did not snap the ball until 3:45. After a play at 3:28, Philadelphia went back into the huddle and did not snap the ball until 2:55. Back to the huddle again, indolent walk to the line again and no snap until 2:20 remained. Not one play called from the line in no-huddle fashion! Yours truly often attends high-school football games, and when teams that are trailing exhibit no sense of urgency at the end, I am tempted to yell, *Coach, can you see the game clock?* I tried yelling this to Andy Reid, but the F-22 fighters overhead drowned me out. Philadelphia scored with 1:48 remaining to pull within 24-21. Because the Eagles had not run a hurry-up drive, the clock situation lured them into the game-ending fatal error noted in the next item.

Reader Nathan Henry of Wilmington, Dela., offers this new Eagles' fight song, to be sung to the tune of *Fly, Eagles, Fly*:

*Walk, Eagles, walk  
With no sense of urgency!  
Talk, Eagles, talk  
Form a huddle 1, 2, 3.  
Take your time, have a chat  
We don't care where the clock is at.  
Walk, Eagles, walk  
With no sense of urgency!*

### **Sour Play of the Super Bowl No. 1**

Scoring to make it 24-21 with 1:48 remaining, holding two time-outs, Philadelphia lined up to onside kick. *Aaaiiiiiiiyyyyyyyyyeeeeeeeeeee!* yours truly lamented aloud. An expected onside kick has one chance in 10 of being recovered. Had the Eagles kicked away, then held the Patriots to three downs and a punt, Philadelphia would have had the ball close to midfield with almost a minute remaining -- very workable distance to tie the game and force overtime, and decent distance to win outright. New England recovered the onside; the Eagles held the Patriots to three downs and a punt, but because of the field-position sacrifice, took over on their own 5 with 46 seconds remaining and hope lost. Why roll the dice for a highly unlikely onside-kick recovery when there was a realistic shot at getting the ball back at midfield? Especially when a field goal was all the Eagles needed!

### **Sour Play of the Super Bowl No. 2**

Now New England is lining up to punt from the Philadelphia 36 with 55 seconds remaining. Yours truly wondered if we would see all 11 Eagles rushing the punter. Or a trick-play return, since now the situation is desperate -- even if the punt rolls into the end zone for a touchback, Philadelphia's chances of moving 50 yards into field-goal position in less than a minute without a time-out are slim. Instead the Eagles rushed only five gentlemen, allowing punter Josh Miller plenty of time to set up a placement kick. Then, as the punt boomed, both Philadelphia return men stepped up and out of the play, simply watching as the ball rolled dead on the Eagles 5 and Philadelphia's Super Bowl dreams rolled dead with it. On this ultra-monster down, the entire Philadelphia kick-defense team did nothing at all -- merely stepped out of New England's way! The game might have come down to a phenomenal finish had Philadelphia done anything on this punt. Instead, the Eagles stepped out of the Patriots' way, politely handing them a third Lombardi trophy.

### **Cruise Ship Report**

One of the cruise ships parked in the St. Johns River at Jacksonville, providing floating hotel space for high-rollers, was the Seven Seas Navigator. "Occupying the uppermost niche in cruising, she offers her 490 guests an unusual level of luxury and some of the highest space and service ratios at sea. From her all-suite, all-ocean-view accommodations with their luxurious marble baths to her signature cuisine to her superbly attentive staff, she has few equals," the ship's promotional materials say. Looking to stretch out? Get the Master Suite with 1,173 square feet of space.

## Super Bowl Cheerleader No. 2

From the Patriots, Amber van Eeghen, a substitute teacher. How come TMQ never had a teacher who -- oh, forget it. According to her team bio, Van Eeghen did not make her high-school cheerleading squad, having to settle for a slot on the pom-pom team. Now she has flounced on the sidelines at the Super Bowl. So even the New England *cheerleaders* are castoffs turned into champions!

## Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed at All

Game scoreless in the first quarter, Philadelphia had first-and-goal on the New England 8. Run the ball! Run the ball! Even if you end up settling for a field goal, a little birdie told me you would have given anything for a field goal at the end. Run the ball! Instead the first-down call is one of what will be many of the evening's first-down play-fakes that fools no one. Donovan McNabb sprints backward, sees he is in trouble and, instead of just taking a short sack, spins and runs farther backward before being sacked at the 24. On the next snap, McNabb heave-hoes a crazy interception that is nullified by a penalty off the ball. So now it's Eagles first-and-10 on the New England 19. Surely after back-to-back disaster passing plays, Philadelphia will come to its senses and run. A play-fake that fools no one, and McNabb heave-hoes a crazy interception. Oh, how they will wish at the end they had kicked a field goal on this possession.

## If the Universe Is a Doughnut, Where's the Jelly?

Recently some astronomers proposed that the universe is shaped like a gigantic donut. Then a competing group proposed that the universe actually is shaped like a gigantic soccer ball. The cosmic-doughnut group, based at the University of Pennsylvania, took exception to the cosmic-soccer-ball gang, who are mainly French academics. Cosmic-donut supporters asserted if the whole universe is a soccer ball, then individual views of the sky should resemble a sliced bagel.

Both the donut and soccer-ball camps hold that when astronomers scan deep space, the infinity they think they see is an illusion. In some doughnut-shaped or soccer-inspired or bagel-sliced way, the cosmos appears much larger than it is. Cosmologists estimate there are at least 100 billion galaxies; actually, these researchers contend, what we observe is reflections of a much smaller number of galaxies: a traveler moving at super-speed straight out into the universe would eventually end up back at the starting point, not continue forever. The universe is an illusion? Well, this seems easier to swallow than the idea that all material for the entire cosmos popped out of a single point with no content, as Big Bang theory maintains.

## Hidden New England Play

Game scoreless, the Patriots had first-and-10 on their own 3. New England came out with four wides; Tom Brady took three steps back to pass, then handed to Corey Dillon on a fast-draw action, 7-yard gain and now the Patriots are not in jeopardy of surrendering a safety. This play had no major impact on the game; it's an example of New England's ability to have well-designed plays ready for any down-and-distance. It's also an example of how, if you want to win the Super Bowl, you cannot be afraid to hand the ball to a running back.

## Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB Non-WR Super Bowl MVP

My Super Bowl MVP is center Dan Koppen of the Patriots, who played one of the best offensive-line games I've ever seen. Repeatedly Jeremiah Trotter blitzed up the middle, and never did he bring down Tom Brady, because Koppen and his line-mates blocked so well. Koppen was out leading the blocking on three of the four screen passes that gained yards and changed the dynamic of the game by slowing down the Philadelphia rush. And there wasn't a blown line call for the Patriots all night, which means the center did a good job in making calls, too. My Non-QB Non-RB Non-WR Super Bowl MVP runner-up: Patriots linebacker Roosevelt Colvin, who played much of the game at standup defensive end in New England's unorthodox 2-5-4 set. Philadelphia tried to run off tackle at the New England linebackers in the first half, and though you would think a light 2-5-4 alignment would be easy to run against, you would think wrong. Then in the fourth quarter, Colvin made the game's biggest hidden play. New England has just gone ahead 21-14, and McNabb has thrown incomplete on first down on another of those play-fakes

nobody bought. On second down, Philadelphia pitched to Brian Westbrook; Colvin made a great tackle to haul him down for a 6-yard loss. Incompletion on third and long, Philadelphia punts, New England drives to make it 24-14, and not even half-naked cheerleaders on a chilly night will be enough to save the Eagles.

### **Sure You're in the Super Bowl, But What Are Your Plans for Next Year?**

A few weeks ago, this column noted the irony that when the NFL postseason begins -- and the playoffs are what the whole thing is about -- interest simultaneously declines. Each week there are fewer teams left standing, and hence fewer fan cohorts directly interested in results. Thus even when it's early January, many NFL enthusiasts are already looking ahead to free agency and the draft. This shifting the focus ahead to next season when this season isn't even over was perfectly epitomized on ESPN's Super Bowl pregame show, when a segment contemplated what offseason financial issues the Eagles and Patriots would face. They hadn't even finished playing yet!

### **The Nielsen Ratings Service Was Unable to Determine Whether God Watched the Super Bowl**

On media day before the Super Bowl, Terrell Owens declared, "I think God put me on this stage for a certain reason. ... I think God is using me [and] put me on a platform to really show the world how great he is. God has put me in the position, and I'm welcoming that challenge. Just by the timing of me getting hurt, he had to sit me down and put things into perspective for me. And that's what he's done. He put me on the biggest stage of my life to show people how great he is." Many commentators ridiculed the notion that God would allow 150,000 people to die in terror in the Indian Ocean tsunami, but intervene in Terrell's football career in order to bring him more publicity. As a churchgoer, I add: if God cares who wins football games, we are all in worse trouble than we thought. Whether God intervenes in daily life is a complicated question in theology. But supposing there is divine influence in events, God help us, as it were, if it's used up on touchdown passes.

There's a second problem in what Owens said, and in similar, though less extreme, statements that athletes sometimes make -- that their victories are really victories for God, or that Allah or Jesus helped them prevail. Praising God for success in sports can be a form of self-flattery. When an athlete says God helped him win a game, he's saying that in a world of poverty, inequality and war, the Maker believes the athlete's touchdown or interception was more important, and thus worthy of divine intervention, than the active suffering or quiet unhappiness of billions of human beings. "God wanted me to win" is an awful lot like saying, "God cares more about my sports career than about the 20 million people who have died of AIDS in Africa."

Of course, many athletes who praise God after victory do so because what they want to express is humility. But it just doesn't work. The way to express humility after a sports victory is to praise your teammates, because they actually had something to do with the victory. Don't praise God, because God had nothing to do with whether both your feet came down inbounds.

At this point, the athlete who is sincerely religious might respond, "What I mean is that if I live a moral life and then prevail at the Super Bowl, this gives glory to God, and shows people that if they live a moral life, they will be rewarded, too." That sentiment is admirable. But sometimes athletes who are completely contemptible human beings prevail at the Super Bowl, and then what is the message? Observing the world, we don't see much relationship between those whose for whom virtue comes first and those who get on magazine covers or receive megabucks bonuses. Living a moral life is a goal unto itself, and is its own reward: the reason to live morally, regardless of whether your inspiration is faith or secular philosophy, is that living morally is the right thing to do. As for giving glory to God -- when you help your fellow man or woman, this gives glory to God. Sports events are only games.

### **The Athlete's Prayer**

In addition to cringing when athletes say God helps them catch passes, yours truly cringes whenever some member of the clergy delivers up a victory prayer before a game. There was no prayer before the Super Bowl, which was appropriate: prayer should be reserved for matters more important. Should athletes pray at all regarding sports? My view is that it is one thing to pray for inner strength, quite another to pray that God crush your opponent. A few years ago for the ecumenical website

Belieftnet.com www.belieftnet.com, I wrote an Athlete's Prayer that might be spoken without vanity or enmity. Here it is:

*God, let me play well but fairly.  
 Let competition make me strong but never hostile.  
 Forbid me to rejoice in the adversity of others.  
 See me not when I am cheered, but when I bend to help my opponent up.  
 If I know victory, allow me to be happy;  
 if I am denied, keep me from envy.  
 Remind me that sports are just games.  
 Help me to learn something that matters once the game is over.  
 And if through athletics I set an example, let it be a good one.*

### **Economics Lesson No. 1**

In stores and restaurants in Seward, Alaska, signs proclaim, FEE IN LIEU TAX ADDED. Alaska has no sales tax or income tax, two facts of which the state's politicians endlessly boast. But many jurisdictions, including Seward, impose a "fee in lieu of tax." Just a fee, thank goodness it's not a tax. It might not be long until IRS forms have a line that says, "Deficit reduction assessment in lieu of tax."

### **Economics Lesson No. 2**

Last week, my literary agent called -- he's a guy I've made hundreds and hundreds of dollars for. My 9-year-old, Spenser, who answered the phone, afterward asked, "Dad, do agents have agents? Do they exist as part of some endless chain?" I explained that, well, this was pretty much how the entire globalized modern economy works.

### **Tuesday Morning Quarterback in the News**

On Sunday, yours truly contributed this article about the Super Bowl to the august *New York Times*. (That's the august paper, not an August edition.) But the article did not run in the sports pages, it ran in the Week in Review, the section of analytical articles about solemn subjects, slipped among somber think-pieces on Social Security restructuring and Japan-China relations. I am now officially a football intellectual! But then, it's not like there is competition. Cultural note: editors told me I could not say "cheer-babes" in the august *New York Times*. "Cheer-studs," on the other hand, was acceptable. Take it away, semioticians!

### **Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!**

Game tied at 7 on the first possession of the third quarter, New England faced third-and 6. Philadelphia had been blitzing a lot in the first half. Yet surely the Eagles know Tom Brady loves to be blitzed on third-and-long, and has consistently burned teams that blitz him on third-and-long. Nevertheless, it's a blitz! Six Eagles cross the line, easy 27-yard completion to Deion Branch. Five snaps later, New England has second-and-10 on the Nesharim 23, another six-blitz and another easy completion to Branch, who gets the ball to the 2. New England scores, and the defending champs have the lead they will never relinquish.

### **Never Hire a Virtual Assistant Who Isn't Certified**

Recently I received an e-mail from a woman who does audio-visual work. Her name was followed by this title: Certified Professional Virtual Assistant.

### **Super Bowl Cheerleader No. 3**

The third is Ashley S. of the Eagles, a dance student at the University of the Arts in Philadelphia. According to her team bio, asked "What's in your CD player?" Ashley answered, "Janet Jackson." Ashley, during Super Bowl Week the correct answer to that question is, "Paul McCartney." As with all Eagles cheerleaders, readers are urged to click on the tabs for her calendar picture and photo album.

## SUPER BOWL ANALYSIS

It bears repeating that New England has won three of the past four Super Bowls in part by constantly varying its game plans. Week in, week out, the Patriots do things differently from the week before. Most NFL teams vary their game plans surprisingly little. Pressed on this, coaches often say, "Tactics are overrated, we just have to execute better." This is the same as saying, "It's not the coaching staff's fault; the players are to blame." Bill Belichick now has spectacularly demonstrated that tactics are not overrated: constantly varying the game plan creates an edge. When will the rest of the NFL catch on?

On defense, New England opened with an unusual 2-5-4 alignment, with five linebackers on the field. Romeo Crennel has used this before. But he didn't use it in the previous few games, and Philadelphia seemed prepared only for what New England had done in the previous few games -- always a mistake. Last week, as every logical indicator said Philadelphia had no chance unless it established the run, Tuesday Morning Quarterback speculated that "Belichick will leapfrog to the conclusion that since everyone expects Philadelphia to run, the Eagles will try to be clever by passing instead -- and therefore the Patriots will come into the game wanting to stop the pass. Eagles, you must run! Belichick knows Andy Reid's staff has a four-year pass-wacky record, and assumes Reid won't be able to resist the temptation to call pass after pass in their first Super Bowl." Sure enough, New England deployed five linebackers to stop the short passes that are the heart of Reid's pass-wacky system. What's really impressive is how this front shut down the Eagles' token attempts to run. Huge offensive linemen ought to have the advantage blocking multiple linebackers. Yet in the first half, when Philadelphia was still making a token attempt to run, the Patriots held Eagles rushers to 37 yards on 11 carries. Of course, New England's defensive game plan might have come crashing down had Philadelphia made any attempt whatsoever to exploit Dexter Reid when the shaky rookie safety took the field in the second half. But why change your tactics in reaction to what is happening on the field? That seemed to be the Eagles' coaches' feeling.

On offense, New England used formation after formation. Multiple-receiver sets; motion and "spin" motion (the motion man changes direction); I-backfields and divides; heavy formations with extra blockers; an unbalanced line; you name it. So many Patriots players were shuttling in and out between each snap that Jacksonville should have built an extra monorail to the New England sideline. (There was a lot of in-and-out on defense for the Patriots, too, as down linemen would replace those extra 'backers for occasional snaps so that Philadelphia could never settle in.) The multiple looks caused Philadelphia defenders to weary or make mistakes, since the Eagles played stout defense most of the first half, but began being caught out of position with New England's first touchdown -- Pro Bowl corner Lito Sheppard *completely* lost track of his man, David Givens, in the corner of the end zone. And New England stuck to running the ball, even when Philadelphia stuffed the Patriots' first few runs. The Flying Elvii ended up with 112 yards rushing, a decent total; as important, their runs made play-fakes work in the second half.

Philadelphia's defensive game plan was to blitz often. It's true the Eagles are the only team in the NFL that, in recent years, has come out ahead by blitzing. But Tom Brady loves to be blitzed, and Charlie Weis loves it when defenses blitz -- why play to the opponent's strengths? All the blitzing led to only two sacks and no blitz-caused turnovers, which is a pretty middling outcome. Meanwhile the Eagles gave up several big plays while blitzing. In the NFC championship against Atlanta, the Eagles showed they could play sound, conservative, position-oriented defense. In the Super Bowl, they gambled too much by blitzing, and as gamblers know, the house usually wins. If you blitz a lot and don't get to the quarterback, you'll lose. Just as Pro Bowl corner Sheppard played a poor game, Pro Bowl linebacker Jeremiah Trotter, who middle-blitzed frequently, was hardly a factor, frequently knocked on his keister (this is a technical term) by the Patriots' who-dat offensive line.

On offense, Philadelphia's game plan was: More of Same. The Eagles threw 51 times and rushed 17 times, thoughtfully doing exactly what they were expected to do. While New England was varying its offensive sets almost down-by-down, Philadelphia used the same few sets the entire game. The Eagles' tight end, for example, was always on the right, sparing New England the inconvenience of so much as having to adjust to the strong side. Philadelphia ran no reverses or end-arounds, no screens -- nothing to slow down the New England rush or complicate the Patriots' backside pursuit. Over and over, Philadelphia called the same handful of bread-and-butter West Coast plays; the out, the halfback middle curl, the short crossing route and the fade. Devastatingly, when the shaky rookie safety came in for the second half, Philadelphia did not react -- only one post pattern and no tight-end seam patterns. Endlessly in the second half, Philadelphia threw *away* from the confused rookie. What a fiasco.



maybe this kind of research will lead to warp drive. But given human history, isn't it more likely that if this research has a usable product, it will be antimatter bombs? Pound for pound, an antimatter bomb would be *far* more destructive than a thermonuclear bomb. In theory an antimatter bomb the size of a baseball could obliterate a city. Doesn't anyone remember that some of the researchers who made the breakthroughs that led to nuclear bombs, thinking they were only pursuing pure knowledge for its own sake, later said they wished they had left Pandora's box closed?

### **More Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization**

A magazine called *New York Dog* has come into existence. It's for people who live in expensive Manhattan doorman buildings and pamper their dogs.

### **Communism Will Lease the Rope That Is Used to Hang It**

The *Wall Street Journal* recently reported that Western European governments have begun leasing huge Ukrainian-owned Antonov 124 jets to ferry supplies to Afghanistan to support their troops there. The Antonov 124 was originally built during the Cold War to transport weapons that would be used to attack Western Europe. One of the missions of the old Soviet Union's military was to prevent Western troops from entering Afghanistan.

### **Cheer-Babes Fail to Appease the Football Gods**

The kickoff temperature was 59 degrees at Alltel Stadium with 12 miles-per-hour winds, but it felt colder -- yours truly was glad to have on a sweater and windbreaker. Nevertheless both the Philadelphia and New England cheerleading squads came out in minimalist two-piece numbers that left little to the imagination. Naturally the halftime score was tied, since cheerleader professionalism was tied. Then, after halftime, the Patriots cheerleaders put on jackets while the Eagles cheerleaders showed outstanding professionalism by continuing to wear nothing but their bikini-esque "summer" outfits throughout the length of this February game. And yet the Eagles were not crowned with victory. Tuesday Morning Quarterback has no explanation. During the offseason, I will journey alone to a distant mountaintop and beseech the football gods to reveal how the team with the least-dressed cheerleaders could possibly have lost the big game.

## **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

### **Reader Animadversion**

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Register it at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com). Include your name and hometown, and I might quote from your e-mail and cite your name and hometown unless you instruct me otherwise.

Kelly Chaplin was among many to point out that the longest upcoming Super Bowl will be LXXXVIII in 2054, not LXXXIX in 2055. The winners of Super Bowl LXXXVIII will have to receive two rings, for adjoining fingers, each with half of the numerals.

Laura Wood points out this article, by Bob Brody, with some unusually useful stats. Topher Connors of Dayton, Ohio, points out this lovely Valentine's Day gift package for sale by the Indianapolis Colts, which includes travel drink cups adorned with swimsuit pictures of Colts cheer-babes. A welcome gift for any traditional male! But maybe not the ideal Valentine's present for the Indianapolis-area wife or girlfriend, Connors notes.

Still more entrants on what to rename the Seahawks: Bernardo Lopez of Mexico City suggests the Seattle Butterfingers, with an obvious candy-bar marketing tie-in. Ben Berry of New York City suggests the Seattle Antibodies, which can't catch a cold. C. M. Hilton of London, England, suggests the Seattle Clangers, combining the "clang" sound of a dropped pass and the 1960s British children's series. Meanwhile David Pinkus suggests that if the Jets do move back to New York City, TMQ call them the Idlewilds -- a jet-related name from the Big Apple's bygone days.

Yours truly has been complaining about the health implications of fast-food megaburgers such as the 1,418-calorie Monster Thickburger at Hardee's. Tom Cammalleri of Westlake Village, Calif., notes that many praised, sit-down restaurants serve heart-destroying smart weapons. PF Chang's, a place that normally wouldn't be mentioned in the same paragraph as Hardee's, McDonald's or Burger King, delivers 1,330 calories and 82 grams of fat in its Orange Peel Beef, for example. That's more fat in one serving than experts recommend as an entire day's limit -- and it is standard to order several servings of Chinese. Andy Goldberg of Durham, N.C., notes the hip and oft-praised Cheesecake Factory serves up deserts that make the Monster Thickburger seem abstemious. He notes, "One slice of Cheesecake Factory's carrot cake has more calories and fat than a Monster T-Burger, at 1560 calories and 84 grams. Slices of their Black Out, Amy's Fudge and Fabulous Chocolate Mousse cakes all have about 1400 calories, same as the Monster Thickburger -- and you eat these deserts *after* consuming a fatty, high-calorie meal." Doesn't Cheesecake Factory want its patrons to survive long enough to return and dine again?

A previous column detailed how the ridiculous new baseball name "the Los Angeles Angels at Anaheim" translates to "the the Angels Angels at Anaheim." Bob Carleton of Everett, Mass., notes that Taco Bell offers "grilled carne asada steak." Since *carne asada* means "roasted meat," the product is "grilled roasted meat steak."

Finally, last week the column noted the new Arizona Cardinals logo, which team officials described as an aggressive bird featuring a "more predatory beak." Jentry Thomason of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, notes the cardinal is not a predator: "Its beak is made for cracking nuts, not snaring fish from a lake." Maybe that's what is holding back this franchise -- the team is named after a herbivore!

### Last Week's Challenge

The long, cold, lonely NFL offseason descends -- seven whole months without testosterone-pumped gentlemen colliding and half-naked cheer-babes hip-hopping. Last week's Challenge was to explain your strategy for surviving the NFL offseason.

Many, many readers -- including Dennis Remie of Sittard, the Netherlands, Europe -- reported that their strategy was to play an unhealthy amount of the Madden or ESPN NFL video games. "I have played a total of approximately 50 seasons of Madden 2003 and 2004," Joe Stromberg of Bloomington, Ind., notes.

Jasmine Noel of New York City said she would try to persuade her local cable company to carry NFL Network so she could watch NFL Europe. Many readers -- including Chad Johnson of Fort Wayne, Ind. -- suggested watching Arena League games. Well, better that than prowling the streets. But TMQ never has been sanguine on football-like substance. I'd suggest attending opera or modern dance, and save your football hours for the NFL.

A depressing number of readers suggested they survive the offseason by looking forward to, and then analyzing, the draft. Peter Best of Phoenix writes, "I sink deeper and deeper into depression with each passing week until the draft. Then I get an incredible high from the draft. Then, the depression starts in again, this time even worse than before, until the end of July, when the teams head back to training camp and I know football is just around the corner."

Many readers, including Suzie Alacron, said they would survive the NFL offseason by watching NHL hockey. Or not. "Never mind, I'll probably play a lot of darts," Alacron writes.

Bryan Miles of Cleveland, now stationed at Fort Bragg, N.C., reports, "When the season ends, I'll probably do what most of us Army guys do -- spend some time in our sister country of Iraq. If the wonderful people of Washington can send their cheer-babes out to us overseas again -- Wizards and Redskins, please -- that would be sand-caked bliss." Also on the international front, Alfredo de la Torre of Cuernavaca Morelos, Mexico, reports, "Luckily for us Mexicans, soccer is year-around."

On an average week, Tuesday Morning Quarterback gets 900 entrants to the Challenge, of which my panel of judges scans as many as possible. This week, I received an all-time low 125 entries, which causes me to conclude there is no satisfactory way to survive the NFL offseason and therefore there were

few solutions to propose.

The winner is Chris Laincz of Wynnewood, Pa., who faced the stark metaphysical truth by providing this accounting: "The offseason gives me the opportunity to remember how to talk to non-football freaks, like the woman and girl who live in my apartment. They'll guide me along by reminding me that they are my wife and daughter, and slowly ease me back into reality, the way captive orangutans are slowly released into the jungles of Borneo. Then summer camp starts and I'm back to square one."

In keeping with this season's Challenge policy, Laincz's prize is shameless praise: "Christopher Laincz is the epitome of the modern man, a husband and father who has his priorities in order." Put that in your resume, Christopher, and just leave out that it was NFL.com that said this about you.

### **This Week's Challenge**

Propose a way to beat the New England Patriots: witchcraft and space-alien technology not permitted. Use the link at Reader Animadversion.

### **Next Week**

The lights have been turned off at NFL stadia, but Tuesday Morning Quarterback still has one week left -- check next Tuesday for my annual Bad Predictions Review.



## Tough guy predicts exact final score!

**By Gregg Easterbrook**  
*Special to NFL.com*

*(Gregg Easterbrook will contribute his column to NFL.com readers each week during the NFL season. He is a senior editor of The New Republic, a contributing editor of The Atlantic Monthly and a visiting fellow at the Brookings Institution. His latest book, The Progress Paradox, released by Random House, is in bookstores now.)*

(Feb. 15, 2005) -- Sports pundits love to dash off NFL predictions, confident no one will remember what they foretold. Tuesday Morning Quarterback remembers. I have a mind like a steel vault -- that is, rusty -- but I write things down. Welcome to my annual Bad Predictions Review. You may end the column by thinking, "I should have been mentioned because I predicted the Patriots would beat the Eagles by a field goal" or "I should have been mentioned because I predicted Kurt Warner would have more fumbles than touchdown passes." (Actual preseason prediction that turned out correct, from Clark Judge of CBS SportsLine.) But remember, this is my annual *bad* predictions review.

### Bad Predictions, Category One

Category One is offseason predictions, and "off" is the operative word. Just after last season's Pats-Panthers Super Bowl ended, Len Pasquarelli of ESPN sounded the starter's gun on the predictions derby with these forecasts for 2004: "You don't think a coach as good as Jon Gruden is going to suffer a second consecutive losing season, do you?" The Buccaneers suffered a second consecutive losing season. Pasquarelli continued, "Those naysayers who suggest the game has passed by Joe Gibbs may have to eat their words." It was a low-cal snack, as Washington finished 6-10 and many said the game had passed Joe Gibbs by. Pasquarelli also divined, "Don't laugh. The Giants [are] certainly playoff caliber." Okay, we didn't laugh, but Jersey/A finished 6-10.

Peter King of *Sports Illustrated* was next off in May 2004, predicting Jacksonville would make the Super Bowl; the Jags did not make the playoffs. A few months after predicting Jax would reach the Super Bowl, King covered his bets by also predicting the team would finish 8-8. In spring 2004, King further declared that City of Tampa had the league's best offseason: "I'm not picking the Bucs to win the Super Bowl, but I won't be surprised if they do." Tampa finished 5-11.

Don Banks of *Sports Illustrated* in spring 2004 foresaw, "Our money is on Dennis Green to produce some results" at Arizona. Well, Green did produce "some" results. Banks also predicted the Tennessee Titans "are still very much a Super Bowl threat. Write it down." Okay, I wrote it down. Tennessee finished 5-11. In spring 2004, Sheldon Spencer of ESPN.com predicted, "The Vikings might have a playoff berth secured long before the regular season ends." Minnesota backed into the playoffs at 8-8 on the season's final day.

In the offseason, many forecasters were high on the Detroit Lions. John Clayton of ESPN declared the Lions the league's "most improved" club, having had "the best offseason of any team in football." Chris Berman of ESPN declared, "Detroit is on the way." Of course, he didn't say where. The Lions finished 6-10.

In June 2004, Dan Pompei of *The Sporting News* predicted Broncos over Seahawks in the Super Bowl. Denver would make the Super Bowl because its defense "should be significantly better" than the previous season, Pompei foresaw. The Denver defense, which allowed Indianapolis to jump to a 31-3 first-half lead in the Broncos' 2003 opening-round playoff loss, allowed Indianapolis to jump to a 35-3 first-half lead in the Broncos' 2004 opening-round playoff loss.

B. Duane Cross of *Sports Illustrated* in spring 2004 predicted a Super Bowl of Miami over Minnesota. He

added that Vikings' new linebacker Rod Davis "is a keeper." They kept him on the bench! NFL.com's own Pat Kirwan declared in spring 2004 that Kansas City would win its division, while Oakland would win at least nine games; Kansas City finished third in a four-team division and Oakland won five games.

### **Sheer Looks Cheerleader of the Week**

For the moment TMQ has given up on pretensions of seriousness and is choosing cheerleaders solely on the basis of good looks. Here's Arianna of the Washington Redskins, a dance instructor who has 18 years of studio dance experience and who, according to her team bio, started modeling in middle school. Readers are advised to click on Arianna's photo album, which provides proof of the Redskins' determination to give away nothing to division rival Philadelphia in the competition for fewest ounces of fabric worn on the sidelines.

### **Media Bad Predictions**

The *New York Post* -- same paper that in October 2003 ran an editorial bemoaning the Yankees' loss to the Red Sox in a game that, in fact, the Yankees won -- on July 6, 2004, bannered a front-page "exclusive!" that John Kerry had picked Richard Gephardt as his running mate. That same morning, Kerry chose John Edwards.

### **Government Bad Predictions**

The Central Intelligence Agency, whose director said in 2003 it was certain Iraq possessed chemical and atomic weapons, in 2005 issued a "corrected forecast" saying Iraq had no such weapons.

### **Bonus Sports Bad Predictions**

*Sports Illustrated* predicted Gonzaga and Wisconsin would make the NCAA men's Final Four: both lost in the opening weekend. In December 2004, Syracuse University Chancellor Nancy Cantor said football coach Paul Pasqualoni had her "full vote of confidence." Two weeks later, Cantor fired him.

### **Many Modern Power Boats Can Practically Take Off**

TMQ's favorite aircraft of the moment is the Beriev 200 -- click "aircraft" on the left bar to view it. Beriev is a Russian company that has been building flying boats since the 1930s; merely the concept of "flying boat" is amusing. The new Beriev 200 has jet engines mounted above the fuselage, so that they don't ingest splashing water on takeoff, and cruises at 345 miles per hour, unheard-of speed for an amphibian flying machine. It's a Spruce Goose that works! But as with a lot of impressive technology, the big question with the Beriev 200 is, What do you do with it? The builder is struggling to convince the world's airlines and aviation agencies that they need a huge plane that lands on water, carries 13 tons and accelerates to 345 miles per hour. If you need such an aircraft, please call now while Beriev is still offering to make the 200.

### **Bad Predictions, Category Two**

Now it gets interesting -- predictions made in September, on the eve of the season's start. *USA Today* predicted that "the Packers should make an extended postseason run." Green Bay lost in the opening playoff round. For Minnesota, "a division title appears likely." The Vikings finished 8-8. For the AFC West, "Don't be surprised if the division title comes down to a Raiders-Chiefs clash Christmas Day." Both teams were eliminated when the game was played.

The *New York Times* predicted the Raiders "should be vastly improved;" Oakland won one more game than in 2003. For the Chiefs, "the playoffs seem likely;" Kansas City was among the first teams eliminated. Carolina "will make the playoffs" and the Saints "could have a fast start." The Panthers did not make the playoffs, and instead of a fast start, the Saints had a false start -- New Orleans opened 4-8 while compiling 33 false-start penalties, tops in the NFL. (False-start stat from FootballOutsiders.com.) As for the Philadelphia Eagles, the *New York Times* divined that "a Super Bowl trip may remain elusive."

CBS SportsLine offered four experts whose predicted Super Bowl winners were: Colts, Colts, Seahawks and Redskins. None made the Super Bowl, and one did not make the playoffs. SportsLine forecasters named Mark Brunell as comeback player of the year and Will Smith of New Orleans as rookie of the year; neither ended the season starting for his own team. Clark Judge predicted, "The San Diego Chargers will wind up with the first draft choice for the second consecutive season" while the Kansas City Chiefs move from 29th in total defense into the top 15. San Diego won its division while Kansas City dropped from 29th in defense to 31st." The Lions, Judge added, "are going to surprise people." Detroit surprised only him, finishing 6-10.

Paul Zimmerman of *Sports Illustrated* not only forecast a Super Bowl of New England over Seattle, he forecast an exact final score -- Flying Elvii 27, Blue Men Group 17. Zimmerman had the Chiefs and Panthers in their conference title games; neither made the playoffs. King of *Sports Illustrated* not only forecast a Super Bowl of Broncos over Seahawks, he forecast the exact final score -- Denver 30, Seattle 13. King had the Cowboys in the NFC title game; Dallas did not make the playoffs. Banks of *Sports Illustrated* not only forecast a Super Bowl of Tennessee over Seattle, he forecast an exact final score -- Flaming Thumbtacks 27, Blue Men Group 24. Banks had the Panthers and the Titans in their conference title games; neither made the playoffs. "The Titans really don't have a weakness," Banks predicted, adding, "I don't see Terrell Owens and Jevon Kearse putting the Eagles over the hump."

The *Wall Street Journal* ran three Super Bowl predictions: Denver over Seattle, New England over Seattle and Indianapolis over Seattle. All wrong! Also, the *Wall Street Journal* declared, Philadelphia "can't" make the Super Bowl.

Then there was the incredible ESPN meta-forecast. On the Internet, ESPN.com had 15 football writers and announcers predict the season. Their Super Bowl forecasts: Pats over Seahawks (predicted four times), Chiefs over Eagles (predicted thrice), Pats over Eagles (predicted twice), Chiefs over Panthers, Ravens over Seahawks, Chiefs over Packers, Colts over Eagles, Eagles over Ravens, Eagles over Chiefs. The two correct calls came from Len Pasquarelli and Eric Allen. On air, ESPN bobbleheads forecast a Super Bowl of New England over Philadelphia (called by Chris Berman), Kansas City over Carolina (neither made the playoffs), Colts over Eagles and Colts over Seattle. So three of ESPN's 19 forecasts were correct. On the other hand, 11 of ESPN.com's 38 forecast Super Bowl entrants did not even make the playoffs.

What about NFL.com's preseason predictions? Of seven forecasters, three had New England winning the Super Bowl. So NFL.com was three for seven predicting the Super Bowl winner, while ESPN was only three for 19. Hey ESPN: our forecasters can beat up your forecasters! Though the NFL's Dr. Cheeks predicted the Colts will "take down the Patriots" in the playoffs, while yours truly was totally wrong about everything -- see below.

### **Leftover Stat of the 2004 Season**

Kurt Warner had six touchdown passes and 12 fumbles.

### **Leftover Stat of the 2004 Season No. 2**

Adam Vinatieri kicked the first and last field goal of the 2004 season. Stat from reader Pete Garofalo of Guilford, Conn..

### **Statistic That Must Mean Something**

Seven teams (21 percent of the league) account for 26 Super Bowl victories (66 percent of wins), while five teams (15 percent of the league) account for 18 Super Bowl losses (46 percent of losses). Dallas falls into both categories. Stat submitted by Ryan Pesanka of Charlotte, N.C.

### **Bad Predictions Bonus! Bad Season-Long Predictions**

*USA Today's* Jeff Zilgit went 0-256 in his quixotic attempt to predict an exact NFL final score. ESPN's Chris Mortensen and Merrill Hoge were right just 61 percent of the time picking regular-season games

straight up, the network's Joe Theismann right just 60 percent of the time, the network's Mark Schlereth right just 59 percent of the time. Considering the home team won 57 percent of games in the 2004 regular season, if you simply picked the home team in every game, you would have compiled 57 percent accuracy as a forecaster. These gentlemen did only slightly better. (Note: the picks here are straight-up, the only kind TMQ tracks. The spread is meaningless to football purists, of use only to gamblers; and as I've noted before, my compromise with my Baptist upbringing is to be pro-topless but anti-gambling.)

Then there's the incredible Harmon Forecast. Harmon says it relies on "a mathematical formula that pick (s) winners correctly between 72 and 78 percent of the time, most seasons getting almost 75 percent right. Jim Harmon and his staff are the only forecasters who predict exact scores and chart every college and pro team." A man *and his staff* who do nothing but predict exact final scores? Only in America!

Once, Harmon tabulated its results. Then, for the 2001 season, Harmon forecast the winner only 63 percent of the time. (Again, the topic here is straight-up picks.) The service's response was to stop publishing its own performance. Now Harmon still claims to be right "between 72 and 78 percent of the time," but readers have no idea, since the Forecast does not tally results and does not archive previous forecasts, making it impossible to go back and count up. The only way you can know how Harmon Forecast predictions fared is if you copy them all down, which TMQ does. For 2004, Harmon was correct a mere 62 percent of the time, barely beating what you could have done simply by picking the home team in every game.

Particularly curious for those who follow quixotic attempts to predict exact final scores is that Harmon regularly forecasts outcomes that are statistically atypical. The best chance of getting a final-score prediction correct is to stick to common finals -- 24-21, 21-17, 20-13 and so on. Harmon often forecasts outlier finals. This fall, Harmon forecast St. Louis 18, Buffalo 15; New England 25, Cleveland 12; Minnesota 32, Seattle 19. One week Harmon predicted that Carolina, Jax and Jersey/B would *all* score 19. During the season there were 25 final scores of 21 points, three final scores of 32 points. If you want a chance of predicting an exact final score, tell your staff to stick with common outcomes!

### Sheer Looks Cheerleader of the Week No. 2

Lyndsey of the Raiderettes, who, according to her team bio, is a registered dental assistant and a member of the dental society of Redwood, Calif. So when she tells traditional male patients, "This might hurt a bit," presumably they respond, "Yeah!"

### Bad Predictions, Category Three

Reserved for bad predictions by me. This column's motto is: All Predictions Wrong or Your Money Back. NFL.com is free, get it? So if by chance one of my predictions were correct, you would receive -- oh, never mind.

Annually yours truly predicts the final records of NFL squads. I hit the nail on the head for just three clubs, was within one game of correct for eight clubs and was *way* off (four games or more difference) for 11. This is pretty modest, and my worst performance ever predicting final records. Last season I was exact or within one game for 18 of the 32 clubs; this season, for only 14 of 32. My 2004 performance barely bests a generic prediction that every team would finish 8-8. If you'd predicted that, you would have been exact or within one of exact for 11 of the 32.

Each year in its five years of existence, TMQ has in fact offered a generic prediction, that "The team goin' to Disney World will come from among the group that did not make the cut for *Monday Night Football*." Note: Now that Super Bowl victors no longer make the ceremonial pilgrimage to Disney World, in the future I will forecast "the team goin' to Lego Land." Two of the first three years I made my generic prediction, I was right -- the Ravens in 2001 and Patriots in 2002, Super Bowl victors, did not appear on *Monday Night Football*. (The Rams also won in 2000 after not appearing on Monday Night, but yours truly made no prediction that year.) After the 2003 season, my prediction came oh so close to realization -- Carolina, not a Monday night baby, lost the Super Bowl on the final snap. This season my prediction came oh so close to realization -- Pittsburgh and Atlanta, two of the four championship-round clubs, were not Monday night babies. Had the Super Bowl paired Pittsburgh and Atlanta, yours truly would be boasting of seer-like prowess. Instead my genetic prediction about the Super Bowl failed again, leaving

me two-for-five forecast Lombardi Trophy winners.

I was way off on many other points, for example declaring Drew Bledsoe's career "over" after the Bills fell to 3-6 with Bledsoe playing poorly; Buffalo proceeded to win six of its next seven, as Bledsoe threw 11 touchdown passes against six interceptions. (Yours truly still thinks his career is over, but that's a separate issue.) One prediction I will pat myself on the back for involves the New England offensive line. In my August AFC preview, I noted that New England had lost Damien Woody and Mike Compton to other teams, lost Tom Ashworth and Adrian Klemm to injury; its offensive line was fated to consist entirely of who-dats. Yet, "The Patriots will once again have the best offensive line in the league." And so the Patriots did. This year's Flying Elvii offensive line was comprised of a second-round draft pick, a fifth-round draft pick and three undrafted free agents. The right side of the line (seriously, how many New England offensive linemen can you name without looking?) had a grand total of eight career starts coming into the season. Yet a primary reason the Patriots repeated as Super Bowl champs was a second consecutive season having the league's best offensive line. Consider that in the 2004 Super Bowl, New England's low-paid anonymous offensive line made Carolina's much-hyped megabucks star defensive end, Julius Peppers, disappear; in the 2005 Super Bowl, New England's low-paid anonymous offensive line made Philadelphia's much-hyped megabucks star defensive end, Jevon Kearse, disappear.

### **Bonus Category, "Could" Predictions**

Vague predictions often turn on the word "could." An awful lot of things "could" happen. Anna Kournikova could return my phone calls; the Philadelphia Eagles' cheerleaders could model their lingerie for me for Valentine's Day. The federal budget could show a surplus this year.

Ron Borges of the *Boston Globe* predicted the New Orleans Saints "could end up going to the Super Bowl." The *New York Times* predicted the Redskins "could contend for a playoff spot." Eric Money penny of Fox Sports predicted the Giants "could" make the playoffs. Len Pasquarelli predicted the Saints "could be the next to go from .500 to the big game" while Clinton Portis "could" rush for 2,000 yards. NFL.com's Gil Brandt predicted, "Joey Harrington could lead the Lions into the playoffs." Mike Celizic of MSNBC said that at the Super Bowl, Philadelphia "could" stun the Patriots.

### **Sun to Rise in Morning, *New York Times* Predicts**

"If the mass of the entire Earth were compressed into a black hole, it would be a little ball only a third of an inch in radius. Fortunately, the Earth is in no imminent danger of collapse." Actual quote from the *New York Times* on Aug. 8, 2004. Fortunately, this prediction proved right -- the Earth did not condense into nothing. Note how the paper couched its prediction. The *Times* would say only there is no "imminent" danger the entire planet will evaporate. Obviously the Multicolored Lady wants to avoid snippy letters to the editor if the Earth vanishes at some future point.

### **Outlook Mixed for Next 100 Billion Years, *Washington Post* Predicts**

The *Washington Post* ran a science article with this vital caveat: "It remains impossible to predict the fate of the universe with certainty." Oh, so we can't be *certain* what's going to happen 100 billion years from now!

### **Tuesday Morning Quarterback Man of the Year**

Can there be anyone in United States academia with a more fun curriculum vitae than John Mueller? He holds the Woody Hayes Chair in National Security Studies at Ohio State University. He's also director of the school's Dance Films Archive and writes dance criticism. And he composes musical comedies. National security, Woody Hayes, dance criticism -- not your everyday mix.

Mueller is among the leading contemporary political scientists. His 1989 book *Retreat from Doomsday* argued that war between great powers has become "obsolescent," in part because rising economic output based on intellectual capital makes the lives of the citizens of great-power nations more valuable than anything that could be gained by military victory. Written before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Mueller's book predicted that the Moscow Communist regime was about to unravel because it had based the social structure of the country on the outdated assumption that there would be endless great-power

combat. Needless to say, a few years later the Soviet Union unraveled. Mueller's new book, *The Remnants of War*, shows that despite the Iraq fighting, "there may be fewer wars now than ever before in human history." Armed conflicts have been in decline globally for two decades, while total military deaths are in a long-term trend of decline, despite an ever-rising global population. Humanity, Mueller believes, is finally in the process of wising up to the notion that disputes can be settled without war.

Meanwhile, Mueller is an accomplished dance critic, and author of a popular musical comedy, *A Foggy Day*, which packed 'em in for two years at the Shaw Festival at Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ontario. *The Shaw Festival* is one of the favorite theaters of yours truly. What duties does the Woody Hayes Chair in National Security Studies impose on Mueller? Presumably, he is obliged to write an annual memo advising the Pentagon to run up the middle on third-and-long.

### **"I Work with a Bunch of *Pan Troglodytes*" Doesn't Have the Same Ring**

Having been at the game at Jacksonville, TMQ watched Super Bowl ads on the web site iFilm, where presentation of the ads was "sponsored by Degree," the deodorant. Advertising with a sponsor! This really must be the 21st century. The CareerBuilder.com ads -- the "I work with a bunch of monkeys" spots -- were pretty fun. Except the animals in the office weren't monkeys, they were chimpanzees. As TMQ has pointed out before, animals described as "monkeys" in advertising and filmmaking usually are juvenile chimpanzees. Monkeys are not even in the same genera as chimps. And it's important to get this kind of detail right as a key sector of the NFL fan base is primates.

### **This Week's Stargate Complaint**

One quirk sci-fi that amuses yours truly is when characters make an amazing discovery, and then forget all about it in subsequent episodes. In one episode of *Star Trek: the Next Generation*, the android Data solves a problem by inventing a device that suspends time, freezing everything motionless. Pretty handy device to have around -- but in subsequent episodes, *Enterprise* forgets about Data's invention, never using it when jeopardy could be avoided by freezing time. (This episode contained TMQ's all-time favorite daffy sci fi line: "We can now stop time, but the effect is temporary.") In an episode of *Star Trek Voyager*, an alien showed the crew how to make the shields so strong that the ship could fly directly through the center of a star. In subsequent episodes the super-strong shields were forgotten, and any phaser hit caused the shields to fail.

Now a great example of forgetting something of value has come in the Sci-Fi Channel show *Stargate*. First, the premise of *Stargate* and its spinoff *Stargate Atlantis*: eons ago, a benevolent super-advanced race called The Ancients built portals that allow instantaneous travel among distant worlds. Archeologists find one of these stargates on Earth, and a plucky team of wisecracking commandos is using the portal to explore space and search for weapons to fight the Goa'uld, sinister aliens who want to enslave the galaxy and have a fleet of enormous starcruisers. In last week's *Stargate*, the wisecracking commandos learn the Goa'uld are about to invade a defenseless planet; they travel there to urge the population to flee. On the planet, our heroes find an incredible treasure -- a million-year-old Ancient spaceship that springs to life when they touch it. The spaceship is tiny, sized to fit through a stargate. But the tiny ship possesses such astonishing power that the commandoes use it to destroy the enormous starcruisers approaching the helpless world. At the end of the episode, our heroes step back through the stargate and return to Earth. *They don't take the spaceship!* They've found technology far more powerful than anything possessed by the evil aliens they are fighting, and they simply forget about it. Next week, surely, the commandos will once again be trying to figure out how to destroy Goa'uld starcruisers.

### **Bad Electoral Predictions**

In May 2004 Chuck Todd, editor of the political insider's newsletter *Hotlines*, predicted, "It's going to be Kerry in a rout."

### **Today's TMQ Is 6,678 Words and Has a Single Author, Which Makes Me 152 Times as Productive as an Author in *Science Magazine***

A running amusement of modern science and medicine is the practice of many people, sometimes dozens, signing their names to a research paper. This is done so that all signers can take credit for the

paper on their CVs, and all get brownie points whenever the paper turns on in a citation index. When the list of authors is long and the article itself is short, the practice becomes comic. Check this article in a recent *Science* magazine, technical journal of the American Association for the Advancement of Science. Listing 28 authors, the article is 1,225 words long -- that's 44 words per author! Either people put their names on this article solely for citation-index credit, or each of the 28 authors was assigned to write two sentences. ("Nigel, you write the introduction to the third paragraph. Gina, we need you for a transitional sentence in the conclusion. Phillippe, you supervise the adverbs...") Since no one believes for a minute that a 1,225-word article actually was written by a 28 people, why do prestigious scientific journals go along with this silliness?

### **Cheerleader-Like Substance**

As NFL cheerleaders put away their microskirts till next season, Nathan Campeau of Minneapolis proposes lacrosse cheerleaders as an emergency substitute. He notes that Ellie of the Minnesota Swarm lacrosse team is both a cheerleader and a law student. Her team bio says she has been studying dance since age three -- that's much too late to start by modern dance-prodigy standards!

### **Baseball Predictions Should Cover All Bases**

Reader Tom Cammalleri of Westlake Village, Calif., says that on ESPN's *Baseball Tonight*, Peter Gammons predicted the Dodgers would win the National League West. Then on ESPN.com, he predicted the Arizona Diamondbacks would win the same division.

### **Maybe the Bud Light Institute Isn't a Joke**

There is a Gatorade Sports Science Institute in Barrington, Ill., which produces incredibly scientifically advanced technical papers like this one, "Influence of Graded Dehydration on Hyperthermia and Cardiovascular Drift during Exercise". Here, watch a video tour of the Exercise Sensory Lab, where volunteers huff on Stair Masters and quaff sports drinks as people in lab-technician coats look on. TMQ especially liked the scene of Gatorade being carefully poured out of a laboratory beaker.

### **Bad Predictions, Category Four**

Finally we arrive at predictions made late in the year, especially once Super Bowl entrants were known. Michael Silver of *Sports Illustrated* kicked off the bad predictions endgame by foreseeing, in December, that the Indianapolis offense would lead the Colts to their first Lombardi Trophy. The Indianapolis offense scored three points in its playoff loss.

Before the Pats-Colts playoff meeting, Chris Mortensen of ESPN predicted that Indianapolis would win. After the game, Mortensen said that "based on conversations I've had with qualified executives and coaches around the league" the Patriots, whom just a few days before he had said would lose at home, "may be the greatest team ever." Similarly, before the conference championships, columnist Michael Wilbon of the *Washington Post* predicted Pittsburgh would beat New England. After New England won the Super Bowl, Wilbon wrote, "How can anybody object to favorably comparing the New England Patriots to any of the great NFL champions?"

Halfway through the playoffs, Brian Baldinger of Fox Sports declared that Philadelphia could not make the Super Bowl, which Pittsburgh would win. Before the Eagles-Falcons and Pats-Steelers title meetings, Joe Theismann's column declared he was "so confident he knows what will happen in the AFC and NFC championships that he is already making his Super Bowl pick" -- Patriots over Falcons.

Then there were the quixotic attempts to predict the Super Bowl exact final score. *Sports Illustrated* ran six different predictions -- all wrong. ESPN ran 22 different predictions -- all wrong. *USA Today* ran 25 different predictions -- all wrong. Topping them all was the Scripps-Howard News Service celebrity Super Bowl predictions, compiled by David Nielsen. He rang up no fewer than 100 real celebrities such as John McCain, midlist celebrities such as Susan Anton and Wolfgang Puck and near-celebs such as "professional wrestler Baron von Raschke" (oh, so you mean *that* Baron von Raschke), asking their final score predictions. William Shatner said New England by 35-22. Chamique Holdsclaw said Philadelphia by 27-24. Penn of Penn & Teller said Patriots by 37-17. Chuck Yeager said New England 28-10. Ed Asner said

Eagles by 21-14.

Ninety-nine of the Scripps-Howard celebrity predictions were wrong. But one was right, tough-guy actor Dennis Farina foretelling New England by 24-21. Scripps Howard has been moving a Super Bowl final-score predictions story for 16 years, in that time ringing up 1,341 people, Nielsen says, for their predictions. Farina became only the second of 1,341 to hit the nail on the head: in 1998, Martina Navratilova correctly forecast a Super Bowl final of Denver 31, Green Bay 24.

Reader may recall that for four years, TMQ tracked NFL exact final score predictions in the *New York Times*, and the Final *New York Times* Final-Score Score was 3 of 1,085. Now Scripps Howard celebrities have gone 2 of 1,341. These totals support Tuesday Morning Quarterback's incredibly scientifically advanced calculation, offered in 2001, that someone making sensible conjectures -- that is, not guessing outlier outcomes such a 62-3 game -- has a roughly one-in-500 chance of predicting an exact NFL final score. Add the *New York Times* and Scripps Howard samples up and you get 5 of 2,426. That is just shy of exactly the one-in-500 ratio that yours truly predicted. So at least I predicted the ability of people to predict!

### Winners of the Coveted TMQ Bad Prediction of the Year Award

Second runner-up, Peter King of *Sports Illustrated*. During the offseason he foresaw with super-specificity, "Rex Grossman will be in the Top 10 in quarterback rating on Oct. 1." On the day in question, Grossman was the lowest-rated starting quarterback in the league.

First runner-up, Tuesday Morning Quarterback, NFL.com. From my AFC preview: "No one in his right mind would let Corey Dillon anywhere near a team grounded in unselfishness and chemistry."

Bad Prediction of the Year goes to Michael Felger of the *Boston Herald*, whose NFL preview predicted the Texans would make the playoffs, that Willis McGahee "is still another season away from making an impact," that "Jeff Garcia is a perfect fit who will lead the Browns back to the playoffs" and that "the Eagles still won't make the Super Bowl."

## RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT

### Reader Animadversion

Got a comment or a deeply felt grievance? Hold it until August, because I won't be reading the TMQ mailbox in the offseason.

Recently I had an item on the Arizona Cardinals saying they redesigned their logo so that the bird would have an aggressive, "predatory" beak: but cardinals are herbivores, not predators. Maybe, I mused, being named after an herbivore is the Cards' problem. Brad Bellmore of Chicago counters, "There are other teams named after herbivores that have enjoyed success: the Broncos, Colts and Rams. The trick is to choose an herbivore that elicits thoughts of power, ferocity or majesty. Perhaps the Arizona teams needs to select such an animal. Or change their logo to depict a cardinal like Richelieu from the Three Musketeers. Now, there is a dangerous cardinal."

Last week the column noted Taco Bell's "grilled carne asada steak" means "grilled roasted meat steak." Eric Lund of Anaheim, Calif., home of the Los Angeles Angels of Anaheim -- which translates as "the the Angels Angels of Anaheim" -- reports the city boasts a King Pollo Chicken restaurant. As pollo is chicken in Spanish, the name translates as King Chicken Chicken. Jonathan Clough adds that Starbucks offers "chai tea latte." In India, chai means "tea served with milk," while latte means "milk" in Italian. So the translation of "chai tea latte" would be "tea with milk with tea with milk."

Brian Meldrum of Chicago asks a question yours truly often asks himself -- why don't football teams simply punt the ball out of bounds all the time, not just near the goal line? Meldrum notes, "Every NFL team expects its placekicker to boot the football through uprights spaced approximately six yards apart, and most kickers answer that call with amazing regularity, even at lengthy distances. Given a 3-yard radius-of-error, placekickers seldom err, averaging almost 80 percent success. Why don't punters live up

to that same standard, and angle every punt to land out of bounds at the terminus of the ball's flight path? If punters could angle their punts such that 80 percent landed within three yards on either side of the target, and the target were the out-of-bounds line, this would remove quite a bit of the downside of punting. Returns for touchdowns would be greatly diminished. The punter's average would decline, but the team's net gain on punts might rise." I too wonder why teams do not aim every punt out-of-bounds - - can it really be that punters boom down the middle to pad their average, regardless of the net? Maybe if punting toward the sideline became the standard, opponents would react by always rushing 11 men. Now that would make punts interesting!

Mark Schroeder of Castro Valley, Calif., wants to give the Kansas City Chiefs a cognomen, especially considering their confused imagery. The Chiefs' name, he notes, refers to people, yet none of the team images are people. Their stadium mascot is a wolf, which has nothing to do with the team name. Their helmet logo is an arrowhead. Fans wave tomahawks, but in most American Indian cultures it was the braves, not the chiefs, who carried tomahawks. Schroeder's proposed solution? The Kansas City Flintstones -- the check helmet logo. Mr. Data, make it so!

### Last Week's Challenge

Last week's was to propose a way to beat the New England Patriots, without using witchcraft or space-alien technology. Corey Livermore Green Bay, Wisc., countered, "Is it possible to beat the Patriots even *with* witchcraft and space-alien technology?"

Cindy Joslin of Oshkosh, Wisc., proposes that the key to defeating the Patriots is to beat them at their own game, by constantly changing tactics; she reports that she has sent Green Bay Packers' coaches links to all TMQ columns on this topic. A reader offers similar thoughts with this incredible haiku triptych:

To beat New England,  
the solution is simple;  
Read more TMQ!

Rarely use the blitz,  
Goal-line play-fakes on first down,  
no 'fraidy-cat punts.

No parka for coach,  
Smaller outfits for cheer babes --  
Football gods appeased!  
-- *Dennis Walter, Hanover, Va.*

Tim Smith of Portland, Ore., supposed, "To beat the Patriots, you must wash Belichick's hooded sweatshirt." Craig Brown of Arlington, Va., adds, "In the offseason, NFL owners should scour the land and buy up every New England Patriots' hooded sweatshirt before Belichick can stock his closet."

Dave Elliott of Bellevue, Neb., supposed, "Browbeat the team members with the word 'dynasty' until they either lose their ability to concentrate." Ken Rea of Collingswood, N.J., suggests owners of other NFL teams must sign every available undrafted free-agent on the market, "Otherwise the Patriots will surely again perform the water-to-wine miracle on any free agent they collect."

Blake Gecinger of Greensboro, N.C., suggests, "Play your second string and keep your stars on the bench. The Patriots are winning with guys you never heard of, so bring out your own guys no one has ever heard of." Joe Gurski of Roselle, N.J., has this plan: "As an attorney, I suggest tying the Patriots up in litigation. Get the estate of Elvis Presley to sue for false affiliation and trademark infringement over the logo, a class-action suit by the citizens of Philadelphia seeking compensation for the pain and mental anguish of seeing their team go down in defeat. Is there anything more American than lawsuits?"

Kyle Jen of Lansing, Mich., writes, "I maintain that Tom Brady's football abilities are directly tied to his male-model-esque looks, much as Samson's strength was directly tied to the length of his hair. Since you can't off Brady's looks the way Delilah cut off Samson's locks, the only hope for the rest of the league is that fashion trends shift to a point at which Brady is no longer considered to be of male-model

caliber." The winner of the year's final Challenge is Jake Schumaker of Overland Park, Kan., who proposed that the way to beat the New England Patriots is to get Notre Dame and the Cleveland Browns to hire their top coordinators. We'll soon see if this theory works! In keeping with this year's Challenge policy, his prize is a sentence of shameless praise. Schumaker is a student at Northwestern University and a Kansas City Chiefs' fan. Here is his praise: "Jake Schumaker is the biggest thing to happen to Northwestern University since the 21st Amendment." (This requires you to know that the Woman's Christian Temperance Union, driving force behind Prohibition, was headquartered in Evanston, Illinois, city of the Wildcat school; the 21st Amendment repealed Prohibition. You can still join the Woman's Christian Temperance Union.) Put that line in your CV, Jake, and just leave out that it was NFL.com that said this about you.

### This Week's Challenge

This week's Challenge is to wait until fall, when the Challenge resumes.

### Next Week

This is the Tuesday Morning Quarterback sign-off, though watch for columns around draft time. A reader laments in haiku,

TMQ's last shot.

The offseason starts Tuesday:

long time till next year.

-- John Fitz, Redwood City, Calif.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback suggests you use the cold, lonely NFL offseason to engage in spiritual and emotional growth. Take long walks through scenic nature preserves and try not to think about mega-babes or ultra-hunks. Attend cultural events such as the Shaw Festival, where *The Constant Wife* by Somerset Maugham is the next play up, and tickets may be purchased using Canadian funny-money. Do deep-breathing exercises; studies show that five minutes per day of slow, deliberate breathing, combined with quiet meditation, can reduce blood pressure. Improve your diet -- eat smaller portions of freshly cooked foods, avoiding fats. Each day, replace one cup of coffee with a cup of decaf herbal tea. Each day, replace one sweet with a piece of fruit. Attend worship services of any faith or denomination: You have obligations to your Maker and your fellow men and women, and it is best not to lose sight of that. Turn off the television one hour earlier each night and see if your life doesn't improve.

Read one book per month from among all those books you always meant to read. Given the death of Arthur Miller, TMQ suggests reading his plays *All My Sons* and *The Price*, not as well known as his famous works but writing of great importance. Reader Michael Thum of Dallas asks my offseason recommendations for newly released books. In fiction, TMQ recommends *Gilead* by Marilynne Robinson and *The Kite Runner* by Khaled Hosseini. In nonfiction, I recommend *American Dream* by Jason DeParle and *The Progress Paradox* by yours truly. In history, I recommend *The Friar and the Cipher* by Lawrence and Nancy Goldstone. In biography, I recommend *John Paul Jones* by Evan Thomas and *Benjamin Franklin* by Walter Isaacson. In humor, I recommend *Molvania* by Santo Cilauro.

Engage in spiritual growth, perform community service, read books, attend theater and dance and concerts, reconnect with friends and family -- then you will feel justified in racing back to the couch, the remote, the swimsuit calendars and the microbrews when the artificial-universe insanity of the NFL resumes in September.