

## My annual mock of mock drafts, plus why "voluntary" workouts are mandatory

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

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(April 19, 2005) -- Four years ago, yours truly wrote of the NFL draft, "This year the second pick overall is worth *less* than the fifth pick. Only in America!" Here we go again with the same dynamic. Many teams at the top of the draft want to trade down a few notches, figuring to get the same quality player, add extra selections and, most important, reduce salary-cap damage. At the top of the draft, each notch adds \$1 million or more to the rookie bonus; the lower a team drops in the first round, the less salary-cap space is lost. This is no small consideration. At the top of the draft, dropping even a few notches could clear enough cap room to fund an entire special team's worth of late-round picks and free agents.

This is why most predraft rumors concern teams wanting to move south. Trouble is, for every seller there must be a buyer -- and many teams don't want to head north, which means taking on added salary-cap burdens. Plus, there's the problem that fans and sportswriters never let a team forget if it blows the first, second or third pick in the draft. But who can even remember who was, say, picked sixth in 2003? Answer: Jonathan Sullivan by New Orleans, but no one remembers. (Sullivan doesn't even start while the next four gentlemen selected that year -- Byron Leftwich, Jordan Gross, Kevin Williams and Terrell Suggs -- are stars.) Thus teams may want to get out of the top, high-visibility positions both for financial reasons and as a shield against future criticism. But because teams in the second echelon know all the reasons the top teams want to trade down, it may be hard to find a club angling to move higher.

Four years ago, yours truly suggested there is a simple way for a high-slot team to solve this dilemma: simply refuse to pick! In the first round, each club gets 15 minutes "on the clock." If you don't hand a choice to the podium in that period, the next team is on the clock and it's your turn again after that club chooses. Suppose Tennessee, picking sixth and with a bad salary-cap situation, simply passed and let the next club, Minnesota, choose; and passed again to let Arizona choose. The Titans would then select eighth instead of sixth, might get the same-quality player -- possibly exactly the same player, depending on who they lusted after -- yet be spared millions in cap-crashing bonus payments.

Two years ago, the Vikings, slotted seventh, passed twice before finally sending a card to the podium in the ninth position. There was mass confusion because Minnesota was attempting to trade its pick; whether the Vikings deliberately gave ground in order to save bonus charges, or merely botched the completion of trade paperwork, remains debated. But if the Vikings didn't deliberately pass, TMQ thinks it is close to inevitable that someday an NFL team will, especially if a team thinks it can drop a notch or two and still select exactly the same player. Or what if cap-savvy New England, selecting last in the first round, deliberately passes in order to transform its choice from a first-round selection into the initial pick of the second round, thus knocking mucho dineros out of the gentleman's bonus? Keep your eyes peeled: teams may have perfectly logical reasons for wanting high choices to become less high.

In other NFL news, this time of year every Tom, Dick and Harry has a mock draft. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice has been burning up the phones, trying to find out if the Bears will stay in the fourth slot or trade out. The College of Cardinals is expected to interrupt its papal conclave today to work on a mock draft. The Department of Homeland Security has a mock draft, though it is being held at an undisclosed location. But how many mock drafts actually *mock* the draft? Only Tuesday Morning Quarterback dares go there. Here, my annual mocking mock draft.

**1. San Francisco:** Kim Mulkey-Robertson, Baylor University. The Niners are desperate to recover the winning touch. Mulkey-Roberston just became the first woman ever to win a national championships as a

player, as an assistant coach and as a head coach. She's a winner!

**2. Miami:** Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist philosopher. Maybe he could lure Ricky Williams back.

**3. Cleveland:** Juliet Schor, sociologist, Boston College. Then the Browns sideline could offer Romeo and Juliet!

**4. Chicago:** Barack Obama, United States Senate, Illinois. The Bears need to change their fortunes, and everything this guy touches turns to gold.

**5. City of Tampa:** Josh Schwartz, television producer. Suddenly Jon "I Was A Teenaged Coach" Gruden doesn't look so young anymore. Maybe adding the creator of "The OC" would restore the Bucs' sense of youthful promise.

**6. Tennessee:** Jack Daniels, distiller. Considering all the Titans' stars discarded for salary-cap reasons, fans will need whisky to get through the 2005 season.

**7. Philadelphia (from Oakland through Minnesota):** Projected trade: Vikings send Raiders' choice to Eagles for Terrell Owens. You didn't really believe that talk about making the Vikings a team-concept team, did you? With the pick, the Eagles select Jennifer Garner, mega-babe action-flick actress. Sure Garner can kick, but is she attractive enough to make the Eagles' cheerleaders squad? Eagles just keep raising the cheerleader bar.

**8. Arizona:** Vicente Fox, president, United Mexican States. Now that the Cardinals play a home date in Mexico the question is, will more people attend this game than all other Cards' home games combined?

**9. Washington:** Gandalf the White, wizard, Istari State University. Getting Joe Gibbs back obviously wasn't enough: the Redskins remain in serious need of magic.

**10. Detroit:** Tom Selleck, private investigator. Just why is a Michigan team wearing "Hawaiian blue" anyway? Selleck's daunting assignment: find the Lions offense.

**11. Dallas:** Fred DeLuca, founder, Subway sandwich chain. This way The Tuna can have unlimited access to the tuna subs he favors. Note: The Subway brand is owned by a company called Doctor's Associates. Sure Subway offers low-fat fare, but are they actually trying to suggest that doctors recommend fast food?

**12. San Diego (from Jersey/A):** Charles Groat, director, United States Geological Survey. By using sophisticated satellite maps and topological charts, he could help Bolts' coaches understand that 40 yards is not close enough for a sure field goal. Months later TMZ still cannot fathom why San Diego did not attempt to advance the ball before blowing that overtime field goal and losing its playoff game.

**13. Houston:** Betsy Ross, flag designer, Continental Congress. Incredibly, no NFL team wears red, white and American flag blue -- not to put too fine a point on it, the single most successful color scheme in world history. The Texans are closest to these colors, and should switch.

**14. Carolina:** Mike Melvill, pilot, SpaceShipOne. The birthplace of flight drafts the hottest pilot of the moment, Melvill, who just became the first civilian astronaut to fly into space aboard an entirely private spacecraft.

**15. Kansas City:** Prince William, Wales. With Prince Charles finally off the board, Chiefs decide to stockpile future royalty; maybe William could be traded to France for a princess, like in the old days. Here is Prince William's official website, which notes, "When he was three years old. Prince William acted in two nursery school plays." Obviously a prodigy!

**16. Los Angeles Clippers (projected trade from New Orleans Saints):** It makes absolutely no difference whom the Clippers draft, and it never will.

**17. Cincinnati:** Dr. Phil, pop psychologist. Bengals' fan: "You see, doc, last year it actually mattered whether we won. Last year we were actually paying attention in the fourth quarter. Last year I actually believed the Bengals could make the playoffs. Is something wrong with me, doc?"

**18. Buffalo (from Minnesota):** Projected trade: Bills trade third choice in 2005, first choice in 2006, seventh choice in 2008, fifth choice in 2009, second choice in 2010 and sixth pick in 2011 to Vikings for Minnesota's first choice in 2005, fourth choice in 2008, sixth choice in 2009, fourth choice and 2010 and seventh pick in 2011. League fax machine fails while printing out terms of deal. With the pick, Bills select the Pittsburgh Steelers' practice squad. The Steelers' practice squad beat the Bills' first string in the season-finale game that cost Buffalo a playoff invitation.

**19. St. Louis:** Whole Martian army, *The War of the Worlds* movie. Rams remain desperately short of space-alien talent since loss of "Kurt Warner."

**20. Dallas (from Buffalo):** Fabian Washington, cornerback, Nebraska. Possible actual pick thrown in for variety.

**21. Jacksonville:** Paul McCartney, bass guitar, Wings. Unable to fill Alltel Stadium, the Jags will cover nearly 10,000 seats in 2005, so that games will sell out and be seen on local television. Why not just have McCartney perform every halftime? That packed 'em in for the last football game in Jacksonville.

**22. Baltimore:** Chris Collinsworth, analyst, Fox Sports. Last year the Ravens suited up retired broadcaster Deion Sanders. Maybe they should pull someone out of the booth every season.

**23. Seattle:** Joel Owsley Cheek, 19th century grocer who founded the Maxwell House coffee company. Seahawks' motto officially becomes: Good to the last drop!

**24. Green Bay:** Quentin Paulik, senior quarterback, Massillon High School, Ohio. Packers finally face the need to begin grooming a successor to Brett Favre.

**25. Denver:** Alvin McKinley, defensive tackle, Cleveland Browns. Only Browns defensive lineman that Broncos don't already have.

**26. Jersey/B:** Charles Kleibacker, fashion designer. Seriously, Jets, now it's 2005. Do something about those uniforms.

**27. Atlanta:** Pliny the Younger, aka Caius Plinius Caecilius Secundus, Roman essayist. Good fit with Mora the Younger, Falcons coach.

**28. San Diego:** Bruce McPherson, California Secretary of State. In keeping with California madness for voter plebiscites, all plays will be called by a referendum of fans present at games.

**29. Indianapolis:** You have the league's highest-scoring offense, you're trailing in the second half in the playoffs, you've got fourth and one in New England territory, your whole season has been about beating the Patriots in New England, you cannot, you absolutely cannot in a million years be sending in the punter! I'm sorry, but when I hear the word "Indianapolis," this is all I can think about.

**30. Pittsburgh:** You're trailing by 14 in the fourth quarter in the AFC championship, you're at home, you're facing fourth and goal on the New England 2, your whole season has been about not losing the AFC championship at home yet again, you absolutely cannot in a million years be sending in the field goal team! I'm sorry, but when I hear the word "Pittsburgh," this is all I can think about.

**31. Philadelphia:** Jim Brown, Marion Motley, Bronco Nagurski, Jim Taylor, Cookie Gilchrist and Larry Csonka. Note to Philadelphia, for five years now you have been trying to win the Super Bowl without a running game. IT CANNOT BE DONE. Please Eagles, get a running game.

**32. New England:** Some guy no one has ever heard of, who will become an instant star.

### **Start the Play!**

A strange virus has spread in both college and pro basketball. Teams with the ball and in position to hold for the last shot of the half or game are trying to dribble out the entire clock, and then score at the final tick. This almost never works; usually the tactic results in a rushed, off-balanced shot that clangs. In the Illinois-Arizona NCAA men's tournament meeting, one of the best-played college games of the year -- bearing in mind that at this point any college basketball game, men's or women's, exceeds in quality of play any 100 NBA games combined -- Arizona trailed by one at the end of overtime, had the ball and 15 seconds remaining. Arizona dribbled, dribbled, dribbled at the top of the arc, planning to use up the time and then score to win on the final tick. "Start the play!" yours truly hollered at the screen. Arizona did not start a play until six seconds remained: which ensured the last shot would be rushed and there would be no time for a rebound attempt. The player who took the pass at six seconds was guarded. He made one move, and with time almost up, heave-hoed a nutty off-balance shot that clangd, handing the game and a Final Four invitation to Illinois.

The following day, in the Michigan State versus Kentucky men's tournament game -- another contest that exceeded in quality of play any 100 NBA games combined -- at the end of the first overtime, Kentucky had the ball with 15 seconds remaining, score tied, the Wildcats in position to win. Did they attack the basket and use all those seconds to try to score? Dribble, dribble, dribble until five seconds remained; then the man with the ball went one-on-one and threw up a wild off-balance shot that failed even to make the clang sound because it missed everything. Michigan State prevailed in the second overtime. Didn't Kentucky watch the game the day before, and see Arizona make exactly the same mistake in exactly the same situation? Then in the men's championship, Illinois had the ball, trailing by 13 with 30 seconds remaining in the first half. Since the Illini were down big, tactics dictate that Illinois should have immediately attacked the basket, hoping to leave enough time to score twice before the end of the half. Instead dribble, dribble, dribble to drain the clock; the Illinois player with the ball didn't even start toward the basket until five seconds were left, and then, out of time, threw up a crazy air ball. And the team wasting the clock was trailing by double digits! At that point, yours truly grumbled, "Illinois deserves to lose this game." The basketball gods heard me.

At least a dozen times this winter, TMQ beheld basketball teams needing points on the final possession of the first half or game dribble down to five or six seconds before moving toward the basket, then run out of time and launch a crazy heave-ho that clangd. Also, waiting until only a few seconds remain leaves no time to run a coordinated play. There's only time for the guy with the ball to go one-on-one, and always bear in mind, a guy going one-on-one is the lowest-percentage offensive tactic in basketball. Start the play!

### **Wacky Food of the Week**

Recently TMQ dined at the ultra-trendy Blue Star in Colorado Springs, Colorado. In addition to "pan-seared pork loin with parsnip bacon hash, wilted frisee salad and maple beurre blanc," the menu offered "cambazola and roasted elephant garlic pizza" plus "porcini lasagna stack with pan-flashed spinach, romano kissed red sauce." But I don't want to swallow garlic that has touched an elephant and I don't want to eat red sauce that has been kissed! How do I know who kissed it?

### **Reading This Item Is "Voluntary," Meaning You Must Read It**

As usual, there are numerous mini-flaps in progress regarding players not reporting for "voluntary" workout sessions. That someone must do something that is "voluntary" is quite a postmodern concept -- yet it's an old idea in football. When yours truly was young, which was farther in the past than I care to

admit, the football team at my high school, Kenmore West of Kenmore, New York, held "voluntary" conditioning sessions called captain's practices. Run by the captains, not coaches, these "voluntary" sessions began well before the county-mandated August start date for official practice. If you didn't attend the "voluntary" captains' practices, you might as well forget about appearing when regular training began.

I have a distinct, haunting memory of a captain's practice long ago, when I was a high-school sophomore. In my memory, I struggle to do pushups in the still, oppressive air of an August evening; I watch a freight train rumble past the field, its whistle sounding plaintively, as one of the senior captains, the older brother of a girl I was sweet on, screams something directly into my ear about proving my manhood. The problem with this memory is that you couldn't actually see the train tracks from my high school's field. I also distinctly remember scoring a last-second touchdown to win our annual big game against archrival Kenmore East, and being carried off the field on my teammates' shoulders as the cheerleaders called my name. Please don't tell me there are problems with that memory too!

### **On the Plus Side, Seasons' Tickets Are Really Cheap Until the Stadium Actually Opens**

New York City's transit authority has already published a map showing a subway stop at the Jets' new West Side stadium -- a stadium that will not exist for at least four years.

### **This Week's *Stargate* Complaints**

In the recent *Stargate SG1* season finale, our plucky wisecracking commandos went back in time 5,000 years to ancient Egypt, got stranded, lived out the remainder of their lives and died. Now it's the present in an altered time-line, and we meet the same four lead characters -- O'Neill, Jackson, Carter and the alien Teal'C -- except these four have never been through a stargate together, because in the altered time-line, there is no Stargate Command buried deep inside Cheyenne Mountain. Then the characters discover a message left by their parallel selves 5,000 years ago, explaining what stargates are and how to detect one. The plucky four find a stargate. The season finale ends with the team re-established, the familiar Stargate Command in operation and at least 22 more episodes under contract.

But wait -- now O'Neill, Jackson, Carter and Teal'C are the ones from the second time-line, *lacking all knowledge of the adventures of the first team* The stargate team from Reality A, heroes of the first eight seasons of the show, died 5,000 years ago in Egypt and are gone forever. The show is now in the hands of the stargate team from Reality B. The Reality B personnel have found the means to travel the galaxy but remain their Reality B selves, without any history of working together or experience with what's on the other side of the stargates. For instance, now the Dr. Daniel Jackson of the show is not the Reality A Jackson, who has met divine beings, been to other galaxies, infiltrated the flagship of the evil aliens' fleet and twice ascended to a higher plane of existence where he acquired ultimate powers that allowed him to save the Milky Way. No, now the show's Jackson is the Reality B Jackson, who just got plucked out of academia and made his first-ever trip through a stargate. And the big Air Force project to build faster-than-light starships to protect Earth from evil aliens -- the project that has been the subplot of the last two seasons? Now that project can't exist, because the information regarding faster-than-light propulsion was uncovered by travel through stargates, travel that, in Reality B, has not occurred. In order for *Stargate SG1* to be consistent in continuity terms, the next season premiere would have to look like the show's first season -- the commandos taking tentative baby steps into a stargate network they know almost nothing about. What do you bet that instead the season premiere picks up exactly where the story left off before the Reality A guys went back in time?

Now to the season finale of *Stargate Atlantis*. The premise of this show is that Atlantis does exist, in another galaxy. The city was built by a super-advanced benign race called the Ancients, who were wiped out thousands of years ago by a super-advanced evil race called the Wraith. Wisecracking commandos from Earth have reached Atlantis through a stargate, and are determined to hold it against a Wraith assault. Just before the big attack, more help from Earth arrives. What's the help? Marines who mount machine guns on the city's parapets. During the big battle scene, Marines are blasting away with manually aimed machine guns and even with assault rifles, and they are *shooting down Wraith starships*. Now, what are the odds that a manually aimed gun with a two-mile range could hit a super-advanced starship?

Even if a gunner scored a hit, what are the odds that machine-gun bullets would penetrate the hull of a super-advanced starship? The United States Navy has not mounted air-defense machine guns on the decks of combat ships in at least 30 years, considering manually aimed machine guns ineffective against the flying craft of 20th century Earth. Now they're good enough to shoot down faster-than-light starships built by super-advanced aliens! Charmingly, both the *Stargate SG1* and *Stargate Atlantis* shows, in their opening sequences, depict plucky commando shooting down a super-advanced starship using a manually aimed gun that fires small-caliber bullets.

### **Up in Heaven Shakespeare, Marvell and Dryden Are All Denying They Were English.**

Andrew Motion, the Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom, wrote the following ode, "Spring Wedding," in honor of the wedding of Charles and Camilla:

I took your news outdoors, and strolled a while  
 In silence on my square of garden-ground  
 Where I could dim the roar of arguments,  
 Ignore the scandal-flywheel whirring round,  
 And hear instead the green fuse in the flower  
 Ignite, the breeze stretch out a shadow-hand  
 To ruffle blossom on its sticking points,  
 The blackbirds sing, and singing take their stand.  
 I took your news outdoors, and found the Spring  
 Had honoured all its promises to start  
 Disclosing how the principles of earth  
 Can make a common purpose with the heart.  
 The heart which slips and sidles like a stream  
 Weighed down by winter-wreckage near its source --  
 But given time, and come the clearing rain,  
 Breaks loose to revel in its proper course.

To "hear instead the green fuse in the flower?" The "heart which slips and sidles like a stream?" This is the best that the poet laureate of England could come up with for the wedding of a future king? The *poet laureate* of England thinks you "hear" a fuse? And check the "winter-wreckage near its source," the "source" here being love, source of the power of the heart. Isn't this a prediction that the marriage of the aging Charles and Camilla, who are entering "winter" in poetic terms, will end in a crack-up? Thanks for the vote of confidence on our wedding day! Of course the current Poet Laureate of the U.K. is the same gent who wrote these lines to honor Prince William's 21st birthday:

It's a threshold, a gateway  
 A landmark birthday;  
 It's a turning of the page,  
 A coming of age.

Fire this guy and hire a greeting-card company!

### **Incredible All-Purpose Any-Team Draft Forecast**

In the last few weeks every sports publication and newspaper sports section has offered breakdowns of what the various NFL teams will be looking for this weekend. Here is the Tuesday Morning Quarterback all-purpose draft scouting report that could apply to any club. Just insert team name:

"The XXXX will be looking to improve their offense and upgrade their defense. Offensive line and defensive line are priorities. They must get better at running back, cornerback, linebacker, tight end and safety. Adding a big-play wide receiver is a must. Finding their quarterback of the future is very, very key. A kick returner with breakaway speed would be a plus, as would players with special-teams mental-

ity. Needs: OL, DL, QB, RB, FB, WR, TE, ILB, OLB, CB, S, K, P, KR, PR."

My point: Everybody needs everything! On draft day, every NFL team always needs everything. There has never been a team that couldn't use players at every position, and there never will be.

### Incredible Seventh Round Predictions

All touts predict the first round of the draft. Some brave souls predict the second and even third rounds. Only Tuesday Morning Quarterback dares to go where others fear to tread with my annual prediction of the seventh round! Here it is, including the supplementary picks.

**215. San Francisco:** Tab Perry, RB, UCLA.

**216. Miami:** Paul Jefferson, FB, Penn State-Behrend. Note: School's official name is Penn State Erie, The Behrend College.

**217. Cleveland:** Matt Grootegoed, S, USC. Note: Only player in Trojans' history to call defensive signals in Dutch.

**218. Tennessee:** Tyson Smith, LB, Iowa State.

**219. Minnesota (from Oakland):** Ellis Hobbs, CB, Iowa State.

**220. Chicago:** Aric Williams, CB, Oregon State.

**221. Tampa Bay:** Rhys Lloyd, K, Minnesota. Note: Mel Kiper sure to call this a "reach."

**222. Washington:** Junius Coston, C, North Carolina A&T.

**223. Detroit:** Wes Sims, G, Oklahoma. Note: Lions hope to cut jersey costs by drafting players with short names.

**224. Dallas:** Jamaal Brimmer, S, UNLV.

**225. Tampa Bay (from Giants):** Branden Joe, FB, Ohio State. Note: Hometown draftniks at Javits Center howl in outrage that Giants gave up this pick.

**226. Arizona:** Diamond Ferri, S, Syracuse. Note: Brother Zirconium Ferri still angry about parents' choice of who to name what.

**227. Houston:** Cedric Houston, RB, Tennessee.

**228. Pittsburgh (from Carolina):** Scott Mruczkowski, C, Bowling Green. Note: "Get me more players with unpronounceable last names!" Bill Cowher ordered after Ben Roethlisberger success.

**229. Kansas City:** Arnold Harrison, LB, Georgia.

**230. Minnesota:** Chris Rix, QB, Florida State. Note: at combine, Rix wowed scouts with his ability to complete sentences.

**231. St. Louis:** Jered Newberry, LB, Stanford.

**232. New Orleans:** Eric Moore, DE, Florida State.

**233. Cincinnati:** Eric Coleman, DT, Clemson. Note: Draft touts go ballistic that Bengals take Coleman with Justin Beriault still on the board.

**234. Baltimore:** Justin Beriault, S, Ball State.

**235. Seattle:** Charles Frederick, WR, Washington. Note: At private workout, impressed Seahawks' scouts by dropping everything thrown his way.

**236. Buffalo:** Billy Bajema, TE, Oklahoma State. Note: Listed at 6-foot- 4 7/8", but rumored to be only 6-4¾".

**237. Jacksonville:** Bryan Randall, QB, Virginia Tech.

**238. Kansas City (from Green Bay):** Bryce Benekos, P, UTEP. Note: Could start a run on punters.

**239. Denver:** Tim Bulman, DT, Boston College.

**240. New York Jets:** Jim Davis, DE, Virginia Tech. Note: Hometown draftniks at Javits Center howl in outrage that draft is almost over and there will be nothing else to howl in outrage about.

**241. Atlanta:** Jason Harmon, S, Michigan State.

**242. San Diego:** Jon Condo, C, Maryland. Note: With mortgage rates expected to rise, Chargers hope to sign Condo immediately.

**243. Indianapolis:** Adam Kieft, OT, Central Michigan.

**244. Pittsburgh:** Larry Burt, DT, Miami of Ohio.

**245. Philadelphia:** Dustin Long, QB, Sam Houston.

**246. New England:** Sione Pouha, DT, Utah.

**247. Philadelphia:** Junior Rosegreen, S, Auburn.

**248. San Francisco:** Josh Denney, DE, Brigham Young.

**249. San Francisco:** Dan Connolly, G, SE Missouri State. Note: Niners may have been terrible in 2004,

but cannily stockpiled seventh-round picks.

**250. St. Louis:** Adell Duckett, DE, Texas Tech.

**251. St. Louis:** Decori Birmingham, RB, Arkansas. Note: Name means "more than one decorum."

**252. Philadelphia:** Steve Suter, RB, Maryland.

**253. Tampa:** Reggie Hodge, P, Ball State. Note: Punters really flying off board at this point.

**254. Seattle:** D.J. Fitzpatrick, P, Notre Dame.

### **In Blockbuster Deal, Niners Swap First Choice in Draft for 375 Other Picks**

NFL analysts laud the draft-choice value chart developed by the Cowboys to weigh the relative value of picks. Here in a recent Gil Brandt column is the chart, which is used mainly when teams swap positions during the draft. TMQ notes that according to chart, you would have to trade approximately 375 seventh-round picks to get the number-one overall selection in the draft. Know what? An NFL team would be *much* better off with 375 seventh-round picks than with the first selection. If I'm San Francisco, and somebody offers me 375 seventh-round picks for the chance to go first, I'm taking that deal in a minute.

### **Next Week**

Grade inflation afflicts the NFL draft again!

## Why peace is at hand in the NFL, and the case for an ego cap

By Gregg Easterbrook

Special to NFL.com

(April 26, 2005) -- A while ago Commissioner Paul Tagliabue said negotiations on a new collective bargaining agreement between management and the NFL Players Association weren't going particularly well. Recently there have been hints of progress. Let me spell out two basic reasons the league's new labor deal may go a lot more smoothly than many commentators expect: \$44 million and \$85 million.

The first number is the level of the NFL's initial salary cap, imposed in 1993, converted into current dollars. The second number is this year's salary cap. This means that in the last dozen years, average per-team payments to NFL players almost doubled in real-dollar terms. (Actual spending on players is slightly different from the salary-cap ceiling, but tracks it closely.) Total NFL spending on players is up since 1993 by a much larger value than average per-team spending, because there are now four more franchises, meaning four more clubs maxing out their salary caps. In 1993, in the dawn of the salary-cap era, NFL teams paid about \$1.2 billion, in today's dollars, to players. In 2005, NFL teams will pay about \$2.7 billion to players. Total monies disbursed to players are thus up 125 percent in just 12 seasons. This is nothing short of spectacular.

Say what you will about the National Football League -- too crazy, too win-at-all-costs, too many taxpayer-funded stadiums ... there are loads of possible objections -- the NFL beats all other sports combined for being a well-run business. Franchises are financially stable; television ratings stay strong while ratings of other team sports falter; gate attendance sets a record every year; merchandising is so efficient it's hard to escape NFL gear. Popularity and financial stability mean ever-rising real-dollar payments to players. The NFL Players Association is a big part of this success: Just as the league is the best-run business in sports, the NFL Players Association is the best-run union. While baseball players strike, basketball players punch out their own fans and professional hockey misses an entire season, the NFL Players Association has insured high-quality game after high-quality game after high-quality game, with positive player-fan relations and surely a higher percentage of good-citizen behavior than is found among groups of young men in other walks of life. Because the NFLPA has a clear understanding of how incredibly lucrative the last dozen years have been to NFL athletes, TMQ is betting that keeping the existing labor peace will turn out to be more doable than many commentators now say. Although, of course, the players will bargain to increase their share as much as possible.

Note to NFL owners: The existing structure of the league serves you well, too, so why not leave it in place?

In other NFL news, the 2005 NFL Draft means we have reached the halfway point of that long, cold, lonely offseason. Halfway back to the wackiness of the NFL: grown men dancing, fans with painted faces, nearly naked cheer-babes flouncing, tailgate parties that start on Thursday night, coaches screaming at the officials over *every* call. I don't know about you, but I can't wait.

Finally, if the NFL has a salary cap, why can't it have an ego cap? See the reasoning below. Now, my draft review.

**Arizona:** In last year's draft, Cardinals coach Dennis Green passed on Philip Rivers and Ben Roethlisberger. The 2004 result was quarterback chaos with three different Arizona starters combining to throw 13 touchdowns and 18 interceptions. In this year's draft, Green passed on Aaron Rodgers. Just a thought here -- quarterback is the most important position in football.

**Atlanta:** Falcons invested in the future by picking the kid in the Michael Vick Experience television commercial.

**Baltimore:** The Ravens now have two former head coaches as assistants, Jim Fassel and Rick Neuheisel. Could this be the first NFL team where there is a coup d'etat? Advice to Brian Billick: Be on the lookout for whispered hallway conversations that suddenly stop as you approach. Be wary when there is a closed-doors senior staff meeting they "accidentally forget" to invite you to. If fighter jets begin buzzing the Ravens' practice facility and paramilitary troops encircle your office, for God's sake, run!

**Buffalo:** Sixth-round draft choice Justin Geisinger pulled down a 4.0 GPA as a pre-med student at Vanderbilt, which is a serious academics school. TMQ suggests Geisinger use 4.0 as his jersey number.

**Carolina:** Cognoscenti are debating whether first-round choice Thomas Davis will play safety or linebacker in the pros. With many defenses now using nickel sets two-thirds of the time, the distinction hardly matters.

**Chicago:** Top pick Cedric Benson of Texas cut his dreadlocks in order not to remind teams of previous Texas long-haired mega-flake Ricky Williams. But if Benson announces he plans to live in a tent, Bears fans will panic.

**Cincinnati:** ESPN commentators praised Bengals' first-round pick David Pollack for having a 36-inch vertical jump despite weighing 261 pounds. Yours truly is 52 years old, and let's just say carries a significant fraction of Pollack's weight; the other day I did a 31-inch vertical jump. Shouldn't an NFL first draft choice jump substantially higher than a 52-year-old columnist?

**Cleveland:** Romeo Crennel will improve the Browns, but the first season may be rocky. To divert fans, team officials plan to place damsels on balconies around the stadium. Whenever Cleveland falls far behind, Crennel will divert the crowd by personally enacting Shakespeare's balcony scene -- "But soft! What light through yonder window breaks!"

**Dallas:** Last year Dallas gave its No. 1 selection for miscellaneous Buffalo picks plus the Bills' No. 1 this year. The Cowboys were gambling that Buffalo would have an awful season in 2004 and its first choice would come near the top of the draft. When the Bills opened 0-4, it looked as if the Dallas gambit might prove a masterstroke. After the Bills rallied to finish 9-7, dropping their 2005 selection toward the bottom of the first round, Dallas surely wished it had simply kept last year's No. 1 choice.

**Denver:** This year Denver gave its No. 1 pick to the Redskins for miscellaneous choices plus Washington's No. 1 in 2006. What is likely going on here is a repeat of the same basic wager previously made by Dallas. Denver thinks the Redskins will have a cover-your-eyes awful season in 2005, causing their No. 1 pick of 2006 to become highly valuable. This fall Broncos fans will be rooting against Washington, just as last fall Cowboys fans rooted against Buffalo.

**Detroit:** In just eight more years, the Lions will be able to field an offense consisting entirely of high No. 1 draft choice wide receivers.

**Green Bay:** As Aaron Rodgers kept tumbling from projected top-three pick to the Packers with the 25th choice, yours truly kept thinking of comparisons to Dan Marino. Except the comparison I was thinking was, "This guy is no Dan Marino." TMQ has his doubts about whether Rodgers will impress as a pro player, but the former Cal quarterback sure impressed as a person by keeping his cool while falling in the draft in full view of a national television audience. If Rodgers handles being behind in the fourth quarter as well as he handled that, the Green Bay faithful will have a new hero.

**Houston:** In latest salary-cap wrinkle, the Texans will peg all rookie bonuses to the world price of a barrel of oil.

**Indianapolis:** Let's hope Colts' top pick, Marlin Jackson, fares better than the old Rambler Marlin.

**Jacksonville:** Jax takes college quarterback Matt Jones, planning to convert him to receiver. This seems quite a leap of faith. But then all conversions require faith!

**New Jersey Giants:** Bottom line on last April's big trade: To obtain Eli Manning, the Giants gave up Philip Rivers, Shawne Merriman, Nate Kaeding and a fifth-round pick the Chargers later traded elsewhere. Better make the Pro Bowl, Eli.

**New Jersey Jets:** The current *Star Trek Enterprise* involves an alternative universe happening simultaneously. After using their first pick on a kicker, Jets will petition league for permission to travel into an alternative universe where they can attempt last January's playoff overtime field goal again. Wait, I forgot -- the entire NFL is already an alternate universe.

**Kansas City:** Last year, though desperate for defensive help, the Chiefs invested a second-round choice in a backup tight end. This year, still desperate for defensive help, the Chiefs invested a third-round choice in a punter. Ay caramba.

**Miami:** However ugly the Dolphins are in this rebuilding season, their beach-based cheerleaders can be relied upon to be the reverse of ugly. Maybe Nick Saban should have drafted former Miami cheerleader Nadia Turner, a contestant on *American Idol*.

**Minnesota:** Yes, Troy Williamson has track meet speed. But football is not a track meet. There are lots of track guys who are fast in a straight line and don't do much wearing pads and being hit. TMQ is a little perplexed at the Vikings using a lottery-level choice on a wide receiver that didn't do all that much in college -- Williamson was only seventh all-time receiving at South Carolina. Sure, Mike Williams could not play in 2004, but when he did play in 2003 he made 95 receptions, more than twice as many as Williamson caught in his year before going pro. I could be wrong, but I think Minnesota will come to rue the day it passed on Mike Williams.

**New England:** It was bad enough when the Patriots used a sixth-round pick on quarterback Tom Brady, who'd had a fairly ordinary college career, then turned Brady into a Super Bowl MVP. Now they've used a seventh-round pick on quarterback Matt Cassel, who *didn't even start* in college. Please tell me New England will convert him into a tight end or maybe a defensive tackle. Please don't tell me he's another future Super Bowl MVP quarterback.

**New Orleans:** Elaborate statistical analysis of the Saints' annual late season collapsed ties problem to players starting Mardi Gras parties in December.

**Oakland:** In effect, the Raiders traded Philip Buchanon, Doug Jolley and the seventh overall selection for Randy Moss and rookies Fabian Washington and Kirk Morrison. I'd call that a good day's work for Oakland. Note that in order to make space for Moss' self image in the locker room, the Raiders had to dispatch the me-first Buchanon. Maybe in addition to having a salary cap, the NFL should have an ego cap. There would be a fixed amount of whining and temper tantrums allowed per team. If a club wanted to acquire a player with a me-first reputation, it would first have to release a whiner on its present roster.

**Philadelphia:** If published reports are to be believed, the Eagles passed on trading a third-round draft pick for running back Travis Henry in order to draft running back Ryan Moats. First, Henry is a power back, what the Eagles desperately need, while Moats is a scatback third-down type, the kind of player Philadelphia has too many of already. Second, Henry is an established talent, while Moats is a rookie question mark. Third, rumor had it Philadelphia shied from Henry because of his fumble stats -- one fumble every 46 touches, worse than the NFL running-back average of about one per 60 touches. But Moats fumbled 16 times in his two years as a college upperclassman, dropping the rock once every 33 touches, a red-alert fumble rate. All this is yet more evidence Philadelphia just doesn't get it. You cannot win the Super Bowl without a running game. Please Eagles, find someone who can drag tacklers forward five yards on a consistent basis. The McNabb era won't last forever. Give Donovan a running game to

work with!

### **Frequent Flyer Pick of the Draft**

Pick No. 126, a fourth-rounder, was listed as Philadelphia from Denver through Cleveland, Seattle, Carolina and Green Bay -- six teams held the pick at some point!

**Pittsburgh:** After striking gold in last year's draft with the unpronounceably named Ben Roethlisberger, the Steelers went for it all with draft choice Uikelotu Kemoeatu, born in Hawaii.

**San Diego:** As Mike Williams lingered on the board and the Bolts' pick approached, yours truly thought, "How could anybody defense a team with Williams and Antonio Gates on the field at the same time?" Two unusually large gentlemen who both can run and have field sense. I would not have wished to be the defensive coordinator assigned to scheme against them as a pair. Now we'll never know. Did the Chargers at least attempt to trade up from 12th to tenth to snag Williams?

**Seattle:** The World Barista Championship was just awarded in Seattle to Troels Poulsen of Denmark, whose winning espresso was flavored with lavender and Madagascan peppers. Yum -- lavender-pepper coffee, can't wait to get a cup.

**San Francisco:** The first overall pick in the draft is listed on draft charts as Alex D. Smith. Oh, so you mean *that* Utah quarterback Alex Smith. Presumably the "D." is so that dozens of other guys named Alex Smith could not have rushed the podium in New York to pose with the commissioner.

**St. Louis:** Now, do you really think I can resist making joke about Rams' draftee Richie Incognito? You could view his picture -- not that you would recognize him. Har har!

**Tampa:** Years ago the draft had 12 rounds. Over the weekend the Bucs, through trades and supplementary choices, became a rare recent NFL team to make 12 draft choices. 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.

**Tennessee:** Flashy first pick Adam "Pacman" Jones hoped to go Hollywood. Instead he's going Dollywood.

**Washington:** The Redskins were forced to use the ninth pick overall on a cornerback to replace Fred Smoot, whom they were forced to let go due to salary-cap problems caused by their trade of Laveranues Coles, who forced the Redskins to trade him by threatening to hold his breath till he turned blue. Boy, Washington could have benefited from an ego cap on this one. What struck yours truly, and must have outraged the football gods, is how Joe Gibbs caved in to Coles' hissy fit. In the old days, if a player was whining in public, Gibbs would have told him to shut up and go do his job. Instead, in touchy-feely 2005, Gibbs twice met with Coles to attempt to persuade the gentleman to please, please, pretty please do his job. Maybe they should have attended encounter therapy together then had herbal tea and a Thai massage. Gibbs even issued a complex statement about how he had reviewed the season's game film and determined that Redskins' quarterbacks looked first at Coles more than they looked first at anyone else. Gibbs seemed to hope this would placate the operatic (me-me-me-me-me) Coles. Coach, just tell the guy to shut up and do his job!

### **Maybe There Should Be a Puff of White Smoke from the Roof of the Javits Center When the No. 1 Choice Is Made**

The College of Cardinals took only slightly longer to choose the new pope as the NFL took to choose first-round draftees. TMQ was struck to read that before each entry of the cardinals into the Sistine Chapel, the papal conclave area was swept for electronic eavesdropping devices. What was the worry, that rival religions wanted to know the Vatican's secret doctrine? That bookies in London would adjust the odds on

the new pontiff depending on the tenor of the deliberations? Next time a pope must be chosen, Tuesday Morning Quarterback suggests the conclave be broadcast live on pay-per-view. Imagine the money that could be raised for the needy! Also, there could be play-by-play coverage and color commentary by religious scholars. It would sound like this:

ANNOUNCER: Wow, Cardinal Vermicelli sure didn't see that allusion to Saint Anselm coming!

SCHOLAR: They're giving it 110 percent down there, Clint.

ANNOUNCER: Okay, the next cardinal is approaching the podium. He's reaching for the water glass -- he's adjusting his vestments -- the tension is building!

SCHOLAR: Expect him to run to the right. It's the best move in the current theological environment.

ANNOUNCER: He's tapping his miter. He must have trouble hearing the play call.

SCHOLAR: They'll have to signal the theological point in by hand.

ANNOUNCER: You know, I think it's really open-minded of the cardinals to allow scantily clad cheerleaders into the conclave.

SCHOLAR: They're justified by the sensual poetry in Song of Songs. Plus, the Magisterium saw the ratings for Olympic beach volleyball.

Though everyone knows a black puff of smoke means no decision and a white puff means the new pope has been selected, perhaps you did not know that a puff of orange smoke means the cardinals have ordered pizza. The custom, known in Italian as *L'ordinamento del formaggio doppio*, dates to the early 18th century and the advent of horse-drawn delivery.

### **Cheer-Studs in the News**

At the moment, only the Baltimore Ravens have male cheerleaders flexing muscles for the crowd. Taking into account trends in women's buying power and double-XX interest in football, Tuesday Morning Quarterback considers it only a matter of time until there are nearly as many hunk cheer-studs as buff cheerbabes on NFL sidelines. Reader James Blakey of Kennett Square, Pa., calls to our attention Ravens' cheer-stud Mark Citarella, a member of the National Guard. Recently his unit was called up and sent to Iraq.

### **It Seems the College Board, Which Writes the SAT, Believes in the Perfectibility of Man**

This spring, of the first 304,000 high school students to take the new three-part SAT, which replaces the old two-part test, 107 achieved the new perfect score of 2400, which replaces the old perfect score of 1600. Four students from the same high school, California's San Marino High, have already nailed perfect scores. Since a little over two million students take the SAT each academic year, if this rate holds, close to a thousand high schoolers will achieve perfect SAT scores in the first year of the new test.

How does this compare to the past? Let's back up two decades. In the 1985-86 testing year, nine students nationwide hit the old perfect score of 1600. In the 1984-85 testing season, three high school students nationwide recorded perfect SAT scores. In the 1983-84 SAT cycle, five kids nationwide aced the SAT with the maximum. These results are typical of the SAT era. YOUTH GETS PERFECT SCORE ON SCHOLASTIC TEST, an *Associated Press* wire story from December 1986 was headlined, back in the days when a kid's perfect SAT merited an AP story. This year there will need to be hundreds of *Associated Press* stories about youths who get perfect SAT scores! Which means, of course, that grade inflation has come to the SAT.

Grade inflation in draft assessments is a longstanding TMQ hobby horse. Coaches and general managers always grade all drafts highly, because in assessing their drafts they are assessing themselves, and so of course they assess themselves as brilliant. As yours truly pointed out in this space at this time last year, "Right now every NFL coach and general manager is saying, "We really, really like our draft." Well, what else are they supposed to say? Nobody's going to say, "Man, what a bunch of no-account who-dats we just reeled in."

Grade inflation also rules in sportswriters' draft assessments, which tend to be dominated by "A"s and "B"s -- every team had an above-average draft! NFL writer Mark Maske of the *Washington Post* was a breath of fresh air in this regard. While most sportswriters were gushing over most drafts, Maske curved his draft grades to an average of C, handing out just 4 "A"s. Maske would set off a major panic at Harvard! (In 2000, 91 percent of Harvard seniors graduated with distinction. At Harvard everybody isn't merely above-average, everybody is far above average.)

Tuesday Morning Quarterback's point about draft grades is that all grades taken immediately after the draft are meaningless because no one has the slightest idea who will play well. Somebody high in the first round is sure to be a bust. Somebody selected late on the second day in the seventh round is sure to be a star. But I don't know who these will be, and neither do you. Draft grades only matter about four years later when we know who's turned out to be good.

### **Mel Kiper Watch**

Millions of guys and, perhaps disturbingly, ever-more women obsess over the NFL draft. But Mel Kiper, Jr. of ESPN earns his living obsessing over the NFL draft. Only in America! Just think, a person whose *occupation* is making NFL draft projections. The Soviet Union never developed anything like Mel Kiper; no wonder it never had a chance against us. Already wondering who the "top prospects for the 2006 draft" are? Mel will fill you in here. Draft projection is a harmless diversion -- mock drafts are fun, and it's irrelevant when they are wrong since every mock draft is wrong. Owing to this, TMQ has always considered Kiper a skilled entertainer who plays an integral role in the zany artificial universe that is professional football. If there were no Mel Kiper, we'd have to invent one! The genetic engineering project would start, obviously, with a strand of his hair.

Though no one expects Kiper (or any draft tout) to be right, TMQ's annual Mel Kiper Watch nonetheless tracks the gentleman. This year, Kiper's final mock first round, offered a few days before the draft, correctly forecast eight of the 32 initial selections, or 25 percent accuracy -- and in the mock-draft business, that's high. But Kiper's final mock draft was the *fifth* of five first-round mocks he issued, each contradicting the one before. By making multiple forecasts, Kiper was able to cover the landscape. For example, in his five mock first rounds, Kiper had the New Orleans Saints selecting Thomas Davis, or Brodney Pool, or Adam Jones, or Jammal Brown; when they took Brown, Kiper could say, "I predicted it!" Though even five tries were not necessarily enough. Kiper had Jacksonville selecting Marlin Jackson, or Khalif Barnes, or Fabian Washington, or Alex Barron, or Antrel Rolle; the Jags took Matt Jones. Kiper had Atlanta taking Brandon Browner, or Shaun Cody, or Pool, or Barron, all linemen or defensive players; when they actually took receiver Roddy White, Kiper implied he had known it all along, declaring, "The Falcons want to give Michael Vick weapons to work with." A few days before the draft, Kiper said quarterback Jason Campbell would be "a reach" if drafted 24th overall; when Campbell went 25th overall, Kiper praised him as "a very solid quarterback ... accurate to the extreme." What a difference one slot makes! Before the draft, Kiper projected that defensive end Marcus Spears to go 12th overall because Spears would be "a welcome addition to a team that needs to boost its pass rush." On Saturday, after the same player went 20th overall, Kiper explained there were reservations about Spears because he "won't be a feared sack artist." Here is this year's Kiper Prediction Air Ball. Mel had Dan Cody of Oklahoma going seventh overall, or 10th overall, or 18th overall or 23rd overall. When Cody actually went 53rd overall, late in the second round, Kiper declared that the player "fell because of questions about his strength."

### **The Coles Case Should Have Been Decided in a Smoot Court**

Coles demanded to be traded because -- he only caught 90 passes! Though Coles' total was among the

best in the NFL, he was furious that he did not get the ball more often. Sportswriter Nunyo Demasio of the *Washington Post* reported that the Skins threw to Coles 168 times in 2004; last season only Chad Johnson of Cincinnati, thrown to 170 times, found the ball fluttering his way more often. Yet Coles told Demasio that when he only had three catches in Washington's final game of 2004, while the 'Skins called a shocking 31 rushes, "I just felt like the offense wasn't for me."

Laveranues, the offense is not supposed to be *for you*, it's supposed to win the game – as the Redskins did win the contest in question, over the playoff-bound Vikings. There is a clear relationship between rush attempts and victory. Seven of the eight NFL teams that rushed at least 31 times per game in 2004 finished with winning records; 18 of the 24 teams that rushed fewer than 31 times per game finished at .500 or below. A chicken-or-egg aspect always exists with rush-attempt stats, since winning teams tend to rack up rush attempts because they are ahead in the fourth quarter and run to grind the clock. But that was exactly the situation in the 2004 Vikings-Redskins season finale: Washington was ahead and rushing to grind the clock. Sorry, Laveranues, that the game situation interfered with your plans for personal publicity!

### **Astonishing Draft Weekend Feat**

Hundreds of sports touts had comments on the first round of the draft. Tuesday Morning Quarterback's hat is off to NFL.com analysts Gil Brandt and Pat Kirwan, who provided live running commentary on every choice from the Alex D. Smith selection at noon Saturday until the pair dropped from exhaustion on pick No. 199, Khari Long to Kansas City at the end of the sixth round around dinner time Sunday. Then Brandt and Kirwan finished their labors on Monday, commenting on every pick until the final one, Andy Stokes to New England at number 255. Most of Brandt's and Kirwan's comments were posted within minutes of the player's selection, even as Sunday afternoon dragged on and only the hardiest fans were still glued to the action. Minutes after the Jets tabbed tight end Joel Dreesen in the sixth round at 3:48 Eastern on the second day, for instance, Brandt posted this analysis: "Dreesen isn't a great blocker but he can catch the ball. He can also be a deep snapper." Now seriously, Gil, you actually knew this off the top of your head? Anyway, a cutting-edge achievement in sports blogging.

If I'd been asked to post instant analysis of late-round picks, I would have written things like, "He's a human being. In college, he wore a lot of sneakers. Known for his ability to hit the buffet table. Might have gone a lot higher if he was a better player."

### **Next Week**

Next week comes in August, when Tuesday Morning Quarterback resumes on a weekly basis.

## Why peace is at hand in the NFL, and the case for an ego cap

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Aug. 9, 2005) -- Ah, for the good old days when players said "Yes, sir!" Twice this offseason, Hall of Fame coach Joe Gibbs met with me-first wide receiver Laveranues Coles to ask him please, please, pretty please to honor his contract with the Washington Redskins. Gibbs then accommodated Coles by trading him, though this strapped the Skins with a crushing salary-cap penalty. In the good old days, Gibbs would simply have told someone like Coles to shut up and do his job. Later in the offseason, Nunyo Demasio of the Washington Post reported, Gibbs personally flew to Cleveland to try to convince free agent Courtney Brown to sign with Washington. In the good old days, Gibbs simply would have called a prospect on the phone and gotten a quick yes or no to an offer of employment. Still later in the offseason, Gibbs tried to phone me-first safety Sean Taylor to ask him to please, please, pretty please do his job by attending team workouts. Taylor refused the call. In the good old days, a player called by Gibbs would have run, not walked, to the phone, and the conversation would have gone like this:

GIBBS. Sean, get your behind to Redskins Park on the first available aircraft or you will soon count yourself fortunate to be covering punts for the Edmonton Eskimos.

TAYLOR. Yes sir!

Now by "the good old days," I mean a couple of years ago. It is amazing how much the NFL has changed in the twinkling of an eye between when Gibbs left the league in the mid 1990s and his return last season. Pleading with multimillionaire players to do their jobs, unheard-of in Gibbs' heyday, has become a primary responsibility of an NFL coach. Gibbs is hardly the only one to make this discovery. When Romeo Crennel took control of the Browns, one of his first tasks was to plead with me-first tackle Ross Verba to please, please, pretty please do his job. Maybe instead of signing bonuses, the NFL should switch to an hourly wage system. The federal minimum wage is scandalously low at \$5.15 an hour, while an NFL minimum wage would be on the high side at thousands of dollars per hour. Still, it might increase the honoring of contracts. Want your pay? Show me an hour's work! At any rate, no wonder Gibbs likes race cars so much. With race cars, you just switch on the ignition. You never have to sit there stroking the cars' fenders and saying please, please, pretty please start your engine.

In other football news, today is the day for which all true football enthusiasts have waited for months. No, I don't mean the release of *Madden 2006*, I mean Tuesday Morning Quarterback is back. I'm back and I'm bad! Well, at least I'm back. And I'm a threat to your workplace productivity on Tuesdays. The column resumes each Tuesday though the Super Bowl, and the first offering as always is my annual review of offseason low-lights in the realms of football, sci-fi, mega-babes and miscellany. IMPORTANT ANNOUNCEMENT! Right now, game programmers are working on the incredible new *TMQ 2006* video game. Incredible realism will make you feel like you're *right there at the word processor*. A voluminous database of the jerseys and player stats of obscure college teams -- Indiana of Pennsylvania, Pittsburg of Kansas -- will put you right into the Division II action. When teams cross the opponent's 40, the screen will turn maroon for TMQ's Maroon Zone. Blitzing too much will insure defeat! Best of all, NFL cheerleaders have volunteered to have their bodies wired with elaborate sensors and then perform alluring motions in bikinis, so that the interactive cheerleader swimsuit calendar section of the game will boast perfect realism. Strangely, the NFL cheerleaders have yet to report to my office to have their bodies wired with sensors. As soon as they do, we'll be updating you on the exciting release of *TMQ 2006*!

Now, my annual offseason Low-Lights.

### TMQ Jinx Now Rivals *SI* Jinx

This January in my annual Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP column, I cautioned, "As there is a *Sports Illustrated* cover curse, this award also carries a jinx," and detailed how something bad immediately happened to the last three gentlemen who won the award. I then handed out three

ribbons for the 2004 season: to runners-up Mike Wahle of Green Bay and Tedy Bruschi of New England and to winner Troy Brown of New England. I cautioned them to be "really, really careful" in the weeks after receiving the award, owing to its jinx.

What happened in the next few weeks? Wahle was waived by Green Bay, though landed on his feet with a nice contract at Carolina. Bruschi was hospitalized with a stroke that's put his athletic career in jeopardy. Brown was shown the door by the Patriots, though after a few months of unemployment, re-signed at reduced pay. All three 2004 TMQ recipients immediately had bad luck! Next January I'm going to be calling up agents saying "I'm thinking of making your client the TMQ Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP" and they'll snap, "Anything but that!"

### **Offseason Football-Like Substance Highlight**

In Arena League action, the Colorado Crush defeated the Arizona Rattlers 74-69 in a game that featured 18 touchdowns and four field goals; the teams combined for 80 pass attempts and nine rushes. The Crush ended up winning the Arena League championship despite surrendering an average of 54 points a game and at one stretch going two full games without recording a defensive stop. The season's wildest Arena contest saw the San Jose Saber Cats defeat the Dallas Desperadoes 83-71; in that game, San Jose alone scored 12 touchdowns. The Saber Cats fielded the Arena League's top dance team, as voted by fans on the league's website. Gawk here at Saber Kitten Karen Benge, both a skilled dancer and a first runner-up in a Miss Hawaiian Tropic tanning pageant; boy, did I ever take the wrong classes in college! Over in arenafootball2, the Central Valley Coyotes beat the San Diego Riptide 83-70. That contest featured 22 touchdowns and a field goal; setting aside kneel-downs, Central Valley scored on 14 of its 16 possessions.

### **It Has to Be Delivered by Crane, Just Like the Ken Starr Report About Clinton**

The unabridged audiotext of Bill Clinton's 1,008-page *My Life* went on sale. At 52 hours, the set contains 42 CDs and retails for \$179.

### **Someday This Column Will Be "Tuesday Morning Quarterback Brought to You by Quizno's"**

The G-8 summit in Gleneagles, Scotland, had three official sponsors -- Ford Motors, Sun Microsystems and Diageo, which markets many whiskeys, including Johnnie Walker. A *sponsored* international negotiation! Then again, perhaps after listening to the speeches, participants needed some Johnnie Walker. What if other historical events had corporate sponsors?

- The Nixon-Kennedy presidential debate, sponsored by Noxema. The Closer the Vote, the More You Need Noxema.
- The Yalta Conference, brought to you by Convair: Making Fine Bombers Since 1943.
- The 2009 Presidential Inauguration, sponsored by ExxonMobilTexacoBPConocoUnocalShellCNOOC.

### **On the Plus Side, Every NHL Goalie Had A Perfect Year**

In April the Associated Press headlined a story about a meeting of National Hockey League officials, GENERAL MANAGERS DISCUSS WAYS TO INCREASE NHL SCORING. Here's a suggestion to increase scoring – hold games! The NHL had just completed an entire season without a single goal scored, which is really more defense than fans care to see.

### **Other Headlines of the Offseason**

*Better Homes and Gardens* ran an article titled, WHAT'S NEW IN SLEEP. Above an article about mortuary directors seeking innovations, the *Denver Post* headlined, FUNERAL INDUSTRY URGED TO THINK OUT-

SIDE THE BOX. The *New York Times* ran an article titled, STUDY REVEALS NEW DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SEXES. A "new" difference – like, new as of this week?

### **It Was Tense for the First Several Plays**

In a National Women's Football Association game, the Columbus Comets beat the Tidewater Floods 100-0.

### **Next Diet Craze -- the Minimum Security Lockdown Diet**

In the offseason, a *Newsweek* cover showed Martha Stewart looking spectacularly buff and declared, AFTER PRISON SHE'S THINNER, WEALTHIER. It turned out Martha has not become spectacularly buff in jail -- the magazine superimposed her head onto a young "body double" model. *Newsweek* assistant managing editor Lynn Staley told the *New York Times* the cover "was intended to show Martha as she would be, not necessarily as she is." My wife wishes my head could be superimposed on some young hunk's body to show me as I would be, not necessarily as I am! Now about the Minimum Security Diet. Trendy California and Arizona health spas charge customers hundreds of dollars a day to deny them food. Why shouldn't the federal government allow people to pay to spend a couple weeks at minimum security prisons, working out and hardly eating? This could become the next huge fad, and help retire some of the federal deficit.

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

Norbert Revels of Hamtramck, Michigan, beat Edgar Downs of Gary, Indiana, in the 2005 Super Bowl of vibrating electronic football, held at the Embassy Suites Hotel in Pittsburgh. Revels, playing as the Kansas City Chiefs, beat Downs' St. Louis Rams 14-0 by staging a clock-killer drive that consumed an entire quarter. Miggle Toys, which revived the 1960s-style vibrating football game, this year added to its line portable vibrating football sets you can take on vacation. Hamtramck note: think Detroit can't build good cars? The General Motors assembly plant in Hamtramck just ranked as the third-best run auto factory in North America in the influential J.D. Power and Associates annual study of manufacturing quality. G.M.'s Hamtramck plant bested all the assembly facilities in the United States run by BMW, Honda, Mercedes and Toyota.

### **Offseason Mega-Babe News**

A few years ago, Jennifer Lopez made news by wearing only the back half of a dress to the Oscars. This year, Hillary Swank wore only the front half of a dress: go to this Los Angeles Times site, click on "arrivals" under "photo gallery." *Baywatch* babe Alexandra Paul was arrested for blocking the path of a truck that was to carry old electric cars to a scrap yard. According to Paul's website, "Alexandra recycles, drives an electric car and will not use any products tested on animals." Of course she recycles: we remember some of those *Baywatch* plots! After a series of issues whose covers sold poorly because they pictured boring males (Jude Law, Johnnie Depp, Leonardo DiCaprio), quasi-highbrow magazine *Vanity Fair* ran a cover that featured three swimsuit models in thong bikinis, embracing in a manner that suggested they were anxious for the camera crew to leave so that they could engage in unnatural acts. Here, watch a promotional video of *Vanity Fair's* photographer setting up the photo shoot on a remote romantic beach with six nearly naked mega-babes -- only somewhat fewer women than in TMQ's standard fantasy! Depressing fact: the report of the presidential commission on intelligence failures before the attack on Iraq noted that the CIA justified some of its about Saddam Hussein by citing an article in *Vanity Fair*.

Apropos the annual *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue, last year Tuesday Morning Quarterback noted that apparently the modern thong bikini covers way too much -- since in the 2004 issue numerous models were shown with their tops off and hands strategically placed, or with suit straps untied or thumbs hooked into suit bottoms, suggesting imminent complete undress. The trend continued in 2005. In this year's *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit number, two of three cover models had their bikini tops untied and about to fall off. Inside were 44 photographs of women in bikinis and one of a woman wearing a tradi-

tional single-piece swimsuit. (How did *that* get past the photo editors?) Nine babes had their tops off with hands strategically placed, eight were shown with bikini straps undone, five wore only body paint, three wore see-everything sheer tops and one wore naught but a few flakes of strategically positioned fake snow. And it must have been fake snow, since it didn't melt!

Finally, backpacker's bible *Outside* magazine, which once featured cover photos of Coleman stoves, had a bikini babe snorkeling in Hawaii as its March cover, then a sultry environmentalist named Sara Carlson rock-climbing naked for its April cover. You may not have known there was such a thing as a sultry naked babe environmentalist! In the cover photo, Carlson fairly smolders while the rocks appear pretty blasé. Next *Outside* cover: lingerie model poses with spotted owl.

### **"The Culturally Diverse Peoples of the United Kingdom Expect That Every Gender-Neutral Individual Will Seek Self-Empowerment," the Actor Playing Horatio Nelson Declared**

To mark the 200th anniversary of the battle of Trafalgar, the British Navy reenacted the event -- eliminating references to France and Spain, the losing side in 1805. Rather than display the colors of nations, ships bearing blue flags simulated a defeat of ships flying red flags. Anna Tribe, great-great-great granddaughter of Horatio Nelson, hero of Trafalgar, derided the sanitized, politically correct reenactment as "pretty stupid."

### **NFL.com Management to TMQ: "Keep the Column Under 5,000 Words and Next Season We'll Take Care of You"**

Ross Verba, then of Cleveland, Darrell Jackson of Seattle and others did not attend offseason training sessions (those "voluntary" minicamps that are voluntary in the sense that it's voluntary to tell your boss he has great ideas) because they claimed that last season team management verbally promised to sweeten their contracts, then did not do so. Tuesday Morning Quarterback has no idea whether such promises were made. But if they were, they were violations of the salary-cap rules. In law, a verbal contract has the same standing as a written one -- though obviously, verbal contracts are harder to enforce. If a team official says to a player, "Have a good year and next season we'll take care of you," that is so vague as to be meaningless. But if a team official says, "Have a good year and next season we'll add \$1 million to your salary," that's a contract. There is an easy way for a player's agent to determine whether a team that makes a verbal promise about adding money next season intends to keep the promise -- just see if the team has reported a new salary-cap charge.

### **Producers Cut the Scene Where the Dukes Meet Their Insurance Adjuster**

Yours truly is increasingly bored with movie special effects -- what was once spectacular now seems tedious as we behold more and more visuals generated by computer, and thus uninteresting. The entire movie *Sky Captain and the World of Tomorrow* was a yawn owing to endless computer-generated special effects -- the same flick with fewer "amazing" but actually sleep-inducing scenes of flying robots, and better writing, would have been more appealing. What really frosts my cake about modern special effects is that by decoupling filmmaking from that which can be done using props and stunt-people, computer visuals decouple filmmaking from physical law. The flying robots made no sense -- they had no wings or engines, how did they fly? Computer-made depictions of action that is impossible under physical law are boring, and TMQ suspects this is one of the reasons people are staying away from the cineplex.

Here, I cite numerous examples of special-effects scene in recent big-budget movies that depict things impossible under physical law, and hence just make movies silly. Many additions to the list could be made from this summer's movies; I pick the flying-through-the-air scenes of the General Lee in *The Dukes of Hazzard*. Numerous times in the movie, the General Lee vaults over another car or truck or off a ramp, flies 20 or more feet into the air and 50 feet forward, then comes down and keeps driving. Why doesn't falling 20 feet rupture all four tires? No car in existence, not even stock racers with beefed-up engineering, could fly through the air, fall from 20 feet and not rupture every tire, to say nothing of cracking the frame.

But don't take my word for it. Comes now *Hot Rod* magazine, which I usually read right after Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences, to report the General Lee flying scenes of the movie are entirely bogus. Some 26 copies of the General were built for the movie, *Hot Rod* says, and most were destroyed by the flying stunts. The movie's three 100-foot jumps, *Hot Rod* says, totaled every car used in filming them: after landing, the Generals Lee were worthless wrecks with smashed frames. Presumably one car would be shown flying through the air; as it struck the ground the scene would be frozen, the smashed and blown-tires General Lee towed off, a fresh car inserted to complete the scene and give the impression it is possible for a car to fly through the air and then drive away undamaged. Three of the movie's four longest jumps involved Generals Lee that not only had no actors aboard, they did not even have stunt drivers; the cars were empty owing to the danger of disintegration on landing, the Dukes digitally superimposed later. Plus for long jumps, Generals Lee were launched by catapults, because even muscle-car engines cannot propel a car 20 feet upward and 100 feet forward through the air.

Thus the flying-car scenes in *The Dukes of Hazard* could never happen, and this by my lights made them boring. Of course the scenes where Jessica Simpson walks up to an unsuspecting man and strips to a string bikini could never happen and nevertheless were, by my lights, extremely interesting. At least Simpson in a string bikini is not forbidden by physical law. Please tell me it's not.

### **Is the Car or the Legs the Star of This Movie?**

Here from the Rotten Tomatoes film commentary site are the production notes on them "Daisy Dukes," the ultra-short short-shorts worn by Simpson as she played the Catherine Bach role in the *Dukes of Hazzard* remake: "'Jessica's Daisy Dukes are even shorter than Catherine Bach's, which I honestly didn't think was possible,' says director Jay Chandrasekhar. The 23 pairs of Daisy Dukes that Simpson wears so very well span a mere ten inches from the top of the waistband to the bottom of the upper thigh. 'That's not a lot of fabric,' emphasizes costume designer Genevieve Tyrell."

### **Best Performance by a Losing Team**

Oakland of Michigan made the NCAA men's basketball tournament despite a 12-18 record. Oakland of Michigan's sports teams are the Golden Grizzlies, though grizzly bears are not indigenous to Michigan.

### **Clang! Clang! Clang!**

The Detroit Pistons won an NBA game despite missing *every* shot they took in the fourth quarter. In the contest, Detroit and Utah combined to hit 47 shots while missing 100. Trailing Kentucky by one with 5:04 remaining in the NCAA men's tournament, Cincinnati proceeded to miss *every* shot for the remainder of the game, going 0-of-13 from the field. In losing a playoff game at home to the Phoenix Suns, the Dallas Mavericks shot 1-of-18 from the three-point line. In losing the seventh game of the NBA championship, Detroit went 2-of-14 from the three line.

### **Clang! Clang! Clang! (Season-Long Achievement)**

Allen Iverson of the Philadelphia 76ers joined a small, elite group of basketball players who have missed 1,000 shots in a single season. Iverson hoisted a NBA-leading 1,818 field-goal attempts and missed 1,047 of them.

### **Next: Inside the Cheerleaders' Locker Room Comes to Pay-Per-View**

NFL Network aired a three-part miniseries about women auditioning for the Miami Dolphins' cheerleader squad. Is the world catching up to Tuesday Morning Quarterback or what? And why wasn't I hired as a technical consultant?

### ***Hmmmm, Heb Ik een Krantekop voor Dit Punt Nodig***

"Admirals hoofdcoach Bart Andrus is door de Europese pers en fans verkozen tot Coach van het Jaar," the Amsterdam Admirals announced after Bart Andrus was named Coach of the Year in NFL Europe. The Admirals won the NFL Europe championship, though considering five of the league's six clubs play in Germany, the enterprise might be renamed NFL Deutschland. Ponder Admirals' cheerleader Geraldine. According to her team bio, Geraldine's life motto is, "Je leeft maar één keer, dus haal alles er uit wat er in zit!" The Babel Fish universal translator renders this into English as, "But you live one time, thus obtain everything from what sits there!" According to the same translator, the headline of this item means, "Hmmmm, I Need a Headline for This Item."

### **Hey Baby, Want a Ride in My Four-Door Coupe?**

Many auto buyers come to showrooms saying they want a two-door, which sounds fun and dashing, but settle for a sedan, which is practical. This offseason, Mercedes tried to have it both ways by marketing the new CLS500 as "the first four-door coupe." Why does Mercedes engage in such euphemism? Surely, to turn what would otherwise be just another routine car model introduction into something that grabs the media's attention. Hmmmm, Mercedes seems to have accomplished that here.

### **Strangely, He Didn't Pretend to Be Ryan Leaf**

A Pittsburgh man got into legal trouble for putting the moves on women by pretending to be Steelers quarterbacks Ben Roethlisberger or Brian St. Pierre. St. Pierre has never completed a pass in the NFL. Sounds like the Pittsburgh guy didn't complete any passes either!

### **If He Didn't Start in High School, He Would Have Gone First**

Marvin Williams of North Carolina, who did not start in college, was chosen second in the NBA draft.

### **We the Euros, In Order to Form a More Verbose Union...**

The United States Constitution, as written in Philadelphia in 1789 and amended over two-plus centuries, is now about 25 pages double-space. The proposed European Constitution rejected in the offseason by France and the Netherlands is 720 pages. The document contains such numbing verbiage as, from Article III subsection 198: "If it is decided, in accordance with the procedure set out in paragraph 2, to abrogate a derogation..." One reason the U.S. Constitution has lasted for centuries is that it's short and sweet. Maybe voters rejected the European Constitution because they didn't have time to read 720 pages! My favorite clause was Article II, subsection 89: "Everyone has the right of access to a free placement service." The enigmatic "free placement service" means government-funded job counseling. But this only obliges government to provide a case worker to talk to you about your desire for a job: It doesn't insure you get a job, as the many high-unemployment nations of the European Union know. Yours truly chortled at the use of the word "free," which occurs more than once in the Euro Constitution. Butterflies may be free, but nothing government does is free. Citizens are taxed to pay for the "free" counseling departments, and economic theory holds that in most cases, taxation reduces the prosperity of the taxed. (Taxation can increase prosperity if it adds to the general good, for example by financing roads or bridges.) Perhaps if European Union nations offered fewer "free" services that are dead weights on the economy, fewer people would need job counseling because there would be increased prosperity and more jobs in the first place! The proposed European Constitution contained so many restrictions, exemptions and special-interest guarantees that the document would have rendered economic change close to illegal in Europe -- thus insuring perpetual high unemployment, giving placement officers plenty to discuss. And speaking of unemployment...

### **Unemployment Rises Among Space Aliens and Starship Captains**

In May, the *Star Wars* movie saga and *Star Trek* television franchise ended in the same week. Right now, thousands of strange aliens, bizarre creatures and starcruiser personnel are hanging around in taverns

aboard space stations, quaffing Romulan ale and tranya (quick, who gets that obscure reference?) as they read the galactic Want Ads and wonder what planet they'll go to next to land acting jobs.

The finale of *Star Trek Enterprise* was a nothingburger with cheese: four years of television leads up to T'Pol giving Archer a hug, then a guy from the future throws a switch and the whole thing disappears. One character dies the least-moving death in scriptwriting history, we never find out the fates of the other figures in the series, two characters from a different series talk incessantly about a 1994 *Star Trek* episode that has nothing to do with this year's program, and there's only the thinnest attempt at a stirring oration about the human need to seek the unknown. What a total letdown. "Out of ideas they were," Yoda would say about *Star Trek's* producers. Yours truly's lampoon of the final *Star Trek* is here.

Meanwhile the final *Star Wars* had 100 times the special effects of the first movie from 1977, yet maybe one percent the originality or writing quality. We forget there were *jokes* in the first *Star Wars*! Obviously George Lucas forgot. It's disturbing that the mechanistic aspects of big-studio movies -- special effects, cinematography and sound effects -- just keep getting better, while the writing just keeps getting worse. And yours truly found it incredibly offensive that *Revenge of the Sith* depicted Darth Vader murdering children. George Lucas became one of the richest men in cinema history by selling billions of dollars worth of movie tickets and toys to children. In the final installment, Lucas raised his middle finger to the parents who paid for all those tickets and toys by gratuitously depicting children being slaughtered. You don't have to be a Freudian to suspect Lucas was saying, "Hey parents who made me super-ultra-rich, here's what I think of your kids."

My departing *Star Wars* complaint concerns the point that it's fine for sci-fi to be improbable, but not fine for special effects to violate laws of physics. Consider the Jedi light sabers, which throughout the *Star Wars* flicks are depicted as deflecting blasts from lasers and other energy weapons. Jedi don't carry sidearms because if anyone shoots a weapon at them, they use the light saber to deflect the shot back at the person who fired. But in order to intercept a laser or other energy beam that travels at the speed of light, the Jedi knight would need to move the light-saber generator, and thus his own arm, faster than the speed of light. Are we supposed to believe that during light-saber fighting, a Jedi's arms constantly jump in and out of hyperspace? And if the Jedi's arms really were moving faster than light we wouldn't see them, yet we do. Einstein showed that as matter -- in this case the Jedi's arm -- approaches the speed of light, it acquires infinite mass. Are we to believe that Jedi are so incredibly strong, their muscles can push an object with infinite mass? If so, a Jedi could push entire planets. If robots, storm troopers, droids, clones and other bad guys of the *Star Wars* universe shot at you with a laser whose bolt travels at the speed of light, you would be toast long before you could move the arm that holds the light saber into position to deflect.

### **Series Finale of "This Week's *Star Trek* Complaint"**

Sadly, the four-year running item "This Week's *Star Trek* Complaint" must end, as the *Star Trek* universe has closed for business. In the penultimate episode of *Star Trek Enterprise*, our heroes visit a mining facility on the Moon. It's the year 2160. Earth is sending faster-than-light starcruisers to other solar systems, has established a huge colony on the Moon, and has built ray-gun stations on Mars. So what do we see in the lunar mine? Dirty miners with pick-axes pushing rocks around in beatup carts. Something tells me that in the year 2160, miners on the Moon will not be pushing rocks around in carts.

### **As the Turnstiles Turn**

The 2004 season was the NFL's fifth consecutive record year for paid attendance. The Washington Redskins led the league with attendance that averaged 88,490 -- though FedExField can hold 91,665, and all Skins games were announced as sellouts. (Club-seat accounting involves fuzzy math.) The Giants were second in attendance with 78,734 per game, and the Jets fourth with 77,873. So although Jersey/A and Jersey/B play in the same facility, offer exactly the same seats and both clubs announce all games as sellouts, the Giants somehow average 861 more customers.

### **More Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization**

An estimated 100 reporters attended Maurice Clarett's press conference at the Indianapolis combine.

### **Neither Bruce Smith Nor Emmitt Smith Will Line Up This Autumn; It's Just Not Right**

Now that the great Emmitt Smith has taped his ankles for the last time, Tuesday Morning Quarterback asks: Who are Ray Agnew, Lamar Lathon, Keith McCants, Percy Snow, Blair Thomas, Andre Ware and James Williams? Some of the 16 players chosen ahead of Smith in the 1990 draft.

### **What Does Schwarzenegger Plan to Do About Cigar Emissions?**

In the offseason's leading display of political double-talk -- there were many candidates from both parties -- Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger of California took the ribbon by announcing he would make his state "a leader in the fight against global warming" via an "ambitious" plan of statewide cuts. What was the ambitious plan? California would, by the year 2010, reduce greenhouse gas emissions to the level of 2000; then, by 2050, reduce emissions to 80 percent below the level of 1990. Sound dramatic? The promise was an utter sham. Owing to improved use of energy-efficient technology in California home-building, the state's current level of emissions, about 330 metric tons of greenhouse gases annually, is already at about the level of 2000. In other words, to meet the "ambitious" 2010 goal, California has only to keep things exactly as they are. Meeting the 2050 target might, by contrast, require all Californians to give up their cars -- the 2050 target is an 83 percent reduction from the current levels. Note the trick that's being played in the announcement. Over the next five years, when Arnold might still be in office, he commits the state to no hard choices and nothing that would upset any voter or interest group. But for the future when he's out of office, Schwarzenegger declares a goal that is impossible unless something like cold fusion is invented. Arnold gets to announce a dramatic commitment, but will be long gone from the statehouse before anyone has to wrestle with anything specific. Schwarzenegger isn't alone in this kind of dodge. In 1997, when Vice President Al Gore announced support for the Kyoto greenhouse gas reduction treaty, he did so after negotiators agreed the treaty would not take effect until 2008 -- the final year of a two-term Gore administration. Lesson? Ignore any politician patting himself on the back for global warming reforms that don't occur until after he leaves office. Believe only global warming reforms that take place *now*.

### **Offseason Salary Cap Low Point**

On April 2, 2005, the Oakland Raiders were just \$57,000 under the NFL salary cap of about \$86 million - - not enough room to sign an undrafted free agent.

### **Next Week**

Readers' offseason complaints about TMZ, and my annual anti-basketball diatribe.

## AFC preview, and why only Jackson Browne should hold out

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

(Aug. 16, 2005) -- As holdouts of first-round draft choices drag on, it's time to raise a point that hold-ers-out rarely seem to consider -- slightly more money now may mean a lot less money over the long term. Draftees who hold out for extended periods do so at the expense of reduction in their long-term career earnings potential.

It's not the rookie contract where the big money is in the NFL, it's the free-agency contract for which players become eligible in their fourth or fifth years. By holding out for slightly more money as rookie -- and it's only slightly more, given that the "slotting" custom dictates the approximate dollar value of rookie contracts -- players often do severe damage to their chances of mega money in free agency. Consider Philip Rivers of the Chargers, fourth overall pick in the 2004 draft. Rivers held out for 25 days last summer, ending up with a marginally better deal. By missing his rookie training camp, Rivers nailed himself to the bench for the 2004 season; Drew Brees blossomed and now Rivers will play in 2005 only if Brees is injured. By this time next year, Rivers may seem much less promising as an NFL quarterback, as he'll be a third-year player with, barring injury to Brees, little or no experience. The holdout caused Rivers' chance of a megabucks payday in free agency to go way, way down.

This is a common phenomenon. First-round picks who hold out for more than a couple days miss key learning time, get off on the wrong foot with their coaches and teammates, and acquire reputations as players whom personnel departments should avoid. This harms the holdout's long-term earnings potential. The second pick of the draft, Ronnie Brown, just ended a nearly three-week holdout; the fourth and sixth picks, Cedric Benson and Adam Jones, continue to hold out for minor improvements in their offers. All three have already missed so much camp their rookie seasons may be disappointing, while all three have already linked their names to the word "disappointment." David Pollack, the Bengals' first choice, continues to hold out, though the guy drafted before him signed for a \$7.8 million bonus, and the guy drafted after him signed for a \$7.4 million bonus. These numbers guarantee Pollack's bonus will be within bus fare of \$7.6 million, so what is he waiting for? Pollack has already missed so much time he may have lost his chance to start this season, and already engendered enough ill will that league insiders are talking about how the Bengals made a mistake by believing in Pollack. Every extra dollar gained by anyone holding out beyond the first few days of training camp may come at the expense of \$10 in lost long-term earnings potential.

Often holdouts result from players choosing bad-news agents. Say what you will about Drew Rosenhaus, who lately has been getting more ink than Karl Rove; Rosenhaus has his clients in camp on time, because he understands this is essential to long-term earnings potential. Many agents don't seem to understand this, or don't care -- they'd rather get their commission on a slightly higher sum today, and who cares what happens to the client five years down the road. Some agents actually seem to like holdouts, because at the end they can claim to have brought an NFL team to its knees, though the client's interest is harmed in the process. (The first offer a first-round draft pick receives is usually the final offer, in big-picture terms. Good agents like Rosenhaus work mainly to keep the deal as short as possible and the bonus timing as favorable as possible.) Some agents don't even seem to understand the legal concept of "agency." In law, agency doctrine holds that any kind of agent is obligated to act in his or her principal's best interest. Yet holding out is almost never in an athlete's best interest. The result is at most a tiny increase in present money, coupled to a huge reduction in the chance a player's career will be a success.

With the league now negotiating a new collective bargaining agreement with the NFL Players Association, this summer's silly holdouts add more weight to the idea there should be a rookie pay scale, an idea that's worked well in the NBA. Many current NFL players favor this concept because it would shift money from unproven rookies to accomplished veterans. First overall draft pick Alex Smith, for instance, may someday be a top quarterback, but right now he's never done squat. It seems ridiculous that Smith, who's never done squat, just signed a deal that guarantees him about \$24 million -- close to the \$32 million guaranteed in the new deal signed by Tom Brady, the NFL's best player, and far above the roughly \$18 million guaranteed in the deal just signed by Orlando Pace, a very accomplished player who

is a likely Hall of Fame entrant. But while a rookie pay scale would mainly serve to shift monies from unproven rookies to accomplished veterans, its secondary effect would be to end the rookie holdout. If initial pay and contract length were dictated by a formula, there would be no point in holding out -- just like the rookie pay scale has ended NBA holdouts. Twenty-one-year-olds may be too callow to understand that long-term earnings potential matter far more than bragging rights about the first contracts. But the system should be adjusted to get all rookies into camp on time, since ending the rookie holdout is in the financial interest of rookies.

And now we take you live to our Terrell Owens desk ...

There's a simple way to end the T.O. sideshow, and that is a moratorium on Owens interviews. Did you see the picture of Owens doing sit-ups while 20 microphones thrust toward him? Owens signed a contract that he must (and will) honor. Nonstop press attention about his many grievances in life are only egging him on. True, it's August, and there is no real football to cover; the sports press always needs an August story, and this year Owens is it. But my guess is that if *SportsCenter* and all sportswriters simply ignored T.O. for one week, he'd be back in camp and all would be forgiven. Therefore, I propose an Owens Mention Moratorium -- hmmm, which I seem to have violated by doing this item.

Now, my AFC preview.

Baltimore: What's this -- the same starting quarterback as last season? Since arriving in Charm City, the Ravens have experienced constant quarterback turnover, never starting the same gent for two consecutive opening days, more than once changing starters during the season. But this year at Baltimore it's Kyle Boller behind center, just like last year -- unprecedented stability. But can Boller place the ball into the hands of his receivers?

Baltimore was 31st in passing last season, and Boller 30th in passer rating. The passing was bad, even though the blocking was usually good, meaning Boller had time to scan the field. All this even with Baltimore's running game having the respect of opponents. The Nevermores' passing will surely be aided by the arrival of Derrick Mason, one of the most productive receivers in the league -- but if Mason is open that won't matter should the ball sail over his head, and last season, Boller struggled with accuracy. Anthony Wright is Boller's only experienced backup, and Wright has sputtered on the field too, with a career 62.4 passer rating. It would be a shame if sub-par quarterback play kept the Ravens, whose defense is terrific, from contending. Baltimore is 14-11 with Boller as the starter, but that's considering stellar defense, solid blocking and a strong running game.

Rex Ryan, Baltimore's new defensive coordinator and son of Buddy Ryan, will use some of his father's "4-6" defenses. TMQ expects sportscasters to gush over this in exaggerated fashion. The old Buddy Ryan 4-6 fronts were bizarre, such as all four defensive linemen on one side on the center and all three linebackers on the other. Rex Ryan plans a mild 4-6 with a safety up in the line, now a common look employed by many NFL teams on occasion. Ryan also plans to have his linebackers vary where they line up, sometimes putting two in the line for a five-man front, even though the front is officially a 3-4. Lining up linebackers in different places was rare when Buddy did it in the 1980s, but it has become common in the contemporary NFL. Buddy's 4-6 would take almost any risk to get to the passer. Expect Rex's 4-6 to be more cautious, since it is the conservative, position-oriented style of defense at which Baltimore defenders excel.

*Sidelines note:* Not only is Baltimore the sole NFL team with hunk male cheer-studs joining the buff cheer-babes, it is the sole NFL team with its own marching band. Cheer-babes in microskirts, cheer-hunks flexing their biceps, sousaphones on parade -- nobody does the game day show better than the Baltimore Ravens.

*Scouting note:* Usually running back Jamal Lewis comes out on third-and-more-than-3. But if he stays in, it's *always* to him.

*Grooming note:* In the offseason, Baltimore coach Brian Billick grew a fuzzy beard. The team's own

official web site allowed that the beard made Billick resemble the monster from "Harry and the Hendersons." Better make bed check, rookie, the coach is a real monster!

**Buffalo:** In 2004, the Bills had the second-rated defense, led the league in takeaways, led the league in points scored by defense and special teams, and fielded the best special teams, according to the influential annual analysis by Rick Gosselin of the *Dallas Morning News*. Yet Buffalo failed to make the postseason, and the reason was cover-your-eyes offense. Drew Bledsoe consistently was dreadful -- more on that with next week's Dallas preview. Play calling was timid with the Bills throwing deep less than anyone in the NFL. Defenses could cheat to the line, confident nothing would go over their heads. Willis McGahee's season was all the more remarkable considering he often ran against over-stacked fronts.

The Bills have almost everyone back. Coaches have promised bolder play calling. The quarterback job is handed to J.P. Losman, effectively a rookie after a first season mainly spent injured. Last season in my AFC preview, I noted this about the Bengals: "History says Carson Palmer is likely to struggle as most quarterbacks do in their first season. Marvin Lewis faces a classic coach's choice -- should he play Jon 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."

Change Palmer to Losman, Lewis to Mike Mularkey, Kitna to Kelly Holcomb and the Ohio to Lake Erie, and you've got Buffalo's preview for 2005. Palmer lost four of his first five starts, effectively eliminating the Bengals by Halloween. Lewis stood by his man, and by season's end, Palmer looked like a future star. If Losman loses in September, Mularkey will face the same vexing choice -- whether to sacrifice the season to the education of his quarterback, or switch to a veteran backup. The difference is that Buffalo's defense might put the team into the postseason with Holcomb as a caretaker. Can the Bills, former juggernauts who haven't won a playoff game in a decade, waste their great defense on another frustrating year?

A puzzling personnel decision hangs over Buffalo's season. After losing left tackle Jonas Jennings in free agency, the Bills made no significant move to replace him. At present, Buffalo's starting LT is Mike Gandy, who last December was OOF -- out of football -- and not on anyone's roster. His backup is Jason Peters, a converted tight end who has never taken a game day snap on offensive line in the pros or college. Losman may spend a lot of time scrambling to avoid blindside pressure, which is not a good way for a novice quarterback to learn -- though a good way to get hit, and the quiet fear about Losman is that he's easily injured. Possible propitious omen: Things worked out pretty well for the last team to ditch Drew Bledsoe.

*Fiscal note:* Erie County, where Ralph Wilson Stadium is located, has all kinds of financial problems. To help, the Bills announced they would pay stadium upkeep costs the county is supposed to cover. Surely this is the first known instance of a professional sports franchise giving money to the public rather than the other way around!

*Personal appearance note:* The Bills will not accept as cheerleaders women with pierced tongues.

**Cincinnati:** Two years Marvin Lewis has been at Cincinnati, and both times the Bengals flirted with the playoffs. This represents a huge improvement for a team that, in the previous decade, had been worst overall in professional sports -- even worse than the Los Angeles Clippers, and "worse than the Clippers" is like being "smaller than Luxembourg." A playoff invitation is a realistic goal for Cincinnati this season -- certainly not words I had expected to type in my lifetime. Though Lewis loves defense, what has held back two straight 8-8 Cincinnati clubs is defense. In 2003, the team finished 28th on defense; last season the Bengals improved to 19th, still well short of what's needed. This year the Cincinnati defensive coordinator will be Chuck Bresnahan, who uses the conservative, position-oriented defense this column preaches and that Lewis himself employed to good effect at Baltimore.

Last season concluded on a positive note for Cincinnati, with a winning streak and Carson Palmer looking like he was worth the first pick in the 2003 draft. The Bengals will in effect field a bonus top draft choice this season, since injuries limited their 2004 first pick, tailback Chris Perry, to one carry. If the Bengals

do actually make the playoffs -- well, as Karl Rove put it, "I've said too much already."

Reader Yancy Deering of Cincinnati points out the Bengals have released a chart of the various uniform looks they will sport in 2005 -- no fewer than five different combos! On Oct. 30, Cincinnati will wear its Halloween costumes: orange jerseys with black pants. Coaches should throw candy! The Bengals host Green Bay that day, meaning a team in black and orange will play a team in yellow, green and white. Fans better bring sunglasses.

**Cleveland:** This year the Browns carry \$5.6 million in cap charges for quarterbacks Tim Couch and Jeff Garcia, neither of whom are on the team. But then some 20 gentlemen who started at least one game for Cleveland in 2004 are now gone. There hasn't been this kind of housecleaning since the last time Samantha in *Bewitched* did a spell and the broom swept the whole house in an instant. The Browns' core problem continues to be lack of talent: No one on the roster has appeared in the Pro Bowl as a Brown, and that is pitiful. As NFL.com's Pat Kirwan showed here, bad drafts left the new Browns in this state. Owing to their expansion-team special picks, from 1999 to 2004 the Browns enjoyed a total of 15 first- and second-round selections -- yet today have just two starters, Jeff Faine and Dennis Northcutt, to show for it. Cleveland, Kirwan calculates, paid \$127 million to high draft choices from 1999 to 2004, and this expense yielded a mere two regulars. That is pitiful.

One thing can be said in the Browns' favor, and that is they played the strongest schedule of any NFL team in 2004. Their opponents finished with a combined record of 151-105. But even discounting for schedule strength, in the second half of 2004 the Browns were being blown out week after week. By the game in which Cleveland scored 48 points and still lost, the team had pretty much run off the rails. Thus, new coach Romeo Crennel knows housecleaning is unavoidable, even if that means a rocky 2005. It's hard to believe any team could get nothing from so many consecutive high No. 1 draft picks (Couch, Courtney Brown and Gerald Warren discarded, with Kellen Winslow Jr. in limbo) and still be competitive. If anyone other than Bill Belichick can pull this off, it's likely to be Crennel.

Many wanted Crennel to clean house even more and waive Winslow, the sixth pick in the 2004 draft, who's taken millions in bonus money from the Browns but rarely stepped on the field. But Winslow's rookie season injury was just an injury, not his fault. This year's sophomore season-ending motorbike stunt injury was as dumb as it gets. That's still only one boneheaded move that is Winslow's own fault. As Len Pasquarelli of ESPN.com has noted, Cleveland's previous management spoiled Winslow by only requiring him to speak to the press once a week -- a privilege normally accorded strictly to senior veterans, not rookies who've never done squat -- and actually assigned a club functionary to carry Winslow's shoulder pads off the field for him. There will, it seems safe to say, be no such foolishness under Crennel, and that may help Winslow grow up. So give him one more shot. But Winslow must bear in mind, three strikes and you're out.

*Name note:* When the Browns returned to NFL, yours truly dubbed them the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.0). When they briefly became a winner again, I dubbed them the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1). Now that the roster, coaching staff and front office have all been torn up with the whole enterprise restarting from scratch, this season they will be the Cleveland Browns (Beta Version).

**Denver:** For the last two years, Denver has led the NFL in schizophrenia. The Broncos have gone 20-12 in the regular season, 0-2 in the playoffs, have won their regular-season games by an average margin of plus-7 points, and lost their playoff games by an average margin of minus-28 points. In 2004, the Broncos had the league's sixth-rated pass defense during the regular season. Then in the playoffs, Denver was down 35-3 at halftime, having surrendered 356 yards passing in two quarters alone. During the regular season, Denver had the league's fourth-best rushing attack. Then in the playoffs, the Broncos rushed for an anemic 78 yards. Some have tried to rationalize away Denver's two schizophrenic years by saying both playoff blowouts were at the hands of the Indianapolis Colts and their hot passing attack. But the Colts have one of the league's weakest rushing defenses -- why couldn't Denver run against them? The Broncos' transformation from regular-season dreadnaught to playoff dinghy seems to occur on a player-by-player, as well as team basis. Last year during the regular season, cornerback Champ Bailey played pretty well. In the playoffs he was so thoroughly toasted he might as well have been

served with butter and marmalade.

During the offseason Denver brought in a number of players who were not invited back by previous employers, plus spent a third-round choice on Maurice Clarett -- who has devoted the last three years of his life to attempting to prove himself the worst-attitude individual in team sports history. Why, exactly, did Denver want a malcontent who threw away a very promising college career just to show the world he could not possibly care less about his team, his teammates, his coaches, the rules, etc.? Then the Broncos signed Clarett to an odd contract that included no bonus, but unusually big incentives for yards gained. This raises the possibility Clarett will become irate if he doesn't play, because you can't run up stats if you're not on the field. How long until Clarett denounces the Broncos? TMQ is betting it won't be long.

As every sports columnist noted, Denver acquired via trades or free agency four of the Cleveland Browns' defensive linemen from 2004 -- though the Browns' defensive line finished dead last against the rush and 27th in sacks. In 2004, the Denver defense was fourth against the rush and 14th in sacks. Now the team has a line that last season performed nowhere nearly as well. Every sports columnist called these transactions weird. Let me just add that in my view, these transactions were very, very weird.

*Roster note:* Entering camp, the Broncos had eight defensive linemen on the depth chart that had been first- or second-round draft choices.

*Cheer-babes note:* The high-aesthetic-appeal Broncos' cheerleaders have an "official cosmetic dentist," Lori Ann Kemmet of Boulder, Colo. Her web site contains testimonials from satisfied customers, one of whom is identified as a "spa consultant." Someone whose profession is spa consultant? Only in America!

**Houston:** Don't take this the wrong way Moo Cow fans, but the Houston franchise has a dullness problem. Its uniforms are the dullest in the league. The team's style of play is droning. Except for Andre Johnson, the Texans lack exciting players. In 2004, David Carr was sacked more often (49 times) than Houston scored touchdowns (37 times). Touchdowns are exciting; sacks are dull. Last season the Texans went 0-7 against teams that made the playoffs. Big victories are exciting; constantly losing to playoff-caliber teams is dull.

Will things jazz up for Houston? For that to happen, the unremitting sacks must stop. Texans' quarterbacks have been sacked 162 times in last three seasons, worst in the league in that span, and plain dull to watch. Yet the Texans are likely to field the same offensive line as last year's underwhelming unit; the team having made no major free-agent signings on the offensive line, while the highest draft pick invested in a blocker was a fifth-rounder. Considering the Texans have spent their first three seasons in the NFL handicapped by poor offensive-line performance, the team's lack of offseason action on this front is puzzling.

Perhaps the most exciting thing right now about the Texans, pointed out by Jeff Kennedy of Louisville, Ky., among many readers, is cheer-babe twins Larisa and Marisa. Larisa and Marisa are both beautiful and smart -- National Honor Society members in high school, according to their team bio. But also according to the bio, "They are currently pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree in education." As one person? The bio continues, "They plan to attain a master's degree." They'll both get the same one degree?

**Indianapolis:** The Colts' player payroll in 2004 was \$92 million, according to the *USA Today* football spending database, while the salary cap was about \$80 million. This means Indianapolis delayed \$12 million in cap charges into the future, and inevitably, the bill will come due. The Colts' offensive septuplets -- Peyton Manning, Edgerrin James, Marvin Harrison, Reggie Wayne, Brandon Stokley, Tarik Glenn and Jeff Saturday -- simply can't stay together much longer. Probably they won't all be together in 2006. And that, in turn, means if Indianapolis is going to win a Super Bowl, now would be the year.

Indianapolis scored a stunning 34 points per game through its first 17 contests in 2004 -- then wheezed out at just three points in its playoff loss at New England. So how good is the Colts' offense? In 2004,

not good enough. But blame for yet another Colts playoff flop should rest on the defense. In 2003, the Indianapolis defense finished a solid 11th; last season it slipped to 29th, and only some of that weak finish can be attributed to the Colts being so far ahead in several games that backup defenders played extensively. In the playoff loss to New England, Indy's defense was just awful. From the point the Flying Elvii took over on their 13-yard line early in the third quarter while nursing a 6-3 lead, New England ran 28 of the game's next 34 plays, staging back-to-back 87- and 94-yard touchdown drives. The Indianapolis defense simply could not get the Patriots off the field, and suddenly the contest was a walkover at 20-3. One reason the Indianapolis defense declined last season was that the Colts let both their starting corners and Pro Bowl linebacker Marcus Washington go in free agency in order to free up money for Manning's bonus. Manning sat on the bench twiddling his thumbs as the undermanned defense lost the game.

Then there is the Colts' ongoing Tony Dungy quandary. Dungy is an impressive 88-56 in the regular season, but has fizzled at 5-7 in the playoffs. He seems to approach postseason contests as "just another game," which is all wrong. In January, the pressure and tension are much higher than during the regular season. Before January's date in frigid Foxboro, Dungy had his team practice indoors where it was toasty warm; the Patriots practiced outside. When it was New England 6, Indianapolis 3 in the third quarter and the Colts facing fourth-and-1 on the Patriots' 49, Dungy passively sent in the punting unit, even though he had the league's best offense! Disaster followed as the night follows the day. I mean that both in the Shakespearian sense and in the causal sense -- everyone knows the night must follow the day, and every NFL coach ought to know that punting on fourth-and-1 in the other team's territory in the second half must lead to defeat. To win playoff contests, an NFL coach must pull out all the stops. Yet repeated January letdowns with good teams in Tampa and Indianapolis does not seem to have changed Dungy's mind about his curious "just another game" approach.

**Jacksonville:** I don't know to make of a team that finished 9-7 and barely missed the postseason, yet got blanked 21-0 at home with two weeks left and holding the inside track for a playoff invite? Blanked at home by Houston to boot, not by some colossus NFL powerhouse. Jacksonville and Green Bay were the sole winning teams of 2004 that did not have winning records at home. In the Packers' case, this was mysterious -- to say the Pack had a good season but not a winning year at Lambeau is like saying Anna Kournikova opened a kissing booth and got no customers. In the case of Jax, a disappointing performance at home was more straightforward. Official attendance averaged 64,089, but that figure is puffed up. For the Houston game that doomed the Jaguars' hopes, the gate was announced as 66,227. But when cameras panned the crowd in the first half, whole blocks of Alltel Stadium were vacant. Apparently thousands of Jacksonvillians bought tickets but did not attend. Yes, it was the day after Christmas, but the game was the most important one Jax had performed in for years. Crowd energy was absent, and while that does not excuse the team's flat performance -- six first downs at home with the playoffs on the line! -- lack of crowd energy has become a concern for the Jacksonville franchise. This season Jax management covered almost 10,000 seats at Alltel, hoping to make the place feel full, while lowering the sold-out point so television blackouts can be lifted. But until Jacksonville fans pack the stands and get jacked up, the Jags will operate at a competitive disadvantage to most of the league's teams.

On offense, last season Jax was too predictable. In several games the team was able to move the ball only the final two minutes, when it abandoned the predictable short-passing stuff. New offensive coordinator Carl Smith promises to throw deep. On defense, Jax performed well overall, but had trouble getting other teams off the field, allowing one of the league's highest third-down conversion percentages. This was an echo of 2003, when the defense performed well overall but had poor stats for stopping third-down conversions. The Jaguars blitz predictably on third down; opponents know this and exploit it. So while the team needs to loosen up on offense, it needs to become more conservative on defense.

**Jersey/B:** Curtis Martin led the NFL in rushing despite a long gain of 25 yards, the shortest long gain of anyone in the Top 30 in rushing last season. How's that for an obscure stat! Yet despite the lack of long gainers, Martin's per-carry average was an impressive 4.6 yards, one of the best figures in the league. This gentleman drags tacklers forward better than anyone in the NFL, and the result was loads of intermediate-yardage runs. If I had to choose between someone whose forte is dragging tacklers forward and a Barry Sanders type who gets trapped in the backfield a lot then occasionally breaks a long one, I'd chose the reliable Martin-style runner any day. Love obscure stats? Here's another. In 2004, Martin had 28 runs for first downs in the fourth quarter, when it's money time. Week in and week out last season,

watching Curtis Martin gain eight yards even when the defense knew he was going to get the ball was one of the real pleasures the NFL offered.

Were the Jets for real in 2004? They won a playoff contest, then had Pittsburgh on the ropes twice in an overtime postseason loss, the Jersey/B defense playing particularly well in that contest. But the Jets were just 2-5 against other teams that made the playoffs -- their wins being piled up against weak clubs. In the offseason, Jersey/B made a puzzling move by reacquiring the me-first Laveranues Coles. Not only had Coles just thrown an ego tirade against the venerable Joe Gibbs at the Redskins; as Mark Maske of the *Washington Post* noted, "Coles has made bitter departures from the last three teams on which he's played, beginning in college and Florida State and continuing in the NFL with the Jets and Redskins." Coles can run under passes okay, but few in recent football annals have shown less team spirit. Why did Jersey/B want him back?

**Kansas City:** As Tuesday Morning Quarterback declares ad infinitum (Latin for "by using my AutoText"), offensive line play is the most important element of success in the NFL. If I had to choose between a great offensive line and an average quarterback, or a great quarterback and an average offensive line, I'd pick the former. Great offensive lines make average skill players look better, while great skill players are basically wasted if they get hit in the backfield. Last year the Kansas City blockers were the best in the league; as yours truly wrote midseason, "The Kansas City offensive line is playing so much better than any other offensive line that it's almost spooky." John Welbourn, Will Shields, Casey Wiegmann, Brian Waters and Willie Roaf blocked so efficiently that sometimes they seem to be doing a no-pads walk-through, the kind where defenders are told to step out of the offense's way. Jordan Black, a Kansas City draftee, may crack this lineup this season. Otherwise note please that of last year's starters, only Shields was a Kansas City draftee. The others were either undrafted (Waters), traded away by teams that didn't want them (Welbourn, Roaf) or let go by their original clubs (Wiegmann). Kansas City has built the league's best offensive line around discards. New England has won three of the last four Super Bowls using a highly proficient offensive line consisting mainly of low draft choices and waiver-wire who-dats. Meanwhile teams that have invested lots of high draft picks and hefty bonus checks in offensive linemen (Arizona, Detroit, Oakland, Washington) can't seem to block the sun from reaching the ground. There's an important lesson here. I just wish I knew what it was.

*Kansas City offense warning sign:* Chiefs' backup quarterback Todd Collins has thrown a total of one touchdown pass in the last *seven years*. Collins hasn't started a game since 1997, when not only was Bill Clinton president, the world had not yet heard the name "Monica Lewinski." As to the Kansas City defense, last season the Chiefs scored an average of 30 points per game, and had a losing record. I believe that is all that needs be said about the Kansas City defense.

**Miami:** When college coaching star Butch Davis jumped to the NFL at Cleveland, he insisted on full control of football operations. The result was a 24-35 record despite a blank salary cap and a bonanza of extra-high draft picks, and Davis, a good guy, was so bummed out he's not coaching anywhere this fall. (Davis just joined NFL Network, where he cannot possibly lose a game because an announcer rips off his helmet before the final whistle.) When college coaching star Nick Saban jumped to the NFL, he insisted on full control of football operations. Several months into the job Saban hired a general manager, but the guy reports to Saban, engaging the risk he will be a yes-man. Davis' experience at Cleveland seems the ultimate argument for a point Tuesday Morning Quarterback endlessly makes -- that at the NFL level the coaching and the front office should be separate operations.

Coaches should coach; somebody else should make the personnel decisions and be the one who screams into the phone at agents. Davis, Saban and others from the football-factory ranks became accustomed to college environments where they were treated like little gods -- and where finances were rarely an issue, where the players say nothing but "right away sir" and where the press is usually pure boosterism. At the pro level the players talk back, the media knives are always out and financial complexities cloud everything. Successful NFL coaches do not expect to be treated like little gods, and know they can't possibly do it all themselves. Bill Belichick is Exhibit A. Early in his head coaching career he tried to run everything himself and failed; arriving at New England he delegated much of his authority, and succeeded. Belichick at New England, not Davis at Cleveland, is the model to emulate. Yet Saban has cho-

sen the latter path.

Saban did make a Belichick-like move by acquiring a strong staff of assistants. Last year the Dolphins surrendered 52 sacks, an untenable total; this year sophomore Vernon Carey, in which the Dolphins have invested a lot, simply must pan out at left tackle, where the Dolphins have been hurting since Richmond Webb. New offensive line coach Hudson Hauck, one of the best at his craft, affords Marine Mammals' faithful some hope. New Miami offensive coordinator Scott Linehan did a tip-top job in Minnesota, offering the Dolphins more hope. Linehan brought in quarterback Gus Frerotte, who was Duante Culpepper's backup, and is a Frerotte proponent, apparently because the gentleman looked sharp in Vikings' practices last season. Let's inject a little realism regarding Frerotte. He is a career 76.1 passer who has not been a fulltime starter in *eight years*. During his three-season run as the starter for the Washington Redskins, Frerotte compiled a 23-24-1 won-loss record. Maybe Frerotte did look good in Minnesota practices last season, but he was throwing to a top receiver corps against one of the league's worst secondaries, plus wearing a red jersey so that he could not be hit.

Even if the Marine Mammals are in a down cycle, bear in mind that since the 1970 AFL-NFL merger, no NFL franchise has won more games. In fact the Dolphins could lose every game this season and still be assured of finishing 2005 with the NFL's most wins since 1970. That is none too shabby.

*Real estate note:* Saban bought a \$7 million beachfront home in trendy Fort Lauderdale, which is a 25-mile drive from Pro Player Stadium along a dense traffic corridor. He's going to have to leave for work early on game days!

**New England:** The Flying Elvii failed to win one of the last four Super Bowls. There, that's about the only criticism I can think of regarding this franchise. Yours truly asserted at this time last August that New England has an NFL dynasty "without a single sure Hall of Fame player." Now Tom Brady is sure to don the Canton yellow jacket -- Hall of Fame officials call the jacket gold, but it sure looks yellow to me -- as is Bill Belichick. But that's still only two sure entrants from a dynasty team, versus the 10 players and coaches inducted so far from the Steelers of the 1970s. Who else besides Brady on the Patriots is sure Hall of Fame material? No one. Willie McGinest will get a hearing; Rodney Harrison stands a chance, but has only a couple of years as a Patriot; Ty Law might be considered, but has departed; the entire New England offensive line should go to Canton as a unit, but most fans can't name a single member; maybe Corey Dillon will be considered, but so far he has one good year at New England versus seven years of whining at Cincinnati; Tedy Bruschi was great in 2004 but has recorded only a couple of premium seasons; Richard Seymour has only played four seasons; Adam Vinatieri is superb, but only one kicker has made the Hall; Troy Brown is a memorable utility player, but the Canton electors strangely disrespect special teams and utility work. (If Steve Tasker, the best special-teams player ever and also an excellent utility player on offense, can't get into the Hall of Fame, how will Brown?) The New England squad has three of the last four Lombardi Trophies, and might add another. But the Pats may not fare well at Canton time, exactly because they play a team-oriented approach that does not create stars.

But don't make the mistake, based on the above, of thinking New England lacks blue-chippers. This season the Pats' starting defensive line may consist entirely of recent No. 1 draft picks. New England is likely to open with 10 No. 1 choices on its roster, plus a dozen others selected in the high rounds. Meanwhile during the 2005 draft, New England quietly stockpiled extra third, fourth and fifth picks for 2006. Is there anything this team doesn't do right?

Under his new contract, the male-model-esque Brady will receive almost \$16 million in 2005, though his cap number will be about \$8 million. There is no free lunch; cap penalties are being shifted to the future. Early in the sal-cap system, which began in 1993, teams could postpone the day of reckoning indefinitely, by converting salary into bonuses and then spreading the bonuses over fictional long-term deals whose full length would never actually be honored. In recent years, sal-cap accounting changes have made indefinite postponement impossible, leading to cap crashes at San Francisco, Tennessee and elsewhere. Since it is now impossible to escape cap damage by endlessly postponing it, New England fans should have no illusions -- Brady's mega deal will cause financial pain for the Pats down the road. Nevertheless it is amazing that the Flying Elvii have been able to win three of the last four Super Bowls, hold their nucleus together and sign the league's best quarterback to a deal that allows New England to

keep its cap under control for one more Lombardi run. Now note that Philadelphia was shaken by player tantrums in the offseason, while New England has the best players, the best coaches and the best front office. What *isn't* this franchise best at?

Finally I don't wish to alarm you, but New England has won 32 of its last 34 games. Yes, in the offseason the team lost assistant coaches and key players; people you never heard of will be pressed into critical roles. In other words, the Patriots have the rest of the league's teams right where they want 'em.

**Oakland:** Just about everything has gone wrong for Oakland since January 26, 2003, when the Raiders trotted onto the field against City of Tampa for Super Bowl XXXVII. In the two years leading up to that moment, the Raiders were 24-12; in the two years since, they are 9-24 and have ditched their Super Bowl coach, their Super Bowl quarterback, pretty much everything but their silver-and-black livery. I can't recall such an example of going from hot to cold since I started asking girls to my high school prom. Single out one problem for the Long Johns since their Super Bowl wipe-out, and it would be lack of a running game. Last season Oakland was last in the league with a pathetic 81 yards rushing per game; the Raiders barely even attempted to rush, averaging only 20 runs, also last in the league. Oakland's leading rusher, Amos Zereoue, gained a mere 425 yards; the number-three rusher at Atlanta, T. J. Duckett, did better than that with 509 yards. When one team's best back runs for less than somebody else's third back, you have, technically speaking, *un problema grande*. Or maybe *un problema vente*.

League-insider types have high regard for tailback LaMont Jordan, signed by the Raiders in free agency. Jordan's playing time at Jersey/B was limited by the unsolvable dilemma of backing up Canton-bound Curtis Martin. Nevertheless, the Raiders awarded a megabucks contract to a running back who last season gained 479 yards rushing. That is to say Oakland, which couldn't run the ball in 2004, handed millions of dollars to a back who just barely did better than the Raiders' 2004 starter. This is quite a gamble, considering the far more accomplished Shawn Alexander and Travis Henry were available in the offseason, and Henry's agent was asking quite a bit less than the Raiders handed Jordan.

As for the Oakland depth chart, it does not inspire confidence. Oakland finished 30th in defense in 2004, and made no notable improvements during the offseason. The Raiders' offensive line was shaky last season and will be presumed shaky until proven otherwise. Yes, Randy Moss has arrived, but even when he's in the mood to play, Moss has rarely done much on defense or on the offensive line. Here's a prediction that could make me look bad later: Oakland could be the worst team in the league.

**Pittsburgh:** The Steelers went 16-2 in 2004, a fantastic achievement and a legit achievement too. Especially since the team went 4-1 against teams that made the playoffs. But what have you done for us lately? Steelers faithful continue to rend their garments and gnash their teeth that it all ended in yet another championship loss on Pittsburgh's home field. But every AFC team except New England would have exchanged its 2004 season for Pittsburgh's.

To complain that the Steelers' 2004 season was a letdown because it did not end with a ring is like complaining that Angelina Jolie and Brad Pitt really just aren't good-looking enough. Note to NFL.com art department -- I have just created an excuse for either a Jolie or Pitt cheesecake or beefcake shot, and you choose which demographic to pander to!

The Steelers bring almost all starters back from the 16-2 season, and that is an impressive accomplishment in the era of the salary cap. Statistically, the Hypocycloids were awesome in 2004 -- first in rushing defense, second in rushing offense, fourth in passing defense. Overall Pittsburgh finished No. 1 for defense, and seriously, how many Steelers' defensive starters can you name without looking? Now, you'd think a team that was right at the top in running the ball and stopping the run would walk away with a cold-weather outdoor championship game in January, but obviously you'd think wrong. The championship loss raised a lot of questions, foremost the meltdown of rookie quarterback Ben Roethlisberger. He looked awful in throwing three interceptions, one run back for a touchdown while the game was close. Roethlisberger closed out his rookie campaign an amazing 14-1 as a starter, yet it is slightly worrisome that in his first 10 starts, he threw just four interceptions, while in his final five starts, he threw 10 picks. By the playoffs, defenses had caught on to his habits, especially his poor look-off technique. (Great quarterbacks appear to be looking at Receiver A while they are actually preparing to throw to Receiver B;

Roethlisberger tends to look at A and then suddenly snap to B and force the ball into coverage without having first watched B out of the corner of his eye.) And in the championship game, Steelers' runners Jerome Bettis and Duce Staley seemed physically out of gas. There were several promising rushers available in the draft from the point at which Pittsburgh chose, plus Alexander and Henry on the open market. Yet Pittsburgh choose to stay with Staley and Bettis. This may be a decision Steelers' fans regret.

*Helmet note:* After Kellen Winslow Jr. seriously injured himself attempting a motorbike stunt, Roethlisberger declared he would continue to ride his motorcycle without a helmet, which is not required under Pennsylvania law. Yours truly was amazed the Pennsylvania state legislature did not immediately enact a helmet law, or perhaps a law denying motorcycle operator's licenses to members of professional sports teams. Anyway it remains totally ridiculous, to say nothing of immature, that Roethlisberger, or anyone, rides a motorcycle without a helmet.

**San Diego:** The Bolts scored 133 more points in 2004 than in 2003 -- improved offense led their jump from league's worst team to playoff entrant. The San Diego offensive line played well, despite being assembled from cast-offs and who-dats. Antonio Gates came out of nowhere to become a star. LaDainian Tomlinson reinforced his standing as the league's top power back. And of course, Drew Brees had a stellar season. Some touts think Brees' great year was a fluke, but TMQ believes Brees is for real. Just two years ago seemingly locked into long-term decline, the Bolts are sitting pretty with a playoff contender, a top young signal-caller and Philip Rivers as trade bait. This is an object lesson in how quickly NFL fortunes can change.

In my draft review, I wrote, "Bottom line on last April's big trade: To obtain Eli Manning, the Giants gave up Philip Rivers, Shawne Merriman, Nate Kaeding and a fifth-round pick the Chargers later traded elsewhere." I couldn't remember what the Bolts had done with the fifth-rounder. Reader Ron from Thousand Oaks, California, reminded me: swapped the choice for Roman Oben, who had a great year at tackle, surely highlighted by the fact that he was named to the Tuesday Morning Quarterback All-Unwanted All Pros squad. So the full bottom line on the biggest trade of 2004 was Eli Manning for Rivers, Merriman, Kaeding and Oben. The bottom line on the biggest trade of 2001 was Michael-Mike Vick for LaDainian Tomlinson, Reche Caldwell and two players no longer with San Diego; in turn, making that trade caused the Bolts to draft Brees. Overall the Chargers seem to have done fine in their two mega-trades, compared to other instances of teams trading out of the top of the draft and winding up with little to show for it.

San Diego looks as though it has a killer schedule in 2005, with five trips to the East Coast. Clark Judge of CBSSportsline noted that in 2004, NFL teams traveling through three time zones for away games were 13-18, or 42 percent. But don't complain about your dance card San Diego, since league-wide, visiting teams lost 43 percent of games in 2004, no different from the opposite-coast total. More worrisome: in 2004, the Bolts were just 1-5 against teams that made the playoffs. Here's the factoid that really jumps at you about San Diego: Marty Schottenheimer is the winningest active regular-season coach with a career record of 177-117-1, and also the losingest active playoff coach with a 5-12 career record.

**Tennessee:** Now in their third year of salary cap misfortune, the Flaming Thumbtacks lead the league in "back debt," cap penalties for departed players. Some \$26 million of the Titans' 2005 cap is devoted to gentlemen no longer with the team -- Derrick Mason, Fred Miller, Samari Rolle and other top performers released this winter for accounting reasons. The window of opportunity for Tennessee to win a Super Bowl may have closed with the cap-accelerated departure of so many top players. And it doesn't help that sixth-overall draft selection Adam Jones is acting so flaky -- he makes Ricky Williams seem like The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit.

Though the Titans have a reputation as a cloud-of-dust team, Tennessee quietly finished fifth in passing in 2003 and 10th in passing last season. Part of the reason was the highly productive Mason, now departed. Those who blame also-departed offensive coordinator Mike Heimerdinger for the Titans' disappointing 2004 ought to think twice, as the team finished in the top third for yards gained -- while in the bottom third for defense. Heimerdinger's replacement, Norman Chow, has changed "hut" in the team's

snap cadence to "go." As in: Go one, go two, hike. Chow says he is seeking a faster pace on offense -- removing a *single letter* speeds up the pace? Over the course of the season the Flaming Thumbtacks will snap the ball about 1,000 times. If "hut" on average twice per snap is replaced by "go" twice per snap, that saves 2,000 letters over the course of the season; presumably the Titans will donate the letters to charity. Why did Chow, who has passed on previous offers to bring his skills to the pros, choose to leave national champion USC and join Tennessee at a time when the Titans are in a cap-crash-induced down cycle? Tennessee is considered one of the best franchises to work for in the NFL, owing to stable coaching, a strong front office and a likable owner. So maybe Chow was sold on the Titans as an employer -- you're a lot better off there than at any of the NFL's endless-turmoil clubs. Still, leaving a national champion to join a team that's likely to have an off-year seems like odd timing.

*Ticketmaster note:* Another reason it's nice to work for the Titans is that you never see an empty seat. Tennessee has already sold all tickets to its 2005 home dates, though the franchise plays in a medium-sized city and though fans know there's a good chance of a losing season. Counting this year's advance sales, the Titans boast 73 consecutive full houses for home games. Nashville has a population of about 575,000, less than that of Jacksonville -- yet the Jaguars are covering seats because they can't fill their stadium, while the Titans wish they had more seats to sell. Maybe Jacksonville should trade a few thousand seats to Tennessee!

*Financial note:* Steve McNair's contract calls for a stunning \$50 million bonus in 2006. This would be the largest single payment in team sports history and, as a "roster" bonus, all accounting charges would accrue immediately in 2006, sinking the Titans' salary cap to the bottom of the Marianas Trench. Future huge payments that never actually occur are a standard NFL accounting fiction; obviously there is no way McNair will receive all this money. The question is, will he receive any of it?

## 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.

Ahndi Coffey of Nashville, Tennessee, a center on the Nashville Dream women's pro football team, noted that four-time NWFA champion, the Detroit Demolition, currently holds a 42-game winning streak. She haikuizes,

Demo wins again. Could Pats this team? No one else seems able to. -- Ahndi Coffey, Nashville, Tennessee

Last week I complained that the Star Wars scenes in which Jedi knights use their light sabers to deflect laser blasts don't make sense: since laser energy moves at the speed of light, the Jedi's arm would need to move faster than light to get into position to block a blast before it arrives. The Force caused many, many readers to write about this item. Melanie Markoff of Bakersfield, California, was among many to contend that Jedi can see the future, and thus move light sabers into the blocking position before the laser blast is fired at them. But if Jedi can see the future, how come they constantly walk into traps? Surely if the Jedi see the future, they would not repeatedly be taken by surprise by events -- for instance, they would have known all along that Anakin would turn evil, not been shocked by this unexpected development. Phillip Rehberger of Kenosha, Wisconsin tried a junior version of see-the-future argument, contending Jedi are able to anticipate events by a few seconds, just enough time to put the light saber into position before the blaster is fired. Rehberger cited a line in *The Phantom Menace* in which Qui-Gon says of the young Anakin, "He can see things before they happen. That's why he appears to have such quick reflexes." But if a Jedi can see even a few seconds into the future, much of what happens in the Star Wars flicks ceases to make sense. How come, for example, in the final episode Emperor Palpatine, the most powerful Jedi ever, has no idea Darth Vader is about to grab him and hurl him into a bottomless pit?

Gustav Eriksson of San Francisco suggested that the Force causes a Jedi to become so perceptive he can sense exactly where the barrel of his opponent's gun is pointed and move the light saber an instant

before the bad guy shoots; relying on extraordinary perceptions, not faster-than-light movements. Johs Sondrup of Skanderborg, Denmark, proposed this explanation: "The beams from the lasers and blasters in the Star Wars galaxy are not moving at the speed of light." Brian Petro-Roy of Tewksbury, Massachusetts, noted, "Watch any of the Star Wars scenes where blasters or lasers are fired. First, notice that a blaster bolt's advance through the air is clearly visible; if the bolt were moving at light speed, the entire length would seem to appear instantaneously. Second, a bolt's impact happens after the noise of the blaster firing has dissipated -- meaning that not only are the bolts in Star Wars not moving at the speed of light, they are moving slower than the speed of sound!" Why weapons designers would labor to slow energy bolts to less than the speed of sound is mysterious, Petro-Roy notes. But considering the muzzle velocity of an M16 is about three times the speed of sound, this seems to suggest that 20th century rifles would be better weapons against a Jedi than any of the lasers and blasters that Star Wars droids use. Of course, since the Star Wars saga happened a long time ago, maybe the M16 hadn't been developed yet.

**Next Week:** NFC preview, plus Donovan McNabb uses Jedi mind tricks on Terrell Owens.

## NFC Preview, and I won't name He Who Must Not Be Named

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Aug. 23, 2005) -- The preseason death of 23-year-old San Francisco lineman Thomas Herrion is heart-breaking; you can write a condolence on the team's page. The initial autopsy was inconclusive; heat stroke and an undiagnosed heart defect are two problems that can cause an outwardly healthy person to collapse after hard exertion. Beyond grieving for Herrion, we must ask -- is his loss, or any football-related death, an indictment of the sport?

This new report from the National Center for Catastrophic Sports Injury Research at the University of North Carolina finds that in 2004 at the youth league, high school, college and pro levels, five football players died from injuries suffered on the field, while 10 more died from heat stroke, heart failure or because they had been hit by lightning. These 15 deaths are terrible, though they reflect a steady decline in the rate of football fatalities, which mainly happens to high school boys.

Past death rates for the 1960s and '70s were higher than today's, though far more people now play football owing to population growth and the explosion of organized sports. In 1968, for example, 36 people, mostly high school boys, died football-related deaths, the University of North Carolina has found. The number of football deaths has been falling for several reasons. One is that severe injuries to the neck and spine have dropped in the last generation owing to rule changes ("leading with the head" has been illegal since 1976) and improved equipment. Awareness of proper hydration is another factor. As recently as the '60s, many coaches forbid football players from drinking water during practice to "make them tough." Now coaches are acutely aware of hydration, especially during August. Still, there have been three football heat-stroke deaths, all at the high school level, in the last three years. That's three too many. It should be possible to eliminate heat-stroke death in any supervised sports environment.

Another reason for the decline of football death is stricter lightning rules. Today most school systems suspend games at the first sight of lightning and do not allow play to resume until 30 minutes after the last thunderclap is heard. Last fall, yours truly was scouting a high school game in Montgomery County, Md., when lightning was seen. The teams left the field and waited 30 minutes after the final sound of thunder, for a total delay of almost an hour. As the ball was put back into play, a distant, barely audible rumble was heard. "Everybody off the field right now," the referee ordered, imposing another half-hour wait. The spectators groaned, but it was exactly the right thing to do.

However, rates of football death from what physicians call "natural causes provoked by vigorous exercise" have not been declining because standard American pediatric practice does not include tests for the congenital heart defects that cause such deaths. This recent *Wall Street Journal* story concerns the jogging death of a 16-year-old boy who had a heart ventricle defect that might have been treated, but went undetected because he never received the fairly simple, inexpensive EKG screening that reveals most congenital heart problems. Any parent reading this story will want to weep. Undetected congenital heart flaws are considered the leading cause of football-related deaths, as well as of all sports-related deaths. Many European medical societies now mandate EKG screening for youths in sports. Why isn't this the norm here?

Still, we are left with the question of whether Herrion's death, or any football-related death, represents an indictment of the sport. This *Washington Post* story summarizes medical research on the relative risks of childhood activities, including sports participation. Football, as might be guessed, was found the riskiest sport for children and teens as regards minor injuries -- a football player was twice as likely to sustain a minor injury as a basketball player, and five times as likely to sustain a minor injury as a skateboarder. But for "level IV injuries," the kinds that require hospitalization, football was only somewhat more risky than other sports. The surprise in the data is that football is not the most dangerous sport when it comes to permanent disabling injuries. Basketball and baseball, the data show, both cause more permanent disabling injuries, compared to the number of participants. Soccer, which many suburban parents now extol as a "harmless" alternative to football, causes permanent disabling injuries at almost

exactly the same rate as football.

Now we get to the hard part to consider, death itself. According to the *Statistical Abstract of the United States*, in 2002, the most recent year for which statistics are available, among males aged 15 to 24 -- the primary football-playing social cohort -- there was one death for every 852 people. (Go here, then scan to table 96.) This study estimates that around 1.5 million people play organized football in the United States, considering youth leagues and the nation's approximately 21,500 high schools and 3,000 or so colleges and universities. Combine the death rate for ages 15 to 24 and the total number of people participating in football, and you would expect about 1,750 football participants to die in the course of a year. Most die from the leading cause of death for that age -- traffic accidents. But the sad truth is that some within that group have medical problems, such as undiagnosed heart defects that will cause them to die whether they play football or not. You only hear about it if the death occurs in connection with a football game. If 1,750 people in the football-playing group are expected to die in a year, and 15 of them die in connection with a game or practice, that is tragic, but statistically not shocking -- considering what a time-consuming pursuit football is. My guess is that a time-and-risk study would show that you are safer in pads on a football field than you are in the car driving to the field. This does not diminish tragedy; only places tragedy into perspective.

It's hard to switch from this to my usual column. Now, my NFC Preview.

**Arizona:** It's 1 o'clock Sunday afternoon, do you know who the Arizona quarterback is? Last season, his first in the desert, Dennis Green vacillated among three starters -- Josh McCown, Shaun King and John Navarre. This year, Kurt Warner is expected behind center on opening day, making it four different starting quarterbacks in a span of about a dozen games. That's turmoil, to put things mildly. Despite Arizona's shaky quarterback situation, in his first two drafts, Green has taken first-round passes on Philip Rivers, Ben Roethlisberger, J.P. Losman and Aaron Rodgers -- at least a couple of whom are likely to be long-term NFL starters. There was quarterback chaos under Green in Minnesota too, with Daunte Culpepper, Randall Cunningham, Rich Gannon, Jeff George, Brad Johnson, Jim McMahon, Warren Moon and Sean Salisbury taking turns under Green's tenure. It's almost as if when Green finally found Culpepper, the sort of steady star who can be a long-term presence, the coach figured the time had come to leave town and seek some other team with quarterback instability.

Judging by the question marks in so many aspects of the Arizona roster -- unsettled offensive line, rookie corners, a cast of unknowns at tight end -- it's hard not to predict another long season for this club. But then it's always hard not to predict a long season for the Cards, who have just one playoff victory in the last 58 years. Jason Schlueter of Portola Hills, Calif., was among many readers to point out this report in the prestigious science journal *Nature*. Two British researchers concluded that "across a range of sports, wearing red is consistently associated with a higher probability of winning." As Mike Florio has quipped, they obviously did not include the Arizona Cardinals in the study!

*Fun fact:* Cards punter Scott Player is the sole NFL gent still wearing the single-bar facemask. Several years ago, the league mandated a minimum of two bars, but inserted a grandfather clause. Every kicker who wore a one-bar helmet has since retired, except for Player. Whenever he quits or asks the trainer for a two-bar, the 1950s helmet look will be gone for good. Ah, for the days of no facemasks at all!

**Atlanta:** My favorite trivia question of the 2004 season: Which team led the NFL in rushing? Rare is the football aficionado who would correctly answer Atlanta. The Falcons even accomplished this feat without a player in the top 10 for rushing yards. Obviously Michael-Mike Vick's 902 yards on the ground helped, but equally important, defenders' fear of losing track of Vick opened things up for the Atlanta tailbacks. That's the good news. The bad news is that the Atlanta passing attack remained low voltage, finishing 30th, ahead only of pass-allergic Baltimore and Chicago. Electrifying as Vick is, it seems fair to ask what Michael-Mike was doing in the Pro Bowl when his team was terrible at the forward pass and when he was only 21st in passer rating, trailing Tim Rattay and Billy Volek.

Are Atlanta's passing problems caused by Vick or by the team's receivers? Detroit got a lot of ink this April for using a third consecutive first-round draft choice on a wide receiver, but in effect the Falcons have done the same by drafting wideouts No. 1 in 2004 and '05 after trading their 2003 No. 1 for Peer-

less Price. In two seasons with Atlanta, Price's stats have only equaled what he did in the previous season at Buffalo -- six touchdowns and 1,410 yards in Atlanta versus nine touchdowns and 1,252 yards the previous year. Maybe Price is one of those guys who signs a mammoth contract and then celebrates by taking the rest of his career off, but there's no getting around the fact that the ball has just not arrived at his hands that much. Considering the wide-receiver acquisitions and the Vick trade, Atlanta has spent its No. 1 picks of 2001, 2003, 2004 and 2005 on the quarterback-wideout battery. Yet the Falcons barely avoided finishing at the bottom in passing, and netted a measly 103 yards passing in their NFC title game loss. Somebody must be to blame for this, and the more Atlanta tape I watch, the more I think that somebody is Vick.

Michael-Mike seems indecisive in the pocket, then often simply misses the man he throws to. His footwork seems all wrong. Steve Young once said you can tell whether a quarterback is having a good game simply by looking at his feet. Good quarterbacks move their feet efficiently and decisively. Vick, by contrast, often seems to be trying to invent MTV dance steps during plays. Among other things, yours truly wonders if the West Coast approach is the best match for Vick's ability. In a West Coast offense (maybe that should be West Coast Offense™), receivers mostly run short routes. That means the receivers are dashing back and forth congested together, while defenders can stay up near the line to stop Vick's scrambles. Maybe it would be better if the Falcons used vertical patterns and sent receivers down the field, drawing defenders away from Vick. Deep patterns take longer to develop, and thus require good blocking. But deep receivers can be easier for a quarterback to spot than a bunch of guys running back and forth near the line, and Vick does seem to have trouble determining who's open.

Two ominous portents for Falcons fans. First, though their favorites made the conference title game, Atlanta played the weakest regular-season schedule last year, with its opponents finishing with a collective 111-145 mark. Second, the Atlanta franchise has never posted back-to-back winning seasons.

**Carolina:** The Panthers are a team of streaks. In 2001, Carolina lost 15 straight. In 2002, the team won three, then lost eight, then won four of five. The next season was Carolina's Super Bowl year, and the Panthers had five-game and six-game winning streaks. In 2004, the Cats lost seven of eight, then won six of eight. These are the kind of hidden indicators that are essential to an insider's understanding of the game. Unfortunately, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has no idea what they mean.

The Panthers are also a team of turmoil: crimes by players, a steroids scandal, injuries, the death of beloved assistant coach Sam Mills. Name a problem and Carolina has been through it -- really. It seems only a matter of time until a plague of frogs descends on the Panthers. (Of the 10 plagues God sent against Egypt in Exodus, the second was frogs. Somehow I'm guessing this was not as funny as it sounds.) At least the Panthers play far enough inland that tsunamis cannot strike. Possible trouble waiting to happen: injury to quarterback Jake Delhomme. His backup, Chris Weinke, has not started a game since 2002 and has twice as many career interceptions (22) as touchdown passes (11).

Many people are predicting a big year for Carolina, but TMQ is less sanguine. Last season, the Panthers finished 1-7 against teams that made the playoffs. Carolina's second-half win streak was padded by two shots at Tampa plus games against San Francisco and Arizona -- these clubs finished a combined 13-35. After Halloween, the Panthers faced only one team that completed the season with a winning record. Mike Wahle, an excellent player, arrived via free agency, but Muhsin Muhammad departed and he had posted a great season in 2004, especially considering there was no other top wide receiver to take the pressure off him. Carolina strikes yours truly as having significant weaknesses, so I am adopting a wait-and-see policy. I will wait and see if the Panthers do well. If they do, I will claim to have predicted it.

**Chicago:** Despite seven touchdowns and three safeties generated by defense and special teams, the Bears were the lowest-scoring team in the NFL in 2004. If your defense and special teams are high scoring, yet your team overall is the lowest scoring, you have, technically speaking, a landlocked offense. Last year, the Chicago Mingdingxiong ("bears whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Mandarin) couldn't run, catch, block or throw, and the play calling was pretty bland too. With Rex Grossman injured early, Chicago struggled through the league's worst quarterbacking. The Bears completed only nine touchdown passes, which Benny Friedman would have considered a bad year back when the ball was shaped like a watermelon and passing was detested by coaches because any incompleteness was a penalty.

(Chicago quarterbacking is so consistently bad, *Chicago Tribune* sportswriter Don Pierson noted at this year's Hall of Fame banquet, that the 20 touchdown passes Friedman threw in 1929 using a watermelon-shaped ball would have led in the Bears in 38 of the last 39 years.) But while rarely advancing the ball using the forward pass, Chicago did march backward with some regularity, surrendering 449 sack yards, worst in the league.

During the offseason, every NFL beat writer pointed out how strange it was that the Bears did not acquire a quality veteran quarterback to back up the injury-prone Grossman. Grossman got hurt, again, in a preseason game, and at that point, all the desirable veteran quarterbacks were employed. The Ming-dingxiong could only find Jeff Blake, who joins his fifth team in five years. Anybody might get cut once or even twice -- when you're let go four times in four years, there may be a message encoded in that data. For 2005, the Bears formally switch to the pass-wacky West Coast Offense™. Let's hope George Halas' ghost does not hear that the Monsters of the Midway will pass first and ask questions later. The whole logic of the plan escapes your columnist. The Bears were dreadful trying to pass the football in 2004 and now are switching to an offense based on constant passing. The only upside is there's an opening for brainy rookie quarterback Kyle Orton -- who went from college golden boy last September to benched in November -- to recover his previous status.

Not only will Chicago open with huge problems at quarterback, but the tailback position is also fouled up. The Bears spent the fourth pick of the draft on Cedric Benson of Texas. If he starts studying yoga and living in a yurt, Bears fans may feel free to panic. Benson still isn't in camp, staging the longest holdout of any first-round draft pick. Here is a list of other recent high first-round Chicago selections who staged holdouts -- Curtis Enis, Cade McNown, Rashaan Salaam and David Terrell. It is not exactly heartening that Benson's opening move was to do the one thing all recent Chicago first-round busts have in common. As for the Bears defense, it has become common to hear linebacker Brian Urlacher described as overrated. Last season, Chicago was 0-7 when Urlacher was out injured and 5-4 when he played.

**Dallas:** The 'Boys place their fortunes in the hands of Drew Bledsoe. Last fall, this space described Bledsoe's career as "over," and I am standing by that assessment. For the past two seasons, only Bledsoe's name, certainly not his performance, has kept him on the field. His accuracy is a thing of the past. Watch old Buffalo tape and behold numerous instances of the ball striking the synthetic grass-like substance at receivers' feet or sailing over receivers' heads. For the past two seasons, Bledsoe has looked exclusively at the receiver he intends to throw to, and safeties have figured this out, let me assure you. In 2004, the Bills played four of what TMQ calls "authentic" games -- high-pressure contests against quality opponents. Two tilts with New England, one game at Baltimore and the season-finales home date against Pittsburgh in which the Steelers rested starters and a victory would have put Buffalo into the playoffs. The Bills lost all four authentic contests, and Bledsoe was just utterly awful in every one. In those games, Bledsoe threw a mere one touchdown pass while committing 11 turnovers on interceptions and lost fumbles, with three of the turnovers returned for touchdowns. That is, when the pressure was on, Bledsoe produced more touchdowns for his opponents than he did for his own offense. TMQ will be surprised if Bledsoe is the Dallas starter past United Nations Day, and the hook may come sooner -- though even if Bledsoe plays only a while, he stands a chance of moving ahead of Johnny Unitas and Joe Montana on the all-time passing yardage list.

Now consider the overall transaction ledger for the big 2004 trade between Dallas and Buffalo and the Bills' decision, based on obtaining quarterback J.P. Losman in that trade, to waive Bledsoe. In effect, the bottom line is that Buffalo got Losman (using the draft pick obtained from Dallas) while the Cowboys got Marcus Spears, Julius Jones, backup tight end Sean Ryan and Bledsoe (using the choices obtained from the Bills, plus signing Bledsoe after he became expendable in Buffalo). If Losman is a bust, Dallas will be seen as the huge winner in this deal. If Losman becomes a star, Dallas will be the huge loser. Conventional wisdom assumes that had the 'Boys kept their 2004 first-round pick, they would have taken running back Steven Jackson. Why assume that? Given Dallas' desperate need for a young quarterback, Tuesday Morning Quarterback assumes that had the 'Boys kept their 2004 first pick, they would have selected Losman. Either way, Dallas remains desperate for a young quarterback. Last year, the Cowboys' most apparent problem on the field was that their pass defense dropped from first in 2003 to 20th. But the team's core dilemma remains lack of quality at quarterback, where the deflating Bledsoe is backed up by Drew Henson (18 career pass attempts) and Tony Romo (no career pass attempts). Should Los-

man become a star, 'Boys faithful will be tormented by the fact that they might have snagged him.

*Cheer-babes note:* Have the Dallas Mavericks dancers surpassed the Dallas Cowboys cheerleaders for glamour and allure? It's a question that merits further study!

**Detroit:** Sportscasters follow the career of Detroit general manager Matt Millen closely because he jumped from sitting in a broadcast booth to running the show as head of the Lions' front office. Every sportscaster huffs about those idiots running the teams and how he or she could show 'em a thing or two if in charge. Has Millen shown 'em a thing or two? Since he was named the Lion tamer four years ago, Detroit is 16-48, the worst record in the NFL in that period. And Millen inherited a Lions squad that came within an eyelash of the playoffs, knocked out only by an improbable 54-yard field goal on the final play of the final regular-season game that year. So it's not like Millen took over a bad team. He took over a 9-7 team and fashioned it into a bad team. Maybe it's just as well that the broadcasters stay in the booth.

Do the Lions have any hope of a better outcome this season? A lot must change. Last season, both offense and defense for Detroit finished in the league's bottom third. On draft day, the Lions got a lot of attention for using a high No. 1 pick on a wide receiver for the third consecutive year. But the first of the three, Charles Rogers, has only appeared in six games in his two seasons in the NFL; players who suffer injuries in consecutive years rarely bounce back. Much of what happens may depend on Joey Harrington, who has not lived up to his exalted draft status. But on the other hand, he has improved in each of the last two years. (His passer rating rose from 60 in his rookie season, to 64 in his sophomore year, to 78 last season.) Harrington has to play well early or the Detroit fans will give up on him and he'll lose his confidence. And when once-touted quarterbacks lose their confidence, this can be an unpleasant sight.

Detroit believers still reminisce about the 1957 season when John Henry Johnson and Lou Creekmur were on the field, and the Lions won the old NFL championship. Yes, that was some season to remember. But in the 48 years since then, Detroit has exactly one playoff victory. Ay caramba!

**Green Bay:** In 2003, the Green Bay "D" performed pretty well, finishing 11th in scoring defense. Then, in the playoffs, came the "Play That Must Not Be Named" -- Philadelphia's fourth-and-26 conversion that cost the Packers an NFC title game appearance. Defensive coordinator Ed Donatell was fired as punishment, though TMQ does not recall seeing Donatell on the field during this blown play. With Donatell cashiered, the Packers slipped to 23rd in scoring defense in 2004, then gave up 31 points at Lambeau Field in an opening-round playoff collapse. Brett Favre actually had a terrific year in 2004 -- about the same statistically as when he was MVP in 1997, compare here -- but the Packers defense was so waterlogged that the team's offensive output did not matter. Meanwhile, Donatell decamped to Atlanta, where the defense improved from 30th in 2003 to 14th in 2004. The football gods grind slow, but they grind exceeding small.

Now Jim Bates is the Pack's defensive honcho. For years at Miami, Bates ran one of the league's most effective units. Bates coaches the kind of defense Tuesday Morning Quarterback admires and advocates -- conservative, position-oriented schemes with little blitzing. In a Bates defense, the ends are usually quite wide to stop sweeps, the corners usually cover man to man, and having the linebackers in the right place at the right time is the key to everything. Can the Bates system work in Green Bay? The system only works if defenders are disciplined, and Packers defensive backs are not known for discipline. Now that Mike "Coach Cratchit" Sherman has surrendered his general manager duties, Green Bay will offer a test of the TMQ maxim that coaches should not double as front-office managers. If TMQ's theory is right, Packer fortunes will improve with Coach Cratchit confining himself to coaching.

*Lambeau note 1:* Green Bay has lost two of its last three playoff games at Lambeau Field, which is like saying Anna Kournikova has been turned down by two of the last three men she asked out.

*Lambeau note 2:* This month, the Packers sold out a scrimmage at Lambeau with 66,000 people filing in to watch a *scrimmage*. Citizens of Wisconsin, you have your priorities in order!

*Lambeau note 3:* Sherman has become Coach Cratchit to this column owing to the Dickensian fingerless

gloves he wore on the sidelines at Lambeau in January. Put another scuttle of coal on the fire, Coach Cratchit, and you do that before you draw up another X or O!

### **A Test Cover Promising "Mild Sex!" Just Didn't Sell**

*Cosmopolitan* magazine recently ran the cover headline, HOT NEW SEX TRICKS! But people don't want "tricks" when it comes to sex; they want the genuine article. And can there seriously be anything that's "new" in sex? Hmmm, now I will worry there is something new and I don't know what it is.

**Jersey/A:** During the offseason, Giants quarterbacks coach Kevin Gilbride said of Eli Manning: "He is never gonna stand up and be Jim Kelly." Coach, thanks for the vote of confidence! Weirdly, Gilbride went on to say he meant this as a compliment, explaining Manning could not become a dynamic leader in the Kelly mold, but that "little by little within the parameters of his personality you see him beginning to assert himself." Manning must have thought: Coach, in the future, please don't compliment me. Another way in which Manning will not be like Kelly is handing off. During the Bills' Golden Era, when he was the last NFL quarterback to call his own plays, Kelly consistently called more rushes than passes, even from the no-huddle. Last season, the Giants, under the pass-wacky Gilbride, called more passes than runs, and this season is unlikely to see a different emphasis.

Giants fans will be screaming for Manning to heave-ho to big-money free agent Plaxico Burress. But bear in mind, the gentleman has not caught for 1,000 yards in two years. Burress' running mate, Amani Toomer, was held without a touchdown reception last season. These are not auspicious signs when your plan is to be pass-wacky. Tuesday Morning Quarterback believes Jersey/B's fortunes will not change for the better until the team tarts up its bland gray-themed uniform. The uniforms make the Giants look slow. As aircraft designers say of planes: "Looks good, flies good." TMQ says of uniforms: "Looks slow, plays slow."

### **Potter Nicknames Return to Column**

The Terrell Owens imbroglio has caused many to weigh in on why wide receivers act like divas, a subject yours truly first saw broached by Bryan Curtis of Slate in 2002. Practically every sportswriter has lately penned a column on this phenomenon. Even Max Boot, a senior fellow in national security studies at the lofty Council on Foreign Relations, wrote a piece on wide receiver ego for the *Wall Street Journal*. A fellow of the Council on Foreign Relations opining about football? Hey, I thought I had this Brookings brainiac/football moonlighting field entirely to myself! Next thing you know, Henry Kissinger will show up on *SportsCenter*. ("Vellll, Trey, der Vest Coast offense is veddy, veddy complex ...") Speaking of No. 81 of the Eagles, TMQ has tired of his act and of the attention paid to his act. Of course as the Go-Gos observed, you can't stop the world. But you can stop yourself. So for the rest of the season, I will cease mentioning this gentleman, which only encourages him. To TMQ, No. 81 of the Eagles will become "He Who Must Not Be Named."

**Minnesota:** What are 31, 31 and 28? Points scored by Minnesota in losses in 2004. Repeatedly the Vikings put up lots of points, yet jogged through the tunnel defeated. Minnesota's pass defense was ranked 29th. This year, the Vikings will field the league's most expensive defensive backfield, with recent megabucks free agents Darren Sharper, Fred Smoot and Antoine Winfield; almost \$25 million in bonuses have recently been accorded these gentlemen. Can they do better than 29th? The Vikings will also field an impressive seven first-round and four second-round players on defense. Will this all serve to prove that where you're drafted means nothing once the guy in the white cap blows his whistle? During the Randy Moss era, TMQ wondered whether Minnesota defenders were poor players or were hampered by the Moss psychology. Randy got all the attention; Randy got away with whatever he wanted; it was Randy this, Randy that; Minnesota coaches rarely seemed to care much about what the defense was up to. Well, Moss is gone and the hope for victory lies in a balanced, team-oriented approach. Now the Vikes defense has no excuse. It's shut somebody down or shut up.

NFC North teams finished 15th (Chicago), 20th (Detroit), 25th (Green Bay) and 29th (Minnesota) versus the pass in 2004, making this the league's easiest division to throw against. These figures are even more underwhelming considering Green Bay and Minnesota got four total games against Chicago and Detroit, two of the league's worst passing offenses. Apparently, it's not hard to pass in cold weather after all. In

the NFC North, at least, what's hard is to stop the pass in cold weather.

### **And Crank Up the Air Conditioner As You Drive Around Trying to Save on Gasoline**

With fuel prices rising, last week the American Automobile Association advised motorists to "shop with their steering wheel" by driving around and looking for the cheapest gas. This is terrible advice. If the pump price is \$3 a gallon, a car that gets 20 MPG consumes 15 cents' worth of gasoline each mile. Motor more than a couple miles looking for the cheapest gas and you've already spent your savings -- considering filling stations know each other's prices and usually post rates only a few cents different from the next guy's. And gasoline is hardly the only expense of operating a vehicle. Cars, pickup trucks and SUVs cost on average about 40 cents per mile to operate, when fuel, maintenance, repairs, insurance and depreciation are taken into account. (The estimate comes from the Internal Revenue Service, which allows a deduction of 40.5 cents per mile for business or charitable use of personal vehicles) So if you drive five miles to "shop with your steering wheel," you've just spent \$2 -- and you're not likely to find a station where a fill-up is \$2 cheaper.

**Philadelphia:** "The Eagles' biggest problem was no depth at running back, yet the Eagles acquired no running back help. 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 win the Super Bowl, but will instead be, what, donated to charity?" For *five straight years* TMQ has been running exactly those words as my preseason comment for the Eagles; see last year's here. Okay, the original five years ago mentioned Duce Staley. But the basic point is the same. For *five straight years*, TMQ has been complaining that the Eagles don't have a power back and that they are among NFL leaders in unspent salary cap. What's the deal this year? Philadelphia looks thin at running back and is near the top in unused salary-cap space. As of July, when the big free-agency decisions for 2005 were done, the Eagles were fourth in unused cap space.

I harp on this because the Eagles were within a touchdown of winning the Super Bowl -- obviously, this team is good -- yet took no offseason steps to correct their only big deficiency -- lack of a running game. Philadelphia was 31st in rushing attempts in 2004, averaging 24 rushes per contest, ahead only of the rushing-doormat Raiders. As reader Spencer Vliet of Northampton, Pa., notes, the Eagles have shown you can score a lot of points and make the Super Bowl without a rushing game. But can you *win* the Super Bowl without a rushing game? Last year, Philadelphia passed on 59 percent of its downs. Assuming most of the 68 quarterback runs by Philadelphia were scrambles -- that is, called passes -- then Eagles coaches signaled in passes on 64 percent of plays. Small wonder New England felt confident about opening the Super Bowl in an unusual 2-5-4 defense keyed to stop the short pass. In the second half of the Super Bowl, Philadelphia rushed for a net of just 8 yards -- and New England *was in a pass defense* almost the entire time. Yet in the offseason, the Eagles did not acquire a power back and left millions on the table in cap money that might have been invested in a running game. Yes, it is good management not to tap out your salary cap. But the Eagles' playoff current run is not going to last forever, and is unlikely to end in a Lombardi Trophy if this team continues to be incapable of rushing.

*He Who Must Not Be Named note 1:* The player in question claims it is a human-rights outrage that he will receive only about \$3.5 million in 2005. That's too little, says He. If so, then the gentleman was overpaid in 2004, when He received about \$9 million, mostly as bonuses, from the Eagles. NFL players always ask for the maximum up front as bonuses, because bonuses stay in your bank account even if you are later sent packing for salary-cap reasons. Asking for the max up front makes total sense for players. But if you ask for what is in effect a first-year advance against your second-year's pay, don't complain later that your second-year's pay is not as much as your first year's. Average the 2004 and 2005 payments to He Who Must Not Be Named and the number comes to about \$6 million annually, which is just about right for his level of performance, as Pat Kirwan argues in detail here by comparing the gentleman's average against the average pay of other top receivers.

*He Who Must Not Be Named note 2:* Reader Steven Lipstein from Baltimore asks, "Why can teams cut a player at any time, dissolving the contract, but a player who signed a deal and then had a great season cannot ask that his contract be dissolved and replaced with one calling for higher payment?" This is basically the Drew Rosenhaus argument -- that if it's fair for NFL teams to waive a player with years remaining on his contract, then it's fair for a player with years remaining on his contract to renegotiate.

But the idea that teams can waive players while players cannot renegotiate is not a double standard, because *the contracts specify that players may be cut but may not renegotiate*. Every NFL contract contains clauses spelling out that only the club, not the player, may terminate the deal. Basically what an NFL contract says is, "If you play well, here's how much you'll get. If you do not play well or the team has salary-cap problems, you will be waived." All contracts contain compromises, and this is one of the fundamental compromises that NFL players and management have negotiated with each other. This compromise arrangement is great for NFL players: The teams-can-cut-anyone clause inspires maximum effort, which keeps the quality of NFL play very high, which keeps mega money flowing to NFL players. But like all compromises, the one-sided aspect of NFL contracts is imperfect. Sometimes players do end up being paid too little. On the other hand, sometimes players end up being paid too much and rarely complain about that. If players want the contractual right to demand a raise after any season in which they performed better than expected, then clubs should have the contractual right to demand money be returned after any season in which a player performs worse than expected. Take a guess how many members of the NFLPA would vote for that arrangement.

**New Orleans:** The Saints' frustration can be summed up in the fact that New Orleans has invested four recent No. 1 draft picks in its defensive line -- yet the team finished last in defense in 2004. Nothing coach Jim Haslett has tried has put the Boy Scouts into the league's elite. All those high picks on defense didn't improve the defense. The big commitment to Aaron Brooks has resulted in only average quarterbacking. On the other hand, Haslett's Saints always compete. Special teams are usually good. The Saints beat Atlanta late last season in a pressure game. They ended their season by beating Carolina in a game that meant far more to the 'Cats than the Saints. Over the last four seasons, New Orleans has gone 7-9, 9-7, 8-8 and 8-8. That's 32-32 -- the perfect expression of competitive balance!

In June, ESPN commentator John Clayton wrote of the Saints, "Quarterback Aaron Brooks needs to get back into the 60 percent completion range after a 57 percent season in 2004." If Brooks had connected on 60 percent of his passes in 2004, this would have resulted in 16 more New Orleans completions -- one per game. It's hard to believe one more completion per game would have made a meaningful difference in the Boy Scouts' season. Modern NFL coaches have become fixated on 60 percent completions as the proof of passing efficiency, but Tuesday Morning Quarterback would trade a few of those 8-yard outs for a few long bombs, and accept the extra incompleting or two. Terry Bradshaw was a career 52 percent passer; Bob Griese, a career 56 percent passer; Bart Starr, a career 57 percent passer.

*Note:* NFC South teams have attended three consecutive NFC Championship Games, with Tampa, then Carolina, then Atlanta representing the division. If this pattern holds, New Orleans goes to the NFC title game this season.

### **Stat That Must Mean Something**

Joseph Parisi of Woodbridge, N.J., points out that Tom Brady and Donovan McNabb, last February's starting Super Bowl quarterbacks, both threw interceptions on their very first 2005 pass attempts.

**St. Louis:** Once again, Les Mouflons threw the ball like crazy, finishing fifth in passing. But St. Louis recorded only one more touchdown pass (23) than interception (22), while ending the year second in sack yards allowed (362). Meanwhile, the Rams did little on the ground, only attempting 24 rushes per game, third-worst figure in the league. Their wacky go-for-broke attack turned the ball over 39 times; the only teams to turn it over more often were San Francisco, Miami and Cleveland, who picked 1-2-3 in the draft. Constant turnovers by the St. Louis offense nullified a quietly respectable performance by the team's defense. Maybe you can argue that since the Rams finished 8-8 they showed it is possible to win in the NFL despite lots of turnovers and a wacky offense. But it's hard to imagine Les Mouflons returning to their former status as a postseason menace until the offense hands the ball to tailbacks more often and to the opponents less.

What the Martz?!? Mike Martz of St. Louis continues to make strange mid-round draft picks. In 2002, Les Mouflons spent a fourth-round choice on guard Travis Scott, who *did not start in college*. Scott never played for St. Louis and is now "OOF," Out of Football. In 2003, the Rams spent a third-round choice on Nebraska quarterback Eric Crouch, planning to convert him to wide receiver, though Crouch had said he would refuse to play any position other than quarterback. Crouch refused and walked out on the Rams,

then walked out on the Packers. Right now, he'd be lucky to be covering punts for the Edmonton Eskimos. In this year's draft, Les Mouflons spent a third-round pick on center Richie Incognito, who did not play college football in 2004 because he had been suspended by his school, and who was drafted needing surgery that may prevent him from playing in 2005. To top it off, Incognito has refused to report to the Rams -- carrying the name thing a bit far, don't you think? At any rate, in three of the last four drafts, St. Louis took a valuable mid-round pick and threw it out the window. In the salary-cap era, mid-round draft choices are gold, because the gentlemen acquired in the middle rounds are indentured to perform for four years at affordable prices. Throw enough mid-round picks out the window and your team is bound to sputter.

Another reason the Rams sputtered in 2004 is that they were last in special-teams performance, according to the annual special-teams ranking by Rick Gosselin of the *Dallas Morning News*. This came one season after Martz fired special-teams coach Bobby April, who went to Buffalo, where his special teams were No. 1 ranked last season, according to Gosselin. By the Hammer of Grabthar, Bobby April was avenged!

**San Francisco:** Terry Dunn of Sacramento, Calif., points out that not only did San Francisco finish 2-14 in 2004, it did so while playing opponents who compiled a net losing record (.488) on the season. Yumpin' yiminy. Now Nolan the Younger takes the reins, charged with reviving this storied franchise, but seems to be repeating a formula that has backfired everywhere it's been tried -- being both a coach and a front-office manager. This didn't work for Mike Holmgren in Seattle; the team floundered until Holmgren gave up his front-office role and concentrated on coaching. It sure didn't work for Butch Davis in Cleveland. It didn't work for Coach Cratchit in Green Bay. The new Niners structure has no general manager. There is a gent with the title "chief of football operations," but he reports to Nolan, engaging the risk he will serve as a yes man. Coaches should coach while a separate department deals with personnel issues. Trying to do both only means you do two things poorly.

Meanwhile, yours truly cannot figure why Jerry Rice was denied a victory lap at Monster Park. Rice is not only the greatest receiver of all time, he may be the greatest football player ever ... period. Of course, at his age, Rice is a third receiver -- the job he hopes to land with Denver. He is just one year away from sitting in a broadcast booth, wearing a garish color-coordinated jacket. But why, Tuesday Morning Quarterback wonders, were the Niners so adamant they did not want Rice back for one last bow? Have a look at the Niners' depth chart; this team is not exactly overloaded at the receiver position.

Professional sports are foremost a form of entertainment: The goal is to show the customers a good time and having them buy tickets again. San Francisco fans love Rice and would be far better entertained this season by seeing him snag the occasional pass for old time's sake than seeing Rashaun Woods run 8-yard outs. Television audiences might feel the same way. Houston at San Francisco on New Year's Day, the Squared Sevens' season-finale game, is unlikely to matter in playoff terms; the Niners may have trouble papering the house that holiday afternoon. But if that was Rice's last game as a pro, every seat would be taken, and TV sets would be tuned in as well. San Francisco's management seemed to think that because Rice is no longer a star, he has no value to the team. The Niners squad is composed entirely of players who are not stars!

*Licensing note:* Candlestick Park, one of the loveliest names in sports, is now Monster Park. If only a cheese company had bought the naming rights and called it Munster Park! Weirdly, there are two big companies named Monster -- and no, I don't know what that says about capitalism. One Monster company makes audio equipment and one Monster company brokers job placement. One is paying the city of San Francisco a hefty sum, the other is getting some free publicity. Do you know which Monster the Niners' field is named after?

**Seattle:** The Seahawks have made the playoffs three times in Mike Holmgren's six years, but have not won a postseason contest. In fact, Seattle hasn't won a postseason game in 21 years. This drought may have been funny for a while, but now is simply wearying for Blue Men Group faithful. And though 2004 was a playoff season for Seattle, the team was a modest 1-3 against clubs that finished with a winning record, and that lone "W" is deceptive -- it came against Atlanta in the regular-season finale, and the

Falcons, having already locked up their best seeding, rested their starters.

The Seahawks enter 2005 with pretty much the same squad as 2004, which means if they want to advance, they need to drop fewer passes and take fewer Sundays off. Last year in the weeks following Thanksgiving, when the pressure was on and Seattle was in a tight playoff race, the Blue Men Group lost to the Jets by 23 points and to the Bills by 29 -- the Buffalo loss coming in front of Seattle's home crowd at the very handsome Quest Field. Now, Buffalo and Jersey/B are AFC East teams, and last season, the AFC East had the league's strongest set of defenses. Which, in turn, points to Seattle's twin problems. First, its own defense is bottom quartile statistically. Second, its offense looked good statistically -- but only by running up yards against the weak defenses of the NFC West. In 2004, Seattle posted only two victories over teams that finished in the top 10 for defense. When the Seahawks met a power defense club, they tended to wilt. If they want to advance, they need to carry the fight to the top defensive teams.

*Accounting note:* Clare Farnsworth of the *Seattle Post Intelligencer* reported that as an incentive to get players to show for offseason workouts, the Seahawks offered a free camcorder to any squad member who compiled a perfect attendance record. Four gentlemen qualified. Presumably this means the Blue Men Group must deduct four times \$699.95 from their 2005 salary cap -- though if the players send the mail-in rebates, perhaps Seattle gets four times \$50 added back to its cap.

**Tampa:** How many starters are still around from a team that won the Super Bowl a mere two-and-a-half years ago? Compare the current depth chart from that game; a mere six starters remain, and the Super Bowl win was *just two-and-a-half years ago*. Ye gods. This means it is pointless to think of City of Tampa as a team struggling to recover its Super Bowl touch. The Tampa team that won the Super Bowl no longer exists, except on highlight reels. This year's Bucs are a new bunch of gents, and they have a lot more commonality with the Bucs unit that has gone 12-20 since winning the Super Bowl than they do with the vanished champions from *just two-and-a-half years ago*.

The best that can be said for the current, non-Super Bowl-esque Bucs is that many of their 2004 losses were close games, with three contests decided by a field goal. Tampa field-goal kicking was poor in 2004, to which Jon "Once I Was A Teenaged Coach" Gruden has attributed some of his team's weak finish. The Bucs' two kickers combined to hit only 15 of 24 attempts, or 62 percent; had they hit the league average for 2004, Tampa would have garnered four more field goals. Think that doesn't sound like much? It's hard to score in the NFL -- field goals matter. Just ask the New England Patriots, where the spectacular Adam Vinatieri hit 31 of his 33 attempts. New England became the Super Bowl champion in part because it scored the most field goals last season. Field goals are not wimpy plays, they are crucial to football success.

*Cheer-babes note:* Tampa's cheerleader unit is rocketing up the charts and threatening to break into the NFL's aesthetic elite, which currently comprises the Denver, Miami, Minnesota, Oakland and Philadelphia cheerleading squads. Here, the team declares that "With their winning personalities, attractive uniforms and intricate dance routines, the beautiful women of the Tampa Bay Buccaneers Cheerleaders have become an important part of the game-day experience". Wait, it's the absence of uniforms that makes the Tampa cheerleaders a hit! Tampa cheerleader outfits have gotten skimpier by the year, which certainly is the cutting-edge trend. Tampa's cheerleaders are also following the current cutting-edge trend of putting their rehearsal time into dance routines, rather than traditional cheer stunts such as pyramids and tosses. Currently, all the top cheerleader squads are emphasizing complex dance.

**Washington:** The Redskins' third-place finish on defense last season was, for the tastefully named Gregg Williams, one of the top coaching feats of 2004 -- considering Washington's awful offense meant the defense was on the field a lot, and star linebacker LaVar Arrington was injured most of the year. Many have suggested the defensive performance sans Arrington shows this gentleman is overrated. But the tastefully named Williams has a history of getting peak defensive output from little-known players, so working without Arrington was just par for the course. This offseason, Washington lost defensive stars Fred Smoot and Antonio Pierce. Don't be surprised if Williams plugs in a couple who-dats and his unit continues to play well.

Defense is the only good news for this cartographically challenged franchise, which calls itself the "Washington" Redskins, though the team practices in Virginia and performs in Maryland. Offensive performance declined from 23rd during Steve Spurrier's final year to a not-funny 30th last season. The team's offseason was about the fifth consecutive offseason of disarray. In the two winters since Joe Gibbs returned, draft choices and big bonuses have been expended mostly on skinny glory boys -- quarterbacks, running backs, receivers, cornerbacks -- leaving question marks in the trenches. During the 2004 offseason, in the euphoria over Gibbs' homecoming, the Redskins signed free agents to contracts with a combined paper value of \$302 million, about four times that year's cap, while also trading 2005 draft picks for lesser choices in 2004. 'Skins officials declared the contracts had been artfully worded to avoid a cap crash. But yours truly warned, "As early as next winter, Gibbs may find his roster top heavy in cap terms, and already 2005 draft picks have been expended."

So what happened "next winter" -- that is, this offseason? The Redskins hit a sal-cap wall. Smoot had to be let go because there was no cap room to re-sign him, forcing Washington to expend the ninth overall choice in this year's draft on a replacement corner. Pierce, one of the league's best defenders in 2004, had to be let go because there was no cap room to re-sign him. To top things off, the 'Skins again borrowed against the future, trading away their No. 1 choice in 2006. Between dead weight on the salary cap and the mortgaging of next year's picks, the future better be now for Washington, as the winter of 2006 may see a wholesale cap-caused roster purge, plus no top draft pick to replenish the ranks.

This leads to the coaching quandary Gibbs faces. The Redskins' core problem is inept quarterbacking. Last season, neither Patrick Ramsey nor Mark Brunell threw accurately and neither ever asserted command of the offense. There's a case for Gibbs handing the job to rookie quarterback Jason Campbell, acquired in the trade that mortgaged the future picks. Letting Campbell have his learning year as the starter might prepare him to be a top quarterback in subsequent seasons, though all but assuring no playoffs this year. Gibbs' complication: If a cap crash is coming in the winter of 2006, this may be his last chance for several years to field a winning team. So should he start erratic veterans at quarterback, or hand the ball to Campbell?

*Draft note:* Washington has become a bottomless pit for high-draft choice wide receivers. In 1992, the 'Skins used the fourth overall selection on receiver Desmond Howard; in 1995 they used the fourth overall selection on receiver Michael Westbrook; in 2001 they used the 15th overall selection on receiver Rod Gardner. All were huge disappointments. You have to go back a quarter century, to Art Monk in 1980, for a high-drafted Washington receiver who played well.

*Cheer-babes note:* The Washington Redskins Cheerleaders, no longer the Redskinettes, also are threatening to break into the league's aesthetic elite. Depending on how the team's season goes, this could be the most important developing story at FedExField.

### **Reader Animadversion**

After calling the second Browns the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.0) and then the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1), last week yours truly said I would call them the Cleveland Browns (Beta Version) owing to the total overhaul in the works. Many software-adept readers, including Aaron Kroll of Chicago, pointed out that the correct techno-designation for the test version of the third iteration of a program would be 3.0b, the b standing for beta. So that's what the team will be this season -- the Cleveland Browns (3.0b). Steven Matuszek of Baltimore further pointed out that if the Browns were a software product, and assuming Ohio is a signatory to the Uniform Computer Information Transactions Act, Browns management could disclaim all liability arising from use of the product, and any merchantability for a specific purpose -- such as winning football games. Meanwhile, Greg Roemelt of Arlington Heights, Ill., pointed out that by using the convention of the Madden NFL video games, I could call the team the Cleveland Browns 2006.

Carson Ghrigsby of Memphis, Tenn., a Raiders fan, was distressed that my AFC Preview declared Oakland "could be the worst team in the league." But then, "after remembering the TMQ guarantee, the burden was lifted from my shoulders," Ghrigsby wrote. This column's motto is: All Predictions Wrong or Your Money Back.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback erred by saying Baltimore is the only NFL team with a marching band. Many, many readers, including Ben Domenech of Alexandria, Va., pointed out that the Redskins also field a marching band. And many readers pointed out that the Redskins' marching band high-steps to a fare-thee-well.

Last week, I expressed amazement that the news that Ben Roethlisberger engages in the idiotic practice of riding a motorcycle without a helmet did not cause the Pennsylvania state legislature immediately to enact a helmet law. Dave Spiese of Telford, Pa., was among many to point out that Pennsylvania Governor Ed Rendell is a fanatic Eagles fan, attends all Philadelphia home games and even hosts an Eagles pregame show. "Surely Rendell would veto any helmet legislation crafted to improve Pittsburgh's chances," Spiese supposed. Bob Whalen of Philadelphia noted that Lynn Swann may run against Rendell in the next gubernatorial election. If Swann wins, Whalen supposed, he might back a law mandating motorcycle helmets for Steelers while forbidding them for Eagles.

Bruce Ford of Riverside, Calif., pointed out that one of TMQ's favorite players for 2004, Ernest Wilford of Jacksonville, appeared on the NFL Network training camp show, and was seen driving his car to the players' lot. His car is a 2000 Toyota Camry. "As a social liberal/fiscal conservative, I applaud Mr. Wilford's restraint," Ford declared. Forget the Hummers and Ferraris, young athletes -- buy Camrys and bank those bonuses.

Jeff Emhuff of Columbus, Ohio, noted that when the Bengals host the Browns on Dec. 11, Cincinnati will wear its Halloween costume uniform of orange jerseys with black pants. If the Browns sport their orange pants that day, the stadium crowd may require those eye shields people wear around warp engines in sci-fi.

#### **Next Week**

The postponed column: readers' offseason complaints about TMQ, plus my annual anti-basketball diatribe.

## The reader's revenge, plus the lost episode of *NYPD Blue*!

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Aug. 30, 2005) -- Early this month, after the Hall of Fame banquet in Canton, I found myself chatting with Hall of Fame coach Bill Walsh. As it happened, we talked about the ever-increasing size of NFL linemen. This was two weeks before the sudden collapse of San Francisco guard Thomas Herrion, whose cause of death remains unknown. But lineman size was on the minds of football observers well before the Herrion tragedy. Twenty years ago, NFL offensive linemen averaged about 265 pounds. Today the average in college is perhaps 300 pounds, while the offensive line average in the NFL has bloomed to perhaps 320 pounds. I asked Walsh three things: if increasing size poses a medical risk to football players, if bigger players will force football to adopt a bigger field, and what might reverse the trend toward endless weight gain.

On medical risk, Walsh said he felt it would eventually be proven that making yourself unnaturally big for football, or any sport, is dangerous. Pro football players gain muscle mass by relentless pumping of iron and by forcing-feeding themselves steaks, tuna, protein shakes; steroids are not a factor, as the NFL tests for them regularly. Via weight lifting and heroic eating, bulk can be gained the old fashioned way, without drugs. Yet the result is what scouts call "unnatural size" --- the player who is 50 or even 100 pounds bigger than his frame should carry. "Skin too tight for his body," scouts say of players who have forced themselves to become unnaturally large. Anyone carrying "unnatural" bulk places the heart under stress, since while muscles and waistline increase in diameter, the heart does not.

Linemen keep trying to get bigger because football size is an arms race: the other guy is bulking up, forcing you to bulk up. The fad for spread offenses is driven partly because the middle is now jammed by inflated linemen. Thus my second question to Walsh: If players keep getting bigger, will fields have to be bigger? Walsh shook his head. Not only would stadiums need to be extensively re-engineered, purists would complain that records were invalidated. Field dimensions, Walsh believes, won't change.

Then what might stop linemen of the future from averaging 350 pounds, or 400 pounds? Medical studies, Walsh said. His suspicion is that research will show a specific statistical correlation between excessive athletic bulk and reduction of life expectancy. When a coach, Walsh was distinguished by his analytical mind. Now, pondering the weight issue, he takes the analytical approach, seeing peer-reviewed medical studies as what could end the bulking-up arms race. If a relationship between "unnatural" athletic weight and shortened life is proven by studies, parents will think twice about allowing kids to bulk up for high-school football; colleges may impose body-mass standards on football, since encouraging players to do something that shortens life would be seen as irresponsible and be opposed by college medical schools; the NFL may need standards for weight control, if only as a precaution against liability. It's one thing for football players to assume the risk of a knee injury: to take chances with their very lives is another matter altogether.

In other news, this column contains my annual anti-basketball diatribe, interspersed with the annual readers' offseason comments about Tuesday Morning Quarterback; plus a bonus, the lost episode of *NYPD Blue*. Next week will be season predictions -- which means the real thing, the absurd artificial universe of NFL football, is about to resume. I can't wait! Now, where did I put those cheerleader calendars ...

### Team Basketball Lives!

Pro basketball is approximately one percent as interesting as pro football, so each year Tuesday Morning Quarterback tosses a percent or so of space to the NBA. Here is this year's NBA Big Point: the league's minority of team-oriented teams are clobbering its majority of undisciplined show-off clubs.

About a decade ago the NBA made a disastrous decision to start drafting high school players en masse. Quality of play promptly declined, then ratings declined as the night follows the day. The pro basketball

television audience keeps shrinking because most NBA contests are crummy games: five guys take turns going one-on-one, more concerned about their endorsement contracts than their team's W-L. There was one strong counter-argument to my position: if high-school kids lead to crummy games, why were so many NBA clubs drafting high-school kids? Wouldn't management be smart enough to figure out that team-concept basketball is more likely to produce victories than squads of pouting showoffs?

An amazing number of NBA clubs still don't seem to have figured this out. But coaches and managers of two teams have: the San Antonio Spurs and Detroit Pistons. They've won the last three NBA championships, and done so by eschewing the star system to play team basketball. When the Spurs and Pistons, the league's two most team-oriented teams, met for this year's title, network mavens groaned that neither fielded flashy glamour players. The reason they were meeting for the title is that neither fielded flashy glamour players! Because NBA contracts are fully guaranteed -- gentlemen paid the same regardless of how well or poorly they perform -- NBA coaches have no leverage to force their charges to play team ball. Many NBA players simply ignore what coaches tell them and launch crazy shots the instant they touch the ball. But the San Antonio and Detroit coaching staffs, at least, have convinced their charges to play unselfishly. The result is three consecutive championships. Other NBA teams need to start asking themselves: do you want strutting show-offs or do you want victories?

### **TMQ Praised for Length, Dullness**

Readers have complained that the printable Tuesday Morning Quarterback -- many print TMQ to read during critical business meetings -- does not contain cheerleader pictures and other graphics. Paraic Reddington of Perth, Western Australia, wrote to praise this very lack. Because the printed version appears to be some dense, overly long report on a weighty topic, "this version is very passable as legitimate office work when viewed from 'over the shoulder,'" Reddington wrote. Susan Weir of Overland Park, Kan., wrote to note, "Last season, I started blocking out time in my Outlook calendar so people wouldn't schedule me into meetings when I only wanted to be reading TMQ." Susan, just print it and read during the meetings!

### **Latte Without Milk, Please**

Last season Tuesday Morning Quarterback ran items on redundant food names. "Grilled carne asada steak" sold at Taco Bell, for example, means "grilled roasted meat steak;" the "chi latte with milk" offered at Starbucks means "tea with milk with tea with milk." Comes now Meg Gallagher of East Aurora, New York, to point out the "au jus" often appended to descriptions of prime rib means "with the juice." But the menu usually says "with au jus," meaning "with with the juice." Recently in Buffalo, yours truly snarfed a beef on weck at Charlie the Butcher's, which serves the best beef on weck I've ever savored. (Though, Charlie the Butcher sounds like someone who should be on trial at The Hague.) The sandwich was delicious, and on the wall were signed photos showing Regis Philbin and Denise Austin had eaten at Charlie's too! What did the menu board offer? "Beef on weck dipped in au jus."

### **Kids, Your Motivational Speaker Will Begin As Soon As She Changes Into Her Bikini**

Natalie Glebova, Miss Canada, recently was named Miss Universe. You'd think it would be too cold in Canada for bikinis, but you'd think wrong. In her photos section, be sure to click "national costume." My parents were Canadian, I've spent some time in the frozen north, traveled as far as James Bay near Nunavik and Yellowknife on the Great Slave Lake, never met anyone dressed in this native costume! According to her official bio, Glebova's occupation is "motivational speaker to grade-school and high-school students." Motivational speaking in grade school? "Come on kids, finish coloring those pictures, I know you can do it!" Glebova bested punters' favorite Cynthia Olavarria, who entered as Miss Puerto Rico despite the fact that Puerto Rico is not a country. Unless this was the Miss Self-Governing Commonwealth pageant, Olavarria should have competed as Miss United States. The judging was held in Bangkok, and controversy ignited when the contestants posed in thong bikinis at Wat Arun, a magnificent Buddhist temple. (Sorry, the link is to Wat Arun, not to the bikini pictures.) Some outraged Thais called having a bevy of nearly naked babes putting it out there at Wat Arun an affront to their national religion. But the outraged could not have been much advanced along the Buddhist path, or they wouldn't have cared who posed in front of the temple! Attachment to the symbols of the world can only bring sorrow,

and Buddhist sanctuaries themselves number among the mere transient material objects that Buddhists are supposed to let go their concerns over.

You've already missed the annual music festival and cribbage tournament held in Kuujjuaq, capital of Nunavik. There was a golf tournament, too -- location listed as "sandpit on dump road." Kuujjuaq is two degrees north of the Arctic Circle. Tourist information Kuujjuaq, including its "state of the art conference center" and "several eating places," is here.

### **This Season's First Thong-Based Item**

Stefan of Cologne, Germany, notes that NFL Shop is offering a sale on thongs with the Tennessee Titans logo.

### **Ah, Mexico: So Far From God, So Close to Arizona**

Mike DeCleene of New York City notes that a gentleman from TMQ's favorite obscure college, Indiana of Pennsylvania, was taken in the draft -- LeRon McCoy, selected by Arizona. Since McCoy played for Indiana of Pennsylvania and now joins a Phoenix team that will perform this season in Mexico City, DeCleene writes, "Clearly, he was brought in help the Arizona team understand how to play for two disjointed geographic entities simultaneously." In fact, DeCleene suggests, this season why not call the Cardinals' franchise Arizona of Mexico? Mr. Data, make it so!

### **Why You're Better Off Not Being a Teenaged Millionaire**

The NBA's new labor compact specifies that beginning in 2006, players be no younger than 19. In most cases this will require prospects to spend at least one year in college before turning pro. This is good news for basketball, since the decline in NBA popularity and ratings syncs pretty much exactly with the league's disastrous decision to begin drafting high-school players en masse. NBA quality of play has declined because high school kids are unskilled in the fundamentals and lacking the maturity gained in college. Quality of play, and hence the NBA's viability as a business, would have been better served had the minimum age been raised to 20, but in negotiations you take what you can get, and the players' union was adamantly opposed to a 20-years minimum. This is puzzling since raising the age minimum is in the interest of the majority of players.

Consider Amir Johnson, a California high school player taken by Detroit just before the end of June's NBA draft. Johnson will be lucky to get on the court for two minutes a night, considering the Pistons, who play team ball and have no patience for show-offs, can't find minutes for Darko Milicic, selected second overall in 2003. (Milicic career average: 5.8 minutes per game.) Maybe Amir Johnson will succeed in the NBA, but odds say he is likely to languish on the bench for a few years, then be waived out of basketball while still barely more than a teenager. If on the other hand Johnson had gone to college, he would have matured physically and mentally while improving his play, and also gotten, now what's that term I am looking for, oh yes, "an education." After learning and maturing in college Johnson might have been an NBA lottery pick, become a starter, then a few seasons down the road inked a megabucks contract that set him up for life. Instead Johnson is likely to earn relatively little in pro basketball, wash out early, and forfeit his opportunity for a free college education in the process.

Occasionally prodigies such as LeBron James are able to play in the NBA out of high school, but the majority who enter the NBA too young simply end up throwing away both their college experience and long-term incomes. For every James there is a Kwame Brown or a DeSagana Diop. Brown, No. 1 NBA pick out of high school, so far is a bench-lurking who-dat; he might have become a celebrated player if he'd gone to college. Diop, a lottery pick out of high school, has a Shaquille O'Neal physique and might have become a great player if he'd gone to college; instead his career average is 1.6 points, because his game is stuck at the high-school level and thus he rarely gets onto the court. The new 19-years-old rule will soften this problem somewhat, but the basic dynamic won't change. Most who declare for the basketball draft after one year of college will not be ready for the pros, will falter and will end up never signing that megabucks deal. As Maurice Clarett completes his self-destruction, I don't have to point out

how this logic applies to football, too.

Why doesn't the NBA players union see that its insistence on allowing teenagers into the NBA both risks the golden goose by reducing quality of play, and harms many teenagers by reducing their long-term earnings potential? It may be unrealistic to think that a teenager with NBA potential could resist declaring for the draft and getting a fistful of dollars while still basically a kid. But the union should have the players' best interests in mind, warning teen prospects that total career earnings can be increased through the delayed gratification of attending college. And please don't give me the line that age minimums in basketball are an attempt to prevent young African American men from getting rich. When teenagers take slots on NBA rosters, whom do they replace? In almost every case, a young African American man.

### **"Carolina, Birthplace of Wind"**

TMQ described North Carolina as the "birthplace of flight." Many Buckeyes including Lisa Knepper of Canton, Ohio -- birthplace of football -- protested that the Wright Brothers did most of the work on the Wright Flyer in Dayton, transporting the first heavier-than-air craft to the Carolina shore only once the hard part was done. Ohio, she maintains, is the birthplace of flight. "Olympic feats don't belong to the country where they happened, they belong to the country of origin of the athlete," she maintains.

### **Bartender, Make Mine a Blueberry-Almond Tranya**

Numerous readers including Jeff Moore got the obscure reference to "tranya," a drink an alien offers to Captain Kirk in a 1960s Star Trek episode. It is unlikely that actors who lost their jobs when the Star Wars and Star Trek franchises ended simultaneously are drinking much tranya, however. A single flask of tranya costs 4,000 quatloos!

### **Burger King to TMQ: We Are Prepared to Offer You Free Ketchup**

The "mid-to-high seven figures" is how much the NFL says Burger King will pay for its promotional alliance with the league, announced in May. Months before, yours truly was touting Burger King in this space. Isn't it obvious Tuesday Morning Quarterback set the whole NFL-Burger King deal in motion? Yet I didn't even receive a coupon for onion rings! For my endorsement, I would settle for a fee in the mid-to-high three figures. Note one: Burger King is now the Official Quick Service Restaurant Sponsor of the NFL. Not fast, quick; sounds like a scouting report. Note two: Burger King has an executive whose title is Chief Concept Officer.

### **Football Licensing Item No. 2**

Pro football continues to go max-tech. In a just-announced deal, Sprint cell phone customers now can get live audio updates during games, and video highlights shortly after each game ends. Sirius Satellite Radio now offers subscribers live radio of every NFL game, and you can choose the home or visiting team's station. You can watch almost any NFL game live by signing up for satellite provider DirecTV, plus the Sunday Ticket package. Pretty soon anyone with Sunday Ticket at home, plus a broadband connection, plus a laptop, will be able to have the games beamed to anywhere the laptop is connected to broadband. If you live in Los Angeles and are sitting in a hotel room in Chicago, you'll use your laptop to connect to your home Sunday Ticket, then watch your choice of any game exactly as if you were sitting on your couch.

All of this march of technology is really great. Except let me pause for a primal scream: I STILL CAN'T GET SUNDAY TICKET! The fabulous Sunday Ticket package remains available solely to those who receive DirecTV, and I can't because my house is surrounded by Kyoto-Treaty-endorsed greenhouse-gas-absorbing trees. I am hardly the only football nut in this boat -- anyone who lives in a home or apartment encircled by trees or tall buildings can't receive satellite television, and thus cannot buy Sunday Ticket. Seriously, NFL, it's the 21st century. You're beaming video highlights to cell phones. Why can't

you come up with a system that allows *anyone* to subscribe to Sunday Ticket?

### **Football Licensing Item No. 3**

The Cowboys are the first NFL franchise with an official pharmacy, CVS. "Eileen Dunne, vice president of corporate communications and community relations for CVS, boldly presented [Dallas owner Jerry] Jones with a large bottle of CVS aspirin for the upcoming season," the announcement reads. What if Jones' insurer refuses to pay for the aspirin? After all, for an NFL owner, headaches are a "preexisting condition."

### **Sure Beats Workin'**

Jim Stekelberg wrote to protest that the *Monday Night Football* schedule shuts out Buffalo and Jacksonville, both of which went 9-7 last season, while granting Monday night dates to Carolina, Dallas, Kansas City and Washington, all of which had losing seasons last year. Lifestyle note: Stekelberg sent me this complaint mere minutes after the 2005 sked was released. So he was sitting around in April obsessing about the NFL -- Jim, you have your priorities in order!

### **Also, Doug Flutie Is the Last Quarterback Still Wearing a Helmet with an AM Transistor Radio**

Last week TMQ noted that punter Scott Player of Arizona is the last NFL performer still wearing a 1950s-style single-bar facemask. Years ago, the league mandated a minimum of two bars but grandfathered kickers using the single-bar, and Player was the sole one remaining. The very day the column came out, the Eagles brought out of retirement punter Sean Landeta, who also has a grandfathered permission to wear a single-bar. This was noted by Seth Caughron of New York City, among many readers.

### **"Leave the Engine On While I'm Speaking About Saving Fuel," Mineta Instructed His Driver**

Last week, Secretary of Transportation Norman Mineta announced new fuel-efficiency standards for SUVs, minivans and pickup trucks. The goal -- an 8 percent increase in the MPG of large vehicles -- seems modest, given that the National Academy of Sciences, in a 2001 report requested by George W. Bush, said vehicle fuel economy could be increased by about one third without sacrifice of safety or comfort. At least give Bush, who in five years has imposed two modest fuel economy increases on SUVs, credit for doing something. In eight years, Bill Clinton took no action regarding MPG standards.

Two aspects of Mineta's announcement struck TMQ. First, he arrived on the scene in a Lincoln Navigator, a mega-SUV that gets 15 miles per gallon and records a three on the EPA's air pollution scale, where zero is worst and 10 is best. The Navigator also emits 12.9 tons per year of greenhouse gases, one of the worst figures for a mass-produced vehicle, according to the EPA. (Go here to find the fuel efficiency, pollution score and greenhouse-gas emissions of any car.) Second, Mineta made his announcement not in Washington, D.C., but in Los Angeles, to which he flew for the event. There is no better way to waste petroleum than taking an unnecessary airplane trip! If Mineta flew to Los Angeles aboard a Boeing 777, the most fuel-efficient jetliner, about 75 gallons of fuel would have been burned to move his seat. But cabinet secretaries rarely travel alone: if Mineta traveled with three aides, then 300 gallons were wasted. And this assumes flying commercial on the most efficient plane in the sky. If Mineta took one of the government's corporate-sized jets -- and cabinet secretaries often demand this perk for ego reasons -- then petroleum waste skyrocketed. The C-20G, the government version of the Gulfstream IV corporate jet, would burn about 4,000 gallons flying from Washington to Los Angeles and back, depending on wind. That much fuel equates to a Hummer driving round-trip coast-to-coast 10 times. Let's waste petroleum in order to announce a petroleum conservation plan!

### **The Football Gods Chortled**

Eyebrows were raised this offseason when the league awarded Denver an extra third-round draft pick as compensation for losing linebacker Ian Gold in free agency, while Indianapolis was awarded a fourth-round pick for losing linebacker Marcus Washington; Gold had a so-so season, while Washington made

the Pro Bowl. Why did the Broncos get more when Indianapolis lost the better player? Fear not; the football gods grind slow, but they grind exceedingly small. Denver used the bonus choice to select the perennially worthless Maurice Clarett who, true to form, immediately began to complain that the Broncos were mistreating him. Yesterday Clarett was waived, after compiling zero carries for Denver -- same as he accomplished in the last two years for Ohio State! Thus Denver's mysterious bonus choice yielded nothing for the club. Meanwhile, TMZ's jaw will drop if any other NFL team wastes even one single second on Clarett, who at this point should count himself lucky to be covering punts for the Edmonton Eskimos.

### **Another Reason to Fear New England**

As the Broncos were cutting their losses with Clarett, New England named Matt Cassel its third-string quarterback. Minor transaction? Tuesday Morning Quarterback trembles. Cassel *did not start in college*; the last time Cassel threw a touchdown pass was in 1999, at Chatsworth High School in California. When New England spent a seventh-round pick on Cassel in this year's draft, yours truly wrote, "It was bad enough the Patriots used a sixth-round pick on Tom Brady, who had a fairly ordinary college career, then turned Brady into a Super Bowl MVP. Now they've used a seventh-round pick on Matt Cassel, who didn't even start in college. Please tell me New England will convert him into a defensive tackle. Please don't tell me he's another future Super Bowl MVP quarterback." Cassel was stuck on the bench behind Carson Palmer and Matt Leinart in college. Now he's had a strong training camp and may be a find. While other teams throw high draft choices out the window, New England scouts a guy who *didn't even start in college*, and comes up with a winner. Ye gods.

### **Break Up the AFC**

John Bjorkman notes the AFC clobbered the NFC in 2004, going 45-20. He haikuizes,

NFC struggles  
 versus stronger AFC.  
 Future looks bleak, too.  
 -- John Bjorkman, *Eules, Texas*

### **Kids, You'll Go Deaf If You Keep Leaving That Refrigerator Open**

TMQ has taken to saying that very loud NFL stadiums reach "experimental scramjet decibel levels" on third downs. David Aronchick of Seattle, Washington, notes that experimental scramjets make about 140 decibels of noise, while an experimental acoustics-based refrigerator generates an incredible 173 decibels, nearly the sound of the space shuttle leaving its pad. (The point of the device is very low energy consumption; if perfected for home use, the fridge will be muffled, needless to say.) Aronchick suggests "experimental refrigerator decibel levels" would better express the madhouse atmosphere of NFL stadia on third-and-10.

### **Beefcake Requisite**

Michelle Wu of Austin, Texas, asks, if yours truly can vertical-jump 31 inches, why there are no beefcake pictures of me in the column? Michelle, this is for humanitarian reasons. If the NFL.com art department can superimpose my head on the bod of some ripped ultra-stud, then we'll run it.

### **Mega-Babe Boasts of Predicting Exact Final Score!**

A few years back, *Sporting News* polled a large group of celebs for their Super Bowl predictions, and the sole respondent to hit the nail on the head was hot-tomato actress Catherine Bell from the old *JAG* show. Trent Douhett of Columbus, Ohio, points out that Bell's bio now boasts, "She's the only person to have ever correctly predicted the participants in, winner, and final score of a Super Bowl before a season began." Note to NFL.com art department: Trent Douhett of Columbus, Ohio, has just provided a perfectly

legitimate football-related excuse for a cheesecake photo of Bell.

### **Hier an NFL.com, Ist Der Gesamte Personal Morgenmuffellen**

Matt Powell, stationed at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, was perusing the Berlin Thunder website and naturally looked in the cheerleaders section. He notes that Thunder dance team member Stephanie is 21 years old and in her sixth season on the Thunder cheerleader squad. Are there no child labor laws in Germany governing flouncing? Powell adds that Stephanie's bio says her worst quality is being a Morgenmuffel -- German for "not a morning person." Isn't that a great word? Morgenmuffel should be borrowed into English to mean "not a morning person."

### **Also, Go For Two When Ordering Beer**

This column's immutable law, Take One Till the Fourth, holds that unless an NFL team is way behind, until the fourth quarter it should take one-point PATs, even if, say, the score is 14-12 and a one-point PAT still leaves you trailing 14-13. Because the final score dynamic is unknowable until the fourth quarter, a 99 percent chance of one point is preferable to a 40 percent chance of two points, these being the NFL averages. Late in the game a seemingly trivial one point, passed up early, might make all the difference. Many's the team that goes for two when unnecessary, then later wishes it had taken one. Carolina in Super Bowl XXXVIII, for instance.

Reader Derek Cornwell of Kansas City, Mo., points out that Bill Belichick uses this incredibly scientifically advanced analysis, by Harold Sackowitz, a professor of statistics at Rutgers University, to decide when to go for two. Sackowitz's graphs take into account not just scoreboard but time remaining and likely number of possessions remaining. Sackowitz, Cornwell points out, recommends an NFL or college team almost always go for one in the first three quarters -- but then start going for two in the fourth quarter. That's pretty much the TMQ immutable law. Tuesday Morning Quarterback adds that Sackowitz's breakdown is different for high school football, where he recommends prep teams go for two in almost every situation. TMQ attends a lot of high school football games, and agrees. In high school it's more like a 60 percent chance of one point versus a 50 percent chance of two points, and that argues for regular use of the deuce try.

### **One Enchanted Evening, You Will Meet a Strangelet...**

Previous TMQ items have questioned the wisdom of the United States and European Union expending billions of tax dollars on complex "atom smashers." Such particle accelerators appear to stand almost no chance of discovering anything of value to the taxpayers who must fund them; they seem mainly a jobs program for physics postdocs. (Yes, of course, seemingly abstract research of the past has turned out to have practical value.) Meanwhile atom smashers engage the risk of accidentally creating a novel "strangelet" particle with unwelcome properties, such as causing the entire Earth to collapse. The "strangelet" risk is small. But given that particle accelerators have no known practical value, what's the point of running any risk at all in this area?

Reader Shaun points out that the most powerful accelerator yet, the Large Hadron Collider, is under construction at the CERN research facility on the French-Swiss border. Here, see enormous superconducting magnets being lowered into the tunnels of the new smasher. The Large Hadron Collider will propel protons to almost the speed of light, then slam them together with 70 times the force of CERN's present accelerator. Let's hope the French-Swiss border does not inadvertently vanish when the machine is turned on. Shaun speculates in haiku,

Protons at light speed,  
superconducting magnets:  
France's doom draws near.  
-- *Shaun*

## Many NFL Teams Offer "Bonus in Lieu of Employment"

Last winter yours truly noted that Alaska boasts of having no sales tax, but some Alaskan towns impose on retail sales a "fee in lieu of tax." It's just a fee -- thank goodness it's not a tax! Mark Higgins, a tight end on the Harvard football team, writes to note that Harvard and MIT, as nonprofit institutions, are not required to pay taxes to the city of Cambridge, Mass. Both voluntarily give the city an annual "payment in lieu of taxes." It's just a payment -- thank goodness it's not a tax!

## Warning, Serious Item

Last week's column discussed the fact that sudden deaths of apparently healthy young athletes usually trace to undiagnosed heart abnormalities, and asked why the inexpensive EKG test is not used to screen youths participating in sports. A number of pediatricians and heart specialists wrote in saying this wouldn't necessarily work. Dr. Jeffrey Kons of the Indiana University School of Medicine noted that attempts to use EKGs to screen young people for heart defects have mainly led to false positives -- kids and their parents are put through the fright of believing there is a heart problem, only to have subsequent tests show there is none. A superior test called the echocardiogram reliably detects heart abnormalities, but costs several hundred dollars per patient. With an estimated 1.8 million people playing all forms of organized football in the United States, if all were subjected to an echocardiogram at \$300 per test, the bill would be half a billion dollars. Cost can't be dismissed as a non-issue; in the utilitarian calculus of medicine, investing half a billion dollars in primary care would likely save more lives than hunting for rare heart defects. Studies suggest, Dr. Kons reported, that one teenager in 3,000 should be disqualified from athletics based on heart abnormalities. How to find that one in 3,000? Dr. Bevin Weeks, a pediatric cardiologist at Yale-New Haven Medical Center of Yale University, says annual physicals and detailed family medical histories are more likely to pinpoint youth heart defects than mass EKG screening. Dr. Shawn Tittle, a cardiothoracic surgeon at Yale Medical Center, even put the whole thing into TMQ terms by haikuizing:

EKG not the  
answer; regular checkups  
make for safer kids.  
-- *Shawn Tittle, New Haven, Conn.*

TMQ interjects that since many medical advances start off being too expensive and end up being universal, maybe someone should find a way to cut the price of echocardiograms, and then this examination could become standard for everyone. Death rates for just about everything have declined for generations. There's no reason medical science can't take on the youthful heart abnormality and knock that out, too.

## In Space, No One Can Hear You Yawn

Reader Mike Cornaro of Milford, N.H, protested that when two spaceships meet in space in sci-fi shows and movies, they're always facing the same way. "Is there a top to the universe?" he asks. Starcruisers ought to move through space the way fish move through water, going in any direction horizontal, vertical or diagonal.

## When Will Someone Make a Show About Los Angeles That's Filmed in New York?

The offseason saw the series finale of *NYPD Blue*. Yours truly hoped the finale would include appearances by the ghosts of all partners, wives, children and girlfriends of Andy Sipowicz who were killed or died of mysterious diseases. But that would have required the episode to be filmed in a convention center. Instead, for the finale *NYPD Blue* stuck to its established formula of incredible realism -- the police lingo, the rundown precinct house, the female detectives played by stunning former swimsuit models. For those who missed the last episode of this realistic New York City show filmed in Los Angeles, here is the script:

*Sipowicz arrives at crime scene, walks through yellow police tape.* SIPOWICZ: Who's the victim?

UNIFORMED OFFICER: An actor.

SIPOWICZ: Sick [expletive] city, not even the actors are safe anymore.

UNIFORMED OFFICER: No, I mean the victim is played by an actor. Medical examiner says the guy's fine. The director told him to lie still during filming.

SIPOWICZ: Sick [expletive] city, you can't even tell who's dead anymore.

Medavoy arrives.

MEDAVOY: I got jammed up on my way to the House.

SIPOWICZ: Didn't you tell them you was on the job?

MEDAVOY: Yeah. But they still jammed me.

*Note: this was TMO's last chance to use the above lines, which for years yours truly has contended could be inserted into any NYPD Blue episode at any point.*

SIPOWICZ: Did you bring the yellow sheet on that mutt who lawyered up?

MEDAVOY: Yeah. And I rolled over a mule, filed my fifty-seven, packaged a white shirt, waxed a soldier and reached out to a rabbi at the Puzzle Palace.

*Playwright David Mamet walks by.*

MAMET: I love this unexplained street dialogue, it's so genuine. At least, I assume it's genuine.

SIPOWICZ: Yo, Mamet! You know anything about the murder?

MAMET: You'll never pin this one on me, copper. I've got an alibi. I was at the studio, dumbing down the pilot for the network's new crime drama.

MEDAVOY: His alibi checks out, sarge. I've seen the script.

SIPOWICZ: Third-grade comprehension level?

MEDAVOY: There you go.

SIPOWICZ: [Expletive] network, they [expletive, expletive, expletive].

MEDAVOY: You can say that again!

*Actor Joe Mantegna walks by.*

MANTEGNA: Love this authentic New York dirt. They must fly it in. Why, this is almost as realistic as my "Spenser" movies that depict Boston and were filmed in Vancouver.

SIPOWICZ: Okay, what about suspects? We gotta close this murder before the victim goes on coffee break.

MEDAVOY: How should I know who did it? There are eight million people back east in New York. In mean, in this city.

SIPOWICZ: Bring 'em all to the One-Five for questioning.

UNIFORMED OFFICER: Just do what you did in the last episode! Drive over to the suspect's building and park in the vacant space that is easily found directly in front of the door, even though this is supposed to be lower East Side Manhattan. Then go into his apartment and immediately see the incriminating evidence in plain view.

SIPOWICZ: Shut up, I'm the detective.

*Lieutenant Bale arrives accompanied by a gorgeous woman whose cleavage is bursting from the décolletage of a barely-buttoned dress shirt.*

LT. BALE: Sipowicz, I come to warn you. Internal Affairs wants your badge.

SIPOWICZ: Not the Rat Squad again!

LT. BALE: Yeah. Though you've solved every case you've ever been assigned and pretty much single-handedly rid Manhattan of crime, they're investigating you for the 10 consecutive season.

MANTEGNA: Say, who's the chickadee?

LT. BALE: Sipowicz, meet your new partner. Her name's Miss July.

SIPOWICZ: (World-weary sigh.) Look, lady, let's put it right on the table. You're a gorgeous young babe. I'm a balding, overweight middle-aged man with a bad personality and an outdated, single-shot weapon. So naturally, you will fall for me.

LT. BALE: She has to. It's in your contract.

SIPOWICZ: Butt out already! Miss July, you won't be able to keep your hands off me. But in one to two seasons depending on the ratings, you will die of a mysterious rare disease. Don't say you wasn't warned.

MISS JULY. Oh Andy, you make me so hot! Take me to a hotel right away!

SIPOWICZ: A hotel -- on a cop's salary?

## **Next Week**

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

## The reader's revenge, plus the lost episode of *NYPD Blue*!

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Sept. 6, 2005) -- Everybody will root for the New Orleans Saints this year -- I know I'll root for the Saints weekly. They will need the moral support because their first scheduled home game, versus the Giants, is now a road game at the Giants. With at least nine road games and perhaps more, the Saints become the Central Florida University of the NFL. This season poor Central Florida faces seven road contests and just four home dates. Weather has nothing to do with it; UCF is a perennial cupcake and, thus, in great demand by football-factory schools looking for someone to clobber in front of the home fans and financial boosters. Central Florida agreed to play most games on the road, in return for gate shares that exceed what the Golden Knights take in at home. In college football, many contests are negotiated on the free market; schools that struggle at the gate may agree to play at schools that always pack the house, in return for a fee guarantee that's attractive. But the obvious happens: those who play more often on the road tend to have losing seasons.

During the regular season, NFL teams play the same number of home and away games, to equalize competition. Now, owing to the hurricane, the Saints will get fewer games within Louisiana than outside the state. Possibly they will play only a few home-state dates in 2005, possibly none. This is one of the small consequences of a large human tragedy, and nearly guarantees New Orleans a losing season.

On the flip side, the schedule decision turns the Jersey/A Giants into the Nebraska Cornhuskers of the NFL. One of the dirty little secrets of college ball is that many football-factory schools stack the deck by playing more games at home than on the road, quietly paying the visitors to agree to the away-team disadvantage. Nobody in college football manipulates the schedule better than the Cornhuskers, who in 2005 will play seven home games versus four road dates. Quirk? In 2004, Nebraska played six at home, five away. In 2003, the Huskers were home seven times, away five times. In 2002, Nebraska was home for eight games and away for five. They pack 'em in at Lincoln, and are willing to share the wealth to get teams to come to Memorial Stadium. But the result is a W-L ratio that's suspect, and this helps explain why Nebraska often looks great from September to November, then honks its bowl game.

Now the Giants will play nine home games and seven road dates. Given that last season the home team won 57 percent of NFL contests, an extra home date grants to Jersey/A an advantage almost without precedent in postwar pro football annals. (Early in the 20th century, teams arranged their own games much as colleges now do.) Of course it's simply chance Jersey/A was the first scheduled Superdome visitor. If the Saints end up playing one extra road date at the Meadowlands, then the remainder of their home schedule at Baton Rouge, conspiracy theorists will ask why only Jersey/A received a special favor -- considering the Giants are a sentimental favorite at NFL headquarters, which is on Park Avenue in New York City. Should the Saints end up playing all games on the road, here are the teams that will realize nine home dates and a standings edge: the Giants, Bills, Falcons, Dolphins, Bears, Bucs, Panthers and Lions. None will enjoy a Cornhuskers-like distorted schedule, but all would have an automatic advantage over their competition.

In other football news, the magnificent Jerry Rice steps down. Obviously he's the best receiver ever: the question is whether he's the best football player ever, period. By statistics, Rice walks away whistlin' with that distinction. Consider the spread between the best-ever in several major sports categories and the second-best ever -- a point TMQ has made before about Rice, but now updates for the final time. In baseball, Hank Aaron has six percent more home runs than Babe Ruth. In basketball, Kareem Abdul-Jabbar has four percent more points than Karl Malone. In football, Emmitt Smith has 10 percent more rushing yards than Walter Payton. Turn to Rice and the spreads become spectacular. For most seasons with 50 or more catches, Rice is 31 percent ahead of the number-two guy, Andre Reed. For most receptions in a career, Rice has 41 percent more than the second-best, Cris Carter. For most consecutive games with a reception, Rice is 50 percent better than the second-best, Art Monk. For most career touchdowns, Rice is 52 percent better than the second-best, Carter. For most receiving yards gained, Rice is 53 percent better than the second-best, Tim Brown. In team sports only Wayne Gretzky, with 54 percent more career points than the second-best, Gordie Howe, rivals the statistical accomplishments compiled by

Jerry Rice. Best football player ever? You won't hear an argument from me.

Now for the fifth year, *still* America's only all-haiku NFL season predictions.

### **AFC East**

Ming Dynasty was  
three hundred years. This will be -- ?  
N. E. Patriots.  
Forecast finish: 12-4

Last team that cast off  
Bledsoe seemed to do okay.  
The Buffalo Bills.  
Forecast finish: 9-7

Manhattan NIMBYs  
say, "You can't go home again."  
The Jersey/B Jets.  
Forecast finish: 9-7

Ricky back. Doesn't  
run plays -- performs his dharma.  
Miami Dolphins.  
Forecast finish: 5-11

### **Mike Nugent Watch**

The Jets got hopping mad at Doug Brien for missing two field-goal attempts in the fourth quarter of a three-point playoff loss at Pittsburgh, and showed Brien the door. Yet Brien finished last season 12 of 17 from 40 yards and beyond, among the league's top long-kicking performances. In the fateful fourth quarter at Pittsburgh, hit the crossbar from 47 yards and barely missed from 43 yards -- the latter after the Jersey/B coaching staff inexplicably had quarterback Chad Pennington kneel on third down, moving the ball backward. The winds off those three rivers adjacent to Ketchup Field have bedeviled placement kickers since the stadium opened: no kicker has ever hit from 50 yards or more at Heinz. So not only were Brien's near-misses not that bad by the standards of the field where they occurred, blame should be placed on the Jets' coaching staff for not knowing about the distance problem at Heinz -- else why would they have moved the ball backward on the snap before the second kick? Bear in mind, as well, that chance is a factor in all field-goal attempts. What a kicker does over the course of a season tells you about his abilities; what a kicker does on any one attempt tells nothing, since any one kick might hit or miss by luck. So hopping mad were the Jets about Brien's bad luck at Pittsburgh that they spent their top selection in the 2005 draft on kicker Mike Nugent. But over the course of the 2005 season, is Nugent likely to perform any better than Brien, now with Chicago? TMQ will track this.

### **AFC North**

Doc, I think they can  
make playoffs. Doc, am I nuts?  
The Cincy Bengals.  
Forecast finish: 10-6

Fourth-and-goal in fourth.  
Must go! Can't kick! Go! Oh, noooooooooooooooooooooo!  
The Pittsburgh Steelers.

Forecast finish: 10-6

If Boller falters,  
how 'bout C. Auguste Dupin?  
Bal-a-mer Ravens.  
Forecast finish: 9-7

Oh Romeo, now  
here for art thou Romeo.  
Cleveland Browns (Beta).  
Forecast finish: 4-12

### **Cheerleader of the Week**

George Brownfield nominates Heather of the Washington Redskins, an engineer who holds a "B.S. in earth systems science and a minor in dance" from George Mason University. You don't run across that many engineers who minored in dance. The Redskins Cheerleaders' warm-to-the-touch new swimsuit calendar can be obtained here. Also order a set of Redskins Cheerleaders trading cards!

### **AFC South**

Can't win in Boston.  
Dread, dread Nov. 7.  
Indy Lucky Charms.  
Forecast finish: 11-5

Ten thousand disguised  
as empty seats: a sell out!  
The Jax Jag-u-ars.  
Forecast finish: 10-6

"What, we haven't cut  
you yet?" Cap-strapped team's greeting.  
Tennessee Titans.  
Forecast finish: 6-10

Sixty bucks now buys  
barrel of oil or loge seat.  
The Houston Texans.  
Forecast finish: 4-12

### **This Week's Stargate Complaint**

With the Star Wars and Star Trek franchises ended, *Stargate SG-1* and *Stargate Atlantis* now have the video sci-fi universe to themselves. Obviously it's because they included the magic word "star" in their titles. Yet TMQ feels both shows are doomed, doomed. Why? Their new opening title sequences.

Star Trek aired five series. The first four began with long, elegant title sequences accompanied by lush symphonic music. The formula worked like a charm. The fifth, *Star Trek Enterprise*, began with grating disco-junk sounds. *Star Trek Enterprise* was doomed by its title sequence, and sure enough, proved the only one of the five series to be a ratings bust. Now consider the Stargate shows. Both, until this season, began with long, elegant title sequences accompanied by lush symphonic music. The opening title sequence of *Stargate Atlantis*, featuring theme music by Joel Goldsmith, was first-rate. For the new seasons that recently kicked off for both Stargates, Sci-Fi Channel has eliminated the title sequences, using only a 10-second shot of the shows' logos. Sci-Fi Channel, don't you know what happened to *Star Trek*

*Enterprise* when it abandoned lush symphonic music? *Stargate SG-1* and *Stargate Atlantis* are doomed, doomed by their awful new openings. And absurdly the *Stargate Atlantis* title sequence, which you can no longer see, is a finalist for this year's Emmy for best title music. I couldn't find a link to Goldsmith's theme track. If anyone has a (copyright-legal) link, let me know at Reader Animadversion, and Tuesday Morning Quarterback will offer the music even if *Stargate Atlantis* refuses to.

### **AFC West**

Best throw-back unis,  
best-looking crowd in football.  
The S. D. Chargers.  
Forecast finish: 10-6

Spelling tells all: There's  
no "d" in Kansas City.  
Kansas City Chiefs.  
Forecast finish: 10-6

Orange turns to brown:  
Denver is now "Cleveland West."  
The Denver Broncos.  
Forecast finish: 8-8

Moss and Sapp in same  
locker room -- ego alert!  
The Oakland Raiders.  
Forecast finish: 5-11

### **Okay, But If My Life Is Meaningless, Then Who Cares How Much Fuel My SUV Wastes?**

Advertisers sometimes employ rock-and-roll songs in seeming ignorance of the lyrics' meaning. Not long ago Chevrolet used snippets from the Steppenwolf's "Magic Carpet Ride" to introduce new cars. The song is generally believed to be about an LSD hallucination, though from the lyrics, it could be argued that it is impossible to tell what the song is about. Recently Subaru has used the Kansas song "Dust in the Wind" to promote a new SUV. "Dust in the Wind" is about how people are so incredibly stupid, they don't realize their lives are meaningless. Read the cheerful lyrics here.

### **NFC East**

League imposes a  
cleavage cap on Birds' cheer-babes.  
The Philly Eagles.  
Forecast finish: 12-4

Super Bowl three-peat  
seems back in Quaternary.  
The Dallas Cowboys.  
Forecast finish: 8-8

At this team they love  
Billy Kilmer, but not Joyce.  
Washington Redskins.  
Forecast finish: 8-8

Manning is manning

quarterback; who's manning lines?  
 Jersey/A Giants.  
 Forecast finish: 8-8

### Place These Next to Your Remote

As the season commences, let me remind you of three annual volumes every football enthusiast should have. First is the new edition of the league's own guide, the *Official 2005 National Football League Record and Fact Book*. It's got every stat, record and historical detail to settle any argument. Also useful is the *2005 Pro Football Guide*, produced by the editors of *Sporting News*. This volume has content similar to the *Record and Fact Book*, but is organized differently; any serious fan would benefit from owning both. Finally the best independently produced annual volume about football is *Pro Football Prospectus*, by Aaron Schatz and the staff at FootballOutsiders.com. The latest, *Pro Football Prospectus 2005*, applies the Bill James stats-mania worldview to the gridiron, and is indispensable to anyone who is entranced by statistics or uses statistics in fantasy-league sport. *Pro Football Prospectus* also offers important original insights about the NFL. This year, Schatz adds weight to the argument that teams should usually run on crunch downs. Though third-and-short passing plays average a longer gain than third-and-short rushing plays, the book shows through exhaustive statistical breakdown, a team that rushes on third-and-short is more likely to score on the possession than a team that passes on third-and-short.

### NFC North

Favre shows age: seen with  
 AARP brochure in locker room.  
 The Green Bay Packers.  
 Forecast finish: 10-6

No more Randy Moss;  
 crowd not mooning over loss.  
 Minnesota Vikes.  
 Forecast finish: 9-7

Lowest scoring in  
 league; mean the team, not the fans.  
 The Chicago Bears.  
 Forecast finish: 5-11

Soon to be first club  
 with all-WR offense.  
 The Detroit Lions.  
 Forecast finish: 4-12

### The End of the SUV?

Who's going to buy a low-mileage SUV if gasoline stays above \$3 a gallon? There may be some consolation for Detroit in the fact that international automakers will also be caught holding Godzilla SUVs no one wants. On Sunday *Washington Post* auto writer Warren Brown reviewed the ridiculous new Range Rover Sport, which weighs 5,670 pounds (nearly double the weight of a regular car), costs about \$75,000, gets 12 miles per gallon and somehow manages to be gigantic on the outside yet cramped on the inside: "seating and cargo space are tight," Brown reported. Hey rich people who can afford a ridiculous \$75,000 SUV -- give the money to hurricane victims instead. General Motors may find it has already sold the last Hummer that will ever sell: perhaps G.M. can switch to marketing the bright yellow Hummer-branded laptop computer unveiled last week. Presumably the Hummer laptop drains its batteries in mere minutes. You'll also want to check out Hummer-branded cologne, which, in keeping with the car, presumably has been formulated to repel women; and the Hummer-branded outdoor grill, which, presumably, wastes

incredible amounts of propane.

### **NFC South**

Gruden no longer  
looks so young; gray hairs on way?  
Tampa Buccaneers.  
Forecast finish: 10-6

Is Vick an RB  
or QB? Time to find out.  
Atlanta Falcons.  
Forecast finish: 10-6

Team of streaks: either  
it's great or cover your eyes.  
Carolina Panthers.  
Forecast finish: 8-8

They have no home: the  
team and half a million more.  
The New Orleans Saints.  
Forecast finish, sadly acknowledging reality: 4-12

### **Saints to Become America's Team**

The plan for the relocated Saints-at-Giants game is a Monday Night doubleheader. On Sept. 19, the Jersey/A-New Orleans game will kick off at 7:30 p.m. ET on ABC; at 9 p.m. that game will transfer to ESPN, while ABC airs the regularly scheduled Washington at Dallas contest. TMQ is betting that unless the first game is a total blowout, at 9 p.m. all America will switch from ABC to ESPN to continue watching the Saints. Washington at Dallas will be the lowest-rated broadcast in *Monday Night Football* history -- but for a good reason.

### **By Mixing Sex and Cars, the Commercial Was Auto-Erotic**

Some dubbed "soft porn" the commercial in which scantily clad Paris Hilton soaped up a Bentley and herself while nibbling a Carl's Jr. mega-hamburger. On the question of which -- babe, burger or Bentley -- came off best, TMQ found the car most appealing. The spot did not make me want to eat the burger, which appeared to be made of painted cardboard; of the possible activities that come to mind for the two other elements in the commercial, I think I'd rather drive the car. Maybe I need my hormones checked, but I do not find Hilton attractive: sure she has a great body, but she's no beauty. Why are people fascinated with this non-beautiful airhead? As for Carl's Six Dollar Burger, it's clever that the product sells for \$4, but the version Hilton was holding contains 1,080 calories -- five candy bars. Doesn't Carl's want its customers to survive to make return visits?

### **NFC West**

Boink, clang, caroom, clunk:  
Another pass hits the ground.  
Seattle Seahawks.  
Forecast finish: 10-6

.500 record,  
2-and-6 on road. Playoffs!  
The St. Louis Rams.

Forecast finish: 10-6

They cut Jerry Rice.  
Football gods have punished since.  
The S.F. Niners.  
Forecast finish: 4-12

Must leave town to find  
lots of faces in home crowd.  
The Mexico Cards.  
Forecast finish: 4-12

### **More Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization**

My Tuesday Morning Quarterback segments, which appeared on *NFL Total Access* in 2003, resume tonight for the 2005 season. See your NFL Network listings for the local air time. And if you live in a Time Warner Cable area, complain loudly that this sinister company run by space alien pod people is defying the popular will by refusing to carry NFL Network!

### **Maybe Women Will Save Football**

Sean Slattery of Los Angeles notes the following of Saturday's college football broadcasts. In the West Virginia-Syracuse game, a running back took the ball going one way, then a receiver took it the other way. The X-and-Y announcers, Brad Nessler and Bob Griese, declared this a "double reverse." But it's a single reverse -- the ball only changed direction once. (To make it a double reverse, a third guy would have had to take the ball back in the original direction; double reverses are extremely rare.) Later, in the UCLA-San Diego State game, a running back took the ball going one way, then a receiver took it the other way. The double-X announcer, ESPN2's Pam Ward, correctly called the action a "reverse."

### **Pats the Authentic Wins Leader**

Super Bowl entrants New England and Philadelphia dominated in 2004, finishing a combined 32-6. So you might assume both would be dominant again. Yet the last four seasons, one Super Bowl club failed to make the playoffs the following year -- the Giants in 2001, Rams in 2002, Raiders in 2003 and Panthers in 2004. If history repeats, will it be the Eagles or the Patriots who don't make the playoffs this year? History points at the Eagles. In 2004, New England went 8-1 against other teams that made the playoffs, while Philadelphia was only 4-3 against playoff clubs. Of Philadelphia's 15 wins, just five came in what TMQ calls "authentic" games -- high-pressure contests versus quality opponents. New England, by contrast, ended 2004 with 10 "authentic" victories by TMQ's quirky reckoning. It is not exactly going out on a limb to say the Patriots are the league's best. But if one of last year's Super Bowl teams repeats the pattern of faltering this year, it is unlikely to be New England.

### **My Generic Super Bowl Prediction**

Annually Tuesday Morning Quarterback offers the same generic prediction -- "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-5 in predicting Super Bowl winners. 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 clubs not liked by the league's scheduling office, and two out of five times I've been right. Plus, Carolina came within a whisker of making me 3-for-5. For the sixth 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." Except now that Disney World no longer sponsors the tie-in, I predict the team goin' to LegoLand will come from among those that did not make the *Monday Night Football* cut. Here is this year's list: Arizona, Buffalo, Chicago, Cincinnati, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, Jacksonville, Jersey/A, Miami, Oakland, San Francisco, Tampa and Tennessee. As Stefan

Zijlstra of Vienna, Austria, wrote to note, this is the first time in my years of making the generic Super Bowl prediction that I have winning teams (Buffalo and Jacksonville) in the mix. Nevertheless I will now say what I annually say 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."

## **RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT**

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

Ohio Dominican 49, Campbellsville 33. Located in Columbus, Ohio Dominican was a women's school until 1964, so its football tradition is somewhat truncated.

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

Luther 55, Martin Luther 21. Luther College of Decorah, Iowa, snagged Luther's name in 1861. Dr. Martin Luther College of New Ulm, Minn., forerunner of today's Martin Luther College, came late to the name in 1884. Too bad they didn't rename the institution Dr. College!

### **College Bad Sportsmanship of the Week**

Texas 60, Louisiana-Lafayette 3. Okay, so football-factory schools schedule overmatched opponents for the purpose of running up the score. But the Longhorns just ran up the score on a team from Louisiana! It was Texas 39, Louisiana-Lafayette 3 at halftime. Yet Texas star Vince Young played well into the third quarter, continuing to heave up passes. Leading 60-3 with 2:07 remaining, Texas took possession and rather than simply kneel, continued to call plays. The University of Texas ought to be ashamed of showing such poor sportsmanship. The football gods remember such things, and exact retribution.

Reader Jon Thiele, a Packers' fan living in Bosnia and working on an international aid project, reports that more than a year ago he started an office pool on when there would be a Tuesday Morning Quarterback without a picture of a scantily attired babe. After last week's column, he finally won the pool. Darn, and I asked for the Miss Canada swimsuit competition photo! Don't forget to declare the winnings on your taxes, Jon. On the continuing subject of redundant names, René Puente Cantú of Monterrey, Mexico, points out that in Mexican cooking, a quesadilla is a tortilla with cheese; so when American menu boards offer a quesadilla with cheese, "it's like offering a cheeseburger with cheese." The "mucho grande" dishes at Taco Bell are also redundant, he notes, since both words mean the same thing.

Chas Mansfield of New Rochelle, N.Y., writes, "My high school art history teacher, a nun, would consistently refer to Notre Dame as Our Lady of Notre Dame. We were so terrified of her that it was the end of the year before she was confronted with that point that Our Lady of Notre Dame means Our Lady of Our Lady."

In response to my item on the Burger King promotional alliance with the NFL, Mike Burrows of Portsmouth, United Kingdom, reminds that I have previously warned readers the upcoming Super Bowl XL will be a marketer's delight. "Now Burger King, purveyors of the XL Whopper, is first to the gate," Burrows notes. He commends to readers this British NFL website specialized "for people in the U.K. who like to sit around drinking tea and eating scones in a dignified manner whilst yelling 'He didn't have both feet in bounds!' at the TV." American society grows ever-more informal: it can't be long until White House press conferences begin, "Hi, I'm Condi, and I'll be your Secretary of State tonight."

Eric Hemmesch of Woodbury, Minn., notes a counter-trend. Here's the page for joining Mileage Plus, United's frequent-flyer plan. Take a look at the possible titles members can select -- Admiral, Baron, Duchess, Fleet Admiral, Monsignor, Swami and many others. My favorite choice is President. Presumably some humorless computer will take it at face value if you join Mileage Plus as President of the United States. Last week a reader complained that in sci-fi, when two star cruisers meet in space they are

always facing the same way -- though space is three dimensional, not a highway.

Kenny Wemyss of Wishaw, Scotland, adds, "In the most recent Star Wars epic, Anakin and Obi-Wan were in a star cruiser that was being attacked. Suddenly it went into a nosedive and everything that wasn't nailed down, including our heroes, start falling toward the front." Since there is no gravity in space, Wemyss notes, people would not fall forward in a nose-diving star cruiser. If the ship had artificial gravity, presumably the system could be set to simulate everything falling forward during a nosedive -- but why would you set the artificial gravity system to generate a problem? The scene Wemyss notes bothered TMQ for another reason. As the star cruiser plummets toward the planet's atmosphere and certain destruction, the captain yells, "Activate emergency boosters!" Suddenly extra engines appear and save the ship. Something tells me that if an ultra-advanced, faster-than-light star cruiser was about to plummet to its doom, the captain would not have to shout, "Activate emergency boosters!" Something tells me automatic systems would activate the emergency boosters.

TMQ complained about high-energy particle accelerators, which cost billions of dollars and appear to serve mainly as a jobs program for physicists. Richard Martin counters that the very expensive Hubble Space Telescope has no tangible value, yet provides benefits by detailing the wonder of creation. Information about the subatomic world, he thinks, qualifies as evidence of the wonder of creation. Nevertheless a worry about particle accelerators is that one will accidentally create a novel subatomic "strangelet" that would have unwelcome properties, such as crushing all matter out of existence. Some respectable scientists, including Martin Rees, Britain's leading astronomer, have declared that an accelerator could create a bizarre particle that causes great harm. The counter-argument is that if such particles were possible, they would be observed in nature. Supernovas unleash energies fantastically higher than particle accelerators. Exploding stars that have been observed by modern instruments, including Supernova 1987A, don't appear to have any weird physics associated with them. Comes now Frank Easterbrook, an Official Brother of TMQ, to point out that experimental lasers briefly deliver far more power than particle accelerators. Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory has fired a "petawatt" (quadrillion watt) laser that, for far less than a microsecond, pulses with 1,200 times the output of all United States power plants. Super-powerful lasers are not weapons, because their output is infinitesimally brief. Anyway, Frank notes the incredible energy of the petawatt laser has produced no subatomic particle that's done any harm.

Many, including Mark Steinman of Ligonier, Pa., objected to my calling Canton the "birthplace of pro football." The Hall of Fame considers Pennsylvania the birthplace of pro football, as it was in the Keystone State where, in 1892, Pudge Heffelfinger became the first paid player. The \$500 Pudge received for that game, considered a scandalously huge amount at the time, inflates to about \$12,000 today; this season's NFL minimum wage for undrafted free agents is about \$14,000 per game. Canton is properly described as the "birthplace of the NFL," as it was in this city that, in 1920, the organization that eventually became the National Football League was founded during a meeting at the local Hupmobile showroom. Last week's column said it would "soon" be possible to use broadband to transmit television images to a laptop, allowing anyone who gets NFL Sunday Ticket to watch almost any game while sitting any place in the world that a broadband port is available. Hmmm -- in the technology business, "soon" means "now."

Chris LaQuay of Valencia, Calif., notes a device called the Sling Box already offers a way to transfer home television to a laptop. For those, like me, who lust after Sunday Ticket, the core problem remains: if you live in a place that cannot receive satellite television you are up the creek, because you can't get the signal in the first place. C'mon, NFL -- if a tech start-up is able to invent a little box that sends a TV signal anywhere in the world, why can't the NFL find a way to let people who cannot get satellite signals subscribe to Sunday Ticket? LaQuay notes in haiku, If I buy Sling Box:

I will never work again.

That sounds good to me.

*Chris LaQuay, Valencia, California*

Finally Adam Clayton of Winnipeg, Manitoba, notes that owing to a labor dispute, last week the CBC aired the B.C. Lions versus Saskatchewan Roughriders game without announcers -- just the game plus sounds of cheering and the public-address system in the stadium. The no-announcers game was the highest-

rated CFL broadcast of the season.

### **This Week's Challenge**

This week's Challenge is to wait until such time as the Challenge resumes. The Challenge was a lot of fun, but had reached the point where it was drawing hundreds of entries per week. Since I create Tuesday Morning Quarterback as a hobby -- I do have real jobs! -- I just didn't have time to scan more than a small share of the submissions. And though I asked the NFL to supply me a panel of scantily clad cheer-babes to examine entries, strangely, the league never acted on this request. Thus the Challenge takes the year off, and we'll see what the world looks like next year.

### **Next Week**

Real football begins, real columns start! As I annually note, during the preseason TMQ uses bland "vanilla" jokes designed to confuse scouts from other sports columns. Next week it's the real thing.

## Basketball's warning to football, and why TMQ needs theme music

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

(Sept. 13, 2005) -- This week's good news includes indicators that the league and the NFL Players Association are optimistic a new agreement will be reached soon. But should either the players or the owners hesitate to make reasonable concessions, let them bear this in mind: basketball's warning to football.

Remember early in the 1990s, when professional basketball was going to be "The Game of the New Century?" NBA ratings and attendance were skyrocketing. Supposedly, pro basketball could do no wrong. Since then, NBA popularity has nosedived. This year's ratings setting lows in almost every category. The core reason for pro basketball's decline is deterioration in the quality of play. Regardless of why that happened, just keep the sequence in mind. Pro basketball seemed on top of the world; quality of play went down, viewers and ticket buyers took their eyes and their dollars elsewhere. The NBA thought it could do no wrong, and discovered otherwise.

This is a powerful cautionary tale. Right now the NFL looks invincible. Everything about pro football keeps soaring: popularity, ratings, gate receipts, licensing. The reason is product quality -- NFL games are fabulous. But could the NFL take a basketball-style tumble? Sure. Should the owners or players damage the product by failing to preserve competitive balance, there is nothing in the laws of nature that says the NFL must remain so popular.

In the last 12 years, payments to NFL players have zoomed 125 percent in real dollars. That represents an extraordinary increase in player wealth and shows the NFL system is working to the benefit of players. So players: Don't ask anything that tampers with the basic structure of the goose that lays the golden egg. By the same token, owners should keep in mind how well the NFL system works for them. While pro basketball, baseball and hockey have all kinds of financial problems, NFL income keeps setting records. The network, cable and satellite deals recently inked by the league will bring in about \$3.7 billion annually beginning next year -- close to half again the NFL's already-hefty television proceeds. So owners: Don't do anything that tampers with the basic structure of shared revenues, because that is what keeps NFL quality, and hence revenue, so high. Should either the players or owners fail to preserve competitive balance, there is nothing in the laws of nature that says the NFL must remain so popular.

In other news, didn't the Buffalo Bills look sweet in their 1965 throwbacks? These uniforms feature red, white and flag blue -- not to put too fine a point on it, but the single most successful color scheme in world history. The look was a huge improvement over Buffalo's current livery, based on a hue TMQ calls Nineteenth Century Rusting Russian Dreadnaught Aft Bulkhead Cyanic. Bills, just switch back to your old uniforms -- the 1965 look or the equally handsome colors of your Super Bowl run. All will be forgiven! You can leave the current ugly uniforms on the loading dock at league headquarters, no questions asked. And in other football news, as I was getting limber to write this column -- jumping up and down, chanting to myself "a gerund is a noun derived from a verb, a gerund is a noun derived from a verb, yes!" -- Peter King of *Sports Illustrated* comes out of nowhere and jams in my face. "Your historical references lack footnotes!" this guy screams. I get right back in his face and shout, "Your metaphors exhibit reductionist solipsism!" Before you know it we're messin' with each other, and in comes Supreme Court nominee John Roberts to throw the flag. Now King and I are banned from writing for the *New York Times* op-ed page for a week. Is that fair? We were just jive-talking in warmups!

**Stats of the Week :** Since the start of the 2004 season, Pittsburgh and New England are a combined 35-4. Two of the losses came when they played each other.

**Stats of the Week No. 2 :** Eagles' coaches called 48 passes and 13 rushes -- though trailing by a

touchdown or less most of the game.

**Stats of the Week No. 3 :** The Baltimore Ravens, ranked second-last in passing in 2004, had more passing yards than the Indianapolis Colts, ranked first in 2004.

**Stats of the Week No. 4 :** Jake Plummer has 143 career interceptions versus 133 touchdown passes.

**Stats of the Week No. 5 :** Kurt Warner has played on opening day at Giants Stadium for three consecutive years -- each time suiting up for different teams.

**Stats of the Week No. 6 :** In the second half at Detroit, Green Bay did not record a first down until the middle of the fourth quarter.

**Stats of the Week No. 7 :** St. Louis lost despite outgaining San Francisco by almost 200 yards and having fewer turnovers.

**Stats of the Week No. 8 :** Buffalo has won 10 of its last 13 games.

**Stats of the Week No. 9 :** Denver has 12 first-round draft choices on its roster, tops in the league, and lost its opener by 24 points.

**Stats of the Week No. 10 :** To open the Seattle-Jacksonville game, Josh Scobee of the Jaguars kicked off to Josh Scobey of the Seahawks.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Keisha Saddler of the San Diego Chargers, nominated by Briton Erwin of Fullerton, Calif.,. Saddler, a dancer with the California Ballet Company, notes in her team that "I love playing football." A classically trained cheer-babe who actually plays football! Briton Erwin was struck by her team bio because under "person with the most influence on your life," Saddler wrote, "God ceases to amaze me." Probably the word "never" is missing, unless Saddler is the first cheerleader to get a sardonic comment onto an NFL team website. Saddler reports her favorite author is Solomon, the ancient Hebrew king who is credited with writing Song of Solomon. This is the Bible's book of erotic poetry, including such lovely lines as "thou hast ravished my heart with one of thine eyes" and such maybe-this-sounded-better-at-the-time passages as "thy hair is as a flock of goats." (Once I told a date her hair was as a flock of goats, and strangely, did not get lucky that night.) A classically trained cheer-babe who plays football and likes erotic poetry! Keisha Saddler may prove impossible to top.

**Sweet Play of the Week:** At 1:20 p.m. ET on opening day, the Saints scored a touchdown -- beginning the New Orleans comeback. Of the city, not the team. TMQ predicts New Orleans will stage the fastest comeback in history. At 4:17 p.m. ET the Saints kicked the winning field goal, and all America was rooting for them on their buzzer-beater winning drive. Now think ahead to next week, when Monday Night Football airs an unusual doubleheader caused by the Saints' jury-rigged schedule. At 7:30 p.m. ET the Saints and Giants kick off on ABC; at 9 that game switches to ESPN, while the regularly scheduled Washington-Dallas contest airs on ABC. Let me repeat my prediction of a week ago: unless the Saints-Giants pairing is a total blowout, *all* of America will switch over to continue watching New Orleans. Redskins-Cowboys will be the lowest-rated Monday Night Football game ever, though for a good reason.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Les Mouflons may have honked their opener, but you can always count on St. Louis for a sweet play. Trailing 28-18 with 2:16 remaining, the Rams faced fourth-and-goal on the San Francisco 6. Marc Bulger rolled right and pumped right, then flipped the ball left for a tight end screen to Brandon Manumaleuna for the touchdown. Earlier on a fourth-and-1, Manumaleuna lined up in the backfield as the blocking back, then took the belly handoff for two yards and the first.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 3:** Charlie Weis having decamped for Notre Dame, supposedly New England's playcalling would wheeze out. One of Weis' favorite tricks was to call the same play twice in a row, especially if the play failed on the first try. Trailing 14-10 in the second quarter, the defending

champions had first-and-goal on the Raiders' 5. First down was a quick out left to David Givens, incomplete. In trots Tim Dwight to take Givens' place. Second down was a quick out left to Dwight, touchdown. They'd never call a play that just failed, would they? Note one: Dwight has been recycled so many times he should be stamped with the PET recycling label. Note two: New England likes to throw a quick hitch or quick out to a single receiver left when inside the opponents' 10. Yours truly did an item about this in the 2004 season and an item about this in the 2003 season. Now it's 2005 and New England is still throwing the quick hitch or out to a single receiver left near the goal line. Time to catch on, NFL.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 4:** Leading 20-10, the Marine Mammals faced first-and-10 on their own 40 with 9:19 remaining. Run to grind the clock? Hard to argue with that. Coming to the line, Gus Frerotte saw Denver safety John Lynch up close to fake a blitz, leaving Marty Booker and the cornerback across from him the sole players in the left flat. Frerotte audibled to a fly pattern to Booker; 60-yard touchdown, and Nick Saban's debut is a winning one.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 5:** The misnamed "double pass" -- wideout takes a long lateral and then throws a pass -- is a high school staple. Squared Sevens' receiver Arnaz Battle, a college quarterback, executed the play to perfection for a 24-yard completion, setting up San Francisco's first score against St. Louis. In the game Battle also caught a touchdown pass and carried once on a draw.

**Sour Play of the Week :** Game tied at 20, New Orleans faced second-and-10 on its 38 yard line with 25 seconds remaining. Where oh where might the pass go? Maybe up the field! Yet Carolina corner Ricky Manning played Saints' receiver Joe Horn as if expecting a short pattern; Manning never turn around and ran full speed as Horn did a deep slant. Completion for a 25-yard gain, and the stage was set for the New Orleans last-second field goal.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk:** Trailing 17-10, the Minnesota Vikings faced fourth-and-goal on the Tampa 4 with 6:17 remaining and the Metrodome crowd roaring at experimental refrigerator decibel levels. A touchdown ties the game; a missed fourth-and-goal try leaves the visitors pinned against their end zone amidst deafening noise; a field goal means you've still got to score a touchdown. Go for it! TMO's immutable law: Kick Early, Go For It Late. Now it's late, go for it! In trots the field goal unit, and the Vikings end up losing. (Note: when it's still early, kick. In the third quarter, Washington faced fourth-and-goal on the Chicago 1, trailing 7-6. Joe Gibbs sent in the field-goal unit as the hometown crowd booed, and the figgie proved the winning points.)

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk No. 2:** Trailing 22-7 at Buffalo, the Texans faced fourth-and-3 on their 33 with 5:55 remaining. You need two touchdowns. Punt and even if the opponent goes three-and-out, the clock situation becomes impossible. Plus it's only fourth-and-3; the average NFL offensive play gains almost five yards. Go for it! In trots the punting unit. Often in situations like this, coaches play to contain the margin of defeat rather than take every possible chance to win. Dom Capers wanted the defeat to seem close; at his season-ending performance review, he doesn't want the first item to be, "We started the season by getting blown out by the Bills." But winning, not keeping the final margin respectable, should be the only goal.

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All:** Willis McGahee gained four yards on his first five carries against Houston. When the run doesn't work right away, many teams immediately give up and go pass-wacky. But often the running game starts slowly, then builds steam as defenders tire. Buffalo kept giving McGahee the ball, and on his remaining 17 carries, the gentleman rushed for 113 yards. NFL teams, don't abandon the run.

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All No. 2:** Now trailing 17-13, the Vikings reached first-and-10 on the City of Tampa 12 with 1:53 remaining, holding two time outs. A touchdown gives Minnesota the lead; considering the time outs, there is plenty of time; the Bucs are thinking pass as Vikings' coaches have called 15 passes and five rushes in the fourth quarter. So do the smart thing and run the ball! Interception, and TMO wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

**At Least the Music Man Delivered the Trombones:** Hedge funds are investment ventures that accept only the rich. As Tuesday Morning Quarterback noted last year, rich suckers who bought into a hedge

fund called Long Term Capital Management -- minimum \$1 million to establish an account -- took a bath when the enterprise collapsed. The amusing part was that Long Term Capital Management was earning lower returns than standard S&P index funds. If its wealthy investors had simply called the 800 number of Fidelity or T. Rowe Price or any respectable fund that's open to anyone, they would have had higher returns in addition to no losses.

So far this year there are two more hedge-fund scandals. Perhaps \$250 million in investors' money disappeared from a hedge fund called KL Financial Group, while a hedge fund called Bayou Group is being sued by federal prosecutors, who allege \$300 million was expropriated from it. In the case of Bayou, it appears rich marks trusted the fund because it was located in Connecticut, home to most legitimate hedge funds. This is like saying that because an Internet start-up is located in California, well then, it's sure to be a safe place to invest money. Located in Palm Beach, Florida, KL Financial used promises of fantastic profits to entice the Sunshine State wealthy, claiming a secret investment formula that gains 125 percent per year. Note to gullible rich people: money managers who promise unrealistic returns are scam artists working some variation on the Ponzi scheme. Secret miracle instant-wealth investment formulas don't exist -- if they did, major firms would already be using them. Think about the logic here: if you actually possessed a secret miracle wealth formula that gained 125 percent per year, would you be *going around Palm Beach offering to let others in on your secret?* You'd either use the formula to make yourself super-rich, or sell the secret to Bear Stearns for billions of dollars.

The S&P 500 gained 10.9 percent in 2004. If the wealthy who were hoodwinked by phony hedge funds had simply called the 800 number of any respectable money-management firm open to anyone, and invested their money in a conventional S&P index instrument, they would have come out ahead by 10.9 percent. Instead the rich believed promises of impossible returns, and lost their investments altogether. How do such dupes become rich in the first place?

**In Defense of Edmonton:** TMQ has taken to saying that gentlemen who flame out in the NFL, such as Maurice Clarett, would "be lucky to be covering punts for the Edmonton Eskimos." Many frostbacks have written to note the Esks are having a good year at 7-4. Suzette Sylvia of Saint Albert, Alberta, noted that because there is no fair catch under CFL rules, covering punts in Canada may be harder than doing so in the United States -- "probably Clarett couldn't handle the job anyway," she supposed. Jon of Edmonton wrote in praise of the Eskimos' cheerleaders, who show tremendous professionalism by sporting scanty two-piece numbers despite the prevailing temperatures. Here, gawk at Eskimos' cheerleader Sarah D., a student at Grant-MacEwan College in Edmonton. Grant-MacEwan "takes pride in offering an exceptional educational experience in a warm, welcoming environment." A warm environment is essential to learning in Alberta! Owing to Canadian enlightenment, the Eskimos have both buff cheer-babes and ripped cheer-studs. Female and nontraditional male readers may wish to gawk at cheer-stud Adam, a pre-med student. Handsome, built, and going to be a doctor? Mothers all over Canada have someone they'd like him to meet!

**This Week's Stargate Compliment:** Last week TMQ complained that *Stargate SG-1* and its spinoff *Stargate Atlantis* have doomed themselves by eliminating their classy opening title sequences, accompanied by lush symphonic music. Many readers, including Cindy Klawitter of Beaver Dam, Wisconsin, and Stargate script coordinator Alex Levine, wrote to report this decision has been reversed -- the title sequences and lush music will return when the shows tip off the second halves of their seasons in January. Great news! Lee Kazz of St. Petersburg, Florida, provides this link to Joel Goldsmith's luxurious *Stargate Atlantis* theme music. It's enough to make you want to materialize in another galaxy!

*Goldsmith note:* Joel is the son of Jerry Goldsmith, who wrote the theme for *Star Trek: the Next Generation*, TMQ's favorite opening title music. Jerry also penned the spiffy music for *Star Trek: Voyager*. Between them, Jerry and Joel Goldsmith have composed roughly half the music you've ever heard in sci-fi and fantasy movies and television shows. If anyone can find (copyright-legal) links to the *Next Generation* and *Voyager* title themes, send them to me at Reader Animadversion and I'll include in a future column.

*Mars note:* Want actual video from another world? This recent film from the Spirit rover shows a whirlwind crossing the surface of the Red Planet.

**Abandoned Quarry Offense Update:** Last November yours truly foresaw that the way to stop the Colts' red-hot offense was to jump around like mad before the snap, frustrating Peyton Manning's choreography at the line of scrimmage. Sure enough, in the playoffs New England jumped around like crazy presnap, and held the Colts to three points. Coach Belichick, how come my commission check is still delayed? On Sunday night at Baltimore, Ravens' defenders jumped around as much as I've ever seen -- at times all members of the front seven were moving when Manning called "hike!" Once again this worked, Baltimore holding the Indianapolis offense to a below-average 17 points. But the Ravens jumped around so enthusiastically they seemed to confuse themselves. In the first half, no one at all covered Marvin Harrison streaking deep; only an off-target throw prevented an easy touchdown. In the second half, no one at all covered tight end Ben Utecht streaking deep, and this time the result was six. Baltimore defenders spent a lot of time pointing at each other and arguing about who was responsible for whom. That's not a winning formula.

**Pass-Wacky Is Putting It Mildly :** When you're way behind, you call lots of passes and end up with crummy rushing stats. But the Eagles were not way behind at Atlanta -- trailing briefly by 14 points, they trailed by a touchdown or less for most of the contest. Yet Philadelphia coaches called 48 passes and just 13 runs. (This counts sacks and a scramble as called passes.) Trying to pass on 79 percent of your snaps *in a close game* is, as ecologists say, not sustainable. It was especially amusing when the Eagles, making no attempt to rush, called play-action fakes: talk about an empty threat! Contrast to the Falcons, whose play-fakes were credible because they were rushing well and often. The game's biggest play, Michael-Mike Vick's 58-yard throw to Michael Jenkins to the Philadelphia 1, setting up the winning score, was a play-fake. Philadelphia safeties crashed the line when Vick play-faked, because the Falcons were rushing well and often. When Donovan McNabb play-faked, Atlanta safeties ignored it.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again:** The Dallas defense did a tremendous job by forcing San Diego into four straight goal-line incompletions in the final minute. But why was San Diego at the goal line in the first place? Trailing 28-24 with 1:30 remaining, the Chargers faced fourth-and-14 on the Cowboys' 40. Since the average NFL pass attempt yields less than seven yards, all the Cowboys had to do was play straight defense and the odds favored a game-ending stop. Instead, it's a blitz! Seven gentlemen cross the line; 33-yard completion to the Dallas 7.

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All No. 3:** Having reached the Dallas 7, San Diego had four downs, 47 seconds and one time-out with which to attempt the winning touchdown. The Bolts threw four consecutive incompletions. Why no rush? Considering the time out, they could have run at least once, maybe twice in a four-play span, crossing the Cowboys up. Dallas had a "dime" look on the field -- meaning lots of skinny guys who should be vulnerable to the rush. More, as TMQ endlessly points out, the closer you get to the goal line the less space there is to throw. Regular passes rarely work at the goal line, simply because the defense has so little territory to defend: power-running, play-action and roll-outs are what work at the goal line. Yet San Diego coaches called four consecutive regular drop-back passes; they never even used the time-out, which, presumably, now can be donated to charity. Ye gods.

**That'll Be a Lesson to Him!:** San Diego stuck to its puzzling decision to suspend tight end Antonio Gates for the opening game, punishment for reporting one day after a training-camp deadline. Gates was the Bolts' best red-zone performer last season -- he caught 12 touchdown passes last season inside the opponent's 20 yard line. And there San Diego was at the end, seven yards from victory, unable to punch the ball across. If the Chargers end the season one game shy of the playoffs, there will be rending of garments and gnashing of teeth over the Gates decision.

**Maybe TMQ Should Have a "Third Logo":** While the Bills were rolling out aesthetically pleasing throwbacks, Arizona showed off a new high-school-inspired uniform. Like the raiments of the Tennessee Titans, the Cards' new look makes it seem the real uniforms got lost and the team had to borrow something from a high school at the last minute. The Lions, previously wearers of one of the NFL's sharpest sets of duds, suspended use of their classy Honolulu Blue for a "third jersey" dominated by a color TMQ

will christen Eighteenth Century Industrial Soot Gloss. Meanwhile the Ravens, wearing all black, played the Colts, wearing all white. This game was best viewed on a 1956 Magnavox black-and-white set.

**Is There a "D" in Kansas City?:** Hometown spectators groaned when Jersey/B scrubs scored a touchdown with 29 seconds remaining at Arrowhead, making the final an impressive Chiefs 27, Jets 7 but ending the chance for the first Kansas City shutout since the Beatles were together.

**Preposterous Punt Ere the Clock Struck Midnight:** Yes, fourth-and-28 is a tough down. I just looked at the color-coded chart on my wrist pad, and I don't have that many fourth-and-28 plays in my game plan. Nevertheless, at 11:58 p.m. ET on Thursday night the Raiders, trailing the Flying Elvii 30-14, faced fourth-and-28 on the defending champ's 39 with 7:39 remaining. Try a long field goal (calm winds) and then onside kick? Go for it? When you go on fourth and very long the pressure is on the defense, as the Packers discovered when the Eagles went on fourth-and-26. Neither option is great -- but surely you're not going to punt! Surely you're not even considering punting! Boom goes the punt, and though Oakland would end up getting the ball back in good field position, by then there was so little time left that TMZ had written the words "game over" in his notebook. You're down by 16 in the middle of the fourth, how can you punt *inside the opponent's territory*? You're playing the Super Bowl champs, you were 9-23 in the last two years, what do you have to lose? And now you are 9-24.

**Freeze! Put Your Hands Where I Can't See Them!** Missing from this fall's television lineup is ABC's *Blind Justice*, a show about a sightless police officer who carries a gun. You don't want to be around when this guy reports for target practice. Dialogue should have included:

POLICE COMMISSIONER: We're putting a blind officer on the streets, armed with a loaded gun. Just wanted to let you know that if he shoots the wrong person, the city will pay the largest liability judgment in world history.

MAYOR: Great plan!

Second-best crack about this show: Kay MacFadden of the *Seattle Times* said it should be titled, *I Can't Watch*. Best crack: Mara Rose, the Official Daughter of TMZ, asked, "Does the network hope to appeal to blind viewers?"

**Best Blocks:** William Green of the Cleveland Browns (3.0b) clocked two men way downfield on Frisman Jackson's 68-yard touchdown. Half a dozen Dolphins, including quarterback Gus Frerotte, got way downfield to block on Chris Chambers' 61-yard reverse run. Kansas City blew out Jersey/B in part because the Chiefs once again displayed the league's best offensive line. Willie Roaf and Brian Waters short-pulled left to lead the way for Larry Johnson's 35-yard touchdown on the opening possession. No Jet ever touched Johnson. It's pretty fun to run 35 yards for a touchdown when everyone in front of you has already been knocked to the ground.

**Worst Blocks:** Trailing 23-14 with 3:44 remaining, the Blue Men Group had first-and-10 on their own 41. Seattle had six men to pass protect; Jax rushed five; no blocker ever touched linebacker Akin Ayo-dele, who sacked Matt Hasselbeck and recovered his fumble, effectively ending the game. Baltimore's offensive line turned in one of the worst line performances in recent memory. Perhaps half a dozen times, Indianapolis linemen Dwight Freeney or Larry Tripplett barreled through the Ravens' line without being touched by anyone as Baltimore blockers, prominently very highly paid tackle Jon Ogden, stood around doing nothing. Tripplett, a journeyman who didn't even start in 2004, ended the game with seven tackles and two sacks. I bet Tripplett wishes he could play against the Baltimore offensive line more often.

**Why Certain Teams Are 0-1 Despite 12 First Draft Choices:** On the last snap with four seconds remaining at Finally Not Named After a Bankrupt Company Stadium in Miami, Dolphin Jason Taylor picked up a fumble and headed down the sideline. Okay, a Miami touchdown would not alter the out-

come. But as Taylor ran, ran, ran for an eventual 85-yard score, just four of the 11 Broncos on the field made any attempt to chase him. The rest of these extremely highly overpaid gentlemen stood watching.

**Nice "Series" Plays:** "Series" plays are pairs in which one action now sets up a different action later. Trailing Seattle 7-6, Jacksonville faced third-and-2 on its 34. Two receivers lined up split left, Jimmy Smith on the outside; Smith ran a deep post while the slot receiver ran a short out-and-in; the safety bit on the short receiver, and Smith caught the long ball for a 45-yard gain. Two downs later, again two men lined up split left, this time Smith in the slot. This time the outside receiver ran a short in-and-out while Smith blew straight up the field. This time the safety took the outside receiver, who had been the problem last time. But this time Smith was on the inside, and hauled in a 30-yard touchdown pass.

**Soon to Be Known as "Mr. Fantasy":** Fantasy leaguers who drafted Willie Parker of Pittsburgh are feeling pretty good after Parker, who did not start in college, rushed for 161 yards against Tennessee. There is a precedent for a Steelers' tailback doing better running the ball in the pros than in college. Hall of Fame tailback Franco Harris was, in college, the blocking back for Lydell Mitchell; only after reaching Pittsburgh did he blossom into a ballcarrier. Parker has now taken the field twice as the Steelers' tailback, in last year's regular-season finale and Sunday against Tennessee: in these appearances, he has 41 carries for 263 yards.

**Aging, Fading Hippies Not Lining Up to Buy \$107,000 Volkswagen:** Volkswagen sales have been faltering, partly because the company ranked low in the latest J.D. Power and Associates automotive quality ranking. Another reason Volkswagen got into trouble, suggested by Christine Tierney of the *Detroit News*, is that the company became distracted with its ridiculous Phaeton. The Phaeton is a Volkswagen that lists for \$106,655 fully loaded and can be ordered in a color actually called Nocturne Aubergine Klavierlack. ("Klavierlack" means roughly "fancy lacquer" in German.) The whole point of the Volkswagen is supposed to be affordable transportation; the word Volkswagen means "peoples' car." The Phaeton is not exactly in this tradition – 420 horsepower, 12 miles per gallon, heated steering wheel, eucalyptus wood trim, a zero on the EPA's greenhouse-gases scorecard, where zero is the worst possible score. Plus in mythology, Phaeton was a bad guy. Although there was a classic 1928 roadster called the Phaeton, Cassie Mendelsen of Palo Alto, Calif., notes that originally the name derives from Phaeton the son of Helios, god of light. Ignoring his father's warnings, Phaeton drove the chariot of the sun; he lost control and scorched northern Africa, which is why Libya is a desert today. A \$107,000 car named after an idiot! Plus to prevent Phaeton from destroying all the Earth as he lost control, Zeus struck him dead with a lightning bolt. A \$107,000 car named after a teenager who crashed his father's chariot! The Volkswagen Phaeton is also available in Waterworld – a color named after a disaster movie!

## RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Earlham 69, Manchester 62. The highest-scoring game in Division III history offered 55 first downs, 1,215 yards of offense, 19 touchdowns and a missed PAT attempt that prevented Earlham from cracking the 70-point barrier. But then Earlham kicker Carlos Bustamante attempted 10 extra points and kicked off 11 times, so his leg might have been tired! Even Earlham, a high-academics school with just 1,190 students, lists nine players at 250 pounds or larger. Located in Richmond, Indiana, Earlham during the 1990s produced a higher percentage of graduates who went on to receive doctorate degrees than did Brown, Dartmouth, Duke, Northwestern, Penn, or Vassar. And it's a small digital world: here, an Earlham press release quotes something I wrote in *The Atlantic Monthly*.

**Bonus Obscure College Score :** Assumption 13, Saint Anselm 7. Saint Anselm, born 1033, spent his entire adult life fighting assumptions! Located in Manchester, New Hampshire, Saint Anselm College boasts that 93 percent of its faculty members have "terminal degrees," which sounds dangerous.

**Obscure College Feat :** Bill Eslinger of Woodbury, New York, reports that after California of Pennsylvania beat Mansfield 88-12 on Saturday, Mansfield issued a press release boasting that kick returner Ronnie Montgomery "set a school record with 10 kickoff returns for 266 yards." Eslinger notes that 10 kickoff returns "hardly seems like an accomplishment, considering this means the opposing team scored at least nine times." The press release laments that Montgomery "was just two returns... from tying the NCAA record" for most kickoff returns in a game. There's always next week! All Mansfield has to do is

surrender at least 11 scores.

**Big College Complaint of the Week:** TMQ noted that the University of Nebraska will play seven home games and four away games. Each home game brings in an estimated \$4 million after stadium expenses, so the Huskers can pay visitors an attractive fee to come to them; but the result is a suspicious final record. I should have added that many football-factory schools pad their records using the same gimmick. This season Alabama, Auburn and Michigan all play seven at home, four away. Auburn even has the first five straight at home! There ought to be frosting on these cupcake schedules. On the flip side, weak college teams may agree to play most of their games on the road against stronger teams -- essentially agreeing to be clobbered, in return for a larger gate share than they'd get at home. Tyler Bohlman, a student at Ball State in Muncie, Indiana, noted his school has seven road games versus four home dates in 2005 -- and the experiment hasn't started well as Ball State lost its first contest 56-0 on at road at Iowa.

**That's Two Uses of "Anselm" in the Same Football Column:** On Thursday, Official Brother Neil will lecture at the Modern Art Museum of Fort Worth, Texas, on the German painter Anselm Kiefer. Neil is also a football nut. More proof that smart people love football!

### READER ANIMADVERSION

On the running theme of redundant translations, Jacob Tripp of Salt Lake City notes "la brea" means "the tar" in Spanish. Thus if you go to the La Brea Tar Pits in Los Angeles, you are visiting "the the tar tar pits." André Mayer of Cambridge, Massachusetts, reports that once when he was in Los Angeles, he saw a menu board listing "Viennese coffee with mit Schlag." Viennese coffee is coffee with whipped cream; in German, "mit Schlag" means "with whipped cream."

Noting how long it feels since the Cowboys were a dominant team, yours truly said their string of three Super Bowl wins "seems back in the Quaternary." This is the geologic period that enfolds that second period of the Cenozoic Era, and it sure sounds like the distant past. Tom Jones, a geologist from Topeka, Kansas, wrote to note that although the Quaternary began around two million years ago, it continues today. Cretaceous, Devonian or Silurian would have been long-ended, four-syllable geologic references to suit my haiku, Jones explained.

Lauding Jerry Rice, I supposed the only team-sports athlete with statistical dominance to rival his is Wayne Gretzky, whom I said had 54 percent more career points than the No. 2, Gordie Howe. Many readers including Jonathan Klein of Toronto wrote to note that Mark Messier recently passed Howe for second all-time in NHL annals; Gretzky holds a 51 percent edge over Messier.

Observing that No.81 of the Eagles feeds off publicity, TMQ resolved to call the gentleman He Who Must Not Be Named, the phrase used in Harry Potter books by those who wish to avoid speaking of Lord Voldemort. Rachel Gantlet of Baltimore notes, "Voldemort's power to inspire fear was enhanced by this nickname. If you really want to stick it to Owens, use the video-game convention for those players who don't sign the marketing agreement -- just call him Eagles' receiver No. 81." Note: last week the Associated Press actually ran a story headlined, OWENS PLANS TO SPEAK TO MCNABB.

Last week's column mentioned advertising that uses music in apparent disregard of the songs' lyrics. Greg Gillson of Hillsboro, Oregon, points out that a recent Toyota ad used the music, though not the words, of the ditty "What'll We Do With a Drunken Sailor." Presumably we won't sell him a Toyota! Mike Rucki of Bethesda, Maryland, points out that a Nissan ad used the Who's "We Won't Get Fooled Again." The song, he notes, "includes the line 'Here comes the new boss/Same as the old boss,' which hardly sounds like a reason to get excited about the latest model. The refrain is, 'I get down on my knees and pray/That I won't get fooled again.' Doesn't inspire much consumer confidence."

Finally in the category of getting your name into TMQ via shameless sucking up -- always the best way to get your name into TMQ! -- Heidi Brigham offers this haiku:

Two highlights of fall:  
NFL and TMZ!  
Thanks for being there.  
-- Heidi Brigham, Walla Walla, Washington

**Next Week:** Have the remote ready on Monday at 9 p.m. ET -- switch to the Saints game!

## Remember the Titans -- I mean the rockets! -- and what if King Solomon had cheerleaders?

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

(Sept. 20, 2005) -- Sometime this autumn the last Titan rocket will thunder off a pad at Vandenberg Air Force Base in California, make an earth-shaking noise, become a small bright dot at the top of the sky and, finally, disappear. After the final Titan roars toward the ocean of space where human destiny may lie, the American rockets of the 1960s "Moon Race" era will be no more. On Sept. 19, NASA announced an initiative to build new flight hardware to carry Americans back to the Moon; the Titan is the only rocket still in use that took part in the 1960s Apollo program. A rocket named Atlas still flies, and the Atlas once lofted astronauts. But today's Atlas is so different from its predecessors that they share little more than a venerable name. Today's Atlas employs a Russian main engine -- a magnificent sign of international cooperation, but showing how diverged the rocket is from its '60s namesake. The core of the Titan remains, however, the same design that carried astronauts to the heavens in the mid-1960s to train for the first Moon flights.

The final Titan payload is a spy satellite for the National Reconnaissance Office. Normally the Air Force doesn't disclose anything about NRO launches until the payload is already in orbit. For the final Titan, the Air Force will announce the "t-zero" -- scheduled blastoff -- 48 hours in advance so networks can cover the event and space buffs can converge on the hills around Vandenberg. When the final Titan thunders skyward, it will be the last of its kind -- last of the rockets that took men into space back when we barely knew what we were doing. Remember the Titans!

To match this nostalgic rocket news, here is wonderful news regarding the end of a military missile. Yesterday the Air Force deactivated the final Peacekeeper. Peacekeeper ICBMs, also known as the MX, carry 10 nuclear warheads. No object ever made by human hands is more horrible than a Peacekeeper, because it holds so many warheads (most ICBMs carry one to three) and because its extreme power created a risk the other side would "first-strike" in order to destroy these hellhounds in their silos. With treaties signed in Moscow by presidents Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, both sides agreed to deactivate their most powerful missiles. In 2002 the United States began decommissioning Peacekeepers, while the Russian Federation began decommissioning its biggest ICBMs. Soon there will be no heavy, first-strike ICBMs left on our planet. Meanwhile, the total number of strategic nuclear warheads continues to decline as the United States and Russia disassemble bombs and work toward a treaty requirement of no more than 2,200 per country by 2012. At the peak of the Cold War, each nation possessed about 25,000 strategic warheads. So the most dangerous piece of technology ever built just went out of existence, while in a few years, 90 percent of the world's doomsday arsenal will be gone. This is fabulous news, which is why you never hear about it.

Turning to football, the Washington Redskins were at desperation time, trailing 13-0, facing fourth-and-15 with 3:55 remaining. Where oh where might the pass go? Maybe up the field! Yet Santana Moss was able to get behind the entire Dallas defense for a 39-yard touchdown reception that roused drowsy viewers in lounge chairs all across America. Then trailing 13-7 with 2:44 remaining, the 'Skins were mired on their 30. Where oh where might the pass go? Maybe up the field! Yet Moss was able to get behind the entire Dallas defense for a 70-yard touchdown reception that won the game. How was this possible? See analysis below.

And in other news, yea, verily, it hath come to pass that TMZ's prophecy of the five blades is made real. Plus, what if King Solomon had cheerleaders? See below.

**Stats of the Week :** Indianapolis, the highest-scoring team in 2004 at 33 points per game, has averaged 12 points in its last three games.

**Stats of the Week No. 2 :** Philadelphia had a drive of 105 yards, while Pittsburgh had a drive of 102 yards. (Drives can exceed 100 yards if there are penalties.) Reader stat submitted by Jeff Miller of Co-

lumbus, Ohio.

**Stats of the Week No. 3 :** Minnesota, which has the league's most expensive defensive backfield -- \$25 million in bonuses to defensive backs in the last two years -- has already surrendered 536 yards passing to rank 28th in pass defense.

**Stats of the Week No. 4 :** Despite taking a huge lead early, Philadelphia passed 39 times and rushed 30 times.

**Stats of the Week No. 5 :** The Bills and Bucs have played eight times. All eight meetings have been in Tampa.

**Stats of the Week No. 6 :** The Ravens had as many punts (10) as points.

**Stats of the Week No. 7 :** Daunte Culpepper has thrown eight interceptions in the first two games; last season he did not throw his eighth interception until his 13th game. Reader stat submitted by Carey Lindsay.

**Stats of the Week No. 8 :** Buffalo and Jacksonville were held to a combined six points despite committing a combined zero turnovers.

**Stats of the Week No. 9 :** Tailback Willie Parker, who did not start in college, has 374 yards in three appearances for the Steelers.

**Stats of the Week No. 10 :** Pittsburgh has won 16 consecutive regular-season games.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Lora of the Eagles, a dance major at DeSales University who, according to her team bio, has no middle name. Her bio also says Lora was once hit in the nose with a football during high school gym class, leaving her nose black and blue for a week. In the NFL, even the cheerleaders play through pain! Traditional males may want to check her "photo gallery," one of which is as sensuous a photograph as will ever be posted on a corporate website. See more on the undress of the always-cutting-edge Eagles cheerleaders below.

**Sweet Play of the Week:** New England leading 7-0, Carolina had first-and-10 on the defending champion's 42. The Cats surprised the Flying Elvii by coming out in a shotgun on a rushing down. Ricky Proehl lined up in the slot and ran TMQ's favorite pattern, the stop-and-go, for a 41-yard advance that set up a Carolina touchdown on the next play. The stop-and-go is not only hard to defend, it opens up short patterns by making defensive backs reluctant to come up quickly. Why don't NFL teams call this action more often?

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Sportscasters were buzzing over Randy Moss' 54-yard touchdown catch, but it was the sweetness of the play that struck yours truly. Score Kansas City 17, Oakland 10 in the third, the Long Johns had first-and-10 on their own 36. Two wide receivers lined up left; one came in motion right; the Raiders faked a pitch left, and Moss ran a deep post. For an instant, nobody was sure where the ball was, and an instant is a long time at NFL speed.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 3:** Game tied at 17, Denver faced fourth-and-1 on the San Diego 33 with 57 seconds remaining. Yours truly expected a 50-yard field goal attempt; kicks fly pretty well in the thin Colorado air. Instead, the Broncos faked up the middle and then did a backhand flip to Ron Dayne, whose 10-yard run not only positioned Denver for a shorter winning kick, but allowed the hosts to grind all but the final seconds of the clock.

**Sour Play of the Week:** Leading Denver 14-3, San Diego had first-and-10 on its 23 on the first snap of the second half. Drew Brees threw an out that went directly into the hands of Broncos cornerback Champ Bailey, whose touchdown return changed the momentum of the contest. Watch the tape -- Bailey "jumps

the route" before Brees throws. Did San Diego somehow give away what the play was going to be?

**Sour Play of the Week (Sour Matched Set):** Score St. Louis 7, Arizona of Mexico 3 in the second quarter, the Cards had third-and-goal on Les Mouflons' 4. Six Arizona blockers faced four St. Louis rushers, yet Rams' tackle Jimmy Kennedy came through untouched by anyone to sack Kurt Warner. A touch-down opportunity was reduced to a field goal in a close game. Now it's St. Louis 17, Arizona 12 with 27 seconds remaining and once again the Cards are nearly there, with first-and-goal on the Rams' 5. Six blockers face six rushers; Adam Archuleta comes through untouched by anyone for the sack.

**Sour Play of the Week (Arizona Special):** So Warner goes down at the St. Louis 10. Now there are 20 seconds remaining; the Cards hold no time outs, but it's only second down. Surely they'll spike to stop the clock, making it third-and-goal; call two plays in the huddle, and have two shots to win. Instead, Arizona tried to call a play at the line; was flagged for false start at seven seconds remaining; the 10-second runoff rule ended the game. Ye gods.

**Sour Play of the Week (Mega-Bonus Edition):** Between them, Minnesota defensive backs Darren Sharper and Antoine Winfield have recently received bonuses totaling about \$15 million. Both were way out of position as Cincinnati receiver Chad Johnson took a quick hitch and legged it 70 yards to the end zone on the second snap of the Bengals-Vikings game. I could have written "game over" in my notebook then and there.

**"Let Them Book the Four Seasons," Marie Antoinette Declared :** Last week in New York, some 150 heads of state gathered for a summit to encourage the nations of the West to donate more aid to the impoverished of the developing world. Western nations should, in fact, increase the aid they give. Relatively small amounts by Western standards go a long way toward reducing human suffering in the world. And though corruption is an obvious problem, Western aid has accomplished far more for average people in developing nations than is generally understood. The details of that argument are here. The short version is that the reason the predicted Malthusian catastrophes have not struck developing nations is that aid helped prevent them. More, United States spending on foreign aid is much lower than popularly imaged -- only about one half of one percent of the federal budget is used for this purpose. We ought to give more.

But yours truly read in the *New York Times* that the influx of foreign leaders for the conference had flooded Manhattan's luxury hotels. The Four Seasons, where a deluxe suite costs \$2,950 nightly plus tax, and the cheapest room is \$625, was fully booked with foreign officials coming to New York to hector the United States for not giving more to other nations. At the Waldorf Towers, where a "grand" suite with dining room and boudoir costs \$3,000 nightly, all 26 suites were booked by foreign delegations. Set aside were many of the super-expensive rooms were being occupied by government officials of the very nations needing aid -- that is, by leaders who are busily robbing their own people while asking America to pony up. I simply wonder how many millions of dollars were spent on luxury suites, first class travel and four-star meals for 150 heads of state and their staffs to come together and wring their hands about why doesn't someone else do more about poverty! Instead of spending that money on themselves, the officials who attended last week's United Nations meeting could have stayed home and given the money to the poor.

**Preposterous Punt Watch:** Last season Buffalo lead the league in Preposterous Punts -- punts from inside the opposition 40. Sunday it was Tampa 16, Buffalo 3 and the Bills facing fourth-and-9 on the Bucs' 39 yard line on the final play of the third quarter. You cannot be thinking of punting! Boom goes the punt, and it took the Buccaneers just three snaps to get past the point where the ball would have been if the Bills have gone for it and failed. Trailing by 13 points with a quarter remaining, you're going to have to take some chances, and fourth-and-9 inside the opponents' 40 is a decent chance. Plus, under the circumstances, it's better to go for it and failed than passively give the ball away. Going for it tells players that their coaches are challenging them to win the game; punting tells players the coaches have quit on the game. So why shouldn't the players quit, too? Which is what the Bills players did in the fourth quarter.

**Preposterous Kick Watch:** Score 28-0, the Squared Sevens faced fourth-and-6 on the Philadelphia Nesharim's 14 late in the third quarter. You cannot be thinking of attempting a field goal! Boom goes the field goal, and then to add insult to injury from the standpoint of the football gods, San Francisco kicked away rather than onside kick. So new coach Nolan the Younger decided his priority was not being accused of being shut out. Otherwise, what possible good can it do to cut the margin from 28 points to 25 points -- you're still down four touchdowns! Every NFL coaching decision should be made with a goal of pursuing victory, not of avoiding criticism of the coach.

**Preposterous Kickoff Watch:** Scoring to make it Tennessee 23, Baltimore 10 with six minutes remaining, the Ravens did not onside kick. Even when the Titans went three-and-out, the clock situation for Baltimore had become impossible.

**TMQ Wants a Five-Bladed Razor Held by the Woman from the Old "The Stripper" Shaving Commercial:** When Gillette bought naming rights to the stadium the Patriots play, the state of the art was three-bladed razors. Yours truly began calling the facility Next One Will Have Four Blades Field. Then Gillette competitor Schick actually offered a four-blade razor, so yours truly began calling the facility Next One Will Vibrate Field. Then Gillette actually offered a vibrating razor, upping the razor wars ante anew and forcing TMQ to begin calling the facility Next One Will Have Five Blades Field. Last week many, many, many readers, including Mark and Tracey Leedom of Durham, N.C., noted Gillette's announcement of a five-blade razor. The new five-blade Fusion is available in a powered version and "features a microchip that regulates the voltage and blade action. Other high-tech features include a low battery indicator light and a safety switch that shuts the razor down after eight minutes of continuous operation." A powered five-blade razor with a timed safety switch -- this razor is *dangerous* if you don't turn it off? Readers haikuize,

TMQ predicts:

Next One Will Have Five Blades Field.

Gillette, make it so!

-- *John deWeerd, Florenceville, New Brunswick*

TMQ predicts:

Gillette five-bladed razor.

Lotto numbers, please?

-- *Sharp Richmond, Mt. Airy, Md.*

My obvious move would be to predict a six-bladed razor. But if the new version already has dangerous power and internal electronics, the pace of razor technology is clearly accelerating. Moore's Law holds that the number of transistors in a given space of computer chip doubles every two years. Maybe we need a similar law for razors. Here is TMQ's Law of Razors: The number of blades will increase to the factorial of the highest number of blades in the previous century. My incredibly scientifically advanced reasoning? The 20th century saw a progression from one to three blades. The factorial of three is six ( $1 \times 2 \times 3$ ), predicting with seer-like assurance that a six-bladed razor will be marketed sometime in the 21st century. Taking into account that the 21st century has already witnessed the five-bladed razor, we employ the factorial of five ( $1 \times 2 \times 3 \times 4 \times 5$ ) to predict that the 22nd century will see a 120-blade razor. Meanwhile, I will now call the stadium in question Next One Will Have Six Moisture-Sensitive Vibrating Blades with Remote Control, Make Coffee, Walk the Dog, Receive High-Resolution GPS and Improve Your Love Life Field.

If only Gunilla Knutson were available to endorse the new Gillette razor! In 1966, Noxema Medicated Comfort Shave produced one of the top all-time television commercials -- Knutson, a Swedish model, cooed "take it off, take it all off" as the David Rose big-band tune "The Stripper" played and a man was seen shaving. Go here then scan to "Knutson" to see stills from the commercial and listen to the audio. When aired this commercial was considered red-hot -- the chairman of the Senate Subcommittee on Communications denounced the ad for sexuality -- but all you see is the face of the sultry Knutson, who purred "take it all off" but never actually took anything off. Once, less was more when it came to being

suggestive!

Gunilla Knutson became a minor 1960s celebrity as a result of the shaving commercial. Her 2005 counterpart is Sabine Ehrenfeld, German-born model in the Overstock.com television commercials -- the mega-babe who coos "it's all about the O" while wearing a single gold O around her neck and looking simply mesmerizing. Watch the ad [here](#). Every advertising critic noted the spot was a far-from-subliminal reference to the Big O. More worldly critics noted the ad alludes to the *Story of O*, generally considered the greatest work of erotic literature, in which a woman who wears a single metal O is announcing her desire to be -- well, you'll have to read the book. What struck yours truly about the buzz the O spokes-woman generated is that Ehrenfeld is not some airhead ingénue: she is a 42-year-old mother of two. Forty-plus pin-up moms -- this really must be the 21st century! (Hey, I haven't used that line in a whole year.) Here is Ehrenfeld's modeling portfolio. Regrettably, it's tasteful.

**We're All Professionals Here:** Baltimore allowed a punt block for a safety. On the play, the Ravens had 12 men on the field.

**Best Plays After the Clock Struck Midnight:** It was 12:02 a.m. Eastern when the Redskins faced fourth-and-15, trailing 13-0 with 3:55 remaining. Wideout Santana Moss and tight end Chris Cooley lined up on the right. Dallas was in a conventional defense and backed off -- exactly what the situation called for. So how did Moss get behind everyone? He took off on a deep post, beating corner Aaron Glenn. Cooley ran alongside Moss, then did a buttonhook at the first-down stick. A short pattern to the first-down stick is what the Dallas defense seemed to expect -- it's the conservative call, and most NFL coaches are conservative. When Cooley stopped at the stick, *three* Cowboys defenders moved toward him, including safety Roy Williams, the deepest man. Only too late did Williams realize the play was to Moss, not Cooley. Give Redskins offensive coordinator Don Breaux credit for going deep when the defense was likely to expect something short. The second touchdown? Moss ran the same pattern, a deep post, and again blew past Glenn, who seemed confused at the snap -- Glenn was looking away from Moss and pointing toward Williams as if to say, "Do you have him deep or do I?" Two other receivers came out on the same side as Moss and ran short crossing patterns; they occupied the attention of the Dallas defenders, including Williams. Once again, only too late did Williams realize the play was deep to Moss, not a short rinky-dink pass. You'd think it would be impossible to get behind an NFL defense twice at the end of a game in which the only thing that could cost the defenders victory was letting someone get behind them. But then, you'd think a lot of things.

**Disclaimer of the Week:** Recently TMQ rode with a friend who owns a Lexus RX with a GPS navigation system. When the ignition switch is turned, the nav screen shows this message: DRIVE SAFELY AND OBEY TRAFFIC LAWS. You must touch a button that says "I agree" before the system will come on. (There is no button you can touch that reads, "I prefer to drive like a lunatic.") A disclaimer says: LOOKING AT THIS SCREEN WHEN THE VEHICLE IS IN MOTION CAN CAUSE SERIOUS ACCIDENTS. First of all, squinting at the screen to read that very disclaimer might cause an accident. Second, the entire point of the nav system is that you look at the screen while the vehicle is in motion! Lexus has elaborately engineered the system for exactly that purpose. The screen faces the driver; the road and position images move as the car moves; the screen dims at night for ease of reading while the vehicle is in motion. If Lexus did not want the driver to look at the screen while the vehicle is moving, it would have interlocked the system so the screen goes blank unless the car is in park, forcing the driver to pull over to consult the GPS. Thus the disclaimer warns you not to use the system for its intended purpose.

**"Initially, My Tactics Seemed to Work," Thomas Dewey Told Reporters:** So far in the young NFL season, the blitz has been awesome. In Week 1 Baltimore, Dallas, Kansas City and others teams did well blitzing. In Week 2, Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, St. Louis Tampa, Tennessee and other teams produced big plays with the blitz. Do not be deceived -- there's a difference between early-season blitzing and the late-season variety. Early in the year defenses hold the advantage over offenses, because offense requires coordination. But as the season progresses, offenses jell and their coordination improves; blitzing ceases to cause general disruption. In the first two weeks of this season, there have been five games in which a team scored fewer than seven points. In the final two weeks of last season, there was only one game in which a team scored less than seven.

The main reason offensive coordination improves as the season progresses is that offensive lines get better at picking up the blitz. The O-line requires more time to jell than any aspect of football. Linebackers and defensive backs generally don't need to engage in highly coordinated activity to blitz; offensive lines and running backs must engage in coordinated activity, including last-second "line calls," to stop the blitz. It takes times to get proficient at blitz-block schemes that dictate which way various linemen turn and when blockers "hand off" a defender to other blockers. This weekend in each of the Buffalo-Tampa Bay, Houston-Pittsburgh, Baltimore-Tennessee, Detroit-Chicago, St. Louis-Arizona and San Francisco-Philadelphia collisions, there were at least two instances when blitzers came flying through untouched by any blocker. By the latter stages of the season, that won't be happening. (Well, maybe in Houston's games.) Then the blitz will decline in effectiveness, and the smart teams will blitz only occasionally. Every year TMQ tracks blitz performance in the playoffs, and every year the numbers show that offenses do better against the blitz than against straight defense, even when you adjust for down and distance. Here are the figures from the 2004 playoffs, and here from the 2005 playoffs. So blitz proponents, enjoy your moment in the sun. As the season progresses, this tactic will begin to backfire.

**Best High School Ploy:** A standard high-school ploy is to give the ball in a critical situation to a guy who never gets the ball -- assuming the defense will ignore him. Score is Jersey/B 10, Miami 7 with 8:24 remaining; the Jets had first-and-goal on the Marine Mammals' 1. Jersey/B lined up heavy with extra offensive linemen, then play faked and threw to blocking back Jerald Sowell, who had only one score in 2004. The result is a touchdown. Trailing Jax 3-0 in the fourth quarter, Indianapolis had third-and-goal on the Jaguars' 6. This just absolutely has to be Peyton Manning pass, right? The Colts handed it to unknown running back Ran Carthon, who to that point had five career carries for minus-1 yard. The result is a touchdown.

**At Least the Elephant Didn't Get a Suite at the Four Seasons:** Granted it's a charming story that Maggie, the overweight African elephant at the Alaska Zoo, last week received a 16-ton exercise treadmill built by a mining equipment company. But the treadmill cost about \$250,000. That's enough to buy medicine that would saved dozens, and perhaps hundreds, of human lives in Africa. In 2003, in Maggie's home nation of Zimbabwe, 170,000 people died of AIDS, according to a Central Intelligence Agency estimate. Many, if not most, of these deaths could have been prevented by antiretroviral drugs. Throughout Africa an estimated 1,400 people die every day from AIDS, and money for drugs remains scarce. But money for an elephant treadmill? No problem! On this topic, how come the \$200 billion or so in federal money that will be expended to rebuild New Orleans was found in the wink of an eye, while most of the \$15 billion that Congress voted in 2003 to spend to stop the African AIDS epidemic still has not been appropriated?

**Line on the Rise:** I want whatever the Indianapolis defensive line is having for breakfast! In Week 1 the, Colts defensive line ran the Ravens ragged, with little-known defensive tackle Larry Tripplett making regular appearances in the Baltimore backfield. This week the Colts defensive line ran the Jaguars ragged, with little-known defensive tackle Montae Reagor making regular appearances in the Jax backfield. Twice the Colts recorded sacks when Jacksonville had six blockers facing four rushers. Could it be that little-known Indianapolis defensive linemen are emerging because defensive end Dwight Freeney is in the process of becoming the best defensive player in the league? Think how much more effective the Indianapolis defensive line may become if tackle Corey Simon gets on that elephant treadmill and loses a couple hundred pounds!

**Line on the Bottom:** The Houston offensive line surrendered eight sacks in Week 2 after giving up five on opening day. Houston's 13 sacks allowed equals the sacks allowed by eight entire teams combined -- Cleveland, Indianapolis, Pittsburgh, New England, Kansas City, Miami, Cincinnati and Carolina. Moo Cow quarterbacks have now been sacked 175 in the 50 games this franchise had played. Twice in Week 2 the Texans allowed Pittsburgh defenders to come through totally untouched for sacks. Are the Houston offensive linemen just terrible, or do they lack pride? Pick your unattractive explanation.

**Cheer-Studs in the News:** The five-bladed razor is not this column's only prophecy. Yea, verily, yours truly has foreseen that trends in society and in women's buying power will lead to ripped cheer-studs joining buff cheer-babes on pro sports sidelines. Reader Mike Enos points out the Philadelphia 76ers have just announced they will add a male dance team, to be called the Broad Street Beefcakes. From the

sound of it these guys should be dubbed the Broad Street Double Cheesesteaks, as the Sixers specify all candidates weigh at least 250 pounds. This is sure to ignite a double-standards debate -- the female cheerleaders are expected to diet and exercise madly to become physically perfect, while their male counterparts chow down.

**Cheer-Babes in the News:** Reader Jim Kilgore points out in this video (click "calendar unveiling web-cast") of the physically perfect Eagles cheerleaders modeling the "barely theres" from their latest lingerie calendar, which was "photographed at a private mansion."

WARNING: video may not be suitable for any traditional male hoping to get any work done in the next hour or so.

**Cheer Studs and Babes in the News:** Sunday's *New York Times* contained an article about the University of Kentucky cheerleaders, whose mixed male-female squad has won 14 of the last 20 national championships of the Universal Cheerleaders Association.

**Over the Moon:** Okay, so we're going back to the Moon, something first accomplished in 1969. The new flight hardware NASA announced looks like it will operate amazingly like the hardware of the Apollo program, which was discarded as obsolete three decades ago. NASA says it will take \$104 billion and 13 years to build the amazingly 1960s-like hardware. Let's see, that's a target of 2018 -- 49 years after the first Moon landing. So *half a century* after America was able to land people on the Moon, we'll be able to do it again. Imagine if you had declared in 1952, 49 years after Kitty Hawk, that for a mere \$104 billion, you could build a wooden flyer that would remain in the air for 12 seconds. Isn't this Moon announcement awfully similar? And remember, the principal discovery made on the lunar surface by the Apollo astronauts was that there was nothing to do there. Half a century later, America once again will have people with nothing to do on the Moon!

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!** It was Cleveland 19, Green Bay 17 at the two-minute warning, with the Lambeau crowd roaring at experimental refrigerator decibel levels. The Browns faced second-and-9 on their 38. The ball is snapped and -- this cannot, cannot in all seriousness be a seven-man blitz. Announcers and sports columnists yak about seven-man blitzes, but the tactic is almost never actually employed because it is akin to handing the opponent an engraved invitation to enter the end zone. Seven Packers cross the line, easy short turn-out to tight end Steve Heiden becomes a 62-yard game-icing touchdown pass because there's no one back to tackle the gentleman. One isolated mistake? Cleveland 13, Green Bay 7 late in the third, the Browns facing second-and-10 on their 20. Green Bay blitzed six; a simple quick slant to Braylon Edwards became an 80-yard touchdown because there was no one back there to tackle the gentleman.

**Mike Brown Play of the Week:** Reader Karen Barefield of Alexandria, Va., e-mailed, "I look forward to the return of Mike Brown Play of the Week." Karen, your wish is my command! Brown's 41-yard interception return in the final minute of the first half, making it Chicago 31, Detroit 6, allowed TMQ to write "game over" in his notebook at halftime. What made this play was that six Detroit blockers could not handle six Chicago rushers; Mingdingxiong ("bears whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Mandarin) linebacker Lance Briggs came through untouched to hit Joey Harrington as he released. Note to Harrington: If you're being hit, don't release. Just take the sack. Harrington, who was assessed a personal foul for venting at Chicago while Brown ran back the pass, threw five interceptions on the day. Detroit has to face the fact that the Harrington experiment is almost over.

**Sked Note:** We'll never know what would have happened had Monday's Saints-Giants game been played in New Orleans, Baton Rouge or San Antonio. We do know it was played at Giants Stadium, and the "visiting" Jersey/A won in front of their home crowd. For years, for NFL purposes, New York has been located in New Jersey. On Monday, for NFL purposes, Louisiana was located in New Jersey. Now the rest of the Saints home schedule shifts to Baton Rouge and San Antonio, where the crowd will root for New Orleans. Jury-rigged steps were unavoidable in the wake of Hurricane Katrina. Nevertheless, it remains that the Giants got a bonus home date. If they should make the playoffs by a game, other NFC teams will be mighty steamed.

**NFL in Iran Update:** Middle East TV, which beams NFL games to Iran, showed Patriots at Panthers followed by Dolphins at Jets. In Washington, D. C., where TMZ lurks, Patriots versus Panthers -- headliner game of the afternoon -- was not aired. Instead, viewers saw the middling Baltimore at Tennessee pairing. So once again, programmers offered Iran a better NFL game than they showed to our nation's capital. As yours truly endlessly complains, the NFL spares no expense to stage fantastic games, then often makes it impossible for audiences to see the fantastic games. Tuesday Morning Quarterback will resume tracking the NFL in Iran.

## RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Mesa State 64, New Mexico-Highlands 51 (overtime). How is it possible to win by 13 in overtime? Mesa State scored to take a 58-51 lead on the first possession of the second overtime; New Mexico-Highlands then fumbled, and officials allowed Creed James to return the rock 63 yards for a touchdown. In the new high school and college format, I've seen officials blow the whistle and end the game the moment a team with the lead gets a turnover in overtime. I've seen officials allow play to continue, on the theory that as long as the defender continues moving with the ball, he might fumble it back and the offensive team might run that fumble in. Does any rules-adept reader know? The moment James took possession of the fumble, should the game have ended or should he have been allowed to ramble for the extra six? Located in Grand Junction, Colo., Mesa State says, "Many students choose Mesa State for three reasons: Hands-on learning opportunities, affordable tuition and the location is great for skiing, mountain biking and river rafting." That's five reasons!

**Bonus Obscure College Score :** Graceland 37, Culver-Stockton 14. Located in Lamoni, Iowa, Graceland University has nothing to do with Elvis. The school "promotes opportunity, justice and world peace."

**Obscure College Book:** Surely the worst college football team in the United States is that of Trinity Bible College of Ellendale, N.D. The school is 31-160-1 since it first fielded a team in 1984. Last Saturday, Trinity was shut out 41-0 by Blackburn, which had lost its previous two games by a combined 77-13. In 2003, Trinity Bible suffered what is believed to be the worst defeat in football history, if not in the history of team sports, losing to Rockford College by a final of 105-0. Considering Trinity has only about 150 male students, a weak football presence may be inevitable. But now Trinity Bible has a distinction that can be claimed but by a handful of the biggest and most successful football programs, namely, it is the subject of a book. *Keeping the Faith: In the Trenches With College Football's Worst Team*, by Shawn Fury, is among the must-read sports books of the year. Fury profiles Trinity's quixotic football program, delves into the question of why athletes play on a team they know will lose and ponders the extent to which getting clobbered in sports actually may be character building. "Any coward can fight a battle when he's sure of winning, give me the man who has pluck to fight when he's sure of losing," the English novelist George Eliot wrote. All college sports aficionados will want to own *Keeping the Faith*.

*Note one:* Trinity actually won a game this season, against Principia. Next to the result appears a bright red YAHOO!! on the school's website.

*Note two:* Did Rockford run up the score in the 105-0 game? The victor attempted only two passes. But Rockford's star running back remained in the game through the third quarter, when the school was "clinging to a 91-0 lead," Fury writes.

**Texas: Land of Poor Sportsmanship:** Clinging to a 49-7 lead, Texas Tech kept star quarterback Cody Hodges on the field throwing. When his touchdown pass made it Texas Tech 56, Sam Houston State 7 and Hodges departed, TMZ expected to see some sportsmanship on the part of the Red Raiders. I expected wrong. Reserve quarterback Graham Harrell proceeded to throw 17 times *after* Tech had taken a 49-point lead, as the school frantically ran up the score to a final of 80-21. Yes, Tech has a pass-wacky offensive philosophy, but to keep throwing when you're so far ahead shows poor character on the part of the coaching staff. There is no glory in pounding on the weak -- only bullies do that, and usually because they are afraid to face the strong. Over at College Station, it was Texas A&M 45, Southern Methodist 8, and not only was Aggies starting quarterback Reggie McNeil still in the game, he was passing on first down as A&M frantically ran up the score on the way to a 66-8 victory. Ahead 59-8 in the fourth quarter, Texas A&M coaches were still calling passes. Aggie coaches, you may want to boast and brag about final

scores, but you show the world poor character when you behave in such little bully fashion. Two weeks ago the University of Texas displayed similar bad sportsmanship by frantically running up the score to 60-3 against Louisiana-Lafayette. Hey, Texas universities, the athletics department is supposed to set an example. If the example set is greediness and poor sportsmanship, how, exactly, is this supposed to serve the interest of students?

#### READER ANIMADVERSION:

Recently, TMQ noted the United frequent flyer program allows you to sign up with titles such as Duchess and Swami. Jeff Esenberg of Chicago reports the Northwest frequent flyer plan has a similar option -- he enrolled as a baron. "To my delight, I received lots of nice mail and unsolicited credit cards addressed to Baron Jeffrey Esenberg. But when I racked up enough miles to get first-class upgrades, they were never processed. It seems the humorless computer at Northwest required me to purchase my tickets as Baron Esenberg. I was forced to abandon my nobility."

TMQ said the Jets' last-second touchdown against Kansas City, making the final 27-7, deprived the Chiefs of their first shutout "since the Beatles were together." Jennifer Williams of Kansas City points out that "the Beatles were not still together in 2002, when the Chiefs shut out the Cardinals 49-0."

Last week's column quoted Song of Songs, which the Bible says was penned by Solomon, the ancient Hebrew king. (My bet is he hired a ghostwriter.) Robert Breedlove of Clinton, Miss., pointed out that Solomon is also considered the author of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes 3:10, Breedlove notes, declares, "I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves." This means, Breedlove supposes, that Solomon predicted football! TMQ adds that the Bible tells us Solomon had 700 wives and 300 concubines -- imagine what the palace swimsuit calendar must have looked liked. Maybe Solomon dressed the 300 concubines as cheerleaders: "Solomon, Solomon, he's our king, he can write scripture like anything!" Ecclesiastes, composed perhaps 2,900 years ago, is well worth 20 minutes of your time on this Earth to read, as it contains some of the greatest passages of wisdom in ancient writing. Chapter three offers the famed "turn turn turn" verses. Other timeless statements of wisdom include, "All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full ... the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled by hearing."

A recent item on whether high-energy particle accelerators might accidentally create some novel sub-atomic with unwelcome properties, such as the ability to crush the Earth out of existence, noted that experimental lasers have already reached higher energies than particle accelerators, yet created no weird particles. Konstantin Kakaes of Mexico City offers this comment, which I simply reproduce, including the final remark: "Although the Petawatt laser does deliver more power, it is delivered at a spatial density (irradiance) of about 700 gW/cm<sup>2</sup>. On the other hand, a typical particle accelerator, such as the Tevatron at Fermilab outside Chicago, packs a density of about 2\*10<sup>15</sup> gW/cm<sup>2</sup> -- the energy is much more concentrated in a proton-anti-proton collision than by a laser. If any crazy particles were to be created, it's the density, in both space and time, you'd worry about rather than absolute power. What really matters is watts per centimeter squared per second, because of the probabilistic nature of making wacky matter. Anyhow, go Patriots!"

Recent items have concerned inappropriate rock songs used as the backdrop to television advertising. One would think there could not be inappropriate classic music, but Scott Lucado of Fort Worth, Texas, points out there can: "The Olive Garden chain of Italian restaurants once ran TV commercials that featured music from Bizet's *Carmen* -- an opera written by a Frenchman and set in Spain."

Tuesday Morning Quarterback calls the place where the Steelers play Ketchup Field. Dave Lackner of Pittsburgh points out that mustard yellow is its dominant color. He proposes in haiku:

Ketchup Field? Yellow  
seats make The Mustard Palace  
better soubriquet.

-- Dave Lackner, Pittsburgh

Last week TMQ said the "double pass," a high-school staple -- quarterback tosses a lateral to a receiver, who throws downfield -- is misnamed because only one flight of the ball is forward. Kevin Lehde, a high school football official in Raleigh, N.C., writes to note that my statement only became true this year. Previously, schools that use the rulebook of the National Federation of High Schools allowed an unlimited number of forward passes, so long as all were thrown behind the line of scrimmage. "Technically, a high school player could throw a pass to a teammate 50 yards downfield, then that player could retreat 50 yards back behind the line and throw another forward pass," Lehde notes. A weird quirk of the rule was that if a pass was thrown over the line; then defenders slammed into the guy who caught the ball; then that guy threw the ball back behind the line; then whoever caught it threw another forward pass; defenders who hit the guy who caught the ball became guilty of pass interference, even though the person they hit was a ball carrier! To eliminate that quirk, the NFHS adopted the pro rule of only one forward pass per down. Here's the press release. From the bottom of the press release: In 2003, 1,057,640 boys participated in high school football -- and 1,615 girls did.

Last week's column noted the Jacksonville-Seattle game began with Josh Scobee kicking off to Josh Scobey. Chris Foster of Marysville, Kan., reports Scobee also kicked off to Scobey to open a game between Louisiana Tech and Kansas State.

Finally Andrew Kenoff of Manhattan Beach, Calif., complains, "Your articles seem shorter this season. It grieves me that my Tuesday workday seems longer." This may sound hard to believe, but I get e-mail protesting that Tuesday Morning Quarterback is too short. Believe me, if the marketing staff could figure out a way to charge for it, this column could be MUCH longer. And if you've gotten this far, you are a Tuesday Morning Quarterback addict.

**Next Week:** Three hundred scantily clad concubines try to figure out what " $2 \times 10^{15} \text{ gW/cm}^2$ " means, while a panel of experts debates whether the phrase "when we barely knew what we were doing" applies to the year 2005.

## Avoid postmodern food, and I challenge Yahoo! with a generic NFL prediction

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Sept. 27, 2005) -- The Green Bay Packers have lost their last four at Lambeau Field, which is a little like saying Anna Kournikova has been turned down by the last four men she asked out. This suggests the fabulous Brett Favre will soon be fitted for the garish color-coordinated jacket he will soon wear in some broadcast booth.

We'd like to think stellar athletes go out in glory, and occasionally this happens. John Elway hung up his pads after being made MVP in the Super Bowl. Yet in many if not most cases, legendary athletes depart on a bum note. In Dan Marino's final game, the Dolphins lost 62-7. On Jim Kelly's final play, he fumbled in opposition territory, leading to the only Bills' playoff defeat in Wilson Stadium history. In Larry Bird's final game, the Celtics were knocked out of the playoffs as Bird played poorly; in Michael Jordan's final game, his team lost by 20 points. In Jerry Rice's final game, he had no receptions as his team lost in the playoffs.

Now consider Favre. For more than a decade he's been a joy to watch, and a darling of the football gods. Last season his stats were still good. But he hasn't seemed like much this year, with the Pack 0-3. On Sunday, Favre threw two fourth-quarter interceptions, one a terrible pass, as Green Bay fell to City of Tampa in a close loss. On Sunday, Favre looked like just a befuddled run-of-the-mill quarterback. In Kelly's final season, he came off the field after throwing a bad interception in a close loss to Miami repeating aloud, "I don't understand it." When great athletes begin to lose abilities they once had, many find this hard to understand. For the great athlete, everything in life has been an upward arc -- through youth, college, the pros and finally national renown, things just keep getting better. Then suddenly things stop getting better, and performance begins to decline. "I don't understand it" must run through the heads of many stellar athletes as their abilities deteriorate and the curtain call approaches. This thought may be running through Favre's head now.

Of course no one should count Favre out. The football gods may smile on him one final time, and if any team can bounce back from a 0-3 start, it's the Pack. But the odds say there are more interceptions than touchdown passes ahead for this great player.

In other NFL news, Eli Manning winced on national television when he was chosen first overall in the 2004 draft by the San Diego Chargers. He hung his head like he'd been stood up by his date for the senior prom. Eli Manning had been chosen first in the NFL draft yet *felt sorry for himself* -- because every single little thing was not exactly precisely the way he wanted it! Only in America could someone who has just been chosen first in the NFL draft feel sorry for himself. Anyway on Sunday night the Chargers, shunned by Manning, hosted him and his Giants and pounded the stuffing out of them, 45-23. By the Hammer of Grabthar, they were avenged!

And in other football news, want to know who will win an NFL game? For goodness sake don't ask the experts: ask Yahoo! users. See more below.

**Stats of the Week:** Pittsburgh and New England are on a combined 36-5 streak -- three of the losses coming when the teams played each other.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** Kansas City has surrendered an average of 215 yards rushing in its last five trips to Denver.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** Indianapolis, highest-scoring team in 2004 at 33 points per game, has averaged 13 points in its last four games.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** Sunday's Atlanta at Buffalo contest pitted teams whose coaches were born on

the same day -- Nov. 19, 1961. Reader stat submitted by Tanya Brunt of London, Ontario, Canada.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** Oakland, which lead the league in penalties in 2003 and 2004, currently leads the league in penalties.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** Oakland is averaging 109 penalty yards per game.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** Cincinnati became the first team in 34 years to record five interceptions in consecutive games.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** Sebastian Janikowski has already missed more field goal attempts (four) than he missed in all of 2004 (three).

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** Ben Roethlisberger is 1-2 against New England and 16-0 against the rest of the NFL.

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** The last time a Brett Favre team was 0-3, Favre was a sophomore at Southern Mississippi.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Reader Tim of Colorado nominates Lindsay McBride of the Broncos, who is basically drop-dead gorgeous. According to her team bio, "spending six hours being painted blue" and then having a horse image airbrushed onto her body was her most memorable moment as a Denver cheerleader. A graduate of Colorado State University, McBride is training to become a physician's assistant. Under "most prized possession" on her team bio, she lists "my health and faith." That's two possessions!

**Sweet Play of the Week:** Leading 10-0 in the first quarter, Denver recovered a fumble at the Kansas City 12. Traditionally, the Broncos absolutely kill the Chiefs on the ground when the two meet at 5,280 feet. On the previous Denver snap, running back Mike Anderson went 44 yards for a touchdown. So Kansas City was expecting the run, and sure enough the Broncs came out heavy with a linebacker lined up at fullback. Play-fake, touchdown pass to Rod Smith and the rout was on.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** With San Diego leading Jersey/A 21-20 in the third quarter, LaDainian Tomlinson took a pitch right, sprinted for the corner like tailbacks do on a standard toss, then straightened up and threw a perfect 26-yard touchdown pass to Keenan McCardell. The Bolts never looked back. Note: Tamara Walski of Modesto, Calif., a Giants' fan, wrote requesting some love for her Jersey/A. Okay, Tamara: on the night, Eli Manning did manage one more touchdown pass than the running back of the team he shunned.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 3:** All attention went to Chris Chambers' spectacular catch on his 42-yard touchdown against Carolina, but what TMQ liked was the sweet action. Miami set up a fake screen left, with three blockers pulling left. Gus Frerotte rolled right -- remember, he's only got two linemen ahead of him -- and hit Chambers on a very deep crossing pattern for the touchdown. So many Panthers defenders went with the fake screen that Frerotte had time to wait for Chambers to uncover.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 4:** Leading 13-10 in the third quarter, the Philadelphia Nesharim faced second-and-goal on the Raiders' 5. Donovan McNabb rolled right, then flipped a shovel pass underneath to Brian Westbrook for the touchdown. The shovel pass is a nice action because if the tailback drops the ball, it's simply an incomplection. The shovel pass off a rollout is even nicer.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 5:** Carnell Williams of City of Tampa sure makes you want to buy a Cadillac. If only the Bucs had gotten him at the employee price! In addition to lots of yards Sunday, Williams registered a sweet play. With the Bucs leading the Packers 17-13 with 2:06 remaining, Williams broke up the sideline for a 24-yard run. Hemmed in, rather than lunge for a meaningless extra yard, he dropped to the ground to make sure the clock kept moving. When defenders tried to push him out of bounds,

Williams fought to stay in. It turned out the two-minute warning stopped the clock anyway. But Williams showed good football IQ, an auspicious sign for Tampa.

**Once Again, It Seems Nothing Is Sexy Now:** Each year, TMQ scans newsstands for the September "What's Sexy Now?" issue of *InStyle*, the celeb-lifestyle magazine that's thick enough to be the hearing record of the John Roberts nomination. Owing to hundreds of ads, this September's "What's Sexy Now?" issue of *InStyle* is 602 pages long; *The Age of Innocence* by Edith Wharton is 381 pages. Future historians will surely study the "What's Sexy Now?" issues of *InStyle* to understand how 21st century society made sex sound so completely ridiculous it's a wonder anyone bothers to do it.

This year's "What's Sexy Now?" issue has Jennifer Garner as cover star. Remarkably, *InStyle's* photographers manage to make this very beautiful woman look ordinary, while the text makes her seem a vacuous dolt. *InStyle* declares Garner "an accidental sex kitten" because she "giggles when she puts on lingerie." The magazine explains that she refers to her breasts as "biscuits." *InStyle* quotes an admirer of Garner as saying, "She's warm, generous and such a *girl*," the italics original. What, she's immature? This is what her *admirers* say?

After the cover piece, the "What's Sexy Now?" issue tumbles downhill to its annual inventory of celebrity turn-ons. Jessica Alba declares her turn-on is imagining she is President of the United States and sitting in the Oval Office surrounded by handsome aides who await her every instruction. Jessica, the whole sex-in-the-Oval-Office thing didn't really work out for Bill Clinton. Patrick Dempsey declares that car racing is "a metaphor for love" because of "the sound, the speed." Patrick, your love life involves spinning out of control and hitting walls. Joan Allen says she likes to have sex in a cornfield because of "the rustling sound." Maybe Dempsey and Allen should make out in a race car parked in a cornfield. Sean Combs declares that "a person's eyes reveal the truth, that's why I wear shades." This leaves us to wonder what he's hiding. Kelly Ripa and husband Mark Consuelos report their sex-fantasy game is for her to dress up like one of Charlie's Angels while he dresses up like a motorcycle cop; he pretends he has pulled her over and she has to get out of the ticket. Um, it would have been sexier if they'd kept that to themselves. Matthew McConaughey declares that if a woman has a "perfect backside" but "moves without grace," he's turned off. Thanks for sharing your high standards. Teri Hatcher shares that her navel is "an area of my body that I've struggled with liking." Hatcher goes on to say that Paris is "the sexiest destination, but not in an obvious way," while her "sexiest moment" is to be at a nightclub dancing all by herself.

**Sour Play of the Week:** Boy did San Francisco look discombobulated at the end of the first half. Reaching first-and-goal at the Dallas 1 with 41 seconds remaining and holding a timeout, the Niners ended up getting off only one proper snap, then kicking a field goal. In a three-point defeat, these four points lost were critical.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Matched Plays:** Pittsburgh leading 13-10, the defending champion Patriots faced third-and-2 on the Steelers' 37 early in the fourth quarter. The Hypocycloids big-blitzed six -- a 30-yard completion to David Givens, and the Pats scored to take the lead on the next snap. Sweet if you're for New England, sour if you're for Pittsburgh. Now it's New England 20, Pittsburgh 13 with the Steelers facing fourth-and-11 on the New England 27 with 1:31 remaining. The Elvii big-blitzed six -- a pass interference at the 4 as a defender grabbed to prevent the touchdown and the Steelers scored to tie on the next snap. Sweet if you're for Pittsburgh, sour if you're for New England.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Plays (Same Team):** With Jax leading Jersey/B 10-7, no blocker even touched Jets defensive end John Abraham as he roared in to hammer Byron Leftwich, causing a fumble that Jersey/B returned for a touchdown. Jacksonville redeemed itself when Jaguars defenders twice stopped the Jets in the red zone in the fourth quarter, forcing short field goals and preventing Jersey/B from winning in regulation. Jax went on to win in overtime on a perfectly executed stop-and-go -- TMQ's favorite pass pattern -- to Jimmy Smith.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk:** Trailing Minnesota 24-6 late in the third quarter, New Orleans faced fourth-and-goal on the Vikings 4. In trotted the field goal unit. TMQ's immutable law, Kick Early Go For It Late, has an exception -- when you're way behind, go for it. A field goal only cuts the margin to 15

points and New Orleans still needs to score three times anyway. Better to go for it here and fail, pinning Minnesota against its goal line, than to waste the opportunity on a likely-to-be-meaningless field goal. Boom goes the kick, and New Orleans went on to lose 33-16.

**Wacky Food of the Week:** Marc Bush of New York City points out this quote from a dining-section article in the *New York Times*: "Homaro Cantu's maki look a lot like sushi rolls served at other upscale restaurants. But the sushi made by Mr. Cantu, the 28-year-old chef at Moto in Chicago, is prepared on a Canon inkjet printer. He prints images of maki on pieces of edible paper made of soybeans and corn-starch, using organic, food-based inks of his own concoction. He then flavors the back of the paper with powdered soy and seaweed. At least two food items made of paper are likely to be included in a meal at Moto." It's hard to know what to take seriously about the restaurant's menu, which includes "spring vegetables with barbecued Styrofoam" and "lobster with freshly squeezed orange soda." The \$100 per person Moto's calls itself a "post-modern restaurant." This must mean a restaurant at which no food can be said with assurance to taste good or bad.

**The Fact That I Had Never Heard of the Hip-Hop Guy Is a Good Sign:** The lead organizations for hurricane donations are the American Red Cross and the Bush-Clinton Fund. Some smaller groups have started to raise money for specific aspects of hurricane relief, and among them is this group founded by former Eagles running back Cecil Martin, a civic activist. Its proceeds go to recovery of the Ninth Ward in New Orleans. In return for a donation, you can download a song about Katrina recorded by a hip-hop star whom I had never heard of. What else is interesting about Cecil Martin? He's read *The Progress Paradox*.

**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 snagged a 21-yard touchdown pass in Jacksonville's win over Jersey/B.

**Maybe the Crowds Should Call the Plays:** Yahoo! sports has four sports experts forecasting NFL winners -- and also allows site users to vote, scoring the consensus of users against the pros. So far, users have compiled a better record than any of the football experts. This conforms to the "wisdom of crowds" theory, detailed in this smart new book, which holds that the many are wiser than the few. Ask a typical person a question, and he or she is no more likely to be right than an expert. But ask lots of people a question and average their answers and the result has a higher chance of being right than expert views. So far the Yahoo! predictions experiment is upholding wisdom-of-crowds premise.

Yahoo! note: Tuesday Morning Quarterback wishes to enter this derby by offering a season-long generic prediction. My prediction is, Home Team Wins. I will take the home team in every remaining NFL contest this year, and see if I can beat the Yahoo! experts or the consensus of Yahoo! users.

**The Football Gods Winced:** Bad enough when you work, work, work for field position, only to commit a turnover and see some gentleman running unopposed the length of the gridiron for an easy six. When you do this near the opponent's goal line, it really hurts. Leading 10-0, the Flaming Thumbtacks had third-and-goal on Les Mouflons' 20. A touchdown here is a long shot, but a draw play followed by a field goal would make it a solid 13-0 lead. Instead Steve McNair forced the ball to a receiver who was well short of the goal line anyway. Adam Archuleta returned the interception 85 yards for a touchdown, and the Titans' momentum was shattered. The next time you looked up, the scoreboard read St. Louis 24, Tennessee 10; the Rams went on to win. (Note: if you're wondering about Les Mouflons and other nicknames used in this column, my annual glossary will run soon.)

**Really Big Shew in Houston:** The Texans benched Phillip Buchanon and Jason Babin, recently acquired for high draft picks. Let's dub this the Lawrence Welk demotions. Why? For the pair, the Texans gave up "a one and a two and a three."

**Will This Airport Be Known as BWITMA?:** A few years ago, Washington National Airport changed its name to Ronald Reagan Washington National Airport, an unwieldy designation -- why not just Ronald Reagan Airport, or Reagan National Airport? Yours truly quipped at the time that they might as well have made it Ronald Wilson Reagan Washington National International Airport. Well, be careful what you wish

for. Next month, Baltimore Washington International Airport, a cumbersome designation to begin with, changes its name to Baltimore Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport. Why honor Marshall, a brilliant and highly sophisticated man, with something that sounds like a writing-exercise mistake? Why not just Thurgood Marshall Airport? The place could keep its distinctive code, BWI, as National kept its distinctive code, DCA, rather than change to RWR.

Baltimore Washington International Thurgood Marshall Airport falls within the current ethos of over-naming. As TMQ has noted, Florida State plays in Bobby Bowden Field at Doak Campbell Stadium; the University of Texas upon Joe Jamail Field at Darrell K. Royal-Texas Memorial Stadium; UVA's football team at The Carl Smith Center, Home of David A. Harrison III Field at Scott Stadium. Maybe if the Jersey/B franchise ever gets a new facility within New York City, the place could be called Joe William "Willie" Namath Center at Sorry We Left Field at Record-Setting Cost Overruns Stadium.

**Best Blocks:** The New England offensive line may be the only offensive line in memory to do a national television commercial -- Visa's clever "metaphors" spot -- and it's a good thing the players have their helmets on in the ad, since you never know who's going to play for this unit. Nor does it seem to matter. Fielding two undrafted unknowns and two rookies, one pressed into service at the last minute owing to an injured starter, the Flying Elvii offensive line was dominant in the fourth quarter at Pittsburgh. The Patriots had three fourth-quarter possessions that resulted in three scores, with Tom Brady a perfect 12-for-12 in the quarter. The chief reason for this success was that no Steelers defender came near Brady in the pocket. Several times yours truly counted one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three, one-thousand four, one-thousand five as Brady calmly surveyed the field. Pass blocking sure helps a quarterback look good. Contrast to Buffalo, where the Bills offensive line had a cover-your-eyes awful performance, J.P. Losman rarely getting more than one-thousand one, one-thousand two before he had to take off scrambling. But, the Bills might say, we had injuries that forced us to play an unknown and a rookie. Funny, this never seems to be a problem for the New England offensive line.

**Best Blocks extra:** On Shawn Alexander's 25-yard touchdown run that put Seattle into the lead it never relinquished, both Blue Men Group guards, Steve Hutchinson and Chris Gray, pulled to lead the sweep in the classic USC "student body left" play rarely seen in today's NFL. Blocking was so good that Alexander reached the 1-yard line before an Arizona defender made contact with him. It's pretty fun to run 25 yards for a touchdown when all but the last guy in front of you has already been knocked to the ground.

**Alternatively, Hire Arthur Andersen to Manage the Salary Cap:** "It's his contract year," sportscasters knowingly say when an NFL player performs well knowing his deal will be up at year's end. When they are about to hit the free-agency market, many NFL players have their best seasons. "So why not make every year the player's contract year by awarding only one-year contracts?" asks reader Dan Langille of Truro, Nova Scotia. Alas, chaos would rule -- general managers would be unable to plan, and there would be so much player movement that fans would be turned off. But this got yours truly thinking: as long as the owners and the players' union are renegotiating the master bargaining agreement, as they are now, what might be done to simplify NFL contracts? Here's my idea. Do away with the prorated signing bonus. Make the salary cap the actual amount spent in a given year, with no deferred accounting.

In the NFL, signing bonuses -- those given when a deal is consummated -- are prorated over the length of the agreement. But why isn't the salary cap simply the amount teams pay to players in a given year, regardless of whether as bonuses (lump sums kept by the player even if he's waived) or salary (paid per game actually played)? The current setup creates much nonsense. Simple example of the current setup: player agrees to a five-year contract with a \$5 million signing bonus and a \$1 million annual salary. The salary counts against the cap in the year received, but the bonus is spread over the length of the contract, as if the player were a capital investment being depreciated. In the first season, the player actually receives \$6 million (the bonus plus a year of salary) but counts only \$2 million against the cap (the \$1 million in salary and one-fifth of \$5 million bonus accrual). For years two through five, the player actually receives \$1 million (the salary) but counts \$2 million against the cap (his salary plus a one-fifth accrual of the bonus). If the player is waived or traded during the deal, all remaining depreciation "accelerates" to the cap immediately. Suppose he's cut on the eve of the third season. That year he actually receives

nothing, but counts \$3 million against the salary cap (the remaining three-fifths of the original bonus).

Proration of bonuses allows accounting hanky-panky that causes a boom-and-bust cycle in NFL spending. In 2004, for example, the Washington Redskins actually paid players \$118 million, though the cap that season was about \$81 million; much of the money was conferred as signing bonuses, to delay accounting charges to future years. When those charges crash-land on the Skins' cap, Washington will have no choice but to enter a bust cycle, waiving veterans and spending much less than the cap allows. Last season as the Skins soared way over the official limit, San Francisco skimmed way under it, actually paying players only about \$63 million -- the rest of the team's cap was eaten up by delayed penalties for past bonuses. Many of the league's teams have had cap boom-and-bust cycles recently. Why go through this in the first place? Why not simply make the salary cap the maximum a team may pay to players in a given year, and discard the bonus-versus-salary distinction?

When the salary cap framework began in 1993, some players and agents thought the prorated bonus would enable teams to spend more than the system allowed, by postponing accounting charges forever. If the prorated bonus really did cause teams to outspend the cap, you could argue that the setup is in the players' interest. But on the whole, teams don't outspend the cap; they underspend it. In 2004, the official limit was about \$81 million and average actual monies paid to players was about \$72 million per team. Occasionally, there are years in which specific teams overspend -- recently Dallas, San Francisco, Tennessee and Washington went way over the cap. But for every salary-cap action, there is an equal and opposition reaction, with each of these teams having to dip way under the cap in at least one recent season. Overall, prorated bonuses do not cause NFL teams to increase the amount they pay NFL players. So why not junk the whole delayed-bonus-accounting concept and simply make the cap the total of checks that teams write to players in any given year? This would prevent the situation in which a player receives a huge bonus, bulked up for cap-accounting reasons, then relatively small salaries for the next few seasons -- a situation that can cause some players to feel aggrieved, even if their averaged pay is excellent. Think, for example, of He Who Must Not Be Named of Philadelphia. This gentleman got about \$9 million, mostly as bonus, in 2004, and now claims a human-rights violation because He will receive only about \$3.5 million, mainly as salary, in 2005. If He Who Must Not Be Named simply drew a salary of \$6 million in both seasons, He'd feel better -- and the Eagles' books would be greatly simplified.

Switching to an actual-monies system in which all that matters is how much the team pays players in a given year would also eliminate the increasingly nutty practice of granting huge bonuses -- made larger for cap-proration reasons -- to first-round draft choices who have yet to do anything, while paying less to accomplished veterans. The Niners just gave first overall draft choice Alex Smith a bonus of about \$24 million, elaborately spread into the future for cap reasons. If there were no bonus proration, instead Smith likely would have ended up with a set of graduated salaries -- "We'll pay you \$X million your first year, \$2X million your second year, \$3X million your third year" -- that would have rewarded him if he performed and cast him aside if he did not perform. As Smith was proving whether he could perform, the money that otherwise would have gone to his mega-bonus would have been available for veterans who have already proven whether they can perform.

If the proration of bonuses were ended, would players suffer? Maybe, because they would be sacrificing big payments up front for salaries down the road that they might never see. Here's how to avoid that outcome. In general, the signing bonus (plus other quirks we can skip here) means NFL contracts guarantee about one-third of their face value. That is, an announced "five-year \$30 million" deal guarantees about \$10 million. So suppose there were no prorated bonuses, but one-third of NFL salary was guaranteed. This would prevent players from being taken advantage of, while avoiding the complacency caused by the NBA's all-guaranteed deals. If NFL salaries were one-third guaranteed, the player would have some financial security, while there would be plenty of motivation for him to perform well and seek the two-thirds that is not guaranteed.

So players shouldn't suffer under my scheme. Players might even take home more overall, if teams never had cap-crash years. Those who suffer would be NFL agents, as their importance would be diminished. NFL agents rise to prominence largely by fighting with teams over the size of bonuses, and the fights are made possible by the fact that bonuses are prorated. If NFL negotiations were based mainly on salary, players might still end up with very high salaries. But the spectacular one-shot bonus would

decline, and along with that, NFL agents would become less high-profile. So the Tuesday Morning Quarterback proposal calls for salary-cap simplification, contracts that are easier to understand, less boom-and-bust in NFL team spending and a lesser role for agents with perfect haircuts who scream into a cell phone while driving a Maserati. My idea has no chance!

Ah well. If the NFL doesn't do this reform, reader Andrew Stead suggests another option -- that the new league-union deal includes an arbitration mechanism for players who "outperform" their contracts. This, he theorizes, would balance the already-existing mechanism for dealing with NFL players who underperform their agreements: namely, the waiver wire.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!:** With San Francisco leading 24-19 and facing third-and-6 on the Dallas 13, the Cowboys blitzed seven; easy touchdown pass to Brandon Lloyd, though the 'Boys would bounce back to win. Note: In the preseason, yours truly opined that Drew Bledsoe's career was "over." Bledsoe is currently third in the league in passer rating, and has six touchdown completions. The guy he was dumped for, J.P. Losman, is 28th in the league and has one touchdown pass.

**"Underrated" Watch:** TMQ winces whenever sportscasters describe as "underrated" someone who's been to the Pro Bowl, been on a Wheaties box, etc. Justin Morse of Minneapolis spots the latest example. After Carnell Williams' first carry in the City of Tampa-Green Bay game, he reports, the Fox booth crew called Cadillac "underrated." Williams was just the star of an undefeated Top 10 college football team; then selected fifth in the draft; was leading the league in rushing as Sunday's game kicked off. Underrated! What more attention, Morse asked, could Williams possibly have received after just two NFL games -- should he have been knighted?

**Curious Tactics, Dr. Watson:** So Kansas City, trailing 20-0, faces third-and-goal on the Denver 10 with 32 seconds in the first half. This is pretty much the game for the Chiefs: If they don't score a touchdown, the second half will be strictly a phone-in. Kansas City absolutely must score a touchdown. That dictates "four-down" thinking -- assume you will be going on fourth down, and call the third-down play accordingly. Instead, Chiefs coaches acted like the game was close and used the standard close-game strategy for this situation -- trying one pass into the end zone, then kicking the field goal. That made it 20-3 at the half; woo-who. Kansas City would have been better off going for it on fourth down and failing than launching a meaningless field goal to avoid being shut out. The second half was strictly a phone-in as Denver won 30-10.

**NFL in Iran Update:** Reader Jean-Pierre Gagick of Paris, a city that is sexy but not in an obvious way, reports he is in panic because Canal Plus, the cable provider that is the Comcast of France, has stopped showing NFL games. He haikuizes,

US, we need help:  
NFL's over in France.  
I move to Iran!  
*Jean-Pierre Gagick, Paris*

## RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Fitchburg State 6, Westfield State 0 (3OT). Through regulation and the first two overtimes, the teams scored no points, punted 16 times and combined to go 0-for-5 on field-goal attempts. Officials must have thought, "Great Caesar's Ghost, what if this game never ends?" Located in Westfield, Mass., Westfield State College says, "Our priority is dynamic, effective teaching, and student involvement in the life of the college and the community ." That's two priorities!

**Bonus Obscure College Score:** Saint Olaf 71, Macalester 10. Not very saintly behavior, running up the score. Located in Northfield, Minn., Saint Olaf College boasts a president who is 6-foot-9.

**Obscure College Feat:** Andy Jones of Brookings, S.D. -- Brookings being "the city, not the Institution," he notes -- reports that in the Minot State-Dakota State game, the teams combined to go 0-for-5 on

extra-point attempts.

**Obscure College Feat No. 2:** Corey Anglemeyer of Hays, Kan., points out that in the recent clash between Fort Hays State and New Mexico-Highlands, running back John Montgomery finished with a stat line of seven carries for minus-2 yards and three touchdowns.

### Reader Animadversion

Recent items have fixated on redundant translations. Barry Gregory of Weston-super-Mare, in the United Kingdom, notes, "the name Pennard Hill in Somerset is formed from 'pen' and 'ard,' both Celtic words for hill; thus we have Hill Hill Hill. But the champion is Torpenhow Hill in Cumbria. 'Tor' and 'how' are Old English words for hill. 'Pen' is Celtic for hill. So this geographical feature is Hill Hill Hill Hill." On the subject of the worrisome increase in football size, Alan Goldenbach of *Washington Post* reports that in Washington area high schools, 10 percent of players are 245 pounds or heavier. Andy Vazquez of Camp Hill, Pa., points out this article about a Harrisburg, Penn., high school whose offensive linemen average more than 300 pounds. A high school!

Last week's column declared that Trinity Bible's 2003 loss to Rockford College by 105-0 might be the worst defeat in the annals of team sports. Many readers, including Mary Hurd, reminded that in 1916, Cumberland lost to Georgia Tech 222-0, with John Heisman coaching the Yellow Jackets. Tech scored on the first play of each possession, and Heisman cannot be accused of running up the score as the play-by-play shows he called no passes. But this match pitted a major college squad with more than 40 players against a club team of a dozen gentlemen who played exhibition dates. Trinity versus Rockford matched two organized squads that practiced daily and played fixed schedules; the 1916 contest isn't in the same category. Also not really in the same category because they happened before the formalization of football, but surely worth mentioning, are these lopsided scores submitted by Alice Rudolph of Wilmette, Ill.:

Michigan 128, Buffalo 0 (1901)  
Michigan 130, West Virginia 0 (1904)  
Cal 127, St. Mary's 0 (1920)

A frequent complaint in my email box is that Tuesday Morning Quarterback doesn't post until a little past noon Eastern. That is still morning in five of the six time zones of our great nation -- in eight of the nine if you include, as does the National Institute of Standards and Technology, the time zones of Marshall and Wake islands, the Federated States of Micronesia and the Pacific Islands Trust Territory. Reader Ricky Yuan of Hong Kong notes that for him, it's Wednesday Morning Quarterback anyway. Matthew Grenz, a Marine sergeant from Spangle, Wash., and currently stationed in Iraq, reports that for him the column is Tuesday in the Late Night Quarterback. Stan McKeon of Richmond, Australia, who gets TMQ on Wednesday mornings, adds to the record-loss ledger that in November 2000, Australia defeated Russia 110-4 in a rugby cup match. His haiku:

Trinity Bible:  
as bad as the Russians but  
consume less vodka.  
-- Stan McKeon of Richmond, Australia

Owing to Gillette's new five-bladed razor, last week yours truly enunciated TMQ's Law of Razors: blades will increase to the factorial of the highest number of blades in the previous century. Since three-bladed razors existed at the end of the 20th century, this law predicts there will be a six-bladed razor in the 21st century (six is the factorial of three) and a 720-bladed razor in the 22nd century (720 is the factorial of six). But, writes Brian Gerspacher of Oakville, Ontario, what about the 23rd century? The factorial of 720, he notes, is  $10^{1764}$  -- 10 raised to the 1,764th power. This figure may exceed the number of particles in the universe. In that case, I want a discount coupon for the refill!

On Texas bad sportsmanship, no reader rose to defend Texas Tech's frantically running up the score to an 80-21 win over hapless Sam Houston State. Readers including David Glickler of Kyle, Texas, did rise

to defend the University of Texas for its 60-3 win over Louisiana Lafayette, contending starters stayed on the field too long only because coach Mack Brown was worried about getting them ready for the following week's encounter at Ohio State. Sasha Eysymontt noted that the college-rankings system encourages bad sportsmanship by rewarding running up the score. Before the Sam Houston game, Texas Tech was ranked 19th in the *USA Today* poll. After showing bad sportsmanship against a hapless team that isn't even in Division I-A, Tech rose to 16th. This Saturday, leading 49-0 against Indiana State at halftime, Texas Tech nevertheless threw 15 times in the second half, frantically trying to run up the score; eventually the Red Raiders won 63-7. Once again the *USA Today* poll rewarded Texas Tech for bad sportsmanship, elevating the school to 13th. This seems troubling, since the *USA Today* ranking is a poll of Division I-A coaches -- are the coaches saying they support bad sportsmanship? That they think it's okay for football-factory schools to beat up on teams with a tiny fraction of their financial resources? Texas Tech has played Florida International, Sam Houston and Indiana State -- all I-AA cupcakes. Given that Texas Tech has yet to face a Division I-A opponent, this team should not be ranked at all. Steve Quinn of Austin, Texas, supposes that next year Texas Tech will schedule Trinity Bible. A reader haikuizes of the school,

Bobby Knight, football  
phonies. Texas Tech: the black  
hole of sportsmanship.  
-- Joe Troyer, *Indianapolis*

Bad sportsmanship addendum: Kyle Painter of Urbana, Ill., notes Michigan State frantically ran up the score against Illinois on Saturday. Clinging to a 52-7 fourth-quarter lead, the Spartans threw deep on first-and-10 for a touchdown. Leading 61-14 with two minutes remaining, Michigan State faced fourth-and-3 on the Illinois 11. Did Spartans coaches do the sportsmanlike thing and kneel? They ordered a pass, frantically trying to run up the score. This display of bad sportsmanship rocketed Michigan State from 22nd to 12th in the *USA Today* poll. Hey Michigan State coaches, the polls are no excuse to teach poor character.

Last week's column said the most recent Mike Brown Play of the Week began when Chicago's Lance Briggs hit Detroit's Joey Harrington as he tried to throw. Julie Ryan of Kalamazoo, Mich., corrected that Chris Harris made the hit.

Recent items have concerned the plight of readers who awarded themselves titles such as Duke or Duchess when signing up for frequent-flyer plans, then found they could only cash in points if ticketed as nobility. Brandon Cave suggests they simply go here and purchase an English title. You can become a Lord for \$325; a couple can become Lord and Lady for \$499. "Seated" titles based on a place -- say, Baron McNabb of Expressway-Upon-Schuylkill -- cost about \$1,800. (Doesn't Donovan McNabb sound like he should have a title anyway?) If you eat out a lot in the United Kingdom, purchasing a title might help you reserve tables.

More on inappropriate music in advertising. Charissa Giles of Minneapolis notes that J.C. Penney ran Valentine's Day commercials backed by Nena's "99 Luftballons." She presumes, "Because nothing says love like a nuclear holocaust!" Destruction of the world is the subject of the song: compare the German and English lyrics here. Michael Schell notes that the standard bridal march, "Here Comes the Bride," originated in Wagner's *Lohengrin* -- "where it accompanies what is possibly the least successful marriage in history, that of Lohengrin and Elsa, which doesn't last a single night." Just after they are wed, Elsa asks the enchanted Lohengrin the one question she was forbidden to ask; he disappears and she dies. At least the lawyers don't get 30 percent.

Last week's item on King Solomon -- who wrote, "all rivers run to the sea, yet the sea is never filled" -- promoted the following from Kathryn Martin of Roberts Wesleyan College. "My husband, Dr. John Martin, in preaching Ecclesiastes, has always called Duane Thomas, the Cowboys' running back of the 1970s, a Solomonic scholar. Near the verses you quoted, Solomon declares 'What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again.' After the Super Bowl, Thomas was asked, 'How does it feel to win the ultimate game?' Duane replied, 'How can it be the ultimate game when they play it again next year?'"

Diego Pava of Bogota, Columbia, notes this website for Mexico's semipro American-football league, whose games air in Colombia. Pava reports that he prints out TMQ and reads it while on the bus -- considering Bogotá's infamous traffic jams, one might have time to read an entire TMQ on the bus. He also notes that no less than five of the Mexican semipro teams are the Borregos, Mexi-Spanish for Rams. Maybe next Sunday when the Cards play in Mexico City, he suggests, they can call themselves the Borregos of Arizona.

Hard upon this column's complaint that the Nebraska football team plays a cupcake schedule by virtue of seven home and four away games, Michael Blum of Lincoln, Neb., points out that the big-deal hockey team of TMQ's beloved Colorado College -- Colorado College is Division I in ice hockey and women's soccer, Division III in all other sports -- this season will play 19 home versus 16 away games.

Robin Schultz of Hoover, Ala., noting the stat that 1,057,640 boys participated in high-school football last year in the United States, factors in the 1,696 active players on NFL rosters and computes that even if there were total annual turnover at the pro level, "Only .0016035702129268938391134979766272 percent of the high school players will play in the NFL." This is an estimate, of course.

#### **Next Week**

What if Robin Schultz's estimate is off by .0016035702129268938391134979766273?

## The Law of Comebacks, and why is NASA hiding the shocking truth about the Voyager probe?

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

*(Oct. 4, 2005) -- ¡Caramba de ay que era un cierto juego en Ciudad de México! La muchedumbre se parecía muy sofisticada sobre fútbol americano -- ella animó y gimió en exactamente los lugares derechos. Los cardenales descubrieron cuánto diversión es él a realizarse antes de una casa embalada, y respondieron con su funcionamiento más emocionante bajo verde de Dennis. ¡Tan qué si este juego "casero" era un vuelo de tres horas del Arizona! Comisión Paul Tagliabue de NFL dijo que él anticipa juegos más internacionales del "hogar" para los equipos de los Estados Unidos. China, Japón, Europa y Canadá están toda en la lista para los juegos "caseros" posibles para los equipos de NFL. ¿Cuanto tiempo puede ser hasta que un club de NFL juega un juego del "hogar" en la luna? ¡Aunque la consideración allí no es ninguna presión de aire en la luna y la temperatura superficial mala de la luna es los grados minus-23 centígrados, los purists satisfacen no se quejan de cuando el primer juego de la luna de NFL se juega en un estadio abovedado!*

That garbled Spanish is what I got when I ran the first paragraph of today's column through the Babel Fish universal translator. Here is the intended first paragraph:

Ay caramba, that was some game in Mexico City! The crowd seemed very sophisticated about American football -- they cheered and groaned in exactly the right places. The Cardinals found out how much fun is it to perform before a packed house, and responded with their most exciting performance under Dennis Green. So what if this "home" game was a three-hour flight from Arizona! NFL commissioner Paul Tagliabue said he anticipates more international "home" games for teams from the United States. China, Japan, Europe and Canada are on the list for possible "home" games for NFL teams. How long can it be until an NFL club plays a "home" game on the moon? Though considering there is no air pressure on the lunar surface and the mean surface temperature is minus-23 Celsius, purists don't complain when the first NFL moon game is played in a domed stadium!

In other football news, the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Law of Comebacks holds: Defense starts comebacks, offense stops them. When Kansas City took a 17-0 lead with the home crowd making the stadium shake and the barely-dressed Chiefs' cheerleaders flouncing to a fare-thee-well (see below), Philadelphia's goose looked cooked. Then the Eagles defense asserted itself, returning an interception for a touchdown, recording four takeaways and shutting out the Kansas City offense until the game clock was nearly at all-naughts. The pass-wacky Philadelphia offense gets the media attention, but the Eagles would not be perennial winners without power defense. The Philadelphia defense tied for second against scoring in 2004 -- bet you didn't know that. On Sunday it was defense that keyed the Eagles' comeback; had Kansas City gotten so much as a field goal in the third quarter, the Philadelphia comeback might have petered out. Some media love for the Philadelphia defense, please.

In more NFL news, what a heroic drive for the ages! Trailing 17-13 on the road at City of Tampa, Detroit takes over on its own 7 with 5:14 remaining. Fifteen plays later with 20 seconds remaining, Detroit is on the Buccaneers' 12, touchdown pass and the football gods cheer one of the greatest purist drives ever! Then -- oh no! Here is Tuesday Morning Quarterback's official analysis of the replay decision that overturned the Detroit score, allowing Tampa to win: my analysis is, IT WAS A TOUCHDOWN! Lions fans, the football gods owe you one.

And in still more NFL news, we've only played a month, and yet there are only two possible pairings of undefeated teams remaining in the 2005 season -- Washington versus City of Tampa on Nov. 13 and Indianapolis versus Cincinnati on Nov. 20. Obviously this means something. But what?

**Stats of the Week:** Jersey/A is the highest-scoring team that has played four games; Jersey/B is the lowest-scoring.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** Indianapolis has given up 26 points in its first four games; in its first four

games of 2004, Indianapolis gave up 82 points.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** At one juncture San Francisco had 3 yards of offense and 14 points.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** Jacksonville has not scored 30 points since December 2001. (Noted by Bart Hubbuch of the Florida *Times Union* ;.)

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** After taking the lead in the fourth quarter at Kansas City, the Eagles passed 10 times and rushed four times. (Stat doesn't include deliberate kneel-downs.)

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** Arizona of Mexico has had five changes of starting quarterbacks in 20 games under Dennis Green.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** Buffalo kicker Rian Lindell, who missed a key 45-yard field-goal attempt in the Bills-Saints game, has not hit a field goal from beyond 44 yards since November 2002.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** Buffalo has scored only 3 points in the second half all season.

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** Atlanta, last year's No. 1 one rushing team, currently is No. 1 with an average of 209 yards per game.

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** Defending champion New England is last in rushing.

**Stats of the Week No. 11:** Donovan McNabb is on a pace to break Dan Marino's all-time record for passing yards in a season.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Mike of Overland Park, Kan., nominates Amy of the Kansas City Chiefs. A dance major at the University of Kansas, Amy would like Cameron Diaz to portray her in a movie, according to her team bio. She also reports that she likes independent and foreign movies. Hmm, an indy movie about the Kansas City cheerleaders, starring Cameron Diaz -- I better call superagent Sid Kibbitz and pitch him! (Sid will say he loves it, which will mean he hates it.) Traditional males are urged to peruse Amy's photo gallery. Note: the Chiefs cheerleaders have been rocketing up the charts in the three key areas of dance performance, aesthetic appeal and scanty attire. Can these women seriously be from *Kansas*?

**Sweet Drive of the Week:** Leading 31-17, San Diego took possession at the start of the fourth quarter, hoping to break New England's 21-game winning streak at Next One Will Have Six Moisture-Sensitive Vibrating Blades with Remote Control, Make Coffee, Walk the Dog, Receive High-Resolution GPS and Improve Your Love Life Field. (What's that?) The Bolts proceeded to stage a 14-play, nine-minute drive that was a model of grinding the clock. San Diego ran 11 times and passed only three times, keeping the clock as well as the chains moving; verily, the football gods smiled. When the field goal split the up-rights, it was San Diego 34, New England 17 with only 4:44 remaining, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook. Personnel note: San Diego seems twice the team with the drafted-by-no-one Antonio Gates on the field. His 38-yard reception to the Flying Elvii 1, setting up the touchdown that put the Bolts ahead to stay, was sweet.

**Sweet Play of the Week:** Game scoreless, Atlanta faced first-and-goal on the Minnesota 5. The Falcons run a play-fake; Michael Vick holds the ball on his hip for a full three seconds, unnoticed by the defense, until Alge Crumpler gets into the flat for the touchdown reception. Three seconds is a long time in the NFL, and there Vick is on the tape, just holding the ball, doing nothing, being ignored by Vikings all around him.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Game scoreless, the Giants' Plaxico Burress lined up against St. Louis on the outside of a double receiver set. The slot receiver "went first" in a crossing pattern, running a down-and-out; Burress "went second," cutting under the slot man for a 31-yard touchdown reception

that started the scoring in Jersey/A's big victory. In crossing patterns, the issue is who goes first -- the receiver making the first cut is almost always clearing the area, the receiver who goes second is almost always the target.

**Sour Play of the Week:** Washington-Seattle enters overtime, and the Blue Men Group have the Skins facing third-and-10 -- they blitz six, and Mark Brunell runs 13 yards for the first down. Six snaps later Seattle again has Washington facing third-and-10. Surely the Hawks have learned their lesson! Again they blitz six, 30-yard completion to Santana Moss and Washington kicks the winning field goal.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2:** The Eagles leading 27-24 with nine minutes remaining, Philadelphia faced second-and-goal on the Kansas City 1. To that point, the pass-wacky Nesharim had thrown 42 times and rushed 11 times. Plus, the first-down run had been stuffed. So how could the Chiefs fall for a play-fake in this situation? It's Philadelphia, you know it's going to be a pass! Play-fake, L.J. Smith uncovered for the touchdown that ices the game.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 3:** Trailing 27-17, Les Mouflons faced third-and-3 on the Jersey/A 6 early in the third quarter. The Rams called reverse right; rather than hand off to the reverse man, running back Stephen Jackson attempted a goofy flip that became a fumble recovered by the Giants, and St. Louis never really threatened again. Quarterbacks might be qualified to flip the ball into the air; running backs should hand off only. Terminology note: Fox announcers repeatedly described what happened as a "double reverse," though they should have called the action an "attempted reverse." No reverse ever happened, as the ball never changed direction. Had the flip been successful, the action would have been a single reverse, the ball changing direction once.

**This Week's Galactica Complaint:** Many readers including Cindy Maka of Wheaton, Md., insist I heed the new "reimagined" *Battlestar Galactica*, the No. 1 rated sci-fi show on television. Like Star Wars, Star Trek and Stargate, this series has the all-important word "star" in its title. Male readers have added that two *Galactica* regulars, actresses Grace Park and Tricia Helfer, recently posed wearing just shy of nothing for *Maxim* magazine. If only they'd undress on the show, I would tune in more often!

Spenser, my 10-year-old, refuses to view *Galactica*, asking, "Why watch a show about people who are dying and helpless, plus constantly arguing with each other?" Spenser has a point. Perhaps there is admirable boldness in producing a TV show in which everything that happens is bad; but if I want unrelenting gloom, all I have to do is turn on CNN. For those who don't know, the premise of *Galactica* is that somewhere on the opposite side of the Milky Way, a society of sinister robots attacks an advanced human society. The robots slaughter billions of people; the last few thousand survivors are fleeing in a convoy of spaceships defended by one gigantic military vessel, the battlestar *Galactica*. This "reimagined" show is based on the 1970s series, which was campy and silly. The new version is dark, tense and violent; nothing good ever happens.

One of my problems with *Battlestar Galactica* is that the men and women in the show are depicted as so astonishingly across-the-board stupid, it's tempting to root for the robots. The military officers are stupid; the politicians are stupid; the civilians are stupid. In the pilot, we learn that the entire defense network of the human society could be deactivated by *one single numeric code*. The evil robots, called Cylons, obtain the code, transmit it, and instantly all the human society's military equipment shuts off. Planets are left defenseless as the Cylons bombard them with nuclear bombs; numerous powerful battlestars are shown hanging in space helpless, their engines and weapons shut off, as the Cylons smash them. (The *Galactica* escapes via plot contrivance.) Now if you were an advanced society capable of building gigantic faster-than-light outer-space battleships, would you design them so that *one single numeric code* renders them all totally useless at the same time? Plus the numeric code that instantly shuts off every military device in the entire human society has been entrusted to a psychologically unstable computer scientist, who accidentally gives it to the Cylons. Halfway through the first season, the computer scientist became vice-president of the survivors' government, and everyone -- including military intelligence -- is so astonishingly stupid as to never realize that since scientist was the only one who had the code, he must have been the one to give it to the Cylons.

Next, the show has premise problems that appears unsolvable. One aspect of the premise is that there

are no other intelligent beings in this part of the galaxy -- just the beleaguered humans and the malevolent Cylons. This means there are no aliens to meet in various episodes, no alien societies to depict. True, it must be hard at this point to come up with new alien ideas for sci-fi. You can imagine the scriptwriters' conference: "Okay, how about they find a planet where people can only speak when the sun is out?" The other premise problem is that the Cylons are depicted as having become so powerful, *Galactica* cannot hope to defeat them. If the characters can't overcome the Cylons and can't meet interesting aliens, to create dramatic tension the scriptwriters are forced to have the humans fighting each other, which is what happens. Almost every episode concerns internecine fighting inside the human fleet: plots, mutinies, martial law, claims of treason, everything but people accusing each other of witchcraft. *Galactica* story lines have become so similar that I have trouble telling whether an episode is new or a repeat.

In the most recent two-part cliffhanger, *Galactica* discovers that a second battlestar, *Pegasus*, also outran the robot attack. Do the two ships cooperate to improve each other's odds of survival? No, their officers immediately start arguing and making threats, and at the cliffhanger ending, not to be resolved until January, *Galactica* and *Pegasus* are about to attack each other. Threatening each other is the single stupidest thing the crews of these ships could do in the situation depicted -- but since the show's premise is that there are no aliens and the Cylons are invincible, the only possible plots turn on people quarrelling amongst themselves. Perhaps somewhere in the universe there is a technologically advanced human society made up of incredibly stupid people who do nothing but walk into traps and argue with each other. But why would I find this entertaining?

Upside of *Battlestar Galactica*: great cinematography. Characters speak slowly, there are pauses in dialogue and even scenes when no one is speaking; movie-making techniques rarely seen on television. Plot quibble: the *Pegasus* episode begins with *Galactica* detecting an enormous star cruiser approaching. Immediately the captain radios, "This is the battlestar *Galactica*. Identify yourself or you will be fired on." But we've been told there are no intelligent beings other than humans and Cylons in this part of space, and *Galactica* believes itself the sole good-guy military vessel to survive the Cylon attack. So based on what is known, *Galactica* would assume the enormous star cruiser in the distance is a Cylon capital ship. Why does *Galactica*'s captain issue his ridiculous challenge to a superior vessel, exposing his location in the process? *Battlestar Galactica* producers, please hire a continuity director.

Meanwhile Jose Marquez of Somerville, Mass., commends the sci-fi series *Firefly* and its new theatrical release *Serenity*. Yours truly found it impossible to figure out what was going on in *Firefly*, other than that good-looking wisecracking people were zooming around the universe. Supposedly *Serenity* is comprehensible, and it's produced by Joss Whedon, who did a slap-up job with *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. Marquez notes that Whedon's sci-fi has the virtue of depicting outer space as silent. Usually in sci-fi the viewer hears engines, phasers and explosions echoing through the firmament.

**Did the Clock Strike Midnight on Brett Favre?** It was 12:15 a.m. ET. Brett Favre had brought the Packers back from a 32-13 deficit with two fourth-quarter touchdown passes and two deuce conversions passes, one touchdown off a 90-yard drive. Now it's Carolina 32, Green Bay 29 and the Packers have first down on the Cats' 48 with 1:39 remaining. Another 20 yards and Green Bay can kick the field goal that causes overtime, and maybe this becomes a game that people will be talking about for years to come. Instead incompletion, incompletion, short gain, incompletion, game over. Now the Packers are 0-4, and you have to wonder if the clock has struck midnight on the fabulous Brett Favre.

**Cheer-Babe Professionalism:** The Kansas City, New England and Washington cheerleaders on Sunday sported outfits that covered even less than the 2004 versions, though you might not have thought that possible. Let's have a round of applause for this display of cheer-babe professionalism!

**Sweet 'N' Sour Plays:** Game scoreless, Denver reached the Jacksonville 2 and sent Dwayne Carswell, a former tight end who now plays offensive tackle, in as an extra tight end; wearing a lineman's number, he reported as eligible. Play-fake and a touchdown pass to Carswell. This was sweet for Denver, though a little sour for Jax -- coming into the game, Carswell had 13 career touchdown receptions, so lining him up as an extra blocker at the goal line should have aroused suspicions. Anyway now it's Denver 7, Jacksonville 0, and the Broncos reach the Jaguars 1. Again Carswell enters the game and reports as eligible. Surely you're not going to fall for this a second time! Touchdown pass, and Denver goes on to an easy

victory; very, very sour for Jax.

**Why Are You Kicking????????????:** Trailing 24-3 on the final play of the third quarter, the Titans faced fourth-and-6 on the Colts 20. In trotted the field-goal unit; TMQ rent his garments, fell prostrate and cried out to the football gods, *aaaiiiiiieeeeeeeeeee!* You're down by 21 points with a quarter to play against the suddenly-hot-again Indianapolis offense; what earthly good will it do to cut the margin to 18 points? You need a touchdown or you should just pack it in and go get a blueberry-almond martini. Outraged, the football gods pushed the field-goal try wide; the Colts scored on the ensuing possession and put the game out of reach. No league insiders question the devotion to winning of Tennessee coach Jeff Fisher; this decision was just a blunder. For a decision by a coach whose dedication to winning league insiders do question, see below.

**Why Are You Punting????????????:** Trailing 16-7 with 4:21 remaining, Buffalo faced fourth-and-5 on its 35; in came the punting unit. Sure fourth-and-5 is a tough down, but you trail by two scores with the sun setting on the game: all New Orleans had to do was go three-and-out and the clock situation would become impossible. It took the Saints only four snaps to get past the point where they would have been had the Bills gone for it and missed anyway. Two weeks ago, the Bills trailing by 13 on the final play of the third quarter, coach Mike Mularkey ordered a punt *from the opposition 39*, signaling his players it was okay to quit on the game -- that the priority was containing the margin of defeat. Again this week Mularkey seemed more concerned with containing the margin of defeat, thus deflecting criticism from himself, then trying all-out to win. Tuesday Morning Quarterback asks: if Bill Belichick is trailing 16-7 with 4:21 remaining and facing fourth-and-5, is there even one chance in a million he sends in the punt unit?

**Best Blocks:** Score Jersey/A 10, St. Louis 7, the Giants handed off to Tim Carter on the reverse left; Carter went 22 yards to the Rams' 3, setting up a touchdown. Announcers lavishly extolled the amazing fact that Eli Manning got a block; but quarterbacks are supposed to block on reverses, so Manning was merely doing his job. More impressive was the offensive-line play. Giants left guard David Diehl pulled right, influencing the defense; then center Shaun O'Hara made a perfect peel-back block on the left to spring Carter. Kansas City used the same action -- guard pulls right, reverse left, quarterback makes a block -- for a 23-yard gain against Philadelphia. In this case, the big block came from tackle Jordan Black.

**Worst Blocks:** In my preseason preview, I noted Buffalo management's strange indifference to the team's need for offensive linemen. During the past five drafts, the Bills have invested eight No. 1 and No. 2 picks in the glamour positions of quarterback, running back and wide receiver; against only one first- or second-round pick invested in blockers. It's showing, as the Bills so far have a cover-your-eyes-awful offensive line. With the score close in Week 3, Buffalo failed to convert a fourth-quarter fourth-and-1 in opposition territory; the Bills offensive line got zero push. In a close game on Sunday, Buffalo failed to convert a fourth-quarter fourth-and-1 in opposition territory; *five* Saints hit the runner in the backfield! These were the decisive plays in Buffalo's past two losses, and on both the offensive line might as well have brought out pillows since it lay down on the field. To add insult to incompetency, on the snap before the failed fourth-and-1 against New Orleans, Buffalo failed on third-and-1 -- as the Bills offensive line got zero push. The Bills have only three touchdowns, and some blame the poor performance of new quarterback J.P. Losman. But pass-blocking is so consistently bad, Losman has to start scrambling on the count of "one thousand two." The Buffalo offensive line is going neck-and-neck with the Houston line for the dubious distinction of worst in the league -- but unlike the Texans, this season the Bills expected to go somewhere other than back to the drawing board.

Worst blocks rivals: in three games, Houston has surrendered 20 sacks, more than the combined sacks-allowed total of four entire teams that have played four games (San Diego, Jersey/A, Cincinnati and Indianapolis). Going unnoticed somehow -- except by Daunte Culpepper -- is that the Minnesota offensive line also has allowed 20 sacks.

**Maybe Computers Aren't That Smart:** Here what's I got when I translated the computer-generated Spanish of the first paragraph back into English, using the same Babel Fish utility:

*Caramba ay that was a certain game in City of Mexico! The crowd looked like very sophisticated on American football -- it animated and moaned exactly in the right places. The Cardinals discovered how much diversion is to be made before a packed house, and responded with their more exciting operation under Green of Dennis. So what if this "homemade" game were a flight of three hours from Arizona! Commissioner Paul Tagliabue of NFL said he anticipates more international games of the "home" for the equipment of the United States. China, Japan, Europe and Canada are everything in the list for possible "homemade" games for the NFL equipment. Whichever time can be until an NFL club plays a game of the "home" in the Moon? Although the consideration is not no air pressure in the Moon there and the bad skin temperature of the Moon is the Centigrade degrees minus-23. Purists do not complain when the first game of the NFL Moon gambles in a vaulted stage!*

**The Real-World Effect of Strange Supreme Court Decisions:** Yesterday, the Supreme Court came back into session under new Chief Justice John Roberts. Last February, the Court made a strange ruling that private property could be seized by government in order to hand the property to another private party. ("Eminent domain" seizure of private property for general public use is clearly constitutional and widely accepted.) Critics predicted the ruling would be used by corrupt politicians to steal land from the disenfranchised and award it to wealthy insiders. Well, it's starting already. Read this chilling story buried in Sunday's *Newark Star Ledger*.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again:** Dallas blitzes six, 79-yard completion to Randy Moss sets up the first Raiders score.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again, and Again, and Again:** Three times against Philadelphia, Kansas City big-blitzed six; each time a receiver was running free, but Donovan McNabb missed him. Surely the Chiefs realize they are living on borrowed time and won't big-blitz again! Score tied at 27 at the start of the fourth quarter, Kansas City blitzes six. Easy 34-yard completion to Greg Lewis, the Eagles scored to take the lead on the possession and never looked back.

**Next Month in *Playboy*: "The Women of Tongue Modeling":** Previous Tuesday Morning Quarterback items have noted the rising prevalence in cinema and advertising of attractive young women sticking out their tongues. This gesture, which once meant "to heck with you," has become an erotic image, given what it causes men to think about. If it's erotic and can be used in advertising, then perhaps it was only a matter of time until the profession of "tongue modeling" came into existence! See this *New York Times* article, and note it is by Warren St. John, whose college football book *Rammer Jammer Yellow Hammer* is well worth getting your hands on.

**Life Imitates Sci-Fi :**Last week astronomers confirmed that Voyager 1, a space probe launched by NASA in 1977, has become the first artificial object to reach the "heliosheath." This is the boundary of the solar system, an area where solar wind from our sun stops and the interstellar medium begins. The heliosheath is about 95 astronomical units away, meaning about 95 times as far here as the Earth is from the sun. Details on Voyager's exit from the solar system are here at the mission home page, including an "interstellar video." Anyway, there is something critically important I must tell you about Voyager -- but first, a digression to *Star Trek*.

In the 1979 movie *Star Trek: the Motion Picture*, in the 23rd century Kirk and Spock encounter a colossal machine, nearly the size of a planet, that has extremely advanced technical knowledge, including invincible weaponry and the ability to materialize objects the size of starships. The machine calls itself V'Ger. At the center of V'Ger, Kirk and Spock find -- the Voyager probe launched by NASA in 1977! The explanation is that the probe fell into a black hole and was transported to a planet of living machines; the living machines gave Voyager super-advanced technology to allow it to fulfill its NASA-programmed mission of learning about the galaxy; V'Ger used the super-advanced technology to acquire all possible technical knowledge, but in the process became hostile to carbon-based life forms.

*Star Trek: the Motion Picture* has one of the best goofy scenes in the annals of sci-fi. V'Ger reaches Earth and threatens to destroy the planet. When all seems lost, Kirk notices that a wire is loose on the outside of the Voyager probe at the center of V'Ger's brain; Kirk re-connects the wire, and instantly V'Ger becomes friendly. So this device possesses ultimate knowledge of technology, yet can't figure out how to

attach a wire? *Star Trek: the Motion Picture* ends with one of the plot quirks too common in sci-fi -- namely, an incredible discovery that is immediately forgotten. Repaired, V'Ger decides to ascend to a higher plane of existence. Before doing so, V'Ger fulfills its mission by transmitting to Earth everything it has learned -- that is, gives humanity all possible technical knowledge. Yet when the next *Star Trek* movie comes along, the information from V'Ger has been totally forgotten and the shields and warp engines are failing just like before.

Why do I mention all this? First, this is Tuesday Morning Quarterback: I don't have to have a reason. Second, NASA has said it soon intends to switch off Voyager. Why turn off a space probe that is functioning just fine? Officially this is to save money on telemetry monitoring. Yours truly suspects the real reason is that NASA learned Voyager is about to fall into a black hole, and wants to deactivate the probe before it can be transported to a planet of living machines and acquire ultimate power! Fun fact: Voyager has an 8-kilobyte active memory in its main computers, versus a standard 128 megabytes in new desktop PCs for home use. That is to say, your home computer has 16,000 times more processing power than the computer running a spacecraft that has left the solar system.

**"We Have Met the Enemy and They Are Ours," Oliver Hazard Perry Emailed from His BlackBerry:** If it's really true that the Irish Republican Army has renounced violence, this could be a historic moment in peacemaking. It also could save the Republican movement, whose stock was falling faster than WorldCom. How was the group's July announcement that it would disarm made? Via a video press release on a DVD that was FedExed to news organizations.

**Wonderlic Is to SAT As Regatta Is to ...:** Sam Walker of the *Wall Street Journal* last week detailed team-by-team scores on the infamous Wonderlic brainpower test given to NFL players. The teams with the top-five average scores were the Rams, Raiders, Titans, Bucs and Chargers; the bottom-five scores came from the Bengals, Redskins, Chiefs, Cardinals and Packers. Four of the top five, Walker notes, have made a recent Super Bowl appearance: maybe brainpower really matters in football. In the college ranks, Stanford, Purdue, BYU and Cal had higher average Wonderlic scores than the highest-scoring NFL team, St. Louis.

**More Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization:** Advertising promos for Sunday's *60 Minutes* declared, "The amazing story of a man with multiple personalities who does not know about his own secret life!"

**Scoop and Score:** Twice in the first quarter, San Francisco defenders saw a fumble bouncing, scooped the ball up and ran for a touchdown -- rather than diving on the ball as coaches have instructed since time immemorial. A few weeks ago, I was watching my oldest son's high school football team. In a close game, the opponent fumbled, one of our guys had a clear path to the end zone but just fell on the ball -- as coaches have instructed since time immemorial. Afterward, I mentioned that just falling on the ball is the right thing; Grant, the Official First Child of TMO, countered, "No, Dad, you should 'scoop and score.' That's what they teach now." Apparently, many coaches are now teaching "scoop and score" -- that it's better to try and scoop up the ball in stride for an easy touchdown, even if this means losing some fumbles you could get by just falling on them.

**I Have Memories Triggered by a Woman Named Madeleine, But That's the Most We Can Say on a Family Website:** The Official Wife, Official Kids and I once lived for a while in Belgium, and when Official Brother Neil came to visit, one thing that struck him were the freshly baked madeleines at the patisserie around the corner. As a professor of literature at the seriously purple Texas Christian University, Neil of course knew the famous passage about madeleines from Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past* -- a work scholars now prefer to call *In Search of Lost Time*, which is how Proust himself translated the title into English. Neil explained it had not occurred to him that madeleines were actual pastries the people of Europe have for centuries been dipping into actual tea; he'd thought of madeleines as something Proust made up.

Comes now word that madeleines are something Proust made up! Edmund Levin of *Good Morning America* tested numerous recipes for madeleines, and found none crumble in tea in the way Proust so elaborately described. It seems the original manuscript of Proust's masterpiece elaborately described "dry

toast," which does form crumbs in tea; later Proust changed the reference. Perhaps Proust was trying to jazz up his text by fixating on madeleines, which are delicious, rather than on dry toast, which is pedestrian. And madeleines are classy; you can't get a bag of them without strolling through Parisian streets to a bakery, or at least sending your maid Françoise. Here, though, is TMQ's theory on why toast got changed to madeleines -- Marcel Proust had a bad memory!

## RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** San Diego 56, Menlo 0. The dining halls of Menlo College in Atherton, Calif., offer only locally grown certified organic produce, organic cheeses, tofu, hormone-free grain-fed poultry and beef and a "composting and recycling program". Let's hope lunch is not being recycled. But Menlo -- if you want the football team to win games, looks like they need steaks with lots of artificial additives.

**Bonus Obscure College Score:** Chowan 20, Southern Virginia 0. Located in Murfreesboro, N.C., Chowan College confers an annual Hobson Award. Presumably someone who is offered the Hobson Award faces a Hobson's choice!

**Obscure College Fight Song:** TMQ noted last week Saint Olaf College has a 6-foot-9 president. Doug Tyson of York, Pa., adds that Saint Olaf has one of the goofiest fight songs in sports. Go here, then click "listen."

**College Nickname Slump:** Mark Wheeler of Ardmore, Pa., notes there are three schools with Owl nicknames in Division I-A football -- Rice, Temple and Florida Atlantic -- and they are a combined 0-13.

### Reader Animadversion:

Last week's column praised Visa for using offensive linemen in a commercial, saying this was the first time "in recent memory" a big advertiser had acknowledged the O-line.

Many readers including Rob Iracane of Madison, N.J., noted that a little less than a decade ago, Nike had the Denver offensive line in a commercial that parodied the running of the bulls in Pamplona. That was back when they were still talking to the press! I mean the Denver offensive line, not the bulls.

(The Denver offensive line won't talk to the press because they are sick of being accused of using dirty attempt-to-injure tactics, an accusation that, in my view, has often been accurate. This year, the league strengthened rules against attempt-to-injure blocking techniques, and Fred Seely of the *Orlando Sun Sentinel* reports Jax coaches scanning Broncos' game film in advance of Sunday's meeting between the teams noted no 2005 dirty line play.)

Steve Alt of Concord, N.C., praised a high-football-IQ play that occurred in the Panthers-Dolphins meeting. Carolina kicked off; the ball was bouncing along the sideline deep in Miami territory. Marine Mammals' returner Wes Welker carefully put one foot out of bounds, then reached back in to touch the ball. Often TMQ notes that gentlemen who are professional kick returners don't seem to know the many quirks of kicking rules. Welker clearly knew that if a player who is out of bounds touches a kickoff that is inbounds, the ball is ruled out of bounds and the receiving team takes possession on its 40. "Nick Saban must have appreciated this display of football IQ, for on Miami's next play from scrimmage, he called an end-around for Welker, his only offensive touch of the day," Alt notes.

Daniel Austin of Reading, United Kingdom, notes that anyone who thinks \$325 is too much to become an English Lord can become a Scottish Laird for about \$30.

Many readers including David Spangler of Tainan, Taiwan, wrote to note that the Broncos' first play from scrimmage in the Denver-Kansas City Monday Night Football game was listed in the official Game Book as "1-10-DEN20(11:19) A. Lelie left end to DEN 37 for 17 yards (S. Knight). Triple Reverse." But it

wasn't the rare, almost never seen triple reverse; it was a single reverse. Jake Plummer handed to a gentleman going one way, who handed back to Ashley Lelie going the other way. To make it a triple reverse, Lelie would have needed to had it to a third ballcarrier who went back in the original direction, who handed to a fourth ballcarrier who went back in Lelie's direction. This erroneous Game Book entry might trick future historians into believing that a triple reverse actually occurred in the National Football League in the year 2005!

To readers -- including Charlotte Lancaster of Hoboken, N.J. -- who have asked when the promised Mike Nugent Watch will start, I'm waiting until the Jets and Bears (now home of Doug Brien) have played the same number of games.

TMQ was calling the place the Steelers play Ketchup Field; a reader proposed that since mustard yellow is its dominant color, the name be changed to Mustard Palace. Along comes a compromise suggestion -- and Mr. Data, make it so!

Pay homage to both:  
 "Condiment Coliseum."  
 Ketchup *and* mustard.  
 -- *Matt Meyers, Charlottesville, Va.*

Finally concerning the recent items on whether high-energy atom smashers will inadvertently create some novel subatomic structure with unwelcome properties, such as the ability to crush the Earth out of existence, Michelle Thaller, an astrophysicist at Cal Tech's famed Jet Propulsion Laboratory and a Packers' fan, wrote that scientists are preparing to create black holes! Just really, really small black holes.

Thaller writes that advanced particle accelerators "will create the incredibly high energy densities needed to form an 'event horizon,' an area where space is so warped that no path lets you escape. But cosmic rays, which are natural high-energy particles, slam into us all the time, and they naturally create even higher energy densities than accelerators will be capable of for a long time. This means that if anything dangerous could happen when there is a very small high-energy interaction, existence would have gone to heck long ago. As I write this, a few subatomic particles blown off from a distant supernova explosion and accelerated through the galactic magnetic fields are striking my body and popping off little black holes every-which-where. Tiny black holes are in your breakfast Wheaties. They're in my cheesehead. They're in Joan Rivers -- though, they're trying to get out. Incredibly high energies at incredibly small scales are common in our universe, we're just too big and slow to notice. The particle accelerators under construction really are weenie little girlie men compared to cosmic rays. Now, why use an accelerator to create miniature black holes? To test 'string' and 'membrane' theories about other dimensions. Different versions of the theories predict different threshold energies for black holes. If the actual threshold energies can be observed, that might give us some experimental evidence to help science begin to figure out what the larger, higher-dimensional universe might be like."

OK, Michelle, so you won't inadvertently destroy the Earth -- you'll inadvertently open a doorway to another dimension. Why do I not find this reassuring?

**Next Week:** Inadvertently opening a doorway to another dimension, Maurice Clarett discovers he's not wanted there, either.

## How to predict scores without knowing who's playing, and do black holes come in other colors?

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

(Oct. 11, 2005) -- I'm ready to predict the exact final score of an NFL game, and just to make things interesting I will handicap myself by not knowing who's playing. My prediction: Home Team 20, Visiting Team 17.

Regular readers of Tuesday Morning Quarterback know it is a complete waste of time for anyone to attempt to predict an exact NFL final score. Last winter yours truly tabulated the final score predictions offered over the years by the *Sporting News*, the *New York Times* and Scripps Howard News Service; of 2,426 predictions, five were correct. That represents one-in-500 odds of predicting an exact NFL final score. You might as well try to predict exactly on what day the next lunar landing will occur. But while it's a waste of time to attempt to predict scores game-by-game, generic final scores make sense. In 2004, there were four NFL contests that ended Home Team 34, Visiting Team 31; four that ended Visiting Team 17, Home Team 10; three each that ended Home Team 24, Visiting Team 17, Home Team 20, Visiting Team 17 and Visiting Team 20, Home Team 17. So suppose last season you had simply endlessly forecast that every game would result in the home team winning by a count of 34-31. You would have been right four of 256 times -- better than *USA Today*, which forecast games individually and went 0-for-256.

For the remainder of the NFL season, I'm forecasting every single game will end with the home team winning by a count of 20-17. That outcome happened three times last season, and has already happened twice this season. The first beauty of my system is that I am predicting a statistically likely combination of scores. Sometimes on sports websites that are let's just say not as good as NFL.com, you see touts predicting that games will end 33-19 or 15-12 or some other improbable combination; stick with likely scores. The second beauty of my system is that you don't need to possess incredible insider information, you don't have to pore over tables of statistics, you don't even have to know which teams are playing! You just endlessly predict that every game will be won by the home team by a count of 20-17. Of course you will mainly be wrong, but you'll be wrong less often than if you tried to forecast game-by-game. And if you're in an office pool, my system makes far more sense than, saying, thinking about it.

In other football news, something happened Sunday that happens all the time in high-school and college football, yet is rare in the National Football League -- the victor ran up the score. Leading 35-3 at half-time, Green Bay kept Brett Favre in the game the entire third quarter, until the count was 45-3; Favre threw eight times after the Packers took the 35-3 lead, which would have required the greatest regular-season comeback in NFL history for New Orleans to overcome. Yes, the spectacular final 52-3 margin was cathartic for the Green Bay faithful, who had endured five consecutive losses. But there's no doubt Green Bay was rubbing it in, and against the hapless, vagabond Saints no less. Running up the score is offensive at the high-school and collegiate levels, where an official reason for games is to teach sportsmanship; running up the score is the reverse of sportsmanship. The balance is different in the pros, where the first reason for the games is the entertainment of the audience, and where the players are well-paid grownups. There is no doubt the Lambeau Field crowd was better entertained because Favre stayed in and the Packers padded their point total; and while it is wrong for poor-sport high-school or college coaches to hurt the feelings of players on lesser teams by running up the score, New Orleans Saints are professionals who know their private feelings are irrelevant to a professional event. Still, yours truly was uncomfortable when Favre threw two consecutive passes from the Saints' 8-yard line with Green Bay ahead 42-3; this was an obvious attempt to humiliate an opponent. For Green Bay to show questionable sportsmanship is not good karma -- especially at a time when the Packers need the football gods to smile on them if their season is to be salvaged.

In other news, after his former Jets and Patriots players Keyshawn Johnson, Terry Glenn and Drew Bledsoe came up big in Dallas' rout of Philadelphia, Cowboys' coach Bill Parcells announced that Harry Carson, Jimbo Covert, Joe Morris, Jim Burt, Terry Kinard and Bart Oates would join the team for Sunday's Giants-at-Dallas clash. "There may also be players changing uniforms during the game," Parcells

announced.

Finally on the crystal-ball front, reader Omar Jalife of Mexico City notes that not only does the consensus of users continue to lead the experts on the Yahoo! NFL predictions page, my off-price ultra-generic prediction -- simply, Home Team Wins -- is outperforming them all. The best Yahoo! expert is 44-30; the consensus of users is 45-29; Home Team Wins is 46-28. Dear Yahoo!, I now formally challenge you to include the Tuesday Morning Quarterback ultra-generic prediction on your football picks page. This would be entertaining and keep users clicking, so add the TMQ prediction and see how it does. Whassamatter, Yahoo! -- you scared or something?

**Stats of the Week:** Owing to penalties, Detroit ran six consecutive plays from the Baltimore 1-yard line -- and needed all six to score.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** Dallas outgained Philadelphia by 327 yards and 22 first downs.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** Indianapolis leads the league in scoring defense, allowing just six points per game.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** Arizona and Washington both exceeded 400 yards of offense and lost.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** First overall draft pick Alex Smith of San Francisco threw 23 times for a net gain of 44 yards.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** Buffalo has a losing record despite being plus-seven in turnovers; Washington has a winning record despite being minus-five. Half the explanation: Buffalo has six points in the second half.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** Baltimore and Miami combined to commit 39 penalties.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** The NFC North is 0-8 on the road. Stat submitted by Zack Slabotsky of West Bloomfield, Mich.

**Stats of the Week No. 9** The sole victory for Arizona has come in Mexico.

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** Seven teams allowed more points on Sunday than the Colts have allowed all season. Stat submitted by Craig Ellenport of North Massapequa, N.Y.

**Stats of the Week No. 11:** With Indianapolis the sole undefeated team, there is no possible pairing of undefeateds for the remainder of the NFL season.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Stacy Pratt of Tulsa, Okla., nominates Amber of the Cincinnati Bengals. She's a graduate student at the University of Cincinnati and an ICU nurse -- male fantasy overload! I mean being a nurse and a cheerleader, not being a graduate student and a cheerleader. According to her team bio, Amy has both a brother and a sister who are United States Marines just returned from Iraq. Asked her favorite Bengals' player, she answered, "Carson Palmer and Brian Simmons." That's two players!

**Best Purist Drive After the Clock Struck Midnight:** Trailing 22-21 at 12:07 a.m. Eastern, Pittsburgh took over on its 38 with 4:36 remaining. Rather than go pass-wacky, the Steelers staged a classic clock-management drive, running seven times and passing just thrice. The result was both the winning field goal and the scoreboard showing 10 seconds left, so the host Chargers could not reply. You just don't see many modern teams running up the middle when trailing late in the fourth quarter, and last night -- rather, this morning -- Pittsburgh did so to perfection.

**Sweet Play of the Week:** The defending champions leading 7-0, New England had second-and-10 on

the Atlanta 45. Tom Brady faked a screen left, then did a dancer's "turn out," spinning around his outside shoulder, and fired a screen right to tight end Daniel Graham, who went the distance behind a perfect block by guard Stephen Neal.

**Sweet Special-Teams Play:** College coaches often send almost everybody after the punter, while rarely do more than a couple of men rush the punt in the NFL. Why? As TMQ has noted, "If the coach orders a big punt rush and the result is roughing the kicker, then the coach is lambasted; if the coach sends a token rush while everyone else drops back to block, the receiving team may end up with poor field position, but there's nothing to criticize the coach about." Because so few NFL teams go after punts, when the tactic is tried it's often effective. With Jacksonville leading 7-0 in the first quarter, Cincinnati lined up to punt. Eight men came after the punter; block, and a field goal on the possession makes it a 10-0 Jaguars lead.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play:** Trailing 10-6 with 3:01 remaining, the Cleveland Browns (3.0b) had first-and-10 on the Chicago 33. The Browns called a "max protect" play on which eight blocked and only two receivers ran routes; Antonio Bryant got deep on the left side for the touchdown that gave Cleveland its winning points. Yours truly watched the tape of this play several times in rapt fascination. First, because eight are blocking five pass rushers, nobody ever gets near quarterback Trent Dilfer -- the Bears' defensive line is a good seven yards from Dilfer as he waits for Bryant to shake his man. Second, Bryant only has one man to shake because he's single-covered. With five Bears rushing the passer and the rest dropping into coverage, six defenders were available to cover just two receivers; yet Bryant, going deep, was single-covered. Where were all the rest of the Chicago defenders? A sweet play for Cleveland, very sour for Chicago.

**Sweet High-School Play:** Leading 17-3, Dallas faced fourth-and-1 on the Philadelphia 12. A standard high-school trick near the goal line is to bring in someone who never plays, then give him the ball. In trotted backup fullback Lousaka Polite, who had one career reception entering Sunday's contest. Play-fake and a pass to Polite in the flat; no one covered him, touchdown.

**Sour Play of the Week:** Trailing 20-13 on the second play of the fourth quarter and facing fourth-and-1 on the Jacksonville 39, Cincinnati made the right Maroon Zone call and went for it, rather than launch a Preposterous Punt. The Jax defense stuffed the run; this was the biggest play of the Sunday night game. The Jaguars did not even have an "overstack" on the field, just their regular front seven. Yet runner Rudi Johnson was hit in the backfield -- a sour play for a Cincinnati offensive line that's otherwise having a good season.

**Sour Ruling of the Week:** The "tuck rule" reared its annoying head again Sunday. The Redskins appeared to score a safety at a key juncture against the Broncos, on an apparent Jake Plummer fumble that Plummer fell on in his end zone. After viewing replays, referee Peter Morelli overturned the safety, saying the tuck rule made the down an incompleteness. Morelli was enforcing the rule correctly -- but it's a dumb rule, as it rewards the quarterback for losing control of the ball! Plummer started to move his arm, tried to stop and dropped the ball; in common-sense terms that's a fumble. Denver sent out its kickoff team to free-kick following the safety that Denver coaches thought happened. The obvious reform is to change the tuck rule. An alternative, suggested by Rahul Keshap of Charlottesville, Va., is classify tuck-rule instances as intentional grounding. The tuck rule usually comes into play when the quarterback is about to get sacked -- as in the situation at Denver and the situation in the New England-Oakland Snow Bowl. (As I've argued before, the way the tuck rule is written, quarterbacks could avoid almost all sacks simply by making a tucking motion then dropping the ball on the ground.) Jeff Blanc of Gaithersburg, Md., adds that if the tuck-rule action really is an incompleteness, the pass does not get to the line of scrimmage and is never catchable for an eligible receiver -- and this is pretty much the definition of grounding. To prevent the rule from rewarding the quarterback who loses control of the ball as he's about to be sacked, enforce the tuck as intentional grounding.

**The Yugo Girl -- Get It?** Last week, Zastava, the Serbian company that built the now-defunct Yugo, signed a deal to begin producing Fiats under license. The first step will be to rebuild Zastava's factory, which was bombed by NATO in 1999. A Fiat-Yugo alliance -- can you think of a worse conjunction of low quality? It's like saying you've invented a new food that combines Spam and corn husks. Anyway, it's a

shame the Yugo went out of production just a few years too soon. If it was still around, the company could offer a model called the Girl.

**My "Words Produced Per Dollar of Compensation" Makes Me the All-Time Leader in Sports-writing**

News story: "The University of Chicago's Richard Thaler and Yale University's B. Cade Massey applied their science to the annual task facing general managers in the NFL. Using statistics such as 'yards gained per dollar of compensation,' the pair concluded the NFL's top draft picks are overpriced." Thaler and Massey got a lot of sports-page ink for asserting many top draft picks are overpriced. What, you needed an academic study to figure this out? Who *doesn't* know that many high draft picks get too much while many late-round picks get too little?

Thaler and Massey's paper maintains that the NFL draft system actually penalizes losing teams by awarding them the top picks in the draft -- selections used on players who receive huge bonuses and are overpriced compared to what they accomplish. Maybe, but then why don't teams at the beginning of the first round simply trade their selections straight-up for picks at the bottom of the first round? Presumably most NFL teams are what economists call "rational actors," and would get rid of high picks if such selections actually were worth less than lower picks. That NFL clubs never offer a straight exchange of high picks for low picks suggests they perceive this not to be in their rational self-interest, and it can't be that every single one of 32 NFL teams fails to grasp its own self-interest. Perhaps teams calculate the bad press and fan anger that would be incurred by deliberate sacrifice of high picks would outweigh any salary-cap leverage gained. Thaler and Massey don't address the value of public relations in their study, but public relations is an economic good and one of considerable worth to organizations in the entertainment business, such as sports teams. Here, the *Wall Street Journal* analyzes the top-paid players in the NFL and finds that general managers actually have been doing a fairly good job of steering the richest contracts to the best performers.

Anyway, it's not the NFL draft system that's misguided, it's the "winner take all" premise of contemporary American society. Top draft choices are hardly the only ones overpaid compared to what they accomplish -- so are most CEOs, and many at the tops of other professions. See this important book for more on that topic. And no, I don't think everyone should be paid the same: doctors should earn more than cab drivers. But top-versus-bottom pay ratios are way out of whack in much of society; big-corporate CEOs now average more than 300 times the income of hourly workers, and that's ridiculous.

**Preposterous Pooch Punt:** With the game tied at 7, Die Morgenmuffel -- see below -- faced fourth-and-8 on the Seattle 35. The Rams lined up in field-goal formation, then placekicker Jeff Wilkins pooch-punted for a touchback, Seahawks' ball on the 20. The Rams exchanged a good chance of three points for a trivial gain of 15 yards in field position, plus it took Seattle exactly one snap to get past the point where the ball would have been if St. Louis had gone for the field goal and missed. It would have been a 52-yard attempt under ideal conditions (domed stadium), and Wilkins has made eight of his last nine from beyond 50. You can't help but suspect the Rams, who like surprise calls, got too cute here for their own good.

As for Die Morgenmuffel, for years TMQ has been calling the St. Louis franchise Les Mouflons -- French for the Corsican ram whose curved horn adorns the team's helmets. Then a while back I used the German word "Morgenmuffel," which means a slow starter, especially someone who is not a morning person. Reader Jörg Aumann of Schwarzenholz, Germany, suggests that since the Rams are off to a slow start, we keep with the international theme and change their cognomon from Les Mouflons to Die Morgenmuffel. (Morgenmuffel is both singular and plural.) And "Muffel," Aumann notes, is German for mouflon. So until such time as St. Louis' fortunes improve, the team will be Die Morgenmuffel to this column.

**Al Franken's "Sodom and Gomorrah on the Seven Seas" Cruise Was Cancelled When the Ship Began Listing to Port:** Last summer, Bill O'Reilly cancelled a planned "values cruise" when few signed up for the trip at a \$1,099 to \$1,629 depending on room, plus \$250 to attend a cocktail party with O'Reilly. The cruise, sponsored by Corporate Travel Service and by the Thomas More Law Center, was to have been held aboard Holland America's ocean liner the *Westerdam*, with stops in Jamaica and Grand Cayman; the voyage was to feature ship-board seminars on conservative policy and was titled the "Battle for American Values Cruise." Apparently American values don't include truth in advertising, since

although O'Reilly's photo was all over the promotional brochure (which has since disappeared from the web), the fine print cautioned, "Passengers agree that neither Corporate Travel Service nor the Thomas More Law Center will be held responsible or liable for any refund in the event that circumstances prevent Mr. O'Reilly's participation in the Battle for America's Values cruise." O'Reilly is hardly the only one pulling this artful dodge: Britney Spears regularly skips the season-ending show at the Britney Spears Camp for the Performing Arts.

**Mike Nugent Watch:** In my preseason AFC preview, I posited that Nugent, highest-drafted placekicker in years, would do no better for the Jets this season than Doug Brien, whom Jersey/B cut and who is now with Chicago. So far, my projection is performing about as well as most NFL predictions -- totally wrong. Nugent is 4-for-7, while Brien is 1-for-4 and was inactive Sunday while another gentleman tried out for the Chicago placekicking job. Kicker update: Buffalo's Rian Lindell, whom TMQ last week called out for not hitting a field goal from farther than 44 yards since November 2002, hit a clutch fourth-quarter 47-yarder.

**Missed Opportunity:** Owing to multiple penalties against the Nevermores, Detroit kicked off in opposition territory, a circumstances almost never seen. The Lions' kickoff was spotted on the Baltimore 40. Detroit, leading 21-10 at the end of the third, just kicked away, and the kickoff sailed out of the end zone, giving Jason Hanson a touchback for his stats. Why didn't the Lions onside kick? A failed onside would have left Baltimore deep in its territory anyway, while a success would have iced the game.

**Ravens Woes:** When do Baltimore fans want to see 21 penalties again? Nevermore! Highlight reels will forever show the play on which Joey Harrington throws what looks like a really bad incomplete pass; Detroit's Kevin Jones casually picks up the rock and stands there patting it; then Jones realizes the whistle never sounded and he's holding a live fumble; Jones runs 27 yards to the Baltimore 2, setting up the touchdown that made it Lions 14, Ravens 0. Yes, the play was strange. But Jones ran past four Baltimore defenders who did nothing at all -- stood watching him, though no whistle had sounded. Even the Stanford band played better defense than that!

On Sunday, Ronde Barber of the Bucs punched an official and was not thrown out, while Terrell Suggs of Baltimore screamed at an official and was ejected; Baltimore sportstalk radio said this shows unfairness against the Ravens. But it was 100 percent clear Suggs should have been disqualified. As an extremely highly paid professional, Suggs is supposed to know that any player who menaces an official gets the thumb. That leaves the question of why Barber wasn't tossed. His punch to umpire Butch Hannah was an accident, in the sense that Barber was trying to punch a Jets' player -- which in itself should have gotten him ejected. What was at work here is that Ronde Barber has a reputation around the league as a good person, so the officiating crew gave him the benefit of the doubt. There aren't many on the Baltimore team or sideline with good reputations around the league, so when the Lions-Ravens game became tense, officials offered no benefit of the doubt.

**Ernest Wilford Play of the Week:** "ERN-est WIL-ford, ERN-est WIL-ford," yours truly and Official Child Spenser, a Jax fan, chanted as Wilford caught an 11-yard touchdown. Scott Self of Seffner, Fla., points out that Jacksonville is 4-0 in games in which Wilford scores a touchdown. Work it to Wilford!

**Are Gamma-Ray Bursts the Mushrooms Clouds of Outer Space?:** Gamma-ray bursts are the most powerful events humanity has observed. In some, for an instant one point in deep space appears to emit more energy than all the stars of a galaxy combined; the brightest recorded such burst, whose light reached Earth in 1998, was so intense that for an instant the source seemed more luminous than the entire universe combined. Relatively long gamma-ray bursts are believed caused by the collapse of giant stars much more massive than our sun. Last week, astronomers in several countries jointly declared their belief, based on results from a spacecraft NASA launched to study gamma bursts, that brief gamma-ray bursts are caused by collisions of neutron stars, which are the dense remnants of old, dying stars.

Maybe this analysis is right, but allow me (actually, you can't stop me) to repeat a fear I expressed here last year: that gamma bursts are muzzle flashes, "the emission lines of horrific weapons being used by civilizations that have acquired fantastic knowledge compared to us, but no additional wisdom." The

standard pop-cultural assumption is that advanced aliens will be benevolent, freed of primitive belligerence. What if instead space aliens are at the Henry Kissinger level of development in terms of morality -- but equipped with star drive and gamma bombs? It just seems spooky as if we might be observing the evidence of distant combat using weapons of cataclysmic power.

**Sweet Drive of the Week (Deuce Succeeded):** Trailing the defending champions 28-20 with 6:08 remaining, Atlanta took over on its own 38 and rather than go pass-wacky, staged a balanced purist drive of four passes and four runs for the touchdown. On the deuce try at 3:32, wide receiver Brian Finneran lined up by himself left; came in motion right; did a spin motion left, and ran the fade-lob route for two points. At 6-foot-5, Finneran is a likely target in this situation. But all that spinning seemed to make the Flying Elvii confused about where he was headed.

**Sweet Drive of the Week (Deuce Failed):** Trailing host Denver 21-13 with 4:37 remaining, Washington took possession on its 6, a very long way from pay dirt in one of the league's hardest places for a visitor to win: 5,280 feet and steady rain to boot. The Redskins staged a 13-play, 94-yard touchdown drive -- 16 snaps counting plays wiped out by penalties -- to make the count 21-19 with 1:15 on the scoreboard clock. Now it's time for the deuce try. During much of the game and nearly all of the fourth quarter, Skins' quarterback Mark Brunell had been rolling out left; a leftie, he is more effective rolling left than right. On the deuce attempt, Brunell a handoff for a sweep right, then once again rolled out left. But the Nanticokes had only rushed or rolled around right end once in the entire fourth quarter; with almost every play going left, who was going to fall for a play-fake here? Not Broncos' linebacker Ian Gold, who knocked down Brunell's pass, sealing the Denver victory.

**Retired Broadcaster Watch:** On Shawn Bryson's 77-yard touchdown run against Baltimore, retired broadcaster Deion Sanders was three yards behind Bryson for most of the run, and never caught him. I can't write as fast as I used to, either.

**Best Blocks:** Special teams account for one-third of yardage; special-teams blocking can be just as important as offensive-line play. On Chris Johnson's 99-yard kickoff return touchdown for St. Louis, wedge blocking was so good Johnson ran untouched for his six. It's pretty fun to run 99 yards when everyone in front of you has already been knocked to the ground. Later in the contest, Seattle leading 27-21, the Blue Men Group faced third-and-2 on Die Morgenmuffel's 18. Toss left; Walter Jones, Steve Hutchinson and Mack Strong all made clock-cleaner blocks; Shaun Alexander wasn't touched by a defender until he reached the St. Louis 2, where he bowled over a man for the touchdown that proved the winning margin.

**Worst Blocks:** Houston's 27 sacks allowed in four games project to 108 on the season, which would break the record for sacks allowed -- 104 by Philadelphia in 1986. It's a wonder David Carr can even walk, he gets hammered so much. Let me reiterate a point from my AFC preview -- given the Houston offensive line was awful in 2004, how could Texans' management have taken no significant step to improve the line before 2005?

**The Pulitzer Prize Judges Always Go for the Phrase "First of a Series":** Recently, *Washington Post* staffer Libby Copeland wrote about the fad for affluent young women spending \$200 or more per pair on jeans that have been elaborately engineered to make the butt more appealing. Now, certainly, appealing female behinds are a noble objective. But consider the line above Copeland's article: "First of two parts." It was a *two-part series* about young women trying to make their butts more appealing.

**The Football Gods Chortled:** With New England leading 14-10 with 6 seconds remaining in the first half, Atlanta let punter Michael Koenen attempt a 58-yard field goal, which missed. But wait! Flying Elvii linebacker Mike Vrabel called time out an instant before the snap, trying to ice Koenen. Officials ruled the time-out valid and let Atlanta try again; this time Koenen nailed it. Maybe in the era of global warming, icing the kicker won't work!

**In the Spirit of Marianne, Olympic Beach Volleyball Should Be Topless:** France failed in its bid for the 2012 Olympics after that deft political genius Jacques Chirac declared Finland's food the worst in the world -- saying this on the eve of the vote by the International Olympic Committee, which has two

Finnish members. Tuesday Morning Quarterback regrets one thing about the failed Paris bid -- the city's proposal included holding the bikini beach volleyball competition at the Eiffel Tower. The sight of thousands crowding the Eiffel Tower grounds to gawk at string-bikini volleyball babes would have been a humor highlight. And remember, in France they say that if a woman wears something revealing, you are insulting her if you don't look!

**Why Are You Kicking???????:** Trailing 14-9, City of Tampa faced fourth-and-4 on the Jersey/B 12 with 4:05 remaining. In trotted the field goal unit. "Has to be a fake," I thought. TMQ's immutable law holds, Kick Early Go For It Late. Now it's late -- go for it! Going for it here might result in the touchdown that wins the game; going and failing pins the low-voltage Jets' offense against its goal line. Instead Jon "Once I Was A Teenaged Coach" Gruden ordered a mincing fraidy-cat field goal. When the Buccaneers got the ball back, there was just a minute remaining, they were on their 12-yard line and out of time outs; one minute later they were no longer undefeated.

**Why Are You Kicking??????? No. 2:** Trailing Indianapolis 14-0 midway through the third, San Francisco faced fourth-and-4 on the Colts' 12. In trotted the field goal unit. You're down by two touchdowns in the second half against an undefeated team, what good does it do to cut the lead to 14-3? The average NFL play gains more than four yards, odds are you will make the first down! To reverse a team's losing mindset, the coach must challenge the players to win, not launch mincing field goal attempts when way behind! Plus you're 3-17 since the start of last season, what have you got to lose? And now you are 3-18.

**Why Are You Kicking??????? No. 3:** Trailing 17-0, Philadelphia had fourth-and-goal on the Cowboys' 5. In trotted the field-goal unit. Going for it might result in a touchdown that changes the flow of the game; going and failing pins Dallas against its goal line, and the Eagles have a stout defense. What was accomplished by cutting the score to 17-3? Nothing, other than signaling Philadelphia players their coaches had quit on the game. The mainly-first-rate Eagles seem to play one game each year where they don't even try -- remember last season's 27-3 sleepwalk loss at Pittsburgh? Philadelphia fans had best hope the Nesharim have now gotten this out of their systems for 2005.

**At Least Black Holes Can't Be Used As Weapons -- We Think...:** Tuesday Morning Quarterback once asked an astronomer, "Do black holes come in other colors?" It turns out the answer is yes! Harvard theorists Avery Broderick and Avi Loeb proposed last week that glowing gas on the boundary of black holes could provide illumination of the area where everything disappears; here is their computer simulation.

**Should 535 People Go to Jail?:** Several top executives of corporations have been convicted or forced to resign for stock and accounting fraud, for among other things manipulating the reporting of revenue and expenses in order to cause profits to be booked on the dates that benefited their bonuses and stock options. This sort of thing can be a crime and always bespeaks lack of character -- the leading problem in America's corporate boardrooms. But bear in mind that manipulating financial reporting dates is standard operating procedure for the United States Congress. The federal government's fiscal year began Oct. 1st, and Congress has enacted only two of the 11 spending bills required by law for that date. This is the ninth consecutive year Congress has failed to enact budget bills by the legal deadline. Plus, in almost every recent federal budget, Congress has slightly altered dates -- usually delaying payments due in one fiscal year until the first day of the subsequent year -- to make the deficit seem smaller, or accomplish some other bookkeeping gimmickry. Arthur Anderson was a model of accountability compared to the House and Senate.

**Wacky Food of the Week:** Charlie Palmer Steak House on Capitol Hill in Washington, D.C., offers a lobster-filled corn dog with black truffle sauce -- \$9 each at the bar. Charlie Palmer is a favorite hangout of the very lawmakers who annually fudge the accounting of the federal budget. At the restaurant, a steak is \$36 ala carte, vegetables and potatoes bring the main course alone to \$50; dinner for two with cocktails, wine and tip easily runs \$250. Members of Congress cannot possibly afford this on their public salaries, so which lobbyists are paying?

**NFL in Iran Update:** On Sunday, Middle East TV beamed the day's headliner game -- New England at Atlanta -- to Iran. Did our nation's capital see this contest? Washington, D.C., was treated to Baltimore at Detroit -- and the local CBS affiliate, which could have switched to New England at Atlanta after Baltimore-Detroit became a blowout, stayed with every last tedious snap even as the fantastic Patriots-Falcons contest was going down to the final seconds. Once again, Iran saw a better NFL game than was shown in our nation's capital.

**NFL in Kuwait Update:** Reader Nawaf Al-Rudaini of Kuwait reports that Showtime beamed the New England at Atlanta contest to Kuwait, kicking off live at 8 p.m. Saudi Arabia time. So Kuwait also saw a better NFL game than was shown in our nation's capital.

## RUNNING ITEMS DEPARTMENT

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Muhlenberg 20, Dickinson 2. The Red Devils' faithful lament: if only we'd gotten 10 more safeties! Located in Carlisle, Pa., Dickinson College lists 29 administrative offices.

**Bonus Obscure College Score:** Concordia of Wisconsin 60, Concordia of Illinois 0. Not much brotherly love shown between these affiliated Christian schools. Located in Mequon, Wis., Concordia of Wisconsin features "campus buildings connected by 3.5 miles of indoor walkways". Go to college and never go outside!

### Reader Animadversion:

Many readers weighed in on whether coaches are now teaching "scoop and score" -- try to scoop up a fumble and run for a touchdown, engaging the risk that you won't recover the fumble -- versus the age-old just-fall-on it. Ike Himowitz of Baltimore reports that the rule he was taught both in high school and college was: Scoop and score on defense, fall on it on offense. Noah Turner of the University of Connecticut reports the rule he was taught was that the first man to a fumble should try to scoop and score; the second man to the fumble should just fall on it, since the first man must have missed.

Numerous readers rose to the defense of *Battlestar Galactica*, which has many enthusiasts since it is currently the No. 1 ranked sci-fi show. Readers including Gloria Kenner of Portsmouth, R.I., noted I was wrong to say that in the show's pilot, the entire defense network of the human society had been designed so that it could be deactivated by a single code. Rather, the evil robot named Six, who appears human, infiltrated one planetary defense organization and planted a computer virus that generated a deactivation code transmitted to the other planets.

Okay, I described the pilot wrongly. But the premise still seems ridiculous -- a society that can build enormous faster-than-light starcruisers doesn't take precautions to protect its military against computer viruses? (The aliens in *Independence Day*, though able to build a starcruiser 90 miles in diameter, also did not know about computer viruses).

Philippe Herndon of Columbia, S.C., rose to defend the current plot arc in which a second battlestar, *Pegasus*, is discovered, but instead of cooperating the two ships begin to threaten each other. "The *Pegasus* story line is great," Herndon writes, saying the new ship symbolizes how military culture becomes corrupt when unchecked by democracy. "*Pegasus* has survived on its own by doing things exclusively the military way, and doesn't want messy democracy revived. They don't care about the fleet of civilian ships that *Galactica* is protecting and aren't interested in the needs of the weak. Confronting this kind of Ayn Rand selfishness is what makes the show terrific."

Scott Cordiner of Salem, Mass., adds that the constant internecine bickering on *Battlestar Galactica* is a reason the series works for him. "The people depicted on the show are technologically advanced but not socially advanced," he writes. "We had wars and infighting 2,000 years ago and still experience those

problems today despite significant technical advances. Sadly, we will probably still have human infighting 2,000 years from now."

As Oakland goes for its third consecutive season of leading the NFL in penalties, Joe Bittner of San Jose, Calif., notes the team has led the league in this department 14 times in the last four decades. Penalties, obviously, are the Raiders' calling.

Gawking at the Chiefs' high-aesthetic appeal cheerleaders, last week TMQ asked, "Can these women seriously be from *Kansas*?" Kevin Olson of Lee's Summit, Mo., conducted a close textual analysis of the Chiefs' cheerleaders website and found that 21 are from Missouri, six from Kansas and four from Nebraska. Kevin, you were using your time wisely! The Chiefs play in Kansas City, Mo.

Finally, *Science* magazine, published by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, is the world's most prestigious technical journal. Therissa Libby of Annapolis, Md., a neurobiologist, reports that the new issue of *Science*, with the Voyager probe on the cover, landed on her desk just as she was reading last week's TMQ item about Voyager. But Therissa, mysteriously the *Science* magazine special section on Voyager *never mentioned that NASA is worried the probe will fall into a black hole and be transported to a planet of living machines*. Hey world's most prestigious technical journal, I beat you to the story!

**Next Week:** The Pepsi dispenser in the NFL Pepsi ads falls into a black hole and is transported to a planet of living machines, only to discover that there, the cheerleaders look like espresso makers.

## Luckily, the *New Yorker* will do a two-part series on the Coors Light Love Train?

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Oct. 18, 2005) -- Defending champion New England is struggling, having dropped two of three; oxygen-depleted Denver is soaring, having won five straight. Reasons include injuries to Patriots and strong play by the Broncos -- but a central factor is simply luck. We'd like to think sports outcomes are determined by merit, and usually the better team wins. But luck plays far more role than is generally acknowledged.

Consider that red-hot Denver hasn't committed a turnover in four consecutive games, while beleaguered New England hasn't gotten a takeaway in three consecutive outings. Skill and tactics are aspects of limiting turnovers and obtaining takeaways -- but luck is a huge aspect too, especially when it comes to fumbles. Skill may protect the ball and hard hits may cause it to pop out; whether a loose ball bounces toward you or the opponent is sheer luck. Lately, New England hasn't had much luck, and lately Denver has had a lot.

This week, the down-to-the-last-snap Falcons-Saints, Giants-Cowboys, Jags-Steelers, Redskins-Chiefs and Panthers-Lions games were so close no victor could have taken the day without benefit of luck. Against St. Louis, the Indianapolis defense looked terrible in the first quarter, surrendering 17 points, then looked great for the rest of game, partly because Lady Luck provided takeaways. Luck was not determinant in every game; the Seahawks simply blew the Texans off the field. But you get my point. A dropped pass, a random bounce, a behind-the-ball penalty -- luck heralds many NFL outcomes, and explains the supposedly "baffling" fact that the same team may win big one week and lose big the next. Luck has more to do with many aspects of life than is commonly admitted: for instance the rich want to believe they got that way based solely on personal worthiness, but luck is often a leading difference between the well-off and the needy. In the NFL, all teams are stocked with big, fast, strong guys, while luck is distributed randomly week-by-week.

Luckily for the Indianapolis Colts, last night they got really far behind! See below for when it's actually good to be really far behind. In other football news, the NFL trading deadline is today, so the year's financial shenanigans soon conclude. What better excuse for my annual reminder that NFL contracts are largely fictional, yet the press reports them as if genuine. See below.

And in other news, the shocking stories you have heard are true -- yes, there was a Tuesday Morning Quarterback lake cruise party, aboard this boat. Strangely, the beautiful women never arrived. But I did see the Coors Light Love Train roaring by in the distance, on the way to somebody else's cruise party, apparently.

**Stats of the Week:** Houston has not led this season.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** Houston is the only team that has not recovered an opponent's fumble.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** Running back LaDainian Tomlinson has as many touchdown passes as opening-day quarterbacks Kyle Boller, J.P. Losman, Pat Ramsey and Kurt Warner combined. Stat submitted by Adam Hillebrand of Akron, Ohio.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** Shaun Alexander scored more touchdowns on Sunday than the offenses of Baltimore, Cleveland, Dallas, Detroit, Jersey/A and Minnesota combined. Stat submitted by Vikram Rao of Raleigh, N.C.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** Minnesota, which has three recent No. 1 draft picks plus big-money free

agent Pat Williams on the defensive line, is last in rushing defense.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** Jake Delhomme threw four touchdown passes in a span of 7:26 -- two to his teammates and two to Detroit defenders.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** Washington has a winning record despite being minus-8 for turnovers; Buffalo does not have a winning record despite being plus-8. Part of the explanation: through six games, the Bills have one second-half touchdown.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** Result of three consecutive dropbacks for St. Louis quarterback Jamie Martin: interception, sack, interception.

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** Washington has not beaten an AFC team in more than two years.

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** The entire NFC East is above .500, while the entire NFC North is below .500. Stat submitted by Lolita Jackson of New York City.

**The Football Gods Promised an Investigation:** Cincinnati is alone in first place -- words I did not expect to type in my lifetime.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Emanuele Fadini of Turin, Italy, nominates Charlia of the Kansas City Chiefs, a dance instructor who majored in public relations at Central Missouri State University. According to her team bio, Charlia is interested in Egyptian art and, as a child, watched the movie *Howard the Duck* over and over. Good grief, Charlia, it's amazing your brain still works! Also according to her bio, the habit Charlia wishes she could break is procrastination. Well, you'll get around to quitting that someday. Declining temperatures note: with the weather changing, cheer-babe professionalism now comes into play. Kickoff temperature 66 degrees at Arrowhead on Sunday, the Kansas City cheerleaders nonetheless came out in their hot-weather outfits, which are barely more than bikinis. This display of cheerleader professionalism appeased the football gods, who rewarded the Chiefs with victory.

**Wacky Martini of the Week:** Last week's column mentioned Charlie Palmer Steak House in Washington, D.C.: there the signature drink is the Aurora, a martini of vanilla vodka, framboise and fruit juice. Nancy Keates of the *Wall Street Journal* reports that wacky martinis have become the rage at night spots across the land. In San Francisco, Aziza offers a martini made from bourbon, lime juice, black peppercorn and "rhubarb-infused vodka." Fresh, a San Diego eatery, offers a gazpacho martini with pepper vodka and chopped vegetables. Jager, in Kirkland, Wash., sells a martini with vodka, horseradish, Grand Marnier and a slice of steak. Vault Martini Bar in Portland, Ore., offers a martini of vodka, vermouth, basil and olives stuffed with blue cheese, and another made from vodka, vanilla liquor and cranberry juice. "It tastes like cough syrup," Keates quotes a patron as saying of the latter. Can a martini with vodka and cough syrup be far behind? Maybe TMQ should actually market the imaginary blueberry-almond martini this column has referenced over the years.

**Sweet Play of the Week:** With the game scoreless, LaDainian Tomlinson jogged into the right flat, then ran an out-and-up, 35-yard touchdown. The running-back out-and-up -- once the favorite pattern of Thurman Thomas -- has practically disappeared from NFL playbooks, and should return.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** With the game tied at 24 in the fourth quarter, Atlanta faced first-and-20 on the New Orleans 21. A sweep by Warrick Dunn, and the blocking is so good Dunn scores the touchdown barely touched. Most teams go pass-wacky whenever it's a long-yardage situation, but the run can be effective against a defense that is thinking pass. Note: Atlanta leads the league in rushing, with Dunn the most effective undersized back since Thomas.

**Sweet Drive of the Week:** Detroit leading 20-14 with 3:07 remaining, Chris Weinke, who had not thrown a pass since 2002, takes over for injured Jake Delhomme. Weinke directed a nine-play drive for the winning touchdown with 32 seconds on the clock. The winning snap was sweet, too: double receivers right on third-and-goal, Ricky Proehl ran a short stop-and-go, Weinke threw it perfectly. Four of Weinke's



NEI: He took more than 30 minutes -- that means dinner is free!

*Later:*

FEI: The delivery guy is still drifting outside the capsule, staring at us through the hatch window. It's creeping me out.

NEI: Didn't you tip him?

FEI: I thought you tipped him!

**Why It's Great to Be Way Behind:** At the end of the first quarter, the host Colts trailed 17-0 -- what good luck! When a team is way behind in the second half, obviously that's bad news; to be way behind in the first half is not necessarily fatal, since plenty of time remains, while the opponent may grow complacent. Football's great comebacks have happened when Team A jumps far ahead so fast there is time for Team B to recover. Consider the greatest comeback ever, Buffalo rebounding from a 35-3 deficit to beat Houston in the 1993 playoffs: Houston made it 35-3 on the first play of the second half, meaning there was as much time left for the Bills to storm back as the Oilers used to get ahead. In the second-greatest comeback -- San Francisco recovering from a 35-7 deficit to beat New Orleans in 1980 -- 35-7 was the halftime score, meaning the Niners had as much time to diminish the lead as the Saints used to build it. (The all-time comebacks chart is [here](#); find the error!) Of course the team that jumps ahead has the advantage; every team wants to play with the lead. But coaches and players, when you fall behind early, don't give up. Remember, there is as much time or more for the comeback as the opponent used to build the lead. Those 17 first-quarter Rams points were forgotten after the Colts used the three remaining quarters to score 45.

**If Only You Could Get Frequent-Flyer Miles for a Voyage of Self Discovery:** Ricky Williams is back, and his agent, Leigh Steinberg, calls the eight months spent at the California College of Ayurveda a "voyage of self-discovery." What did Williams discover? That he's a football player. Ricky, I could have told you that and saved you the tuition! Here are the California College of Ayurveda's views on the three doshas: vata, pitta and kapha. Note: With the Marine Mammals trailing City of Tampa 23-6 and facing fourth-and-1 on the Bucs' 5, Williams lined up as the quarterback, then ran for no gain. Since Tampa knew Williams would not roll out and pass, the formation basically announced to defenders that Ricky would carry.

**Trust But Verify:** There was so much confusion in the second quarter of the Atlanta-New Orleans game that first NFL.com displayed a score of New Orleans 17, Atlanta 3; then a moment later displayed the score as Atlanta 12, New Orleans 10; then a moment later displayed Atlanta 10, New Orleans 10.

**Hey, Maybe I've Got a Future in British TV Commercials:** The United Kingdom's Advertising Standards Authority ordered the maker of Lambrini, a sparkling wine, to remove a handsome, studly man from a television commercial and replace him with a "balding, paunchy" actor. The commercial depicted three young chickadees knocking back Lambrini at a hotel bar while trying to pick up the studly guy; this, the ASA decreed, "implies the drink may bring sexual success," violating British advertising codes. But the revised commercial showed three hot chicks trying to pick up an unattractive middle-aged man - which should violate British science-fiction codes!

**Big, Rich Corporation Afraid of TMQ:** So far, Yahoo! has not accepted my challenge to place my off-price ultra-generic prediction -- Home Team Wins -- on its football forecasts page. As of today, the "wisdom of crowds" thesis is doing fine as the consensus of Yahoo! users leads all experts at 57-31. My ultra-generic prediction is 55-33, which ties me with the highest-ranked Yahoo! football expert.

**Mike Nugent Watch:** TMQ was going to run a regular comparison between high-drafted kicker Mike Nugent and Doug Brien, the guy he replaced; Brien ended up being cut by the Bears after just three appearances. Talk about flameout! It's still not clear Jersey/B was wise to invest its top draft choice in a kicker, however. On Sunday, trailing Buffalo 24-10 in the fourth quarter, the Jets punted from the Bills'

35 rather than let Nugent attempt a 52-yard field goal. Anyway, in keeping the Jersey/B theme, I'll substitute a Laveranues Coles Watch. In the offseason, Coles demanded to be traded out of Washington because the Redskins offense was, inexplicably, not totally oriented around getting Coles stats. So far after six games at his new home with the Jets, Coles has 26 receptions; last season after six games in Washington, he had 31 receptions.

**We're Recommending You for the CEO Job. Don't Mention That Parole Violation Thing, Okay?**

Korn/Ferry International, the management-headhunter firm that calls itself "the world's premier provider of executive human capital solutions," sued a recently departed top manager, alleging he took proprietary files when leaving Korn/Ferry's employ. Needless to say, I have no idea whether he did. But if this is true, then -- an executive-recruitment firm recruited the wrong guy! Either Korn/Ferry's claim against its former officer is false, or Korn/Ferry did such a bad job of checking the candidate's background that the company hired a thief and placed him in a position of responsibility. An expensive headhunter firm that can't handle its own head-hunting! Fun note: Though Korn/Ferry has sued its former executive, the company's website still contains an article by the gentleman. Its subject? "The significance of reputation management."

**Fictional Contracts Review:** Last year, Todd Steussie signed a "six-year, \$20 million" contract with Tampa. It lasted one year and paid about \$4.5 million; Steussie was waived and re-signed at a much lower number. Peerless Price signed a "seven-year, \$37 million" contract with Atlanta; it lasted two years and paid \$12 million. In 2004, Mark Brunell signed a "seven-year, \$34 million" contract with Washington; in 2005, it was quietly redone to a two-year, \$10 million agreement. Walter Jones of Seattle recently signed a "seven-year, \$53 million" contract that only assures him of three years and \$27 million. Muhsin Muhammad of Chicago autographed a "six-year, \$30 million" contract that assures him of two years and \$13 million. Santana Moss of Jersey/B signed a "six-year, \$30 million" deal that is for two years and about \$12 million. His stadium-mate Plaxico Burress of Jersey/A signed a "six-year, \$25 million" contract likely to run two years and pay about \$10 million. Todd Heap of Baltimore signed a "seven-year, \$30 million" contract that could be as little as a one-year, \$4.5 million deal. Kendrell Bell of Kansas City signed a "seven-year, \$35 million" deal that only assures him of one year and \$4 million.

The actual figures for NFL contracts are heady enough, of course. But I'm willing to wager there has not been a single multi-year NFL contract in the salary-cap era that has gone to term exactly as signed. Announced value is almost always far higher than what players actually receive, because all the player can be sure of is the initial bonus and, in most cases, the second year's payout; after that the player is either waived or renegotiates. The artificial length of NFL contracts creates fictional future years into which to spread prorated bonus charges. Artificial dollar value is also a little favor teams do for players' egos, and a little favor to agents. The agent holds a press conference boasting about the "\$50 million" deal he just negotiated, and the publicity helps him recruit new clients. Later, when the deal is quietly renegotiated downward, the agent does not call a press conference.

Current NFL title holder for contract paper value is Drew Bledsoe. In 2001, at New England, he signed a "10-year, \$103 million" agreement that lasted three years and paid \$24 million. In 2004, at Buffalo, he signed a "three-year, \$19 million" deal that lasted one year and paid \$9 million. This year, at Dallas, he signed a "three-year, \$14 million" contract that guarantees about \$6 million. So in five years, Bledsoe has signed 16 years and \$136 million worth of contracts! Combined, these deals will actually pay around \$39 million -- heady enough. But the actual value is about a third of the announced value.

Why, *TMQ* annually asks, do sportscasters and even serious news organizations such as the *Associated Press* treat the fictional announced value of NFL contracts as real? Sportscasters gush over ersatz numbers such as the "eight-year, \$68 million" contract signed by LaVar Arrington of Washington -- after this, the deal's second year, Arrington will either be waived or accept a substantial reduction -- because inflated numbers grab the listener's attention. Yet the actual amounts earned by professional football players are plenty heady enough. There's no need for the media to persist in pretending that NFL players earn far more than they actually do.

**Two Trains Running:** The *New Yorker* harkened back to its heyday with a two-part series by John McPhee about coal trains and Union Pacific's Bailey Yard in North Platte, Neb., the world's largest rail

yard, which handles 10,000 railcars daily. I like trains both for romantic reasons and because it is not physically possible to outsource them to Bangalore. The articles made me reflect on a coal-train subject. TMQ's beloved Colorado College lies adjacent to the Northern Joint Line that follows the Rocky Mountains front range. Hundred-car coal trains course these tracks the day long, northbound trains making the ground shake as their locomotives strain to climb Monument Pass. Teaching political science at Colorado College last spring, I took walks along Monument Creek, and noticed: There were trains full of coal headed north, and trains full of coal headed south. Huh? Wouldn't the coal be going in one direction, such as from the Powder River Basin in Wyoming, to another direction, such as the power plants around Pueblo, Colorado? Instead it seemed millions of dollars were being spent to ship the same product north and south simultaneously. More than once I witnessed a mile-long chain of hopper cars brimming with coal, headed north or south, idling on a siding as it was passed by a mile-long train of hopper cars brimming with coal headed in the opposite direction. Can any railroad-adept reader explain what was going on here? Use the link at Reader Animadversion.

The head of this item is the title of a play by August Wilson, greatest playwright of our generation, who died young this month. Many know his works *Fences* and *Ma Rainey's Black Bottom*; I recommend *Joe Turner's Come and Gone*, in my opinion the best play written in my lifetime. A century ago, plays were commonly published as books, which people would experience as literature or perform informally in small-group staged readings similar to contemporary book clubs. Today few playwrights are published. Wilson was a pleasant exception -- so you don't need to wait until *Joe Turner* is mounted near you, just buy this great work and read it.

**Best Blocks:** In an age of prima-donna wide receivers -- *What do you mean the President didn't call to congratulate me on my catch!!!!* -- downfield blocking has become a lost art. Game scoreless at Ralph Wilson Stadium, the Bills faced third-and-goal from the Jersey/B 8. Jonathan Smith caught a short hitch and made it to the end zone behind a fantastic block by fellow wide receiver Sam Aiken. Now Buffalo leads 7-0 and faces second-and-goal from the Jersey/B 15. Eric Moulds caught a short hitch and made it to the end zone behind a fantastic block by fellow wide receiver Lee Evans. Over in Kansas City, game tied in the fourth, Priest Holmes took a screen pass 60 yards for the winning touchdown behind fantastic downfield blocks from receivers Dante Hall and Tony Gonzalez. Bill Walsh pulled receivers out of the game if they did not block like crazy when teammates had the ball: Walsh had it right. Federal deficit note: that B2 bomber, based at Whiteman Air Force Base in Missouri, sure looked impressive passing over Arrowhead before the Skins-Chiefs collision started. But please tell me the Chiefs or the league paid the operating cost for this flight; please don't tell me the federal taxpayer was billed for an NFL promotion.

**Giants-Cowboys Extra:** It's overtime in the Jersey/A-Dallas collision, the Cowboys have first-and-10 on their 46. Tight end Jason Witten lines up left with a wide receiver to his left. The receiver cuts first on a crossing pattern; Witten cuts second and runs a deep out. Crossing patterns usually set up a speedy wide receiver -- this crossing pattern set up the tight end! Twenty-six yards on the reception, and the Cowboys are positioned for the winning field goal. But why was there overtime in the first place? Trailing 7-6 in the third, the Giants faced second-and-6 on the 'Boys' 13 -- positioned for a field goal and the lead. The ball was spotted directly in the mystical vortex of sunlight at Texas Stadium, which henceforth I will call Stonehenge Field. On sunny afternoons, the home team, accustomed to the field's constantly shifting solar effects, holds an advantage over any visitor. So run up the middle then take the field goal! Incompletion, then interception. Often all a football team needs do is run up the middle and things will be fine.

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Wittenberg 66, Hiram 0. Located in Hiram, Ohio, Hiram is "the only college in the country that offers students two formats for scholastic study." Check this Hiram professor resorting to a blackboard as he struggles to explain the dual-format Hiram Plan. One Hiram Plan option is to spend three weeks doing nothing but taking a class called "Dickens' Christmas Stories."

**Owl Nicknames Update:** Mark Wheeler of Ardmore, Pa., reports the Owls Alliance -- Florida Atlantic, Rice and Temple -- is now a combined 1-18.

**Stats of the Week (College Extra):** Texas Tech had 669 yards passing and 15 yards rushing.

**Hidden Play of the Week:** Hidden plays are ones that do not make highlight reels, but stop or sustain key drives. New England having stormed back from a 28-3 deficit to 28-20, the defending champions faced third-and-20 with 3:53 remaining. Tom Brady threw a strike to Deion Branch on a "stick" pattern at the first-down marker; Denver's Al Wilson clocked Branch, causing him to drop the ball. New England punted, this hidden play ending what would prove to be the Flying Elvii's final possession. Next, Denver faces second-and-7 with 2:56 remaining. The Broncos fake a screen left; tight end Jeb Putzier blocks a man, then sprints out right; he makes the first-down catch; New England spends its second timeout, and Denver is on its way to all-naughts on the clock. The second play was both sweet (clever action) and hidden (the first down helped Denver ice the game).

**When a Bengals Coach Rang a Bell, All Tennessee Players Salivated:** Trailing 10-0, Cincinnati had first-and-goal on the Titans 1 with 37 seconds remaining in the first half. Carson Palmer play-faked -- an exaggerated "show the ball" fake in which he extended his arm and made the rock easy for Tennessee defenders to see. They couldn't resist, and converged toward Palmer as running back Chris Perry snuck into the flat for the touchdown reception that began the Bengals comeback.

### Reader Animadversion

**Reader Animadversion Schedule Change:** Starting this week, Reader Animadversion will run as a separate feature on Wednesdays.

**Don't Tell Terrell Owens, Because If He Had His Own 148-Decibel Horn, He Would Blow It Constantly:** Speaking of trains, Michelle Higgins of the *Wall Street Journal* reported Floridians are having locomotive horns installed in their cars. She went on to explain that installing super-loud horns in urban SUVs, for reasons of road rage, may force government to regulate horn decibels. This, in turn, could imperil the pastime of "honking rides," in which hobbyists mount train horns atop pickup trucks, drive to remote areas where no one will be disturbed and -- I am not making this up -- pretend to be trains. Here, listen to a variety of recordings of actual locomotive horns. For a mere \$2,400, you can purchase an authentic Nathan K5LA five-trumpet locomotive horn to install in your SUV. The horn sounds at 148 decibels: The front row of a rock concert is 110 decibels, a military jet taking off is 140 decibels, 160 decibels perforates the eardrum. Presumably the antisocial idiots who buy locomotive horns for their SUVs will have such ringing in their ears they will not be able to hear the charges the judge reads them.

**Next Week:** The *Stars Wars* bottomless pit final score.

## Week 6 Readers:

(Oct. 19, 2005) -- Recently, TMQ noted that slightly more than a thousand girls joined about one million boys playing high school football last year. Mike of Gainesville, Fla., reports [this story of a California girl](#), Miranda McOsker, who just threw three touchdown passes in a high school varsity game. My only problem: two of the touchdown passes came in the fourth quarter as McOsker's team was running up the score in a 55-14 win. Otherwise, hers was a fine achievement. In less than a decade, the idea of girls and women playing high school and college football has gone from sacrilege to widely accepted, with the proviso that the girl or woman make the team on her own merit -- which will always be a high hurdle given the huge advantage boys and men have in a sport that celebrates strength. But if any girl or woman can make a football team on merit, of course she must play. Tuesday Morning Quarterback continues to believe it is only a matter of time until a woman plays in the NFL. And as I've said before, I hope never to meet that woman.



Getty Images  
**NFL overtimes could be even wackier, just look at the college game.**

Should the defense fumble back to the offense in an NCAA overtime, the offense must score during that play or the game ends; there is no fresh set of downs. [See Section FR 59](#). Stephen Rochelle of Huntsville, Ala., adds this means that in the NCAA, a team could win in overtime by as much as 14 points -- if it had possession first and scored a touchdown and then scored a deuce, then ran a turnover back for a touchdown.

A recent column wondered why, in college and high school overtime, sometimes a takeaway by a team that's ahead simply ends the game and sometimes the defense is allowed to try to score. Dave Sunderland of Portland, Ore., notes that in the NCAA, on an overtime interception or fumble recovery by a team that's ahead, if the player takes a knee, then the whistle sounds and his team wins; but if the player begins running, the play continues until a dead ball, because he might fumble it back to the offense. Unlikely? Oh, how LeKevin Smith of Nebraska wishes he had simply taken a knee after intercepting a pass in the final minute against Texas Tech. (Jason Twining of Silver Spring, Md., notes that Smith "majors in 'construction management,' but should have minored in 'clock management.'")

At the high-school level, things are more complex, as different states and counties adopt different overtime standards, high school official Kevin Lehde of Raleigh, N.C., reports. The National Federation of High Schools recommends an overtime format in which alternating possessions begin on the 10-yard line and the game ends the instant a leading team gets a turnover. But states or counties can choose the college format, the professional format, have no overtime, or make up their own formats. Question for readers: Does anyone know of a state or county that's made up its own overtime format? Let me know at [TMQNFL@yahoo.com](mailto:TMQNFL@yahoo.com).

Last week, TMQ decreed that Die Morgenmuffel would temporarily replace Les Mouflons as my cognomen for the St. Louis Rams. Ronda VanGompel of Fremont, Ind., appeals for reinstatement of Les Mouflons, which is "more lyrical and pleasant to hear," she writes. Well, this is a standard objection to German versus French. Anyway, the 2-4 Rams need to stop being Morgenmuffel ("slow starters") for their old nickname to resume. In haiku, Ronda appeals,

Morgenmuffel, nein!  
 Les Mouflons sweet to the ear;  
 schnell you Rams now, schnell!  
 --Ronda VanGompel, Fremont, Ind.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback has been wondering why Drew Bledsoe looked so bad the last two seasons in Buffalo, and now looks so good at Dallas. Primary speculation: All quarterbacks suddenly become more talented when behind a decent offensive line. Since general manager Tom Donahoe arrived in Buffalo, the offensive line has been treated as an afterthought, and the Bills OL has consistently been in the league's bottom quartile. A recent column noted Donahoe has spent eight No. 1 or No. 2 draft picks on quarterbacks, running backs and wide receivers, but only one on an offensive lineman. This winter, Donahoe spurned a chance to get left tackle L.J. Shelton pretty cheaply; Shelton

is now playing well for Cleveland. Sportscasters constantly said Bledsoe, at Buffalo, was holding the ball too long. Actually, the offensive line was not holding the pass rush -- last year, rushers often reached Bledsoe on the count of two Mississippi, this year things aren't much better for J.P. Losman and Kelly Holcomb. At Dallas, Bledsoe has been getting five Mississippis, and it's rejuvenated his career. Now that Flozell Adams, Dallas' best offensive lineman, is out for the year, we'll see if this impacts the Bledsoe revival. A reader sums in haiku:

Two Miss-is-sip-pi:  
 scramble, slam, get up slow. J.  
 P. learns Bills' system.  
 -- *Michael Kovaka, Seattle*

On the redundant translations front, Tom Hayes of Keller, Texas, reports he walked into a Subway and ordered the chicken parmesan hero the chain is promoting. He was asked, "What kind of cheese do you want on that?"

Tuesday Morning Quarterback rails against the "underrated" tag being applied to players who are widely praised, have been on a Wheaties box, etc. Colin Oetken of Phoenix was among many to point out that this week's *Sports Illustrated* player poll lists Drew Brees, Tom Brady, Trent Green and Daunte Culpepper as the "most underrated" quarterbacks. One has been Super Bowl MVP and all have recently appeared in the Pro Bowl.

Hans-Werner Egerland of Baltimore reports the entire cheerleading squad of Indiana of Pennsylvania University, TMQ's favorite obscure college, has been banned from performing [owing to a hazing incident](#). This will grant California of Pennsylvania a huge advantage in the annual Tuesday Morning Quarterback Obscure College Game of the Year! This year, the game is on Nov. 5 -- California of Pennsylvania versus Indiana of Pennsylvania at George P. Miller Stadium in Indiana, Pa.

Mike Tracey of Stanford, Calif., was among many readers to note that Lambeau Field will host [an outdoor ice hockey game this coming winter](#), giving "frozen tundra" a whole new significance. But though the Packers themselves now use the "frozen tundra" moniker, many readers, including Alicia Treadwell of Austin, Texas, have noted all tundra is frozen.

Last week's column speculated that Bill Parcells would bring more former players to Dallas, and listed some of the old Jersey/A Super Bowl pantheon -- Harry Carson and so on. On the list was tackle Jimbo Covert; many readers pointed out I meant tackle John "Jumbo" Elliott. Such confusing jimbo-jumbo! In haiku,

Jimbo Covert was  
 a Bear not a Giant. Think:  
 Jumbo Elliott.  
*Dan Krueger, Pontiac, Ill.*



**Long drives equal more time to watch this offense in action. Hmmm.**

Jeff Miller of Columbus, Ohio, notes Baltimore has recorded the longest drive of the 2005 season, a drive of 112 yards. The touchdown possession began on the Ravens' 11 and included 23 yards of penalties against Baltimore, adding up to a 112-yard drive according to [the official Game Book](#). In the game with the 112-yard drive, opponent Detroit kicked off from the Baltimore 40 after multiple fouls against the Ravens. TMQ lamented that the Lions boomed their kick into the end zone, rather than inside kick -- since the worst that could have happened would have been Baltimore ball deep in its own territory anyway. Many, including Larry McClemons of Annandale, Va., noted there was another fun possibility: Detroit could have deliberately kicked out of bounds. When a kickoff goes out of bounds, the receiving team takes possession 30 yards from the kickoff spot -- meaning, in this case, Baltimore would have gotten the ball on its 10-yard line.

This column now calls the place the Patriots play "Next One Will Have Six Moisture-Sensitive Vibrating Blades with Remote Control, Make Coffee, Walk the Dog, Receive High-Resolution GPS and Improve Your Love Life Field". In order to save space, suggests Chris Hubbard of Fort Collins, Colo., I could abbreviate to NOWHSMSVBRMMCWDRHRGPSI-YLL Field. Exactly when, Chris, have I shown concern with saving space?

Finally, Scott Abercrombie of Sydney, Australia, has conducted a close textual analysis of all Cheerleader of the Week items and determined the leader board: four COTWs from the Philadelphia Eagles, three each from the Washington Redskins, Denver Broncos and San Diego Chargers. Based on this, he predicts the Eagles and Skins will meet for the NFC championship while the Bolts and Broncos vie for the AFC title. This has as much chance of being correct as any other prediction system.

## Why NFL coaches should wear pajamas, and 96% of the universe finally found!

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

(Oct. 25, 2005) -- The NBA just imposed on players a dress code of business casual. Will this start a fad for dressy attire in sports? Not in pro football. This summer Niners' coach Mike Nolan asked permission to wear a business suit on the sidelines, and league headquarters told him no. Since 1993, when NFL Properties signed a marketing deal with Reebok, coaches have been required to wear licensed team apparel on game day. Coaches can't opt out of wearing NFL duds, though they can choose which types of licensed clothing to model: so presumably, though Nolan the Younger cannot wear a business suit, he could sport these officially licensed 49ers pajamas. League spokesman Greg Aiello told Mike Florio of Profootballtalk.com that while coaches must dress in licensed apparel on gameday, the head coach has the option of adding a tie. Coach Nolan, wear pajamas with a tie.

Licensed apparel is now a major revenue stream for the NFL, giving the league a rational business purpose in promoting branded garments. But this means if Tom Landry were alive today, they'd not only make him shed the gray suit for color-coordinated pullovers, they'd make Landry ditch the felt hat and wear a Cowboys' baseball cap turned backwards. Reader Douglas Deem of San Francisco suggests a solution: "If the issue is truly about merchandising, let the NFL introduce a line of suits, sportsjackets, dress slacks, ties and accessories, all with tasteful team logos." Imagine walking into your next business meeting nattily attired in a three-piece Denver Broncos business suit with a bright orange stripe up the side. Imagine a tuxedo with tiny Philadelphia Eagles' logos as trim, or a women's power suit in the colors of the New England Patriots. This idea is so completely ridiculous, no one could believe anyone would ever put down good money for it. Sweetheart, get me NFL Properties on the phone fast!

Some football coaches once wore coat-and-tie to be seen as authority figures; others hoped the corporate-lawyer look would make them more credible when shouting red-faced at officials. These lines of thinking are ascendant in college and pro basketball. In recent years, almost all NBA and men's college basketball coaches have taken to wearing conservative suits with tie, while WNBA and women's college coaches have taken to power suits with heels. The goal is to make basketball coaches seem persons of stature to the referees. It's amusing to behold basketball coaches arriving at the sidelines dressed like members of the boards of directors of Fortune 500 firms -- then the instant the game tips off, screaming like lunatics. And how do they keep those suit jackets on without sweating through them? This spring yours truly attended some games of the ACC men's basketball tourney. The entire Duke coaching staff was dressed in matching dark business suits. They looked like the law firm of Krzyzewski, Dawkins, Wojciechowski & Collins, LLP.

In other football news, TMQ decrees the Law of the Other Shoe. This law holds that when something bad happens on offense, something bad immediately happens on defense -- the other shoe drops. Atlanta leading Jersey/B 7-0, Vinny Testaverde loses a fumble. On the next snap the Jets defense allowed unknown fullback Justin Griffith a long run to the seven yard line, whence Atlanta scored again. When the offense turns the ball over, often the defense immediately surrenders a big play. Suggestion to coaches: call a time-out after giving up a turnover, and try to defeat the Law of the Other Shoe.

And in other sports news, the Red Sox won the World Series last year, the White Sox lead the Series this year. That's really great -- unless it heralds the end of days. Some scholars believe the verse from Revelation that is commonly translated as "And I stood upon the sand of the sea and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and 10 horns," in fact should read, "Lo, I saw garlands placed upon the sox of color, and garlands upon the sox of white, and this occurred at a time of floods and great storms and melting ice, and then came fire from the sky and the Earth shook, and FEMA refused to do anything." If the White Sox win the World Series, just be on the lookout for seven-headed dragons and armored locust, okay?

**Stats of the Week** Seattle scored all of its points in the final minute of each half.

**Stats of the Week No. 2** San Diego, the league's highest-scoring team, has a losing record of 3-4.

**Stats of the Week No. 3** Of the top 10 teams in turnover differential, Buffalo is the only one with a losing record; of the bottom 10 teams in turnover differential, Washington is the only one with a winning record.

**Stats of the Week No. 4** Tennessee quarterbacks have thrown seven touchdown passes to their teammates and three touchdown passes to the opposition.

**Stats of the Week No. 5** In the first half at Philadelphia, the Chargers ran 22 offensive plays and gained yardage on seven. Stat submitted by Seth Kaufman of Washington, D.C.

**Stats of the Week No. 6** Miami had a scoring drive of minus-4 yards. Stat noted by reader Nate L. of Kansas City, Mo.

**Stats of the Week No. 7** Green Bay and New Orleans held a combined 31-0 lead, and both lost.

**Stats of the Week No. 8** Philadelphia and San Diego combined for 45 yards rushing.

**Stats of the Week No. 9** Green Bay has outscored its opponents, and is 1-5.

**Stats of the Week No. 10** The Bears and Ravens combined for 16 points and 16 punts. Stat submitted by Andrew Rudnik of Davenport, Iowa.

**Cheerleader of the Week** Many including Rich Kempter of Clinton, Conn., have nominated Tara W. of the Cincinnati Bengals, who graduated magna cum laude from the University of Kentucky and is a PhD student in cell and molecular biology at the University of Cincinnati. Trent Douthett of Columbus, Ohio, adds that third-string Bengals quarterback Craig Krenzel majored in molecular genetics at Ohio State; maybe he and Tara talk amino acids on the sidelines. According to her team bio, Tara's greatest accomplishments are "being selected to a PhD program with full tuition and stipend and being selected to attend the 2005 Pro Bowl as a cheerleader." Here is actual dialogue from cheerleaders at the 2005 Pro Bowl:

CHEERLEADER: And then I was like, "whatever," and he was like, "that is so random," and I'm like, let's just rent a movie. What did you do last night?

TARA: I read a research paper, Structural and Evolutionary Division of Phosphotyrosine Binding PTB Domains, in the *Journal of Molecular Biology*.

CHEERLEADER: Whatever.

**Sweet Play of the Week** Trailing 6-0, Pittsburgh had second-and-goal on the Cincinnati 2. Play-fake; fullback Dan Kreider ran into the left flat, drawing coverage; tight end Heath Miller blocked then ran a quick turn-around and was uncovered, touchdown. Pittsburgh knew rookie Bengals' linebacker Odell Thurman would be lined up over Miller, as he was; aggressive rookie linebackers fall for play-fakes.

**Sweet Defensive Play of the Week** Minnesota entered Sunday with the league's last-ranked rushing defense. Leading 20-17, the Vikings had the Packers facing third-and-2 on the Minnesota 20 with 1:13 remaining and Green Bay holding two time-outs. A first down here and Green Bay has an excellent chance to win the game, or at least run the clock down to almost nothing before kicking the tying field goal. Tony Fisher carried up the middle and the Minnesota defense dropped him for a loss; Green Bay kicked the tying field goal with enough time left on the clock for Minnesota to win with its own kick on

the final play.

**Sour Defensive Play of the Week** Game now tied at 20, Minnesota had the ball at midfield with 8 seconds remaining, out of time outs. There is no mystery about what happens next. The pass isn't going to go down the middle, because there is no way the Vikings could get to the line and spike to stop the clock. The pass might go to the end zone, but 99 percent of Hail Marys fail. Every last man and woman in the crowd of 64,278 knew the pass would be a quick out to the sideline to put the ball into field goal range and stop the clock. Nevertheless, Marcus Robinson caught a quick out at the sidelines and stepped out of bounds with 2 seconds on the scoreboard; Minnesota kicked the winning field goal on the next down. How can you give up a quick out when you *know* that's the pattern coming?

**Sweet-Turns-Sour** Trailing 23-17, the Giants took possession on their 17 yard line with 3:29 remaining and staged a sweet drive for the touchdown with five ticks on the clock. Eli Manning's winning pass, thrown off his back foot with a blitz in his face, may someday be remembered as the quarterback's first step into Giants lore. But over on the Denver side, sweet tactics turned sour. As Jersey/A began creeping down the field, the Broncos stayed patient and remained in a standard defense. But when the Giants reached the Denver 32 with 27 seconds left, caution went out the window and the Broncs started blitzing. You know what happened next! First, a 24-yard pass to Jeremy Shockey against a blitz, then the eight-yard winning touchdown to Amani Toomer against a safety blitz. On the fateful final drive, it took the Giants three minutes to move 51 yards versus Denver's standard defense, and just 27 seconds to go the final 32 yards against the blitz. Too often in crunch moments, defensive coordinators feel they must make something happen, and call ill-advised blitzes. The goal, for a defense, is to prevent something from happening.

**Best Purist Drive** Houston staged a 14-play, 79-yard touchdown drive of 13 runs and one pass.

**Best Postmodern Drive** Philadelphia staged a 12-play, 86-yard touchdown drive of 11 called passes and one run.

**Star Wars Bottomless Pit Final Score** Tuesday Morning Quarterback tracks the bottomless pits that often turn up in sci-fi. There was no bottomless pit in *Revenge of the Sith*, making the Star Wars final score: bottomless pits in four of the six flicks. Previously, Official Brother of TMQ, Frank, noted that none of the Star Wars bottomless pits are surrounded by safety rails, indicating there was no OSHA long ago in that galaxy far away. Yours truly countered that the scenes prove enlightened self-interest does not exist in the Skywalker galaxy, since you should not need a burdensome government agency to tell you to erect a guard rail around your bottomless pit!

Never resolved was why there were so many bottomless pits in the first place. My speculation is technological: advanced future economies will somehow depend on the construction and maintenance of bottomless pits, possibly as conduits for dark energy (see below). Frank's guess is more straightforward. In the 1970s and 1980s, he speculates, it was a lot of work to fill in complex scenes, so matte artists simply had the bottoms of long chambers blur to oblivion. Now computer animation allows dozens or hundreds of moving objects in a scene. Thus, instead of people fighting at the edges of pits, the final Star Wars flick offered scenes of people standing or fighting at the edges of incredibly tall structures where complicated cities, chambers or landscapes were visible beneath. Indeed, there were many such scenes in *Revenge of the Sith*. But still no guard rails! In one scene, Anakin stopped his flying car at Padme's spectacular penthouse apartment, atop a building miles high with a panoramic view of the planet. (The ad must have read, 10 RMS PLNT VU.) The soon-to-be-Darth Vader parked at a pad next to the aerial terrace; Padme, R2 and 3PO came out to greet him. All stood right at the edge of the balcony, which had no rails or protection between them and a very, very long fall. But then if Padme could afford such a magnificent penthouse, perhaps she could afford force fields for her balcony.

**Aaaaaiiiiiiiiiyyyyyyyye!!!!** Pittsburgh 27, Cincinnati 6 with 6:31 remaining. The Bengals face fourth-and-3 on their 35. This cannot seriously be the punt unit taking the field!!!! *Aaaaaiiiiiiiiiyyyyyyyye!!!!*

**Cheer-Babe Professionalism Watch** Kickoff temperature at Paul Brown Stadium may have been 47 degrees, nevertheless the Cincinnati Bengals' cheerleaders came out seriously overdressed. This was a

crunch game -- professionalism was in order! (In the NFL cheerleader context, professionalism means skin or at least skin tight.) Sure, Cincinnati is used to losing, so the cheerleaders are hardly accustomed to being under pressure. But if the Bengals want to make the playoffs, their cheer squad must appease the football gods with displays of professionalism. Over at Lincoln Financial Field, kickoff temperature 53 degrees, the highly professional Eagles' cheerleaders came out in barely more than bikinis. Needless to say, the football gods crowned the Eagles with victory.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk** Trailing 27-13 in the fourth quarter, Miami faced fourth-and-1 on its 24 and punted. Sure the Marine Mammals were deep in their territory, but it was the fourth quarter, Miami was trailing big, the average NFL play gains more than four yards and in the game, as noted by Mikey Morris of West Palm Beach, Florida, the Dolphins averaged 6.1 yards per play. As the punt boomed, TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook. In cases like this TMQ asks -- trailing by 14 in the fourth quarter and facing fourth-and-1, is there one chance in a million Bill Belichick doesn't go for it? Anyway a buck-buck-brawckkkkkkk pattern is forming under Nick Saben. As David Kennedy of Fort Lauderdale, Florida, points out, against Buffalo, Miami punted on fourth-and-5 in Bills' territory despite being down by 10 points; against City of Tampa, punted on fourth-and-7 from the Bucs' 35 despite being down by 7 points.

**Wacky Hotel of the Week** Last year the globe-trotting Official Wife of TMQ was in Wuhan, China, where she stayed in the wacky Donghu Hotel, whose offerings included a "slap-up feast with zero service." This year the Official Wife paused from globe-trotting at Hotel Dan in Bucharest, Romania, whose offerings include a "breakfast saloon, American style." You know you'll have a good time because Hotel Dan has "high standards of quality and comfort that are a compulsory requirement." Compulsory comfort! A single room goes for 240 Romanian New Leu.

**Why Seeing Less Is More Fun** Because television shows only the small tetragon immediately around the football, sometimes when a gentleman breaks free, viewers think, "Wow, what amazing thing did he do to get so open!" If you see the whole field, the amazement value is lower. Indianapolis leading 7-0, Peyton Manning heaved a 31-yard touchdown pass to tight end Dallas Clark. Clark simply ran a short turn-in, going five yards down the field and turning around. The Houston defense doesn't notice him; Clark snagged the pass and legged it out to the end zone. Basically it's a touch-football play; the television perspective made it seem more dramatic. That camera perspective adds to the drama is one of the reasons football works so well on television.

**Worst Blocks** As this space has noted, in two of Buffalo's three previous loses, the deciding play came when the Bills failed to convert a fourth-and-1 run. Both times the Buffalo offensive line got zero push. Trailing 10-7 in the second quarter at Oakland on Sunday, Buffalo faced fourth-and-goal on the Raiders' 1. The Bills' offensive line got zero push, the runner was stuffed for no gain, Oakland ball. Buffalo has faced three critical fourth-and-1 situations this season, run straight ahead each time, and failed each time. Bills' blockers, who barely gave Kelly Holcomb two-Mississippi on Sunday, continue to compete with Houston's for the dubious distinction of worst offensive line in the league. Buffalo quarterbacks have not had a 300-yard passing day since September 14, 2003. (Stat noted by Mark Gaughan of the *Buffalo News*.) Consistently awful offensive line play is the reason.

**Why Are You Punting???????** Trailing 31-17 with 7:51 remaining, Buffalo faced fourth-and-6 on its 31. In trotted the punt unit. There are eight minutes left and you need two touchdowns! Obviously Bills' coach Mike Mularkey had quit on the game, and was concerned about holding down the margin of defeat. But NFL coaches should try all-out to win, not worry about how final scores will look on their resumes when they begin the offseason hunt for new employment.

**Mega Babe News** The hottest hot babe in America right now is the Jennifer Anniston body double Vince Vaughn was seen embracing. We don't even know this woman's name! She should hold a press conference and announce a swimsuit calendar. Meanwhile if it's true the real Jennifer has fallen for Vaughn, this gives hope to unattractive paunchy men everywhere. Remind me again what his appeal is?

**The Sportsmanship Paradox** Tuesday Morning Quarterback rails against running up the score, yet also wrote last week that Indianapolis did not need to panic when falling behind 17-0 against St. Louis in the first quarter because there was plenty of time for a comeback. Many readers objected; if comebacks are

a danger, shouldn't teams run up the score to prevent them? Rabbi Josh Yuter of Springfield, New Jersey, said I had created a Sportsmanship Paradox and should offer "an objective criteria for what constitutes running up the score." Zach Summers of New Haven, Connecticut, proposed one: "Being accused to arbitrary line-drawing -- I am a Yale Law student -- I propose the four-minute mark of the third quarter be the last time a team that is ahead by four touchdowns or more tries hard to score." That's a pretty good metric, but I'll offer a simpler one. Comebacks are always a worry; running up the score occurs when comebacks have become impossible. The greatest comeback in NFL history was from a 32-point deficit, the greatest comeback in NCAA Division I from a 31-point deficit. (If any reader knows what the greatest high school comeback was, use the link at Reader Animadversion, and we'll add that.) So here's my rule. A team can never be accused of running up the score in the first half. But once into the third quarter, teams above the 31-32 point margin that are still passing, faking kicks, calling timeouts and so on are running up the score.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback has presented so many examples of bad sportsmanship in college, it is refreshing to offer an example of good sportsmanship. Leading 56-3 at halftime against Illinois, Penn State did not attempt a forward pass in the second half. Taking possession on the Illinois 17 with 2:19 remaining and a 63-10 lead, the Nittany Lions knelt on the ball four times to end the game. The whole second half for Penn State was Class with a capital "C". At many colleges that routinely run up the score, such as Texas Tech, they don't know much about class -- but then, nobody on the football team goes to class.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!** Game scoreless, San Francisco blitzed six against Washington; 43-yard completion to Santana Moss, and the Skins record their first touchdown three plays later. Now trailing 7-0, San Francisco blitzed six; 32-yard completion to Chris Cooley, and the Skins record their second touchdown a play later.

**Whew -- 96 percent of the Universe Found!** Tuesday Morning Quarterback regularly notes the "dark energy" puzzle -- cosmologists believe the galaxies move as if acted upon by far more matter and energy than can be detected in the firmament. For the last decade or so, physicists have posited the explanation is mysterious "dark energy" that defies detection. Last year's common estimates used by astrophysicists was that 85 percent of the content of the cosmos is undetectable. As yours truly said in this space, "We can't find 85 percent of the universe. But trust us, we're experts." This year many researchers have endorsed the idea that an incredible 96 percent of the universe is exotic "dark" stuff that cannot be located.

Comes now these words from the frontiers of science. First, Edward Kolb, a researcher at the Fermi National Accelerator Laboratory in Batavia, Illinois, declared the whole dark-energy concept may be nonsense. That still leaves the problem of explaining the movement of the galaxies. Kolb's proposal? The galaxies move as they do because they are following "perturbations" in space-time, extremely large-scale structures created during the Big Bang. Why can't we discover the perturbations? They, um, are undetectable, Kolb thinks. Back to Square One. But wait! Consider this recent paper by two researchers at the University of Victoria in Canada, pointed out by Bobby Schmidt of Bellevue, Washington. The paper posits the galaxies do, in fact, move as if acted upon solely by the matter and energy accounted for; it's just that scientists haven't realized the equations of general relativity already explain galactic motion. So we fell for the notion that 96 percent of the universe is concealed in mysterious forces, and now it turns everything was directly in front of our eyes the whole time. But trust us, we're experts!

**Puzzling Play of the Week** Once again the United States Saints (what TMQ will call them till their home is resolved) lost on a last-minute puzzling officiating decision. Yet the Saints are no slouches at creating their own problems. Leading St. Louis 17-14, New Orleans had second-and-3 on its 39; Donte' Stallworth fumbled an end-around, Die Morgenmuffel scored a touchdown on the possession and the Saints trailed for the remainder of the contest. Every week there is one NFL play that yours truly re-runs multiple times in rapt fascination, and this week, this was it. On the play, New Orleans only sent one receiver downfield. Six gents are blocking in a tight formation, four others fussing around in the backfield going every which way in apparent confusion. Because only one Saint went downfield, nine Rams defenders stayed at the line of scrimmage and were present to plaster Stallworth, then recover his fumble. Somehow New Orleans thought 10 guys could all stayed packed into the same small space, then one would

burst out of the pack with the entire defense fooled.

**You'd Think It Would Be Too Cold to Strip in Canada** The 2005 Miss Nude Canada title was won by a woman who dances under the name Honey Houston, and turned out to be a 28-year-old graduate student at the University of Calgary. According to the Miss Nude Canada website, which yours truly cannot link to for obvious reasons, contestants in the event do not have to be Canadian. "The Miss Nude Canada title is the most respected title of its kind," the pageant's website declares. A *respected* nude pageant! TMQ suggests that next year, only graduate students be allowed to compete.

**Person You Really Don't Want to Be When They Look at Game Film** You don't want to be San Diego reserve offensive lineman Scott Mruczkowski, who just stood there and watched Eagle Quintin Mikell go by for the field goal block that won the game for Philadelphia.

**Get On the Ground!** The spectacular return of a blocked field goal put Philadelphia up 20-17 just before the two minute warning, but now here comes San Diego to tie or recover the lead. With 1:44 remaining, Drew Brees hit the smallish Reche Caldwell with a first-down strike to the Nesharim 19. Caldwell was under tackle but kept churning forward, trying to pick up an extra yard. An Eagle punched the ball out: Philadelphia recovered, game over. It's one thing for power backs such as Jerome Bettis to drive the pile forward; usually once under tackle, just put both arms around the ball and get on the ground.

**Even Drew Bledsoe Has Seven Rushing Touchdowns** In 49 career starts for Detroit, Joey Harrington has never run for a touchdown. In his first career start for Detroit, Jeff Garcia ran for a touchdown.

**If It Wasn't Fake, Nobody Would Believe It** Recently the Official Family celebrated a birthday by staying at this Great Wolf Lodge, part of a new mini-chain of family resorts that combine lodging with a water park inside the hotel -- you walk barefoot from your room to the water. Beholding the huge facility chock with families cavorting on water slides and munching pizza at air-conditioned indoor picnic tables, I thought, "This is why the United States won the Cold War. It wasn't missiles. It was that the old Soviet Union never had anything like Great Wolf Lodge." We had a fun time, but at the center of Great Wolf Lodge is a cheesy animatronic display with talking trees and animals; the machine sang a cheesy faux-Disney song about the wonders of nature. The tag line was, "The rhythm of nature keeps us working together in harmony." The Great Wolf Lodge we stayed at was next to a Wal-Mart; the parking lot was at least half SUVs; inside a machine that simulates forest creatures was signing about harmony with nature, while the whole point of the Great Wolf experience is that *you never go outside*. At the entrance to the restaurant were barrels full of apples; the apples were fake. Disney note: at the center of Disney's new Animal Kingdom park in Orlando stands a gigantic Tree of Life. It's fake.

**A.J., J.P. -- Not a Good Year for Initials Quarterbacks** Bottom line of Miami's pair of A.J. Feely trades: the Dolphins surrendered second- and sixth-round draft picks for Cleo Lemon.

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All** Trailing 27-14, Jersey/B took possession on its 27 with 10:26 remaining. As noted by Michael Bauer of Fort White, Florida, Jets coaches called 16 consecutive passing plays, the drive ending on an incomplection on fourth-and-1 at the Atlanta 11 with 3:39 remaining. Conventionally it is assumed that when team behind, pass pass pass. But when you're behind, the first priority is to score a touchdown -- then you can assess the next move. Plus abandoning the run simplifies life for the defense. Suppose Jets coaches had mixed in a few runs on that drive, using more clock, but scoring a touchdown to make it 27-21 at the two-minute warning. Suddenly it's an exciting ending! Panicking and going pass-wacky, on the other hand, almost never works.

**Why Not Hurricane Aardvark?** Tropical storms are given names in alphabetical order -- Arlene was first in 2005 -- so it tells you something that we just had Hurricane Wilma. Wilma was the last of the names the National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration chose for the 2005 hurricane season, which still has weeks to run. Not wanting to restart with a double-letter name such as Aaron, NOAA named the latest tropical storm Alpha; the next will be Beta, and so on. If hurricanes continue to increase, maybe

NOAA should use the 40-letter Saxon Spanglish alphabet.

**We're All Professionals Here** Kelly Holcomb fumbled the snap, recovery by Oakland. One play later Kerry Collins fumbled the snap, recovery by Buffalo.

**NFL in Iran Update** This week's Sunday card offered four headliner-quality contests -- San Diego at Philadelphia, Denver at Jersey/A, Pittsburgh at Cincinnati and Dallas at Seattle. When has there been a Sunday with *four* such monster pairings! Three went down to the final seconds. And which of these four marquee games was shown in Washington, D.C., where TMQ lurks? None. Though, we did see Baltimore at Chicago, a woofier matchup of losing clubs. Over in Iran, two of the four monster contests were aired by Middle East TV. So yet again the NFL spared no expense to stage fantastic games, then made it impossible for many American viewers to see the fantastic games; while yet again Iran got a better selection of NFL games than did our nation's capital.

**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. Reader comments now run on Wednesday.

**Obscure College Score of the Week** Campbellsville 62, Cumberland of Tennessee 60. Not to be confused with the University of the Cumberlands in Kentucky, Cumberland University of Lebanon, Tennessee, emphasizes "development of the whole student -- intellectual, spiritual, psychosocial, physical, creative." Parents, are you sure you want to pay a small fortune to have some college experiment with your child's "psychosocial" development?

**Near-Ultimate Final Score** TMQ has long contended the ultimate football score would be 2-0 in overtime. On Saturday, two teams came as close as possible: Arkansas State 3, Florida Atlantic 0 in overtime.

**Stats of the Week (College Extra)** Against LaSalle, Catholic University has minus-48 yards rushing and 728 yards passing. The teams combined for 47 yards rushing and 1,128 yards passing. Noted by Scott Fendley of Crawfordsville, Indiana.

**Generic Predictions Update** The generic final of Home Team 20, Visiting Team 17, predicted by yours truly and by reader Michael Wolfe, took just two weeks to come to pass -- Eagles 20, Chargers 17 at Philadelphia. Meanwhile, the consensus of users continues to outpace the experts at Yahoo!. Consensus of users is 66-36; the leading Yahoo! football expert is 65-37, same as my off-price ultra-generic prediction of Home Team Wins. A reader notes in haiku:

Nesharim beat Bolts.  
Generic prediction holds;  
Twenty-seventeen.

-- *Bradley Dull, Willow Grove, Pa.*

**Next Week** Sci-fi is plagued by bottomless pits, but what's really troubling about this genre is -- why do super-advanced beings bother to attack the Earth? If you were super-advanced, wouldn't you have better things to do? TMQ fires a death ray at alien-invasion movies.

## Week 7 Readers:

(Oct. 26, 2005) -- Last week's column supposed that Lady Luck determines more football outcomes than we care to admit. A reader counters in haiku:

You say luck. I say  
the football gods call the shots  
in the NFL.

-- Dave Leininger, Fort Collins, Colo.

Regarding the item on social deviants who install locomotive horns in their cars, Tom Ahearn of Buffalo, N.Y., reports, "Lawyer Milloy of the Bills drives [an obscenely huge Ford F-650](#), and when he pulls into Ralph Wilson Stadium on Sunday mornings for a game, he lays on his locomotive horn that he has installed to pump up fans who are tailgating." Okay, blow a locomotive horn at a tailgate -- you're supposed to make noise at a football game. But Lawyer, don't you dream of blowing that monstrosity in traffic.



The wacky-martini item drew multitudinous responses. I speculated that with rhubarb-vodka and steak-slice martinis out there, the vodka-and-cough-syrup martini can't be far behind. Catherine Ewen of Berkeley, Calif., rejoins that on *The Simpsons*, Homer has already devised a terrifying potion of tequila, crème de menthe and cough syrup called the Flaming Moe. Rob Margolis of Portland wrote, "Previously I lived in Manhattan, where oddball martinis are the rage. During Passover, my wife suggested I mix a vodka martini with Manischewitz -- the Manischewitini. A regular Manischewitini would feature traditional Manischewitz Concord Grape, but other Manischewitinis could use blackberry, elderberry or even [cream peach Manischewitz](#)."

**Lechaim!**

Randy Ryan made the purist's objection that the word "martini" means gin or vodka mixed with vermouth. Just because you put that colorful sickly sweet concoction in an elegant martini glass, Ryan points out, doesn't make it a martini. Meanwhile this column has run imaginary recipes for my imaginary blueberry-almond martini. Aaron Ehle of Southfield, Mich., found an actual blueberry-almond libation recipe posted in a [bartender's guide](#). TMQ can say only -- Waitress, I'll have anything else.

Last week's column "harkened back" on a point of nostalgia. Professor Stephen Carter of Yale Law School notes, "One may hearken to the call of the train whistle or hark back to the golden age of the *New Yorker*, but to hearken back is to do the impossible -- not unlike running a 'double' reverse with only two handoffs." Carter is author of the bestselling novel [The Emperor of Ocean Park](#), which I recommend to readers. Falk Solbrig of Dresden, Germany, a Steelers' fan, notes the soccer equivalent of TMQ's generic final score prediction -- Home Team 20, Visiting Team 17 -- is Home Team 2, Visiting Team 1. Solbrig reports he has endlessly been predicting a final of Home Team 2, Visiting Team 1 in a soccer pool and currently is ranked third of 50 pool participants.

Last week's column noted how the U.K.'s Advertising Standards Authority ordered winemaker Lambrini to change a television commercial in which three flashy babes drink Lambrini while trying to pick up a studly young guy. This, the Authority said, impermissibly implies that a product brings sexual success; a balding, middle-aged man was inserted into the commercial to replace the stud. Paul Spirito reports that Lambrini now invites women to submit pictures of [overweight, middle-aged men they find sexy](#). As TMQ has noted before, the balding, overweight men who run television, advertising and the movies have a self interest in suggesting that frisky young women are sexually drawn to them; there exists little empirical evidence of this contention. Meanwhile Steve Reber of Gainesville, Fla., proffers, "There's something dramatically wrong with the reasoning employed by the Advertising Standards Authority. First commercial: Stud uses product, gets hit on by hot chicks. Revised commercial: Bald-

ing, paunchy man uses product, gets hit on by hot chicks. Which of these scenarios implies a product has an effect on sexual success?"

I challenged readers to find the error in the [NFL's chart of greatest comebacks](#). Many, many readers including Glenn Levin of Atlanta, caught that the line score for the Buffalo-Indianapolis comeback game adds up to the Bills finishing with 47 points; they scored 37.

Concerning the recent item on a high school girl who threw three touchdown passes in a varsity game, Ben Volin of the *Palm Beach Post* offers this article on [women who work as high school football officials](#). Male officiating crews are strictly a convention; expect this convention to be overturned.

Observing the rail line that runs along the Front Range of the Rocky Mountains in Colorado, yours truly wondered why I saw full coal trains passing each other headed both north and south. Wouldn't they be running loaded in one direction and empty in the other? Bill Mallett of Bangkok, Thailand, suggests, "Clearly the coal is being used to fuel the trains." I worry that a lot of modern economics boils down to this. Barry Bryan of Fort Worth, Texas, a retired Burlington Northern official, notes the line I was watching has parallel tracks, one owned by Union Pacific and one owned by Burlington Northern-Sante Fe; full coal trains may be passing each other because they are under different contracts to different customers. (Here's a view of the [BN-SF rail control center in Fort Worth](#) -- eat your heart out, NASA.) Jared Stokes of Peoria, Ariz., who has ordered coal as a manager of a cement plant, speculates, "Coal is in a boom cycle, so customers are getting it from whatever supplier they can. Often the nearest supplier is already covered up with other sales commitments," resulting in coal that is traveling a long distance passing local coal. The most detailed answer comes Karl Zimmerman of College Station, Texas, who first establishes his bona fides: "The locomotives in your photo are ex-Southern Pacific EMD SD45T-2s rebuilt with 16-cylinder 645E engines and microprocessor controls and called SD40T-3s, and the cars in the photo carry iron ore, not coal." He continues, "Yes, you saw coal headed both ways. There are a variety of grades of coal, with different uses. There's lignite (which is something like burning dirt), and bituminous, and the really hard stuff, anthracite. Each burns differently. Every coal seam has different chemical properties, so even within a grade of coal, one mine's product may be better for a particular application than another's. What you probably saw was Power River Basin low-sulfur bituminous coal from Wyoming headed southbound to power plants, and a different grade of coal for a metallurgical application headed north and then east, ultimately."



**This isn't a friendly flyover, it's a tactical warfare maneuver.**

I wondered if the federal taxpayer had been hit up for the B-2 bomber flyover at Arrowhead before the 'Skins-Chiefs collision. The answer is yes, though numerous Air Force, Army and Navy personnel wrote to note that flyovers are scheduled as part of regular flight-crew proficiency training -- in other words, are costs that would have been incurred anyway. Ray Mooney, a Chief Petty Officer at the [naval air station in San Diego](#), writes, "If the military isn't fighting, it's training. Every time a pilot lights the fires on his or her aircraft, he or she is training for something. If a group of H-60 helicopters fly over a Chargers game prior to *Monday Night Football* (as they did), they fit that flight into a regular training schedule. If the aircraft are going to fly anyway because pilots need to get in so many flight hours per month, why not wave the flag, so to speak, over a packed stadium? No harm/no foul for the taxpayers -- the U.S. military gets its training accomplished, and maybe a few folks in the stadium take a moment to remember those who serve."

In one of the *Star Trek* theatrical movies, our heroes travel backward in time to the 1980s and, lacking money, get supplies by swapping a 23rd-century formula for "transparent aluminum." Watching the flick I thought, "But wouldn't this alter history?" Stand by for history to change -- William Wright, an engineer in Cleveland, points out that [glass fashioned from alumina](#) has recently been made in the lab. Was this discovered, or did somebody get the formula from a time-traveler wearing a Starfleet uniform?

Finally, Jaime Olander of Seattle, who once toiled as an Alaskan fisherman, weighs in on the "frozen tundra" debate. Many animadverting readers contended the phrase is redundant; that all tundra is frozen. Olander points out that only the subsoil in tundra regions -- the "permafrost" -- is always iced, while topsoil undergoes cycles of freeze and thaw. He writes, "[See this article](#), which provides a synopsis of the history of tundra fires in Alaska, believed to have occurred fairly frequently since the last Ice Age. If it's frozen, it ain't goin to burn." If global warming melts the permafrost under Lambeau Field, does this mean future sportscasters will refer to the surface as the "sizzling tundra?"

## Greek mythology warns Brett Favre, and why would super-advanced aliens bother to invade Earth?

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

(Nov. 1, 2005) -- Sic transit gloria Favre? That's not quite Latin, but the splendor of one of football's best-ever quarterbacks seems fading fast. Five interceptions! Yes the Packers have injuries, but injuries did not cause Favre to throw into triple coverage on his fifth interception Sunday. All glory of this world fades away -- and as the Bible warns, moth and rust consume.

Is Favre's problem just rust of aging, or is the vengeance of the football gods at play? A few columns ago, yours truly warned the Packers had angered the football gods by furiously running up the score to 52-3 against the hapless United States Saints. Angus Swantee of Halifax, Nova Scotia, notes what has happened to Green Bay since: A last-second loss to Minnesota, followed by Favre's worst game ever. Much as the football pantheon loves Favre, gods never let hubris go unpunished. Remember what happened to Nerites -- you do remember, right? Nerites was a sea-god and the lover of Aphrodite. Zeus invited Nerites and Aphrodite to leave Earth and ascend to Olympus; essentially, he told them it was time to retire. Aphrodite agreed but Nerites refused; as punishment, Zeus turned him into a shellfish. Brett, beware of being turned into a shellfish.

The Packers are hardly the only ones to anger the football gods. Leading 42-21 with 30 seconds remaining, ball on the Philadelphia 6, rather than do the dignified thing and order a kneel down, Broncos coaches called a play, snickering as they ran up the score to 49-21. Sportswriters praised Denver's big winning margin -- but the Bible cautions, "Woe to you when all think well of you." Expect the football gods to punish Denver for poor sportsmanship. Overall, things are getting pretty Biblical-mythological in the NFL. In non-football news, why would super-advanced aliens bother to invade the Earth? Don't they know we have nothing to offer but fatty foods, rap music and hurricanes? Below, Tuesday Morning Quarterback fires a death ray at alien-invasion movies and television shows.

**Stats of the Week** At 1:22 p.m. ET on October 30, the Houston Texans led for the first time this season.

**Stats of the Week No. 2** Fifteen of Cincinnati's league-leading 20 interceptions have come against NFC North quarterbacks, while all NFC North starting quarterbacks have a five-interception game. Noted by Brian Spence of Chicago.

**Stats of the Week No. 3** The NFC East is 13-1 at home while the AFC East is 3-13 on the road. Submitted by Marcel Hanenbergh, Amsterdam, the Netherlands.

**Stats of the Week No. 4** Denver was ahead 28-0 before Philadelphia recorded a first down.

**Stats of the Week No. 5** Last week Washington had 52 points, 457 yards of offense and 24 first downs. This week Washington had zero points, 125 yards of offense and seven first downs.

**Stats of the Week No. 6** Trent Green passed for 317 yards in the second half -- and Kansas City lost.

**Stats of the Week No. 7** Since the Drew Bledsoe trade, Buffalo is 1-6 against New England.

**Stats of the Week No. 8** Washington has a winning record despite being minus-9 for turnovers, second worst in the league. Buffalo has a losing record despite being plus-8 for turnovers, fourth best.

**Stats of the Week No. 9** Running back LaDainian Tomlinson has as many touchdown passes (three) as all Jets' quarterbacks combined. Stat from Dori Reichmann, Rehovot, Israel.

**Cheerleader of the Week** The Redskins Cheerleaders continue their upward surge and now rival the Philadelphia Eagles Cheerleaders for No. 1 in the NFL, by the three essential measures of complex dance routines, aesthetic appeal and disdain for clothing. This week's Cheerleader of the Week Jennifer B. of Washington, a graduate of Towson University who works as an accountant. Hmmm -- maybe I need tax advice! According to her team bio, Jenn has been studying ballet, jazz and other dance since the age of three, which is too late to start by contemporary standards of dance obsession. Jenn reports her favorite saying is "Everything happens for a reason." Warning, serious digression: Even as a churchgoer, what gets me through the day is the belief that most things do not happen for a reason. God may be watching from afar, but tragedies past and present seem inexplicable unless most accidents, violence, sickness and other traumas are simply flaws of existence, lacking direction or larger purpose. If what goes wrong lacks purpose, then perhaps humanity may find ways to remove accidents, violence and sickness from life. Thus the idea that most things do not happen for a reason is, to me, a life-affirming thought. Digression ends. Jenn also reports a favorite saying is "Kiss me, I'm Irish." Now there is a sentiment we can all wholeheartedly support!

As TMQ has noted, apparently the modern thong bikini covers *way* too much, as today many women modeling for cheerleader calendars or the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue pose with tops undone or fingers hooked into the bottoms of their suits, suggesting imminent nudity. In the Redskins' calendar, traditional males will be pleased to hear that nearly half the cheerleaders pose this way.

**Sweet Play of the Week** "Influence" actions are high-risk, high-reward -- a lineman pulls one way and then the rusher goes through the hole the lineman just vacated, offense gambling the defense will react to the pull and vacate the area. Dallas leading Arizona of Mexico 17-10, the Cowboys faced second-and-goal on the Cards' 10. Both offensive linemen on the right side pulled left, then tailback Marion Barber ran right -- directly toward a place where there were no blockers -- for the touchdown that turned the game into a walkover.

**Sweet Special-Teams Play** One of Tuesday Morning Quarterback's causes is that conservative NFL coaches don't go after the punter enough, rarely sending more than a token rush. Game scoreless in St. Louis, the Rams rushed seven against a Tennessee punt -- and Die Morgenmuffel rushers were jumping around before the snap, too, another tactic neglected on punts. Block, touchdown return.

**Sweet Player of the Week No. 1** The undrafted Antonio Gates is the best tight end in the league; is he the best receiver in the league? On two of his three touchdowns against Kansas City, Gates was double covered. On the third, he ran through tacklers. Ten receptions for 145 yards and three touchdowns -- yes, that will be adequate, Antonio.

**Sweet Player of the Week No. 2** Third-string quarterback Cody Pickett not only saved the day for San Francisco by playing the fourth quarter, but he made a special-teams tackle on the punt-coverage unit.

**Sweet Player of the Week No. 3** As noted by Danny Groner of Silver Spring, Md., Tiki Barber ran for more yards on his first carry than the Redskins ran for in the entire game. Between his loyalty to the Giants, his pleasant public persona and his steady climb up the Giants' all-time rushing chart, Barber is now "The Toast of New York."

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2** Sometimes the first snap of the game is as important as the last. On the first snap of the Jersey/A-Washington collision, Barber took a toss 57 yards down the sideline behind perfect blocks by OLs Luke Pettigout and David Diehl. Barber had motored 50 yards before a defender touched him. It's pretty fun to run 50 yards on the first play when everyone in front of you has already been knocked to the ground.

**Sour Player of the Week** Extremely overpaid Minnesota corner Fred Smoot, who got an \$11 million bonus in the offseason, not only was fried by Carolina's Steve Smith, who caught 11 passes for 201

yards, but Smoot also committed five illegal contact, holding and other penalties in trying to guard Smith.

**Almost Sour Play of the Week** The winless Moo Cows lead Cleveland 19-16 with 50 seconds remaining, the Browns facing fourth-and-17 on the Houston 47. All Houston has to do is stop one play and it's finally in the win column. But look -- Antonio Bryant is streaking *single covered* into the end zone -- Aaaaaiiiiiiiiiyyyyyyyye!!!! The pass was there, just barely deflected by corner Philip Buchanon. How can a receiver possibly get behind everybody in that situation?

**Hey, My Name Only Comes 174th! I Was Promised 158th Billing!** This column noted the ridiculous number of authors who attach their names to scientific papers, citing a *Science* magazine article that listed 28 authors for 1,225 words. Maureen Long, a doctoral candidate in geophysics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, reports that author-to-words ratio has been blown out of the water by a 2,889-word paper in *Science* that lists a preposterous 209 authors. That's 14 words per author. Maureen adds, "Most of the work of a research paper comes in doing the science. Papers with dozens of authors are actually written by a small subset of those authors, but they describe work all of the authors contributed to substantially -- one hopes, anyway." Could 209 researchers (at 84 institutions!) really have played a substantive role in one study, or is this just a record-setting case of resume padding?

**Never Run Backwards!** There is one player in the NFL who should be allowed to run backwards, and he is Dante Hall. Everyone else, it's pretty simple -- run forward, not backward. Miami leading 6-3 and the United States Saints facing third-and-6 in Dolphins territory, Aaron Brooks of the Saints reversed his field backward three times and ended up being sacked for a 25-yard loss. Later, Miami leading 9-6 and New Orleans facing third-and-17 on its own 8, Brooks ran backwards into his end zone and was sacked for a safety. Not only is it nutty to run backward toward your own end zone, it's especially nutty to do this on third-and-17 when a punt on the next snap is likely. New Orleans ended up with 68 yards lost on sacks in a 21-6 defeat.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk** Trailing 10-0 in the second quarter, the 2-4 Vikings faced fourth-and-1 on the Carolina 48. In trotted the punting unit, and it took the Panthers just three snaps to pass the point where the ball would have been had Minnesota gone for it and missed. You're 2-4! You're behind by two scores! You're in opposition territory! If you can't make one single yard, you deserve to lose! And now you are 2-5.

**"Hi, I'm Bob Schieffer, and Here Are Tonight's Fantasy News Stats"** Sean McManus, president of CBS Sports, was named to head CBS News. This development is going to be heavily mined by comedians, so let me get my lines in fast:

Scantly clad cheer-babes on CBS Evening News. Bob Schieffer is going to have a lot of trouble keeping his eyes on the Teleprompter.

Halftime show during State of the Union address.

Fantasy draft of politicians. I'd steer clear of Tom DeLay unless you can get him cheap in the last round.

Note: there's no reason only television types should have Teleprompters. This website sells them to anyone for as low as \$799. Check the "presidential style prompter" of precision machined aluminum, whose "screen display will flash to tell presenter to speed up or down." But where do you jack in the device that lets your staff control what you say?

**Can You Give Up 418 Yards and Also Have a Great Defensive Day?** San Diego 21, Kansas City 10, the Chiefs had third-and-12 on the Bolts' 13. Rookie end Shawne Merriman "rip" rushed Kansas City tackle Jordan Black. The rip is the hardest move for the defensive linemen: You must push the blocker away with the outside of your arm, and the triceps are not naturally strong. Merriman ripped so well that he blew past Black and caused a fumble, even though Black was holding; recovery by San Diego and the threat ends. Now it's San Diego 28, Kansas City 13 late in the fourth quarter, the Flintstones have sec-

ond-and-goal on the Chargers' 3. First snap, runner stuffed. Second snap, sack. Third snap, pass incomple-  
 tion; the rest is filler. Note to Kansas City: The final call was a play fake. Who's going to fall for a play  
 fake on fourth-and-goal from the 9?

**Martians: Even Dumber Than Humans** Aliens, computers, clones -- at the movies they're all trying to  
 take over the Earth. Why would they want to? And I don't mean just because of pop music. In the *Matrix*  
 movies, sinister computers enslaved humanity, sustaining men and women in elaborate racks tended by  
 medical droids, while an incredibly complicated simulation tricks everyone into thinking they are experi-  
 encing normal life, thus preventing revolution. Why did the sinister computers do this? Because, the  
*Matrix* movies explained, the computers depend on human body heat as a power source. This makes  
 absolutely no sense. First, body heat isn't a "source" of energy -- body heat originates with food, which  
 requires sunlight as its energy source. If the malevolent computers wanted heat, it would be far easier  
 and cheaper to build nuclear reactors, or even burn the crops grown to feed the captive people who give  
 off the heat.

In *Independence Day*, Earth is attacked by aliens who live in space aboard an ultra-gigantic starship,  
 calling no world home, using planets solely for resources. Why do they want to conquer Earth? To seize  
 its resources. Maybe Earth-like planets are rare, but the likelihood is there are thousands, if not millions,  
 of Earth-like worlds in the galaxy. Wouldn't it be far more appealing to mine an uninhabited Earth-like  
 world than to stage an elaborate global military assault -- which, even if successful, will consume re-  
 sources?

Hark back to the television miniseries *V*, in which aliens land in California and pretend to be friendly in  
 order to buy time to position forces for the conquest on Earth. Their sinister objective: They want our  
 water. Water is among the most common substances in the cosmos! The immense Oort Cloud of comets  
 that surrounds the solar system has an estimated 40 times the mass of Earth, and most of that mass is  
 water. Super-advanced aliens could simply pull their starcruisers up to the Oort Cloud and take all the  
 water they could carry without having to stage an elaborate invasion and overcome armed resistance.  
 Meanwhile, we don't yet know why outer space beings are trying to take over the Earth in *Threshold* and  
*Invasion*, the new network aliens attack series. All we are sure of so far is that aliens are *obviously*  
 attacking, yet government is doing nothing. Maybe FEMA is in charge of alien response, too.

Now to Steven Spielberg's *The War of the Worlds*. We're told that thousands of years ago, super-  
 advanced aliens buried hundreds of attack tripods across the Earth to be activated during an invasion.  
 But if the bad aliens were here with overwhelming force thousands of years ago, why didn't they just  
 seize the Earth then, when there was no resistance? Meanwhile, humanity has engaged in centuries of  
 excavation for sewers, tunnels and subways, yet no one has ever stumbled across even one of the alien  
 machines. Plus, since the tripods are buried under cities how, thousands of years ago, did the aliens  
 know *where the cities were going to be built*? Anyway, it turns out the sinister aliens want to drain hu-  
 man blood for use as fertilizer for some hideous plant-thing that will turn our world into a planet like  
 theirs. But if the goal was to turn our world into a planet like theirs when they came here thousands of  
 years ago, why didn't they just deploy the hideous plant-thing then?

My main death-ray blast against *The War of the Worlds* movie is that it represents another case of Hol-  
 lywood buying the name of a famous work, then producing dreg with only passing resemblance to the  
 famous work. H.G. Wells' 1898 book presented a complex struggle between humanity and its attackers;  
 Spielberg's version presents human beings as appalling fools who practically deserve to be wiped out,  
 while reveling in scenes of slaughter of the helpless and destruction of U.S. cities. Somehow Spielberg  
 manages to glamorize violence, dumb down great literature, be misanthropic and be anti-American all at  
 once -- quite a feat even by Hollywood standards. Wells' book was written at the peak of the imperial  
 era, when European powers were seizing African and Asian lands under the pretext that industrial supe-  
 riority gave Europe a right to conquer. Wells wrote a parable to ask: If superiority justifies conquest, why  
 shouldn't another world conquer ours? In the book, the Martians believe their technical superiority enti-  
 tles them to seize whatever they want and kill whomever stands in the way -- exactly what European  
 imperialists believed. Wells' 1898 *War of the Worlds* was an indictment of the notion that might makes  
 right, and played a role in turning European public opinion against imperialism. The Spielberg movie is  
 just explosions and screaming, every last trace of intellectual merit squeezed out -- quite a feat even by

Hollywood standards.

Death ray update: MIT students recently used cheap mirrors to prove it is possible, at least, the Archimedes built a solar-powered death ray that set Roman warships aflame 2,200 years ago.

**Crazy Pass Watch** Every quarterback sometimes throws a bad pass; crazy passes are another matter. Game tied at 13 in overtime, Detroit faced third-and-5 on its 18. Jeff Garcia was flushed out of the pocket right; sprinting right, he threw back across his body left toward the center of the field. Interception, Chicago touchdown, Bears win. There are times when the smart thing to do is simply heave the ball out of bounds.

**Cheer-Babe Professionalism Watch** Last week TMQ complained that the Cincinnati Bengals cheerleaders, unaccustomed to high-pressure big-game situations, failed to show professionalism by overdressing. The football gods were not appeased, and the Bengals lost. This week, despite a kickoff temperature of 58 degrees, the Ben-Gals came out in skimpy two-piece summer numbers. Lesson learned, and needless to say the football gods smiled on Cincinnati.

**Harmonic Convergence of TMQ Obsessions** Buffalo led New England in every statistical category, but lost the game -- and why not, since the Bills violated TMQ immutable laws left and right. Through most of the first half Buffalo played disciplined defense and shut down the defending champions. Late in the second quarter Buffalo started blitzing; New England immediately flew down the field, though for a missed field goal. Buffalo big blitzed on three straight snaps to start the second half; New England immediately flew down the field for a touchdown. Taking a 16-7 lead with 10:02 remaining, Buffalo big blitzed on the Flying Elvii's first snap; 37-yard gain sets up a Pats touchdown. On the offensive side, the Bills rushed for 147 yards, yet went pass-wacky in pretty much every key situation. Game scoreless, Buffalo had second-and-goal on the New England 4 in the second quarter on a night Willis McGahee would run for 136 yards against an injury-depleted Pats defensive line. Did the Bills pound, pound? Incompletion, incompletion, field goal.

Scouting note: TMQ has done not one, not two, but three items on the fact that England throws a wide receiver hitch left at the goal line. Yet defenses still haven't caught on. Trailing 16-7, New England had second-and-4 on the Buffalo 6. Hitch left to Tim Dwight, who advances to the 1, setting up a touchdown.

**Running Up the Score Update** John Dellaportas of New York City notes the *New York Times* just had this Page 1 story asserting incumbent mayor Michael Bloomberg should stop campaigning in order to avoid beating his challenger by too wide a margin. Bloomberg leads in polls by 27 percent. Last week, yours truly supposed teams should stop trying to score when ahead by 32 or more in the second half, since the greatest comeback in pro or college football history was from a 32-point deficit. By this reasoning, if Bloomberg gets ahead 32 percent in the polls, he can stop campaigning.

**Car Ads Update** Nissan recently withdrew a television commercial in which its Titan mega-pickup was shown while the title music from the movie *Bridge on the River Kwai* played. The movie is about Japanese mistreatment of prisoners during World War II, which is perhaps not the best subject to remind people of when trying to convince them to buy Japanese. Volvo has been running commercials that make safety claims for its cars, while the Donovan song "Catch the Wind" plays. But "Catch the Wind" is about wanting something you can never have. Is Volvo saying you may want a safe car, but you'll never have one? Toyota has been advertising its Tundra mega-pickup as getting "up to 450 miles per tankful." This may sound like a fuel-efficiency measure, but all it means is the Tundra has an unusually large gas tank, holding 26.4 gallons. At \$3 per gallon, that tank will cost you \$80 to fill -- and you're going to be filling it often, because Toyota's own "up to 450 miles per tankful" means the company estimates *maximum* mileage for the Tundra is 17 MPG. Buick is running ads proclaiming, "We'll stand behind you." How will you back up?

**Best Fast-Forward Drive** Dallas went 80 yards in three plays in 1:07 for a touchdown.

**Best 99-Yard Drive** Chicago staged a 99-yard touchdown drive despite committing two penalties and

allowing a sack.

**For Halloween, Two Passing Teams Came Dressed as the Steelers and Ravens** Baltimore meets Pittsburgh, and it's sure to be a purist battle of power rushing -- arrgggghh. Seventy-five passes, 55 rushes. With 6:12 remaining and holding a 17-16 lead, Pittsburgh had first-and-10 on its 45 -- surely the fabled Steelers rushing game will take over and grind the clock! Incompletion, incompletion, incompletion, punt formation. Technically four consecutive incompletions as punter Chris Gardocki attempted to pass after a botched snap.

**Why Certain Teams Are 2-6** Trailing Oakland 17-12 in the second quarter, the Flaming Thumbtacks faced third-and-12 on their 7. Steve McNair sprinted backward into his end zone -- a crazy tactical call by Tennessee coaches, since it's a close game in the first half and this is no place to act panicky. As McNair is hit and fumbles, Oakland recovers for the touchdown that breaks open the game, and Titans offensive linemen Brad Hopkins and Zach Pillar are just sitting on the ground, watching the Raiders' rush, making no attempt at all to protect their quarterback.

Coaching note: Now it's the fourth quarter, Tennessee trails 27-22 and faces fourth-and-1 on the Oakland 6. Kick Early Go For It Late -- now it's late, go for it! Plus you're playing at home and averaging 5.6 yards per rush on the day. Mincing fraidy-cat field goal, and Oakland scores on its possession to ice the game. Coaches have good and bad games just like players; Jeff Fisher, one of the NFL's top coaches, has had several bad games this season.

**Best Blocks** Screen blocking is an art many offensive linemen don't grasp; many is the time a screen receiver has two huge offensive linemen ahead of him, and neither of them ever hits anyone. Oakland leading Tennessee 10-0, the Raiders had second-and-9 on the Flaming Thumbtacks' 18. Screen right, and blockers Adam Treu and Ron Stone get perfect blocks that enabled LaMont Jordan to waltz in for the touchdown. Jax leading St. Louis 21-17, the Rams had second-and-12 on the Jacksonville 19. Screen right, Andy McCollum got a perfect block that enabled Steven Jackson to waltz in for the touchdown.

**Why Are You Punting???????** Last week the Bills, trailing by two touchdowns with eight minutes remaining, punted on fourth-and-6 from their 31; the game ended at that point. Sunday the Eagles, trailing by two touchdowns, punted on fourth-and-6 from their 37 with nine minutes remaining, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

Game note one: Boy that was a sweet catch by Stephen Alexander to put Denver's lead at 28-0.

Game note two: Falling behind 28-0, Philadelphia went three-and-out on its first four possessions, then threw on interception on its fifth. This is one of the dangers of a pass-wacky offense.

**Obscure College Score of the Week** Black Hills State 8, Mary 6. Of course an entire team defeated one woman! Located in Spearfish, S.D., Black Hills State sponsors a Center for Tourism Research. Tourism *research!* Presumably the center produces incredibly scientifically advanced explanations of why tourists avoid South Dakota.

**Obscure College Feat** Central Washington University of Ellensburg, Wash., set an NCAA record by scoring 27 points in 79 seconds, as noted by Andrew Pima of Tampa. This gives me leave to boast that last season my kids' high school scored 21 points in 75 seconds in a playoff game. That link is to a description of the game on the NFL's high-school football web site, which is incredibly useful to anyone involved in the prep version of the sport.

**Generic Predictions in the News** Carl Bialik of the *Wall Street Journal Online*, who writes a brainy column about use of numbers in the media, notes my generic prediction of Home Team 20, Visiting Team is doing better than expert NFL predictions. Richard Adams of Dallas cites this *Associated Press* sports dispatch predicting such statistically unlikely finals as Dallas over Arizona 15-11 and Jags over Rams 20-18. Adams asks, "Where's the 18 points supposed to come from?" Nine safeties, would be my guess.

**Next Week** Here in Indianapolis we're undefeated, we're red hot and -- oh no! The schedule says, "At New England."

## Week 8 Readers:

(Nov. 2, 2005) -- TMQ lauded Penn State for not throwing a single pass in the second half against Illinois in order to avoid running up the score. **Helen Wasiakowski of Sweet Valley, Pa.**, notes, "If only good sportsmanship were a factor in determining the BCS standings." Sadly, it's the other way around -- college polls penalize sportsmanship. **Christopher D'Lauro of Boulder, Colo.**, notes that going into the final regular-season game of the 1994 season, Penn State was ranked No.1. In that final game, the Nittany Lions held a three-touchdown lead over Indiana in the fourth quarter; Paterno brought in his subs to make sure everyone got on the field during the season. (There are many on Division I teams who never actually play, and Joe Pa was concerned about his players in this category.) The result of clearing the bench was that Penn State won "only" 35-29. Pollsters sneered at the final score and elevated Nebraska to No. 1. Penn State went on to win the Rose Bowl, [but Nebraska got the national championship](#) because Paterno made the colossal blunder of being a good sport.



Joe Paterno's 1994 team won the fan vote for the national title by being the good guys.

**Zuber of Louisville, Ky.**, reports that Jordan-Hare Stadium at Auburn -- already a dual name, honoring Ralph Jordan and Clifford Hare -- [just christened its field after Pat Dye](#). So now it's Pat Dye Field at Jordan-Hare Stadium, a triple name. **Dave Scocca of Carrboro, N.C.**, writes, "At Haverford College in the 19th century, there was a noted chemist named Lyman Beecher Hall. A new chemistry facility was needed. Built in 1878, it was called the Lyman Beecher Hall Chemistry Building. These days chemistry has moved elsewhere and the structure is called the Hall Building, though sometimes cited as Hall Hall."

I've been calling the NFL's wandering franchise the United States Saints. Noting I already nickname this team the Boy Scouts, owing to its fleur-de-lis logo, **Wade Checketts of Salt Lake City** countered that the Boy Scouts of America would be a better cognomen. No non-traditional players allowed in the locker room! **Ken Bauer of Baltimore** proposed the New Orleans Labres, as Benedict Joseph Labres is patron saint of the homeless. If the team moves to Las Vegas, surely its name must change from the Saints to the Sinners. If the team moves to Los Angeles, I propose it be rechristened the Los Angeles Moguls; the logo would be a man in sunglasses screaming into a cell phone; the cheerleaders' squad would be the Bimbos.

On the recent topic of over-naming, **Daryle LaMonica of Massapequa, N.Y.**, reports that Jones Beach Theater on Long Island, a venerable concert venue, is now [Tommy Hilfiger at Jones Beach Theater](#). **Chilton**

Over-naming also exists in the corporate world. For instance, the publication generally referred to as *Oprah Magazine* is officially *O, The Oprah Magazine*. Buyers are supposed to stop at newsstands and say, "Hey Ralph, you got the latest *O, The Oprah Magazine*?" TMQ continues to feel this publication should be rechristened *Oprah Winfrey's Oprah Winfrey Magazine Featuring Oprah Winfrey*. The mag now has a spinoff, *O At Home*, whose official title is *O At Home: An Oprah Magazine*. So at the newsstand ask, "Hey Ralph, you got the latest *O At Home: An Oprah Magazine*?" Actually at any New York City newsstand you wouldn't say "Hey, Ralph," you'd say "Hey, Janab." Future historians may note this is the first use of Urdu in TMQ.

Last week's column supposed that if hurricanes keep proliferating, NOAA use the 40-letter Saxon Spanglish alphabet for names, or switch to double-letter names, such as Hurricane Aardvark. Right now NOAA is using the Greek alphabet for the second tier of 2005 storms, and Hurricane Beta has already struck. **Ian Long of Lancaster, Pa.** asks, "What if we have quite a hurricane season in an upcoming year and get to Hurricane Omega? Wouldn't that pretty much signify Armageddon en route?" Or enlightenment; in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's writing, the Omega Point is the event at which God and humanity are rejoined and the conditions of Eden restored. Another reader notes in haiku that NOAA, which stopped at Wilma this year, hasn't been proactive enough in finding names within the conventional 26-letter alphabet:

So why not Xerxes?  
Yvette, Zeno also work  
as hurricane names  
-- Robert K. Swenson, Chevy Chase, Md.



Not only did FAU lose 3-0 on Oct. 22, but the Owls will probably be the first destroyed by aliens.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback has proposed the ultimate final score would be 2-0 in overtime. **Ross Paton of Mississauga, Ontario**, notes that in the CFL, it is possible to win 1-0 in overtime -- though the chance of this is fairly small as the CFL now uses an NCAA-like alternating-possessions overtime format. **Greg Tartaglia of Midland Park, N.J.**, who covers high school football for a New Jersey radio station, reports as he attended two 2-0 games since 2003: Lincoln 2, Snyder 0 and Seneca 2, Triton 0. Neither overtime, sadly.

Noting somebody who resembles Jennifer Aniston is making kissy-face with Vince Vaughn, I wondered why the paunchy Vaughn is hot stuff -- every college campus in America has 100 guys better-looking than him. **Richelle Coulter of Robinson, III.**, replied, "Vince Vaughn is a 10-month-old-baby-learning-to-walk adorable. That's his appeal." Richelle, I'd carry a rattle and a pacifier if it would get Jen to return my phone calls. Actually, Anniston's body double might be a better date -- same bod, fewer complications.



San Diego is so happy to have Heather Mitts, er A.J. Feely.

**Kim Kolb of Reston, Va.**, supposes that super-advanced beings would invade the Earth for the same reason that Nebraska schedules Central Western Carolina A&M: "Super-advanced beings are in a constant struggle to remain highly ranked, so they're looking for easy victories to pad their records. Earth is the Florida Atlantic of intergalactic wars, a patsy on some alien race's early-season schedule." Kolb adds his speculation that the real reason San Diego traded for A.J. Feely is to improve the aesthetics of its crowd by drawing Feely's steady, extremely delectable soccer star [Heather Mitts](#). Here is Mary Buckheit's interview with Mitts after she was named [Hottest Female Athlete](#) by ESPN.com.

A recent subject was the strange economics of fully loaded coal trains passing each other headed in opposite directions. **Gates Grainger of Charlotte, N.C.**, points to this [strange economics article](#) in which colleges declare they must raise tuition in order to cover the cost of financial aid. But the reason students need financial aid is exactly that.

Finally, two readers submit adroit readings of the league's official GambBook. **Ignacio Lujan of Tijuana, Mexico**, a life-long Chargers fan, notes San Diego receiver Reche Caldwell finished the Week 7 game against Philadelphia with a fumble in the fourth quarter, then his first catch in Week 8's game against Kansas City resulted in a fumble. The play-by-plays: Week 7. "(1:44) Fourth Quarter. (Shotgun) D.Brees pass to R.Caldwell to PHI 18 for 19 yards (S.Brown). FUMBLES (S.Brown), touched at PHI 18, RECOVERED by PHI-D.Walker at PHI 19. D.Walker to PHI 19 for no gain (R.Caldwell). Play Challenged by Review Assistant and Upheld." Week 8. "(5:35) Second Quarter. (Shotgun) D.Brees pass to R.Caldwell to KC 27 for 20 yards (J.Allen). FUMBLES (J.Allen), RECOVERED by KC-E.Warfield at KC 31. E.Warfield to KC 31 for no gain (R.Caldwell)." **Ed Stubenrauch of Cincinnati** notes the [Gamebook of the Bengals/Packers contest](#) records the final play like this: "(:05) (No Huddle) B.Favre to CIN 26 for 4 yards. B.Favre pass to B.Franks to CIN 15 for 11 yards (O.Thurman). Penalty on GB-B.Favre, Illegal Forward Pass, declined." According to this line, Brett Favre both rushed for 4 yards and passed for 11 yards on the same play, getting statistical credit for both because the Bengals declined the penalty. Had the Bengals accepted the penalty, the game would still have been over, but Favre would only get credit for his rush. In haiku:

Favre can do it all!  
Including pass and rush on  
one singular play  
-- *Ed Stubenrauch, Cincinnati*

## What Hollywood could learn from the NFL, and get ready for the flying McMansion

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Nov. 8, 2005) -- Hooray for the Kansas City Chiefs! Trailing by three, ball on the Oakland 1 with 5 seconds remaining, the Chiefs went for the touchdown and victory rather than take the easy way out, kick a field goal and accept overtime. As Kansas City approached the line, yours truly said aloud, "Verily, the football gods will smile upon this show of courage." And yea, verily, they did. And, bless him, Dick Vermeil resisted the pass-wacky urge, telling offensive coordinator Al Saunders to call whatever was the team's best short-yardage run; blocking was fabulous.

For years, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has been contending that teams at the goal line on the last play should go for the win, not kick and proceed to a fifth quarter. A ticket to overtime is a 50/50 chance of victory, whereas there's maybe a 90 percent chance of scoring from the 1 and an 80 percent chance of scoring from the 2. Vermeil understood these percentages. Yet in almost every instance when an NFL coach must choose between likely victory on a last-second try from the goal line, and a kick that forces overtime, coaches choose overtime. The reason? Avoiding criticism. If the team goes for victory and the attempt fails, the coach is denounced; if the team plays it safe, proceeds to overtime and loses in the extra session, players get the blame. Avoiding criticism should not be an NFL coach's first concern. Victory should -- and fortune favors the bold.

Next, hooray for CBS! Endlessly yours truly complains that rather than show the fabulous finishes of the early games, networks air the listless opening minutes of late games. Not Sunday. CBS had the double-header slot, planning to show Pittsburgh at Green Bay. Instead when San Diego at Jersey/B went down to the wire, CBS aired that; then when the Raiders at Chiefs went down to the wire, CBS switched to Kansas City, not joining the Packers-Steelers contest until halfway through the first quarter. Bravo CBS! Make this a habit, please. And Fox take note, please.

In other football news, He Who Must Not Be Named is now He Who Need Not Be Named. This gentleman continued to throw selfish temper tantrums because there was never a cost associated with such behavior. Every time he denounced teammates or demanded special treatment, he got away with it. Now there has finally been a cost. The NFL Players Association has filed a grievance, but NFL players have a stake in making sure the discipline sticks -- because they will benefit. The descent from team play to selfishness is what started the NBA's tumble from charmed sport to vanishing ratings. It is imperative the me-first virus, busily destroying the financial structure of pro basketball, not be allowed to catch on in the NFL. Eagles' owner Jeff Lurie should be lauded for taking a stand for the whole league; players will benefit too, as keeping the me-first contagion out of the NFL will preserve the league's ability to provide handsome income to the majority on NFL rosters. Now, sports media -- let's see a little more attention for the majority of players who bust their busts, never complain and behave with dignity in public, a little less 24-hour coverage of a guy who deserves to be traded to a day-care center.

In non-football news, the *Wall Street Journal* reported Google founders Larry Page and Sergey Brin purchased an enormous Boeing 767 for use as their private jet. The 225-ton jetliner, which normally carries at least 245 passengers, will be converted into an airborne luxu penthouse. Hysterically, Page told the *Journal* his owning a personal gigantic airliner will be "good for the world" because he can "take large numbers of people to places such as Africa." Hey Larry, why not give the millions to fight African AIDS, instead of lavishing it on yourself? And am I the only one sick of the Google crew pretending to be principled while merely stealing the copyrighted work of others? See below. Anyway, if you think an entire Boeing 767 devoted to indulging a selfish billionaire's ego is going too far -- then you don't have vision! For news of an even more expensive airborne obscenity, see below.

**Stats of the Week:** Cleveland scored a rushing touchdown for the first time since Nov. 28, 2004.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** Arizona has not scored a rushing touchdown, but is 26-for-26 on field goal

attempts. Noted by Greg Chida of Glendale, Ariz.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** Green Bay staged an 18-play, 9:30 drive that resulted in no points.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** Minnesota has seven straight wins over Detroit.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** In 24 games at Arizona, Dennis Green has changed starting quarterbacks six times.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** In the last two games, the Giants have not allowed a touchdown and the Niners have not scored one. Stat from Aaron Kleinman of Washington, D.C.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** Jacksonville is 5-1 when Ernest Wilford scores a touchdown.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** Green Bay is 1-7 -- and has outscored its opponents. Pointed out by a multitude of readers including Cheryl Denis of Chicago.

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** David Carr has gained 216 yards running and lost 292 yards on sacks; in college, his stats would say 82 rush attempts for minus-76 yards. Noted by Nicholas Aguelakakis of Buenos Aires, Argentina.

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** Philadelphia is first in passing and last in rushing.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Jim Hickey nominates Holli of the Indianapolis Colts, another woman who is both a cheerleader and a nurse -- male fantasy overload! The Colts post little bio info about their cheerbabes; all we know is that Holli's hometown is Brownsburg, Ind., and her favorite childhood memory is "my parents buying me white cowboy boots." Born to flounce! She is cheering in white cowboy boots. Note: Indianapolis posts cheer photos by week. Go here and you can check what the Colts cheerleaders were wearing, or not wearing, at any home game.

**Sweet Call of the Week:** In the playoffs last January, Indianapolis punted on fourth-and-1 in New England territory: yours truly went through the roof while the Colts went on to lose. Last night, on the heels of 286 consecutive defeats at New England, Indianapolis faced fourth-and-1 in Flying Elvii territory, and went for it. Hallelujah! The Colts converted, scored on the possession to take a 14-7 lead and never looked back. Tony Dungy has been strangely passive in his many defeats at New England; this time Indianapolis threw deep on its second play, setting an aggressive tone. The Colts' 40 points almost equaled the 41 they scored in their last three trips to Boston combined, and aggressive rather than timid play was the key. Meanwhile, the defending champion Patriots have now lost as many games as in the entire 2003 and 2004 seasons combined. Apparently that mystical object Bill Belichick found in the catacombs in Egypt is beginning to wear off.

**Sweet Offensive Line of the Week:** On Shaun Alexander's 88-yard touchdown run, the Seattle tailback was never hit; the only contact was a defender's diving brush against the back of Alexander's shoe just before the score. It's pretty fun to run 88 yards when everyone in front of you has already been knocked to the ground. TMQ wonders, has there been a longer run in NFL history on which no one hit the runner?

**Sweet Offensive Line of the Week No. 2:** LaDainian Tomlinson scored four touchdowns and on *all four*, was not touched till he reached the end zone! Not only did his four-touch feat match Chuck Muncie's club record, L.T. looked like Muncie on a 25-yard flare pass touchdown. The Chargers ran the action exactly as in Muncie's era, the tailback sprinting parallel to the line of scrimmage, then taking the flare at full speed as if it was just a long pitchout.

**Sweet Play of the Week:** How did Kansas City get to the Oakland 1? Trailing 23-20, the Chiefs had first-and-10 on the Raiders' 37, holding one time-out. In this situation defenses usually deploy a dime,

with safeties deep and corners near the sidelines to stop a receiver from stepping out of bounds. Often that means the middle is open. Kansas City simply threw a short middle curl to tailback Larry Johnson, who rumbled to the 1. Psychologically, offensive coordinators tend to assume the only way to gain dramatic yardage is to get behind the defense. But throwing under a backed-off defense may be just as effective.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** TMZ likes the shovel pass; it usually works, slows down the pass rush and, if the receiver drops the ball, is just an incomplection. Leading 7-3, Cincinnati faced third-and-goal on the Baltimore 8. Wide receiver Tab Perry lined up as a halfback, then stepped into the center of the Ravens' rush; Carson Palmer flipped the shovel pass using his left hand. Touchdown and the Bengals never looked back.

**Sour Play of the Week:** Eagles trailing 10-7, Donovan McNabb was sacked at the Washington 31 with less than 20 seconds remaining in the first half, Philadelphia out of time-outs. Urgently McNabb signaled the Eagles back to the line, making the spike motion as he did so. A clock-stopping spike was expected; instead McNabb took the snap and straightened up to pass, attempting the same trick Dan Marino once played on the Jets. Except -- McNabb's fake was so authentic he convinced this teammates the play would be a clock-stopper, and Eagles' receivers just stood there. McNabb was sacked, half over. (Also false start was called against the Eagles, so had the play worked it wouldn't have counted).

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2:** Game scoreless, Cleveland threw deep along the sideline. Dennis Northcutt caught the ball at the Tennessee 22, where rookie corner Raynaldo Hill was in position to make the tackle. Instead, Hill attempted to snatch the ball out of Northcutt's hands -- and missed him entirely, allowing the Browns' receiver to stroll the rest of the way for a 58-yard touchdown. Yours truly blames this on ESPN's *Sportscenter*. Defensive backs now take silly risks in the hopes of creating highlight plays that will be shown on *Sportscenter*, instead of just making a routine tackle that ends the down.

**"Forget," Spock Said to Kirk:** Johnson & Johnson wants to abandon its \$25.4 billion acquisition of Guidant, the pacemaker manufacturer plagued by product recalls. The *New York Times* described Guidant as a "troubled heart device maker." If only there was a device for the troubled heart! (Star Trek nuts will get the subhead.)

**Sour Play of the Week No. 3:** It was tense at Carolina 17, Tampa 7, and the Bucs with first down on the Panthers' 38 early in the second half. Chris Simms throws the three-step short out. Offensive coordinators like the three-step short out because when cornerbacks are backpedaling, as they usually are, this pass is easy as pie to complete. But if the quarterback stares at the receiver, as Simms did, and the corner breaks in front, there is nothing but green grass between him and the goal line. Sixty-one-yard interception return for the touchdown by corner Chris Gamble, and the Panthers have won 12 of their last 16.

**Sour Call of the Week:** TMZ's immutable law holds, Kick Early Go For It Late. Leading 28-20, San Diego faced fourth-and-goal on the Jersey/B 1 with 8:39 remaining. Now it's late -- go for it! A touchdown ices the game, while a failed rush leaves the Jets pinned against their goal line. Instead, the field goal made it 31-20, Jersey/B got a long kickoff return and scored a quick touchdown. Suddenly, a sweaty-palms ending.

**Wacky Medicine of the Week:** Head On, "an entirely new and advanced headache treatment applied directly to the forehead." Check out this advertising model smiling in relief as she applies Head On to her forehead. It couldn't possibly work that fast! Plus applying things directly to your head was tried in the 1960s, and didn't have a great track record.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play:** Leading 3-0 with 23 seconds remaining in the first half, Jersey/A faced fourth-and-1 on the San Francisco 32. Eli Manning play-faked and threw deep to Jeremy Shockey, whose lunging catch and touchdown was all the points the Giants would need. The catch was sweet. But the defense was sour, as Shockey was singled deep with only 23 seconds in the half. Where, exactly, did San Fran-

cisco think the play was going to go?

**Can a CEO Space Shuttle Be Far Behind?:** The Google guys wanting an entire Boeing 767 to themselves is just the latest twist on an egotism trend. For several years, CEOs and oil sheiks have been quietly buying the BBJ, an entire Boeing 737 converted for personal use. Airbus offers the ACJ, an entire Airbus 319 converted for use by a few people or just one person. Here's an ACJ laid out with a king-bed apartment. These flying ego monuments cost at least \$60 million; most BBJ and ACJ buyers are CEOs of publicly held corporations, or heads of state of small countries. The CEOs are buying their flying opulence with money that ought to go to shareholders or workers, while the small-country heads of state are robbing their taxpayers, many of them impoverished.

But why stop at a Boeing 737 or even 767? Airbus is offering a VIP version of its enormous new A380 mega-jet. The largest airplane in the world, the A380 is a double-decker Leviathan designed to carry 600 people: the VIP A380 is refitted for a small number of plutocrats, even for one person. "Airbus is selling the first private jet version of the giant A380 airliner to a Middle East customer," *Aviation International News* just reported. The interior area of the A380 is 6,400 square feet, the same as a McMansion -- imagine a McMansion that flies, and is dedicated entirely to the ego gratification of a CEO or president of an impoverish nation. The luxu A380 VIP is expected to cost \$400 million once Jacuzzis and marble are added; Airbus says it expects to sell at least 10, but will not reveal buyer's identities. Companies that have purchased the existing BBJ and ACJ generally do not reveal they have done so, and have fought not to have to reveal this fact on SEC documents. Come on, SEC, at least mandate that public corporations disclose spending on these monstrosities. Imagine the day a Fortune 500 CEO announces he's using company funds to buy himself a \$400 million flying penthouse, while canceling workers' pensions to free up the money.

**Law of the Other Shoe:** This law holds that when something goes badly wrong on one play, something goes badly wrong on the next play too -- the other shoe drops. Game tied at 14 with 3 minutes remaining, Jax lost a fumble on the Houston 17. But wait! Holding on the Moo Cows negates the play. The other shoe dropped as Jaguars fullback Greg Jones ran for the winning touchdown on the next snap. After the Texans had jumped around like mad thinking they had gotten a turnover, you could see them lose spirit when the penalty was assessed. TMQ continues to think that in Other Shoe situations, coaches should call timeout and calm their charges down.

**What Hollywood Could Learn from the NFL:** Film types are bemoaning a bad year at the box office. They blame DVDs, Internet piracy, El Nino: everything but Hollywood itself. Tuesday Morning Quarterback suggests the box-office slump is a rational market response to a string of lousy movies. Major studios now assume that if you take a couple of brand-name stars, put them in a plot that makes no sense, have them read listlessly from a terrible script -- then add cleavage and explosions -- millions will pay \$8 to sit through the result. The governing Hollywood premise is that typical ticket buyers are so incredibly stupid as to lack any ability to tell a good movie from a bad one. Actually, movie patrons are getting more sophisticated about flicks all the time, exactly as Hollywood dumbs down. Should we be surprised that steadily fewer people want to watch? Anyone selling a discretionary item, entertainment and sports among them, must never lose sight of the fact that quality is the essence of the product. Food and clothing are necessities; people don't have to have movie or sports tickets, so buyers line up only if they get their money's worth. In an era of 500 channels, the NFL continues to set records for gate attendance and ratings because product quality, namely the games themselves, remains the league's focus. Product quality seems last on the list of Hollywood's concerns. Which leads us to ...

**Shoot to Kill the Hitman Characters:** Ben Affleck, Tom Cruise, Jennifer Garner, Samuel Jackson, Angelina Jolie, Jennifer Lopez, Brad Pitt, Pierce Brosnan, Uma Thurman and John Travolta have played hit men or women who will murder anyone, even the helpless, for money. The number of current box office stars who have portrayed hired killers in major-studio films probably exceeds the number of paid professional assassins in the real world. You don't have to be Dr. Freud to speculate that cinema stars, steeped in a Hollywood culture obsessed with personal power, subconsciously fantasize about actually being able to kill whomever they please. But doesn't it strike you as strange that so many big-name stars are willing portray characters who commit murder without compunctions? Can it be coincidence the public is becoming turned off to the movies at the very time so many stars revel in morally vacant roles?

And if Hollywood won't show smoking because viewers are impressionable, how come the movie industry eagerly glamorizes murder after murder after murder after murder? Which leads us to ...

**Maybe Someone Can Invent an Electronic Device That Stops *USA Today* From Saying Murder Is "Fun":** Recently, George Bush signed the Family Movie Act, legalizing electronic gizmos that delete violent scenes from privately owned movie DVDs. These devices will be busy! *Sin City*, a recent big-studio movie shown in suburban shopping malls, was praised by *USA Today* as "genuine fun." *Sin City* begins with a beautiful woman being murdered by a man she just met. The movie continues to dozens of graphic depictions of people being murdered, tortured or decapitated, and ends with the man of the opening scene capturing another beautiful woman and grinning as he prepares to murder her. Genuine fun! Of course sometimes movie violence is justified; for instance, *The Pianist* was sickeningly violent and rightly so, as its subject was the Holocaust. Usually movie violence is just cheap exploitation and injurious to young viewers. Studies show the more cinematic depictions of violence to which a child is exposed, the more likely the child is to commit violent acts in adulthood: see this statement by the American Academy of Pediatrics, summarizing research on the relationship between film violence and actual violence.

The First Amendment protects moviemakers' rights to produce almost anything they wish. But just because it is legal to make films that glorify violence doesn't mean studios should do so; lots of things are legal and also irresponsible. If Hollywood doesn't want people buying gizmos to zap gratuitous bloodshed out of movies, there is a simple solution -- don't glamorize violence to begin with. Meanwhile, though there is far too much brutality in the movies, I don't think there is too much sex. In the last decade, Hollywood has almost completely abandoned sensuality to make room for more stabbing and screaming. I'd favor an electronic box that deletes the violent scenes from movies and replaces them with sex scenes!

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All:** Trailing 17-10 with 2:47 remaining, Miami faced third-and-2 on the Atlanta 8. Given the score and the clock, this is a two-down situation -- and if you simply pound, pound, two yards are highly likely. Instead, interception forced into double coverage, 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:** San Diego 31, Jersey/B 26, the Jets had first-and-goal on the Bolts' 3 with 1:40 remaining. That's plenty of time for four rushes -- so did Jersey/B pound, pound, pound, pound? Rush, incompleton, incompleton, incompleton, San Diego victory. There's maybe a 90 percent chance of gaining three yards on four consecutive runs; passes from the goal line, on the other hand, are hard to complete, since the defense has so little territory to defend. Opposite proves the rule: trailing 13-3, Green Bay had first-and-goal on the Pittsburgh 4. Three consecutive handoffs to emergency tailback Samkon Gado, an undrafted rookie just called up from the practice squad -- touchdown.

**I Don't Wish to Alarm You, But:** The Bears have won four straight.

**Laveranues Coles Watch:** Coles demanded to be traded from Washington because, inexcusably, the Redskins' offense was not designed solely for the purpose of getting Coles his stats. So far this season at his new home in Jersey/B, Coles has 449 yards receiving and two touchdowns; his replacement at Washington, Santana Moss, has 856 yards receiving and five touchdowns.

**Funny, Most Clubs Want to Be the Team of the Moment:** The Raiders have taken to calling themselves The Team of the Decades.

**Enron, WorldCom -- Google?:** The Google Print Library Project last week began scanning the contents of copyrighted books. Google says it will make the texts searchable in short portions, and give away this service (while keeping revenue from advertising that runs alongside). Searchable book texts sound great for readers and could result in new sales for authors, so there may be merit to the idea. The problem is, Google is scanning the books without permission. Copyright law gives authors and performers the exclusive right to make or authorize copies of their works; the exclusive right to make or authorize copies is, at heart, what a copyright represents. Yet Google is merrily copying legally protected works without

permission. Here is an explanation posted by Google; it boils down to, "Since our business plan won't work if we obey the law, therefore we can defy the law." Publishers have sued Google to block the company's thumbing its nose at copyright statutes; Google continues to copy books anyway. The company says it will not scan books whose authors send a letter of objection. But if you want to use a copyrighted work, the legal onus is on you to get permission, not on the copyright holder to lodge a protest. Google's position is like saying that if you do not want your house broken in to, it is your responsibility to send a notification to thieves. In this analogy, Google is the thief -- just like in the real world! Remember when Google maintained it would never be the next Microsoft? It's not; Microsoft obeys the law. Remember when Google was going to be a corporate good-guy? Google is fast becoming the next Enron; maybe this is the kind of thing that happens when your founders decide they need an entire Boeing 767 to themselves. Contrast Google's corporate kleptomania to Amazon's decision to offer online books only if authors grant permission. As we enter the digital age, it becomes ever-more important society resists the idea that unaccountable corporations have an unlimited right to seize whatever exists in electronic form. And Google, now that you have declared it is fine to copy intellectual property without permission, surely you won't object if anyone steals your proprietary software and corporate data?

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!:** Game tied at 7, Atlanta was facing third-and-goal on the Miami 11. Since the typical NFL play gains less than six yards, all the Marine Mammals had to do was play straight defense and the odds favored a stop; plus there's no incentive to take risks for sack, since a sack would still leave the Falcons in short field goal range. Yet -- it's an all-out blitz! Seven gentlemen cross the line, easy touchdown to Brian Finneran for what would prove the winning points. Most of Atlanta big gainers Sunday came against Miami blitzes.

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** California of Pennsylvania 38, Indiana of Pennsylvania 23 in the annual Tuesday Morning Quarterback Obscure College Game of the Year. It was the final appearance at George P. Miller Stadium for IUP coach Frank Cignetti. Cignetti leaves behind one of the top legacies in Obscure College annals, including 28 Division II playoff games, most for a D-II coach. California of Pennsylvania's win was the sole time in Cignetti's 20-year tenure that Cal prevailed in this annual season-ending rivalry collision. California of Pennsylvania, being the Vulcans, showed no emotion in victory.

**BCS Showdown Omens:** It was Texas 48, Baylor 0 in the fourth quarter -- yet Texas star Vince Young was still on the field and heaving passes as the Longhorns ran up the score in an incredible display of bad sportsmanship. In California, Matt Leinart was comfortably seated on the bench when the fourth quarter began with USC leading Stanford 44-14. The football gods remember bad sportsmanship, and exact revenge; Texas is setting itself up for a hubris-induced collapse when it meets USC.

**Next Week:** TMO's nightmare -- rich people on an expensive private airliner watching a violent Hollywood movie about Google.

## Week 9 Readers:

(Nov. 9, 2005) -- Regarding my complaint that Denver ran up the score with a touchdown in the final seconds to defeat Philadelphia 49-21, many, including **Amanda Kincaid of Aurora, Colo.**, reminded that points can be an [NFL playoff tiebreaker](#). Yes, but "net points in all games," the number the Broncos padded with their last-second touchdown against the Eagles, is unlikely ever to be used. Since the merged-leagues format was adopted in 1970, net points in all games has been called on as a tiebreaker only once, in 1979, when Chicago got a wild-card berth over Washington. But in 1979, net points in all games was the third tiebreaker, and thus significant. Later, the tiebreaker hierarchy was changed and net points in all games dropped almost to the bottom -- it is now the ninth tiebreaker for a wild-card slot, 10th tiebreaker within a division -- exactly because using overall points as a high tiebreaker gave teams a reason to run up the score. Had today's tiebreaker hierarchy been in force in 1979, Washington would have bested Chicago for the wild-card slot; common-opponent records, not net points in all games, would have been the tiebreaker. Net points in division or conference games still stand a chance of being used as a tiebreaker, but chances are net points in all games will never be used in the current hierarchy -- it's just too far down the list. And since Philadelphia was an inter-conference opponent for Denver, that last touchdown applied only to the "all games" calculation. Of course, the NFL tiebreaker system is famously mystifying, so Mike Shanahan might simply have been confused about the fact that points in inter-conference contests no longer have much significance. And hey -- wouldn't *Tiebreaker* be a great name for a James Bond movie? A reader notes in haiku:

Running up the score?  
 Gods frown but seeding matters.  
 It is a business.  
 -- Ricky Kimball, Atlanta



The cost of our bottled water is out of this world.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback complained that the sinister aliens in the miniseries *V* wanted to conquer the Earth to steal our water: though water is among the most common substances in the universe. **Rick Collarini** counters that perhaps what the sinister aliens really planned to steal was our *bottled* water -- they'd seen the prices and assumed it must be incredibly valuable! Americans bitterly complain about paying \$3 for a gallon of gasoline, though petroleum must be found, extracted and put through elaborate refining. Yet when you plunk down \$1 for a pint of Dasani you are paying \$8 a gallon, and all they've done is bottle the stuff.

On ridiculous advertising disclaimers, **Andrea Gamret of Lubbock, Texas**, points out the ad for the Toyota Tacoma in which the truck survives a blazing rock crashing from the sky -- labeled DRAMATIZATION. The commercial ends with the humor tag line, "Toyota: Meteor-Proof." But, she notes, "A meteor is debris falling through the atmosphere; should any piece reach the ground, it becomes a meteorite, so Toyota meant to say 'meteorite proof.'" Maybe the grammar of the commercial is a dramatization! **Mark Engelhart of Newtown, Pa.**, notes the new Jeep Commander commercial. Children are seen marveling at marine life through a window: then the Jeep drives out of the sea and you realize the vehicle has been under water. The disclaimer reads, "Fictionalization. Vehicle not intended for underwater use." Aside from the fact that this ad presents a product doing something the product cannot physically do -- Jeeps have no ballast tanks and automobile engines must intake air to function -- now we are getting *fictional* reasons to buy cars?

**Mark Becker**, an Army lieutenant colonel in Hawaii, was among numerous readers to say I should have lauded Joe Gibbs for going for the touchdown at fourth-and-goal from the Giants' 5 in the fourth quarter, rather than ordering a field goal. The Redskins were trailing 36-0; a field goal would have preserved Gibbs' record of never being shut out in the regular season, but to try for a touchdown was the dignified approach. On the critical issue of cheer-babe professionalism, **Ben Domenech** notes that for Sunday night's Eagles-Skins contest, the Redskins cheerleaders debuted extremely skimpy garments despite cool nighttime breezes. Needless to say, the football gods rewarded Washington with a

victory. Here, [Sean Taylor jogs through the cheerleader line](#) wearing his unauthorized striped socks. The socks appear to contain more material than the cheerleaders' entire outfits.



Hey Charlie, did you say quick hitch left?

TMQ has done not one, not two, not three, but four items on the fact that [the Patriots like to throw a quick hitch left](#) at the goal line, yet NFL defensive coordinators refuse to catch on. Saturday, it's Notre Dame 21, Tennessee 21 and the charges of Charlie Weis -- who designed the Pats' goal-line play -- are on the Volunteers' 4. As noted by **Chris Van Hees of Milton, Ontario**, what's the play? Quick hitch left, touchdown and the Irish go on to win. Okay NCAA coaches: Now the ball is in your court to notice this tendency.

Yours truly made fun of [Black Hills State](#) of Spearfish, S.D., for having a Center for Tourism Research. **Jeremiah Preszler of Rapid City, S.D.**, stationed at the RAF base in Lakenheath, United Kingdom, notes a certain group of stone presidents does make his state a tourist attraction. **Jack Hunt of Rapid City** adds, "Spearfish is only about 20 miles from Sturgis -- home of the Sturgis motorcycle classic, which draws up to one million bikers every year. Spearfish is 20 miles from Deadwood and a short drive from Mount Rushmore. So South Dakota does get tourists, and I'm sure the re-

search involves things like how to convince people it doesn't take that long to reach the South Dakota highlights."

**Peter Nessen of Lorton, Va.**, asks, "Why is the highest possible quarterback rating 158.3? Would it really hurt to multiply by 100/158.3 so that a perfect rating would be 100? A perfect ERA is 0.00. A perfect batting average or shooting percentage is 1.000. Is there any other stat that has such a silly perfect score?" Many readers, including **Carla Johnson of Hempstead, N.Y.**, noted that while He Who Need Not Be Named demanded the Eagles launch fireworks to celebrate his 100th touchdown, the very classy Curtis Martin asked for nothing after scoring his 100th touchdown on Sunday. TMQ has obtained the actual request He Who Need Not Be Named presented to Philadelphia in anticipation of the 100th touchdown:

- Game stops; fans removed from stadium for security reasons.
- Fireworks launched.
- George W. Bush, Kofi Annan, various heads of state arrive in helicopters.
- The Rockettes perform.
- The Bank of Sweden announces new Nobel Prize for Football, confers.
- New contract awarded; large bonus denominated in Swedish kronor.
- Heads of state bow.
- Next day: game resumes.

**Joe Gerard of Beaver Falls, Pa.**, writes, "I was flipping back and forth between two CBS stations I get here. KDKA of Pittsburgh was airing Bengals-Ravens, and at halftime, Shannon Sharpe and Boomer Esiason predicted the Steelers would win against the Packers. Then I switched to WKBN, the CBS affiliate out of Youngstown, Ohio, which had the halftime report from the Titans-Browns. Sharpe and Boomer predicted the Packers would win."

TMQ has been obsessing about scientific papers signed by a ridiculous number of "authors." **Eric Jablow of Herndon, Va.**, points out the all-time champion -- [this 1993 paper](#) in the *New England Journal of Medicine*, which lists 975 authors for a 10-page text. The byline is five times the length of the Gettysburg Address!

Finally, yesterday's column lauded "The majority of NFL players who bust their buns, never complain and behave with dignity in public." As pointed out by many readers, including **Laura Cunningham of Portland, Ore.**, I meant bust their buns, not busts. Too much Cheerleader of the Week on the mind!

## When offensive coordinators benefit from losing, and is Hal-loween the new Thanksgiving?

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Nov. 15, 2005) -- What a finish! It's New England 23, Miami 16 with the Dolphins first-and-goal on the Patriots' 5-yard line, 58 seconds remaining. Miami holds two time-outs. The time-outs mean the Marine Mammals can rush four straight times against the 23rd-ranked New England run defense, and four straight rushes are highly likely to result in a touchdown. Oh no! Pass, pass, pass, pass, defeat. Aaaaaiiiiiiiyyyyyyyyeeee!

As this column documents ad infinitum, rushing at the goal line usually works better than passing. Yet many offensive coordinators insist on going pass-wacky when the end zone is near. Why? Self-promotion. The unspoken belief is that passing is a complex, almost magical activity, and thus passing success means the offensive coordinator must be brilliant; while running is just ill-tempered brutes colliding, anybody can call a run in an obvious-run situation. A subset of coaches seem to think compiling passing stats proves them to be masterminds, whereas rushing stats don't matter on the resume. Scott Linehan, Miami's offensive coordinator, may have subconsciously been driven by the desire to win the game with a pass and be praised for brilliant play-calling. Maybe it's even true that in today's NFL, offensive coordinators advance their careers only by calling passes, since clubs looking for offensive coordinators to hire undeniably are swayed by flashy passing stats. But for the team, a victory via rushing is a lot better than a defeat as the air rained passes. Note that Tom Moore of Indianapolis, the best offensive coordinator in today's NFL, often calls runs near the goal line. When the Colts reached the Houston 5 on Sunday, Moore called a run: Touchdown.

Linehan is hardly alone. Last night, on a night when Philadelphia ran well for the first time since the Warren G. Harding Administration, Eagles' coaches just could not resist the urge to throw one more pass. Philadelphia led 20-14 with 2:53 remaining, the situation was well under control -- second-and-7 with the Cowboys already burning time-outs, the Eagles already having rushed for 181 yards and a healthy 5-yard average per run. Grind the clock!!!!!! Instead pass, interception, touchdown return, Dallas wins. This had nothing to do with He Who Need Not Be Named filing grievances or a rookie receiver running the wrong route: it had everything to do with Eagles' coaches preferring passing yards to rushing yards. (The fateful call was a sideline out, meaning the clock was likely to stop even if the throw had been complete.) As this column regularly notes, "Often all a football team needs do is run up the middle and things will be fine." But Andy Reid and offensive coordinator Brad Childress couldn't just do the obvious. The assumption is that passing success proves the coaches are brilliant, whereas anybody can call a run in an obvious-run situation. There's a reason obvious-run situations are obvious-run situations!

In other football news, last week yours truly lauded Dick Vermeil for going for the win from the 1 at the end, rather than kicking a field goal and proceeding to overtime. This Sunday, Jon "Once I Was A Teen-aged Coach" Gruden faced almost exactly the same situation. One minute remained, the score was 35-34, a Washington penalty put the ball on the 1 for the Bucs' PAT attempt -- a kick probably means overtime, but a deuce probably wins it. Gruden went for the win and the football gods smiled, even causing officials to raise their arms though Mike Alstott appeared not to get in.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback contends it is playing the percentages to go for the win in this situation -- but am I right? Of course I am or I wouldn't set it up that way! The invaluable book *Pro Football Prospects 2005* analyzed all fourth-and-1 plays in the NFL from 2002 through 2004. Teams that ran needing 1 yard succeeded 74 percent of the time; teams that passed needing 1 yard knew 62 percent success. So think about the percentages in the choice Vermeil and Gruden faced, between attempting a 1-yard run to win or launching a short kick to force a fifth quarter. What the sports media calls a "huge gamble" wins the game 74 percent of the time, while what is called the "safe" strategy leads to a 50/50 chance of victory.

**Stats of the Week:** Indianapolis is 9-0, but has beaten only two teams with winning records.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** Atlanta is 6-3, but has not beaten a team with a winning record. Noted by Aaron Schatz of the *New York Sun*.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** The Lions are 10-0 on coin tosses. Noted by Sami Ahmed of Macon, Ga.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** Carolina is the only team to score at least 20 points in every game. Noted by Ryan Daniels of Rural Hall, N.C.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** Buffalo has a losing record despite being plus-10 in turnovers, second-best in the league; Washington has a winning record despite being minus-11, second-worst.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** In the third quarter, Minnesota had 14 points and 18 net yards of offense. Noted by Patrik Asén of Helsinki, Finland.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** In the first 58:45, the Jersey/A defense allowed the Minnesota offense 97 yards and no points; in the final 1:15, the Jersey/A defense allowed the Minnesota offense 42 yards and the winning score.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** Buffalo won despite reaching the Kansas City 7, 9 and 13 without scoring.

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** Philadelphia had more rushing yards than passing yards for the first time since the Warren G. Harding Administration.

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** Shaun Alexander has more touchdowns than nine entire teams: Arizona, Baltimore, Buffalo, Cleveland, Houston, Jersey/B, Minnesota, New Orleans and San Francisco. Noted by Leon Hunt, Debry, England.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Chuck Case of Denver nominates Katie of the Sea-Gals, finalist in the upcoming Miss USA Chinese pageant. Sadly from the standpoint of NFL.com readers, the Seahawks don't post cheesecake photos of cheerleaders, though you can gawk at the squad dressed as naughty officials here. Obviously further review is in order! According to her team bio, Katie is majoring in physiology at the University of Washington and in addition to modern, jazz and ballet, has studied Flamenco and hula dancing.

**Sweet Play of the Week:** As Diane Firstman of Brooklyn, N.Y., has shown, on trick plays have a running back throw the pass -- last season running backs were 7 of 12 passing for six touchdowns, while wide receivers were 5 of 25 passing for two touchdowns. But if your wide receiver was a college quarterback, the equation may be different. Leading 17-7 at the start of the second half, Pittsburgh ran a reverse to Antwaan Randle El, who pitched a perfect 49-yard touchdown to fellow receiver Hines Ward, breaking open the game.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Game scoreless, Indianapolis had the ball on the Houston 14. Peyton Manning faked the stretch handoff left, then threw a naked tight end screen right to Dallas Clark, who jogged untouched for six. That's a naked screen, not a screen to a naked tight end; though given trends in marketing sports to women, the naked tight end is not out of the question for the future.

**Sour Call of the Week:** Carolina led Jersey/B 7-0, the Jets facing fourth-and-1 on the Panthers' 4 in the second quarter. TMQ preaches Kick Early Go For It Late, which normally would dictate kicking here. But the Jets were desperate at 2-6. They were playing the only team in the league to score at least 20 points every game. Field goals aren't going to cut the mustard, when will you see a better chance to advance for a touchdown? Jersey/B took the field goal and never scored again.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Record Play:** On the last snap of the first half, San Francisco attempted a 52-yard

figgie that fell short and was returned 108 yards for a touchdown by Chicago's Nathan Vasher, longest run in NFL history. That, surely, was sweet. But how could the Squared Sevens not have been ready for a return? Winds were gusting to 47 miles per hour, making a short attempt likely. Of course, field-goal returns are rare, for two reasons. First, most attempts go out of the end zone. Second, a missed field goal is spotted at the point of the try -- the 42, in this case -- so normally the defense would rather accept a long miss at the spot than attempt a runback. But on the final play of a half, many teams put a returner in the end zone in case the try is short; the longest previous run in NFL history, 107 yards by Chris McAlister of Baltimore, came on a long field-goal attempt on the final snap of the first half. The Bears knew all this and were ready. San Francisco's field-goal team, accustomed to trotting off the field after the try is launched, definitely was not ready. That was quite sour. Officiating note: highlight-reel shows are happy about Vasher's record, but a significant block-in-the-back went uncalled.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Distinction:** Game scoreless, Jacksonville went for it on fourth-and-1 against Baltimore; slow-developing up-the-middle rush, Greg Jones stuffed. Jaguars leading 10-3, ball on the Ravens' 1; sweep right and Jones scores without being touched. On short-yardage downs, straight ahead runs must be fast-developing -- quarterback sneaks or tailbacks leaping the pile. A slow-developing up-the-middle action is death against an overstacked defense, while an outside run may catch the defense caught inside.

**Your Trademark Here Stadium:** Adelphia Coliseum, PSINet Field, Network Associates Coliseum, Pro Player Stadium, CMGi Field, 3Com Park -- it's a spooky graveyard for NFL stadiums named after corporations that bought the rights, then went bankrupt or radically retrenched. When yours truly heard the new Steelers' stadium would be named Heinz Field, I was tempted to try to corner the market on Del Monte stock. The latest is that Invesco Funds Group no longer exists. Yet as Will Shanley of the *Denver Post* reports, Amvescap, a British corporation that owns the name-rights contract to Denver's field, says it wants the stadium to continue to be christened after an extinct enterprise.

Here are two possibilities. First, simply change the name back to Mile High Stadium, among the most memorable in sports. Amvescap, if you restore the gloried Mile High Stadium name, everyone in Colorado will love you and rush out to buy -- whatever it is Amvescap sells. Alternatively, the name could be changed to Your Trademark Here Stadium. Naming rights to Denver's field would be auctioned on a weekly basis, democratizing access to stadium designation. Small companies could rent the name for a week to call attention to a product. Hollywood could rent the name: *Lethal Bimbo III* in Theaters Now Stadium. Individuals might even bid: I would offer hundreds and hundreds of dollars to make it, *The Progress Paradox* Is Still In Stores, the *Economist* Calls It "Excellent" and Carrying This Book Into Parties Will Improve Your Love Life Stadium.

**Plus In France They Put Malaise on Their Frites:** Jacques Chirac says France's problems stem from "malaise." In France, malaise is mandatory! Plus it is the nation's leading export.

**On Christmas Eve the Manning Figurine Demanded a Bonus:** Spenser, the Official Youngest of TMQ, likes Peyton Manning. So last Christmas, Santa gave him a Manning figurine. Spenser took the figurine to show his grandmother, and in the car, one of the legs snapped at the knee. Even football figurines have ACL problems! The leg didn't glue back on quite right. "We'll get him a new one," the Official Wife of TMQ pronounced. No way, I replied. Having an NFL figurine with a damaged knee only makes it more realistic. I guarantee if the figurine could speak, it would say to Spenser, "Kid, kid, give me a shot of Super Glue and put me back into the game!"

TMQ favors McFarlane figurines because the company makes an offensive lineman figurine of Willie Roaf. This year's line of McFarlane NFL figurines not only has tattoos, they're modeled on the actual tattoos of the players. My son Grant suggests McFarlane make figurines in matched sets, one of the players on the field and the other of the player on the sideline on crutches. My daughter Mara suggested McFarlane make Major League Baseball figurines whose muscles can be inflated with a pump, symbolizing baseball's toleration of steroids.

**Halloween the New Thanksgiving:** Christmas products are already out at the CVS near my home. Kay Jewelers is among national retailers already running Christmas television commercials. A mall near my

home not only has its giant Christmas tree up -- on Saturday there was already a Santa there, bouncing tots on his knee. *AaaaaiiiiiiiyyyyyyeEEEE!*

**Failure to Read TMQ:** Last week, TMQ noted of the short out, "Offensive coordinators like the three-step short out because when cornerbacks are backpedaling, as they usually are, this pass is easy as pie to complete. But if the quarterback stares at the receiver and the corner breaks in front, there is nothing but green grass between him and the goal line." Denver was leading Oakland 23-10, Raiders' ball on the Broncos' 24 in the fourth quarter. Oakland called the three-step short out; Kerry Collins stared at Joey Porter, giving away the play; corner Darrent Williams did not backpedal but broke in front, 80-yard touchdown return to ice the game.

**Patriotic Food of the Week:** A hit product is the Hooah!, a protein bar cooked up for troops in Iraq and now being marketed generally. The Hooah! contains no trans fat and is formulated to be metabolized slowly, preventing the spike-and-crash problem of comparable products. (The "energy" part of most energy bars is sugar.) The recipe for the Hooah! was perfected at the Pentagon's Combat Feeding Directorate in Natick, Mass. The Combat Feeding Directorate "actively leverages leading edge technologies to ensure the warfighter is provided the decisive edge in all aspects of combat feeding". Its sister facility at Natick is the Center of Excellence for Inflatable Composite Structures.

**Cover-Your-Eyes Play:** Detroit leading 7-0, Arizona of Mexico was on its 2. When the ball is that close to the goal line, every defensive lineman is thinking safety -- defensive linemen know the safety is their best chance to go into the record books as having scored. Snap, and Arizona guard Alex Stepanovich didn't even try to block Lions' tackle Dan Wilkinson: just brushed him then went upfield, safety. Ye gods, it's the first quarter and already the Cards are collapsing.

**Why Are You Kicking??????:** Trailing 28-14, Houston faced fourth-and-2 on the Indianapolis 6 at the end of the third. This is another gray area for the immutable law, Kick Early Go For It Late. But what mattered here was that the Colts have a high-scoring offense, the Moo Cows' a low-scoring offense; Houston needed to maximize points while it was still close. The Texans took the field goal and never scored again.

**Why Are You Punting??????:** Trailing 20-3 with six minutes remaining, facing fourth-and-10 on his 20, Baltimore coach Brian Billick signaled in the punt unit. Billick might as well have pulled his team off the field and sent everyone to get blueberry-almond martinis; Jax required just three snaps to pass the point where the ball would have been had Baltimore gone for it and missed. Billick had quit on the game and was playing to contain the margin of defeat, hoping to make the score look less bad on his resume when he job-shops this winter. NFL coaches should play to win, even if it means going down in flames. The football gods showed their displeasure by sending Baltimore down in flames anyway, 30-3.

**I Don't Wish to Alarm You, But ...** Chicago has won five straight. However, the Mingdingxiong ("Bears whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Mandarin) have yet to beat a winning team; their cupcake schedule should come with frosting!

**I Don't Wish to Alarm You, But... No. 2:** Have a look-see at the Indianapolis schedule. The Colts' final date in a four-seasons city falls Sunday at Cincinnati. From then on it's naught but Sun Belt, dome or West Coast -- and if the Colts lock home-field advantage, all their possible postseason dates will be indoors. For years, Peyton Manning's charges have looked great in sunshine or artificial lightning, wheezed out when the wind blew and frost formed. This year they may never confront the elements.

**Using Time Travel, I Went Back to That Party in 1980 and Still Didn't Get Lucky:** Last spring, students from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology staged what was billed as the first convention for time travelers. Cleverly, they declared it would be the only time-travelers' convention ever needed, since anyone who missed the event could just travel backward in time to attend.

The chances of time travel are vanishingly small. First there is the problem that there would have to exist an infinite number of interwoven universes, each representing an instant in time, in order for there

to be destinations to which time-travelers could journey. No one can prove there are not an infinity of universes each forever locked in an instant of time, but what are the odds? Second are the obvious causality paradoxes. If you went backward in time and prevented your parents from meeting, you would cease to exist; but if you ceased to exist, then you could not have traveled backward in time to prevent the meeting. Third is the already-altered problem -- if a future person went into the past and altered history, this would have already happened from our perspectives; history would already be altered and thus the current condition would be the normal condition, that is, not altered. The clincher is the free-will problem. If any future person with a time machine is debating whether to travel into the past, he or she would have no free choice in the matter, because from the standpoint of the past the journey has already either occurred or not occurred. For the theological flip side of this argument -- God cannot know the future because if the future is already determined then God has no free will -- see my favorite philosopher, Charles Hartshorne.

Back to MIT. When the *New York Times* put a whimsical story about the time-travel conference on Page One, the affair immediately sold out, and people were turned away at the door. This appeared to solve a delicate problem for the organizers, namely: Why didn't anyone from the future attend? People from the future tried to attend but when they got there the tickets were sold out! But if there really were time travel, people from the future would have known the conference would sell out and would have come backward to the day before the *New York Times* article ran, when tickets were easy to get. Football argument that there really is time travel: reader Kristy Scott of Bellevue, Wash., asserts that in a 1990 episode of the sci fi series *Quantum Leap*, a character used time travel to glimpse the 1996 Super Bowl and declared the Steelers were down by three. The Steelers did in fact play in the 1996 Super Bowl, and in the fourth quarter trailed by three.

**Unknown Beats Out Mega-Bucks Man:** The Bills have benched tackle Mike Williams, fourth pick of the 2002 draft, whose game is ordinary at best; undrafted free agent Jason Peters has won Williams' job. Buffalo's highest-paid player, Williams now appears among the leading draft busts of the 21st century. So is Bills' management a bunch of idiots for blowing such a high pick on Williams? (Roy Williams, John Henderson, Dwight Freeney and Jeremy Shockey are blue-chippers taken shortly after.) Or is Bills' management a bunch of geniuses for finding Peters, a who-dat who had a terrific game Sunday? No one ever knows which college players will be good in the NFL.

**Samko Gado Play of the Week:** TMQ likes shovel passes; they gain yards, slow down the rush and if the back drops the ball, it's an incomplection. Leading 7-0, the Packers had first-and-goal on the Atlanta 1. Brett Favre rolled right and flipped the shovel back to who-dat Samko Gado, who refused to be tackled, touchdown. Gado, with three touchdowns against the Falcons, was a practice-squad player a fortnight ago. He started just two games in his career at Division I-AA Liberty.

**Shaun Alexander Untouched Touchdown Run of the Week:** After running 88 yards untouched for a touchdown last Sunday, this Sunday, Shaun Alexander ran 17 yards untouched for a touchdown as the Blue Men Group iced their game against Die Morgenmuffel. Many Seattle blocks were good, the best came from tackle Walter Jones. If I picked an MVP right now it would be Jones -- and it is about time an offensive lineman received serious consideration for this honor.

**Dolphins' Bonus Error:** Miami's major error was to go pass-wacky in the final minute, but there was also a puzzling bonus error. Two of Scott Linehan's calls were alley-oop fades. Not only had Miami scored earlier on an ally-oop from near the goal line, alerting New England to the play -- both attempts were thrown to the corner where the declining sun was shining directly into the receivers' eyes! In the opposite corner of the end zone there was no direct sun. Once Halloween passes and the sun declines in early afternoon, Stonehenge effects can afflict the second halves of outdoor games. Many NFL and college teams have some brainiac chart where Sol will align during November and December contests, to avoid plays that force the receiver to look back into the sun. Miami called such plays twice with the game on the line. Holy Ptolemy!

**Ricky Williams Proposed the Dolphins Move Their Training Camp to Rockville:** Developer Jeffrey Abramson has announced he will construct the world's largest Vedic-certified office building. The \$72 million structure in Rockville, Md., will feature "the most advanced green environmental technologies

along with the ancient Vedic design principles of orientation, placement and proportion." The building will include a vastu and a brahmasthan, the builder declared, and will "promote healthy living." The structure is being designed by Maharishi Global Construction of Fairfield, Iowa; Abramson said Vedic architecture employs "the eternal laws of nature." TMQ wonders -- doesn't all construction entail eternal laws of nature, such as the moment of inertia is equal to mass times the square of distance? Yours truly lives near Rockville and often drives past the tract for which this Maharishi-sanctioned office structure is planned -- *it's next to a 12-lane freeway*. You'll be able to sit crosslegged thinking healthy thoughts and chanting namaste while thousands of SUVs roar by. Maharishi Global Construction promises that if you buy one of their homes, you'll "enjoy greater peace and prosperity." At least they will. Note: a "vastu" is simply any space defined by four walls. So the vastu may be nothing more than a parking garage -- but a parking garage in harmony with the eternal laws of nature!

It turns out the Canyon Ranch health spa outfit is planning a 150-room hotel and "healing" complex nearby, just off the same freeway. Two existing Canyon Ranch spas, renowned for drawing celebs, sit in gorgeous locations in the Arizona foothills and the Berkshires. Now there's going to be a Canyon Ranch with exclusive views of a 12-lane freeway! But then Canyon Ranch already has a spa facility in the center of Las Vegas, a restful, serene locale.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!** Washington leading City of Tampa 28-21, the Bucs faced third-and-9. Since the average NFL play yields about six yards, all the Redskins had to do -- anyway it's a six-blitz, 46-yard completion. Two snaps later Washington six-blitzed again, touchdown pass. Now it's Washington 35, Tampa 28 with 1:05 remaining, Bucs on the Skins' 30. Blitz; Edell Shepherd is single-covered deep, touchdown and the stage is set for the fateful ending.

Also the key play of Jersey/A's last-minute meltdown was a six-blitz that allowed Minnesota to complete a 21-yard toss to Jermaine Wiggins. Stat quirk: As widely noted, Minnesota had 394 return yards and 137 offensive yards. NFL stat compilations contain a subhead that reads, " Total Return Yardage Not Including Kickoffs." Shouldn't total return yardage be total?

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All:** Trailing 14-3 at the start of the fourth, Kansas City reached third-and-3 on the Buffalo 25. That seemed four-down territory given the score, the clock and a gusting wind that caused four of five field-goal attempts to miss on the day; also, the Bills' defense is second against the pass but second-to-last against the run. So did the Chiefs pound, pound? Incompletion, missed field goal and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

**Man Vacations Without Laptop, Lives to Tell the Tale:** Walter Mossberg, whose popular technology column run in the *Wall Street Journal*, last week reported he and his wife vacationed in Scotland -- and he did not take along a laptop. "I carried only a digital camera, a new video-capable iPod and a new, enhanced BlackBerry 8700c," Mossberg wrote. It's a wonder he survived! For his country holiday, Mossberg had on his person a camera that can transmit images anywhere in the world, a music player, a video player, video and music receivers, Internet access, an email system, a miniature computer with color screen and full keyboard, a multimedia messaging system and a speakerphone. Imagine trying to explain this to Hannibal.

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Cortland State 37, Ithaca 30 for the Cortica Jug. Located in Cortland, N.Y., a place that once grew scrumptious apples and now produces perfectly round red objects without flavor, Cortland State hosts an annual Scholars' Day. Last year topics for Scholars' Day included Exercise Science, Video Game Play and Preference of Cortland Students and a marathon showing of Hollywood movies about ancient Rome.

**BCS Bowl Omens Watch:** Texas led Kansas by an insurmountable 52-7, yet Longhorns' star Vince Young was still on the field in the third quarter and still heaving passes as Texas frantically ran up the score in yet another display of bad sportsmanship. Out in California, Matt Leinart took a seat once USC led by an insurmountable 32 points and from that juncture the Trojans did attempt a pass. Increasingly TMQ thinks a Texas-USC championship will be a walkover for the Trojans: the Longhorns are practically begging to be put in their place by the football gods.

**A Balanced Attack:** San Francisco is last in offense and last in defense.

**Next Week:** Tuesday Morning Quarterback discovers the Christmas decorations already at malls are for Christmas 2006.

## Readers, Week 10:

Nov. 16, 2005) -- A recent column mentioned some MIT students had shown it is possible, at least, that Archimedes really did build a solar death ray that set Roman galley ships aflame 2,200 years ago. Apparently you need not be an MIT student -- here, noted by **Joel Weinstein of Miami**, is [a web site devoted to a variety of homemade solar death rays](#). Note the disclaimer [which cautions](#), "The solar death ray is dangerous. Don't build one." This seems like the Philip Morris anti-smoking advertisements that warn you never to buy cigarettes: Sponsored, of course, by a company that wants to sell cigarettes.



In Missouri, we believe in being repetitively redundant.

On over-naming, **Ken Mendelson of Sharon, Mass.**, notes Missouri has a [City of University City](#), whose administrative building is called City of University City City Hall.

Marveling at Shaun Alexander running 88 yards for a touchdown without being hit, I wondered if there had been longer never-hit jaunts by running backs. **Wray Blattner of Dayton, Ohio**, noted fullback Earl Gross of the Eagles ran 90 yards untouched in an Eagles-Giants game in the 1960s. Going that one better, **Andrew Goddard of London, United Kingdom**, noted Bo Jackson went 91 yards untouched against the Bengals in a 1989 contest.

Going that one better, **Curtis Faessler of Algonquin, Ill.**, was among many to note that in 2003, Ahman Green motored 98 yards without ever coming into contact with another human being in a Packers-Broncos game.

And going that one better -- in fact, going as far as possible -- many readers

including **Debbie Koller of Palo Alto, Calif.**, noted that on the longest running-back run of all, Tony Dorsett's 99-yard jaunt in 1983 against the Vikings, Dorsett was never touched. I remember it that way too, but failed to find a highlight clip that would confirm same.

On the critical question of bottomless pits in Sci-Fi movies, many, including **Paul Nicoll of Essex, England**, wrote to note there was a guardrail around the bottomless pit where the Emperor meets his demise in *Return of the Jedi*. But this guard rail was so flimsy that when Luke crashed into it during the light-saber fight with Darth Vader, the guard rail broke. If you were the sinister absolute ruler of a galactic empire able to build huge fleets of enormous faster-than-light starships, and you for some reason wanted a bottomless pit in your office, wouldn't you have insisted on a better quality of guard-rail?



I wonder if the new Google Boeing jet is wired for the Internet.

On ridiculously expensive CEO flying ego monuments, **Mark Wroblewski of Longmont, Colo.**, suggests perhaps the gigantic Boeing 767 Google's two founders just bought solely for themselves is intended as an airborne command post in the event of an all-out virus attack against Google. **Roger King of Weston, Conn.**, notes that on the day my rant against super-expensive private jetliners was published, Boeing announced [it had passed 100 orders](#) for the \$60 million Boeing Business Jet -- an entire 737 converted for the use of one corporate plutocrat or third-world tyrant. **Jerry Hendrickson of Stoughton, Wis.**, supposed that if the Google 767 ever vanishes in flight, newspaper headlines will read, GOOGLE SEARCH COMES UP EMPTY.

**Idan Avisar of Ramat Hasharon, Israel**, noted Washington kicked a 33-yard field goal [with 3:33 showing on the clock](#). TMQ cautions: If there is ever a 66-yard field goal with 6:66 showing, prepare for the end of days!

Running up the score is rare in the NFL, yet distressingly common in college. The main factor in college is poor sportsmanship, but **Eric Menke of Irvine, Calif.**, raises an unsettling possibility -- gambling. College sports economics depends on big-money boosters, some of whom are high rollers. Some college coaches, Menke supposes, want to insure they cover the spread so that any high-roller boosters who bet on the game will collect, be happy and give more to the school. But the point spread

in college football can be huge; being a 30-point favorite is not unusual when a football factory plays a second-echelon opponent. To be sure of covering a huge spread, you've really got to run up the score. Coaching decisions that seem related to the spread are so infrequent in the NFL they probably occur strictly by coincidence. I've monitored NFL games for years for any indication of spread-aware coaching decisions, and just never seen it. But the NFL has elaborate safeguards against bettor influence. In college, by contrast, money changes hands between boosters and teams. Everywhere in Division I-A, boosters give large sums to teams directly; at some football-factory schools, big donations help pay coaches' hefty salaries, meaning that for intents and purposes the coaches are employed by the boosters. This may make some college coaches quite aware of boosters' desire to win wagers. And what do we observe in some college games? Coaching decisions to run up the score, which helps a bettor who has bet on the school. I put this out only for consideration, having no evidence beyond appearances. Appearances can point to a hidden truth, however, and it is disturbing that some college coaches behave as though concerned with covering the spread.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback lauded Dick Vermeil for going for the win from the Oakland 1-yard line with one second remaining in the game, rather than kicking a field goal to force overtime. **Yechiel Robnison of New York City** reminded that the last time Vermeil faced this choice, he kicked. The Chiefs scored a touchdown to make it 38-37 with one second remaining against New England in 2002; Vermeil took the PAT and overtime, [where he lost](#). But this isn't exactly the same situation. Against Oakland, Kansas City needed only one yard to win on the final play; if the Chiefs had gone for the deuce in 2002 on the last play, they would have needed two yards to win. Still, lining up for a regular PAT kick and then going for two off the fake should be devastating on the final play of regulation.



**If you are allergic to Aspirin, you will have a bad reaction to this column.**

On the ridiculous disclaimers front, **Tim Olevsky of Dorchester, Massachusetts** reports, "I recently purchased a bottle of Walgreens Aspirin, which included the following warning: DO NOT USE THIS PRODUCT IF YOU ARE ALLERGIC TO ASPIRIN." This warning would have meaning only if you knew you were allergic to Aspirin. And if you knew you were allergic to Aspirin, why would you walk into a pharmacy and buy a bottle brightly labeled ASPIRIN? Yesterday I opened a spam by mistake, an offer to buy "authentic replica Rolex watches." So they aren't phony fakes, they are authentic fakes!

Regarding my diatribe against glamorization of violence in big-budget Hollywood movies, readers including **Jake Phelan of Providence, R.I.**, countered that it was important to distinguish between preposterous movie violence and realistic violence. Films such as *Sin City* are so obviously preposterous, Phelan maintained, that no one could take them seriously. He continued, "But when Jack Nicholson receives electroshock therapy in *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* I can't even watch," because such films realistically depict actual suffering that human beings inflict upon each other. One reader recommended [the web site of writer Edward Jay Epstein](#), who maintains Hollywood has, in the last decade, decreased sex and sensuality, while increasingly adulating gore, because megastores such as Wal-Mart won't stock DVD titles that contain nudity but are only too happy to sell movies about innocent people being stabbed to death in slow motion.

This marketing angle points to an issue insufficiently appreciated in discussion of cinema glamorization of violence. Many Hollywood movies today earn more overseas than in the United States. Hollywood is decreasing the sex, while increasing the scenes of slaughter and torture, because censors in many nations won't allow films with nudity but are only too happy to approve movies drenched in bloodshed. More, violence doesn't require subtitles. Global economics increasing allows American movies to be shown almost everywhere in the world. So what is Hollywood exporting to developing-world audiences? Powerful images that depict sadistic violence as a norm -- that suggest that it's amusing to murder anyone you please, practically a form of recreation. Sure, most foreign audiences receive such films as preposterous, but there's a borderline personality in every crowd. Can it be coincidence that global terrorism is increasing at the very time Hollywood is deluging the world with movies that say it's fun and glamorous to kill the innocent?

## If a federal agency controlled sports, and the Christmas present that can conquer the world!

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

(Nov. 22, 2005) -- It looks like baseball will finally act against steroid use, thus staving off congressional intervention. This is a good thing, because if Congress created any kind of sports regulatory body -- surely with a catchy name such as the Federal Administration of Sports Administration -- it would be the beginning of the end. Here is what would happen if there were a Federal Administration of Sports Administration:

- An Acting Deputy Associate Assistant Administrator for Sports Administration would be required at every NFL, MLB and NBA game.
- Ticket prices would be doubled to pay for the thousands of supervisors and one clerk at the Federal Administration of Sports Administration.
- Outdoor games would require an Environmental Impact Statement.
- Defenses would be required to file Blitz Impact Statements.
- Replay reviews would be conducted by the Supreme Court, with decisions announced annually on the first Monday of October.
- Congress would hold hearings into the Eagles' playcalling.
- Teams would be forbidden to ask the age or gender of cheerleader candidates.
- The Arizona Cardinals would be admitted to the Super Bowl on an affirmative action basis.
- Huddles would be open to the public.

Actually, the thought of the Supreme Court being the final authority on replay reviews is pretty amusing. On Sundays, the justices could sit in their chambers in their robes drinking microbrews and screaming at the tube, "He never got both feet in bounds!"

In other football news, after Houston rookie Jerome Mathis returned a kickoff for a touchdown against Kansas City, yours truly heard sports bobbleheads note Mathis ran the 40-yard dash in 4.32 at the NFL Scouting Combine. Hundredths of a second are meaningless, except in high-energy physics! See below. And in more news, every summer various NFL defenders boast about how their units will be the new 1985 Chicago Bears, and every year by around this time, the units that did the boasting look like the new 1976 Tampa Bay defense. What if the 2005 Bears defense is the new 1985 Bears defense? Pat Kirwan first raised this possibility last week. Come Sunday, the Bears held the high-scoring Panthers to three points. Chicago is allowing 11 points per game, best in the NFL, and also has allowed the least yardage. Yes, the Bears have faced some weak offenses: Hasn't Chicago played the Lions six times already this season? But the Bears defense looks stout and is doing it the old-fashioned way, with conservative position-oriented schemes, not by excessive blitzing. Chicago has a favorable schedule down the stretch. Damn, I meant to predict the Bears would be good!

And in still more news: Hello, you have reached the Jets front office. If you would like to start at quarterback, please press "1." If you used to be Curtis Martin, press "2." To hear these options again, press "2006."

**Stats of the Week:** Results of first-half possessions at Cincinnati: touchdown, field goal, touchdown, touchdown, touchdown, touchdown, punt, touchdown, field goal, interception, touchdown.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** After going almost four years without scoring 30 points, Jacksonville has exceeded 30 on back-to-back weekends.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** In games played in California, the Bills have surrendered an average of 43

points; in all other states, the Bills have surrendered an average of 15 points.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** With 8 yards, Justin McCareins was the Jets' leading rusher.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** McCareins outgained the entire Rams team, which rushed for 6 yards.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** Washington has lost nine straight to the AFC.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** Jacksonville is 6-1 when Ernest Wilford scores a touchdown.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** Baltimore scored a touchdown for the first time since October.

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** Division leaders Chicago and Cincinnati have only one victory against a team with a winning record.

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** Neil Rackers not only is 31-for-31 in field-goal attempts -- he has 22 touchbacks, nearly twice as many as the next-best kicker.

**Stats of the Week No. 11:** Although Indianapolis is undefeated, Seattle can clinch its division sooner. Randall Liu of NFL headquarters calculates the Colts cannot clinch until Dec. 4 at the earliest, while a Seattle victory and St. Louis loss this Sunday gives the Seahawks the NFC West.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Phil Brown of San Francisco nominates Ashley C. of the Squared Sevens, who does well on the scale of unusual occupations: according to her team bio, she certifies forklift operators. Brown speculates, "I'd wager that's the least successful forklift certification program in history" -- guys deliberately fail so they have to come back and take the test from Ashley again.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! (Twice in Six Days):** In their Monday Night collapse to the Cowboys, Philadelphia got the 'Boys comeback started with a ridiculous blitz. Leading 20-7 with three minutes remaining, the Eagles sent eight after Drew Bledsoe. The eight-man blitz is almost never seen, because it is the equivalent of handing out cards saying, "Please score an easy touchdown." Which Dallas did -- 20-yard touchdown to Terry Glenn and a memorable collapse was in the making. Now it's six days later, Sunday afternoon and the Nesharim have a comeback of their own in progress, trailing host Jersey/A 20-17 with 5:35 remaining, the Giants facing third-and-2 on their 39. Surely Philadelphia won't make the same mistake again! Seven-man blitz, each Eagles handing out cards that say, "Please score an easy touchdown." To top it off, Philadelphia corner Sheldon Brown, knowing there is no deep help on a sellout blitz, made the high-school mistake of looking into the backfield rather than watching his man. Almost effortless 61-yard stop-and-go touchdown to Plaxico Burress, and the Eagles seem quite determined to become the fifth consecutive Super Bowl loser not to make the playoffs the following season.

**Sweet Play of the Week:** I've narrowed it down to about 35 nice offensive plays in the Indianapolis-Cincinnati game. Colts 28, Bengals 17, Indianapolis faced third-and-13 on the Tootsie Rolls' 21. Tight end Dallas Clark lined up as a wide slot man in a double-receiver set left, and shot straight up the field, out-running presumably faster Cincinnati nickel back Keiwan Ratliff for the touchdown. In the fourth quarter, Colts leading 42-34 and facing third-and-15, Indianapolis put Brandon Stokley in the same slot left; Stokley faked the fly that worked for Clark and instead ran a crossing pattern, 24-yard gain that set up the field goal that put the contest out of reach.

**Sweet Play-Fakes of the Week:** In addition to male modeling, Tom Brady play-fakes well. Before touchdown passes to Mike Vrabel and Andre Davis, Brady crouched low to play-fake, and held the ball in the runner's chest for an instant before pulling it away. A surprising number of quarterbacks yank the ball back from the runner so fast that the defense doesn't have time to bite: appearing to hand off requires offering the ball to the runner for a full second, a fundamental many don't seem to understand. New England note 1: the injuries continue, but no matter who the Flying Elvii send out on offensive line, the blocking is good. Super-sub Ross Hochstein was terrific in his first start at center. New England note

2: though linebacker Vrabel catching a touchdown pass after reporting eligible as an extra tight end is *the cover photo of the 2005 NFL Record and Fact Book*, the league's official guide, the Saints were surprised by the play.

**Sweet Sequence of the Week:** Leading 3-0, Jersey/A reached first-and-goal on the Philadelphia 1. Run, no gain; run, no gain; run, no gain. Now it's fourth-and-goal on the 1 and a case could be made for the safe three. The Giants go, and you could just sense the Philadelphia defense assuming it would be a test-of-manhood fourth consecutive run. Play-fake, touchdown pass.

**Sweet Defensive Play of the Week:** Can your defense give up 492 yards and still be sweet? Colts 42, Bengals 34 at the end of the third, Cincinnati faces fourth-and-1 on the Indianapolis 27. Cincinnati goes, though later it would turn out a field goal here would have been crucial; linebacker Gary Brackett stopped the runner for no gain.

**Sour Play of the Week:** City of Tampa leading 3-0 in the first quarter, Michael Vick departs with a minor injury. Reserve Matt Schaub enters cold and on his first snap, drops back to pass. But what is the situation? *It's third-and-22 on the Atlanta 1!* Falcons coaches, it's the first quarter of a close contest -- why are you ordering that a reserve quarterback coming in cold take a crazed risk? Schaub sprints backward into his end zone and fumbles, Buccaneers touchdown. Atlanta spent the entire game, which it lost by three, trying to recover from this boneheaded call by the Falcons coaches. As this column regularly notes, "Often all a football team needs do is run up the middle and things will be fine." Had Atlanta simply run up the middle on that down and then punted, the game outcome might have been very different.

Speaking of running up the middle and things will be fine: leading Cincinnati by 45-34, Indianapolis took possession with 4:17 remaining. Incompletion, incompletion, incompletion; the Colts punt it back at 3:57, having taken a mere 20 seconds off the clock. Great Caesar's ghost! Had Indianapolis simply run up the middle thrice, there would have been no time left for Cincinnati's almost-comeback.

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2:** Houston trails Kansas City by the new economy score of 24-7 with 14 seconds remaining in the first half, holding a time-out, ball on the Moo Cows' 47. David Carr heave-hoes into *triple* coverage, Eric Warfield returns the interception for a touchdown. But it wasn't the toss into triple coverage that made TMQ cry *Aaaaaiiiiiiiyyyyyeeeeee!* It was the call: Houston was running a short sideline out, exactly what Kansas City would expect in this situation. That's why the triple coverage was there! In this situation, throw down the middle, then use the timeout. Sour bonus: after the interception return, Kansas City kicked off with three seconds remaining, and the hundredths-of-a-second Jerome Mathias got all the way to the Chiefs' 18 before being tackled to conclude the first half. *Mathias never tried to lateral*, just let the half end.

**Sour Plays of the Week:** Trailing the defending champions 24-17, the United States Saints had second-and-10 on the New England 22 with 15 seconds remaining, no timeouts. On both of the game's final snaps, Aaron Brooks heave-hoed into the end zone, incomplete. But the end zone is where the Patriots expected the Saints to throw -- there were a half-dozen defenders in the end zone on both plays. Throw underneath and give somebody a chance to run it in!

**He's a Hundredth of a Second Faster Because He Lost Three Grams, Clint:** Matt Jones of Arkansas, the Associated Press reported last winter, turned heads at the Combine by running the 40-yard dash in 4.41. There's no chance the measurement was accurate down to the hundredths of a second. But even if it was: who cares? Jerome Mathis, AP went on, recorded a 4.32, best wide-receiver speed at the Combine; Courtney Roby was second at 4.36 and Troy Williamson recorded a 4.38 for third best. These distinctions are meaningless! Even assuming perfect measurement, 4.32 is 0.9 percent faster than 4.36. Someone who can run a 4.32 would arrive at the 40-yard marker *13 inches* ahead of someone running a 4.36.

The stock of USC's Mike Williams fell at the Combine because he ran the 40 in 4.59. Never mind that Jerry Rice ran a 4.6; it's how you perform in pads, not how you sprint in track shorts. A month after the Combine, when Williams ran a 4.58, the *Los Angeles Times* sports section devoted an entire story to the

notion Williams was "moving up draft boards" owing to his improved time. But 4.58 is 0.2 percent faster than 4.59! Someone running a 4.58 would arrive at the 40-yard marker *three inches* ahead of someone who runs a 4.59. Meanwhile, ESPN predicted on draft day that Williams would slide owing to a "pedestrian" 40 time. Oh, so he walked!

Tenths of a second matter in judging athletic potential: a 4.4 receiver gets to the marker one yard before a 4.5 receiver. But tenths, in turn, are meaningless in scoreboard terms, since they fly by too fast for human beings to perceive in any meaningful way. Yet just as sportscasters increasingly natter about hundredths of seconds, increasingly even high-school scoreboard clocks show tenths of seconds, while announcers knowledgeably speculate about how many tenths of seconds should be on the clock. Last winter in the NCAA men's basketball tournament, during the Wake Forest-West Virginia game, officials huddled at the end watching television replays, trying to decide whether to reset the clock to 1.6 seconds or 1.3 seconds.

**Wacky Food of the Week:** Lunching recently at trendy Firefly in Washington, I saw on the menu a dish containing Maytag cheese. In light of the previous item about a trendy Chicago restaurant that uses an inkjet printer to make "postmodern food", I feared this might be a dish that had been sauteed in the wash cycle then cooked in a clothes dryer. Instead, it turns out Maytag is a brand of gourmet cheese made in Iowa. Cheese that never needs repair -- Wallace would love it!

**Alouettes, Bonne Chance in the Coupe Grey!:** The Grey Cup on Sunday pits Montreal versus Edmonton. Here is Alouettes' cheer-babe Nathalie, who, of course, sounds sexier in French. It even sounds sexy that for relaxation she likes to *marche à l'extérieur* -- "walk outside," as opposed to walking around her apartment, perhaps.

**TMQ's Christmas List:** I'm hoping to get this seven-foot tall Robby the Robot, from the classic sci-fi flick *Forbidden Planet*, noted by Troy Savoie of Cambridge, Mass. The "fully animatronic" Robby marches, talks, flashes his lights and speaks lines from the movie. Also, you can use a wireless mike to project your voice from the robot's mouth. ("Hello Nathalie, I'm your blind date.") Hammacher Schlemmer, which sells the robot for a mere \$49,999, declares, "Robby is made by renowned artist Fred Barton, the man commissioned to restore the original robot." A robot artist -- this really must be the 21st century. The fine print cautions, "Special conditions and guarantee limitations apply to this product." So if you try to use your robot to take over the world, the manufacturer is not liable for counterattacks by jet fighters! I put a \$49,995 Robby into a shopping cart, and found the shipping and handling was a bargain at \$27. Maybe they just program Robby to walk to your house.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk:** Trailing 35-10 in the second half, the Bills faced fourth-and-13 on the San Diego 40. Boom sounds the punt, and TMQ barely had time to write the words *game over* in his notebook before the Chargers scored going the other way. Punting inside opposition territory when down by 25 is "coaching scared" -- Mike Mularkey seemed afraid of his own shadow. When the count was San Diego 48, Buffalo 10 at the two-minute warning and it could not possibly have made the slightest difference whether the Bills went for the first, punted or started square dancing, *then* Mularkey went for it on fourth-and-11. Contrast to Atlanta: trailing 13-0, Mora the Younger had the Falcons go for it on fourth-and-8 in Tampa Bay territory. Atlanta went on to lose a nail-biter, but the bold play ignited the Falcons; from the point at which Jim Mora went for it on fourth-and-long, Atlanta rallied from 0-13 to a 27-20 lead. When a coach goes for it with his team trailing, he is challenging his players to win. When a coach shrugs and punts, he sends the message he has quit on the game; so why shouldn't his players quit, too?

As this column has documented, Buffalo has punted in opposition territory a truly shocking amount in the past five years. During that period, the Bills have been led by two gentlemen -- Mularkey and the tastefully named Gregg Williams -- who had no head coaching experience at any level before assuming the post. Both have played to avoid criticism rather than playing to win, consistently taking the timid way out and then shrugging their shoulders after defeat. Is there any mystery about why the Bills have not made the playoffs in the period during which their head coaches regularly quit on games? Is there one chance in a million Bill Belichick, trailing 35-10, punts in opposition territory?

**Preposterous Punt Bonus:** Trailing 9-0, Nick Saban ordered a punt from the Cleveland 33. Game scoreless, Jim Haslett ordered a punt from the New England 32. The Bills, Dolphins and Saints all punt in opposition territory, and let's see how this daring strategy works out -- hmm, the teams are a combined 9-21.

**Man Drinks Blueberry-Almond Martini, Lives to Tell the Tale:** Before the Cowboys-at-Eagles game on *Monday Night Football*, there was a fundraiser at Bookbinder's, the famed Philadelphia eatery. Featured libation of the event? The Tuesday Morning Quarterback blueberry-almond martini! The picture shows former Eagles star Fred Barnett looking tres chic with blueberry-almond martini in hand. But did Barnett actually *drink* this concoction? Whether one actually drinks a blueberry-almond martini, as opposed to simply looking tres chic by carrying it around, is a subject of debate. The original blueberry-almond martini recipe, which first ran in a 2001 column, ended this way: "Shake ingredients, strain into glass. Drink as much as you can stand. Pour remainder down drain."

**Pony Car, Pony Car, Won't You Be My Pony Car:** I was 12 when the Mustang fastback came out in 1965, and every 12-year-old that year dreamed of sitting behind the wheel of one. Recently a rental-car clerk handed me the keys to the beautiful new retro Mustang fastback, and what a kick it was to drive around for a few days. Here is the original fastback in Rangoon Red; Honey Gold was another choice in 1965. Check out the new retro beauty in Screaming Yellow or Legend Lime. After decades of nostalgia about the original Mustang, Ford has simply returned to producing the 1965 look. My suggestion to Ford: Don't ever change the Mustang again, just keep selling the 1965 look forever.

Auto pallet note: the Range Rover Sport is now available in Vesuvius Orange 3. A car color named after a natural disaster! Sixties wheels note: TMQ also gives thumbs-up to the new retro Dodge Charger, which sadly is not a facsimile of the legendary *Vanishing Point* Charger of 1969, but is a fine car with redolent Sixties overtones. DaimlerChrysler is the only financially sound member of the Big Three. Note the company keeps hitting home runs with *cars* -- the 300C, Magnum and Charger -- while General Motors and Ford keep losing billions emphasizing SUVs the size of self-propelled day care centers. Andy Jones of Brookings, S.D., adds that the spiffy new Charger is available in an "R/T Road & Track" model. But R/T means "road and track."

**Why Are You Kicking??????:** Trailing 17-9, the Squared Sevens faced fourth-and-goal on the Blue Men Group 5 in the second half. Yes, the field goal is the standard tactic here. But you're 2-7, the season is sinking into the West, why not go all-out for a win for the home crowd? In trotted the field-goal unit, and now you are 2-8.

**Why Are You Kicking??????? No. 2:** A week ago, Houston booted a field goal on fourth-and-2 from the Indianapolis 6 though trailing 28-14 in the second half, and never threatened again. Now it's Sunday night, Houston trails Kansas City 31-14 at the end of the third, and faces fourth-and-goal on the Flintstones' 4. Don't you remember what happened in your last game? In trotted the field-goal unit, and Houston never threatened again. You're 1-8, why not go all-out for a win for the home crowd? And now you are 1-9.

**Everyone Just Go Back to Your Old Uniforms, No Questions Will Be Asked:** The Rams showed off a monochrome look against the Cardinals, who appeared to be wearing pajamas bought on close-out at K-Mart. The Chargers wore their Sixties powder blues, sweetest unis in all sports, while the Bills also sported the toddler's-pajamas look. Whenever I see the Bills' new pajama-esque road unis, which might as well have feetsies, I think, "OK, you've had your little joke, now put on the real uniforms." Beholding the beautiful powder blues line up against the pajamas, the football gods decreed a walkover.

**Don't Go Tasteful On Us:** The Titans and Texans cheer-babes showed lack of professionalism by coming out covered head-to-toe despite pleasant autumn temperatures in Nashville and Houston. Needless to say, the football gods punished their teams.

**Passengers Should Be Advised That Airbus Regulations Prohibit Moving Your Elbows:** Two years ago, Airbus was showing artists' conceptions of its new A380 mega-jetliner all decked out for airborne elegance and passenger comfort. The sketches depicted large open areas, piano lounges with

stand-up cocktail bars, sleeper cabins and even a children's playground. Yours truly warned at the time, "Don't believe this for an instant! Every actual Airbus A380 will lumber into the skies with seats wedged into every possible square meter, and people having to turn sideways to pass each other in the aisles." Comes now Scott McCartney, who writes the delightful airline-bashing "Middle Seat" column for the *Wall Street Journal*, to report that with the A380 being prepared for initial service, all the piano lounges and open areas are disappearing, replaced by seats wedged into every conceivable square meter. "Despite the hubbub about onboard casinos, Jacuzzis and private double beds," McCartney wrote, "typical coach seating on the A380 will be 10 across." Meanwhile, Boeing continues to promise that its new 787 Dreamliner will be the first-ever jetliner to provide a pleasant sense of openness; see this lovely mock-up, which shows a soaring "rotunda" open area and spacious coach seating. Don't believe for one minute you will ever board a 787 that looks anything like these pictures!

**Worst Blocks:** When a team gives up eight sacks, it's hard to be sure whether the defensive played well or the offensive line played poorly. But ye gods did the Carolina offensive line play poorly against Chicago. Panthers tackles Jordan Gross and Travelle Wharton barely slowed the Bears' rush on numerous plays. Only two of the sacks came against blitzes; on the other sacks, Carolina had at least five men blocking four rushers, yet the quarterback went down. On the game-icing play, the Panthers offensive line's performance became pathetic. Chicago leading 13-3, Carolina had fourth-and-6 on the Bears' 18 with a minute remaining. Not only did four rushers almost immediately break through five blockers to sack Jake Delhomme; during the sack *all five Panthers offensive linemen* are simply standing there, watching the defenders clobber their quarterback, not even trying to block anyone! Every week there is a play that TMZ re-runs over and over again in rapt fascination, and this week, this was it -- five Carolina offensive linemen stand there doing nothing as their quarterback is sacked to end the game.

**Misery loves company:** Oakland 16, Washington 13 with 17 seconds remaining, highly hyped megabucks offensive tackle Jon Jansen just stood there watching as his man, Raiders end Derrick Burgess, sacked Mark Brunell to end the contest. And when Tommy Maddox was sacked in overtime, leading to a Pittsburgh punt and Baltimore's winning drive, yours truly counted three Steelers blockers simply standing there watching, not even trying to protect their quarterback.

**Best Blocks:** Sometimes the first play of the game is as important as the last. On the first Dallas play against Detroit, guard Marco Rivera and center Al Johnson pulled right and got perfect blocks as Julius Jones ran 18 yards, setting the tone for the Cowboys to control the day. When a center pulls and gets a wide block, that's impressive. The first play was most important in Cleveland, too, as Reuben Droughns ran 75 yards for a touchdown on the Browns' initial snap. Cleveland tight end Steve Heiden knocked down *three* Miami defenders at various points during that long play, a great example of the tenet that just because you've already blocked one man doesn't mean you shouldn't be looking for someone else to block.

**It's Like Borrowing Wildly to Have Everything You Want Right Now, Then Handing the Bill to Future -- Wait, That's How the Entire Country Is Being Run:** Nothing hurts quite like a salary-cap invoice for a player who isn't even on the team; it's like having to make mortgage payments on a house that burned down. This season Washington is assessed \$9 million for Laveranues Coles, though Coles plays for the Jets; Tennessee assessed \$8.8 million for Fred Miller, though Miller plays for Chicago; Tennessee assessed \$8.8 million for Kevin Carter, though Carter plays for Miami; Buffalo assessed \$4.4 million for Drew Bledsoe, though Bledsoe plays for Dallas; Dallas assessed \$3.3 million for Marcellus Wiley, though Wiley plays for Jacksonville; Arizona assessed \$3.3 for L.J. Shelton, though Shelton plays for Cleveland; New England assessed \$2.6 million for Ty Law, though Law plays for Jersey/B; San Diego assessed \$2.5 million for Tim Dwight, though Dwight plays for New England; Cleveland assessed \$2.5 million for Jeff Garcia, though Garcia plays for Detroit; there are loads of other examples. Even worse are salary-cap charges this year for players who weren't present *last* year. Washington is assessed \$4.8 million for Jeremiah Trotter, though he didn't play for the Redskins in 2004; Tennessee hit with \$4 million for Eddie George, Jacksonville \$3.6 million for Hugh Douglas, both players who weren't even around last year. All these ledger entries are the results of prorated bonus charges that crash-land on a team's cap when the team spends freely to have a player today, then waives or trades him tomorrow. Still more reason, as Tuesday Morning Quarterback advocates, to end the proration of bonuses and compute the

NFL salary cap simply by tallying actual monies paid in a given season.

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Eastern Michigan 38, Buffalo 14. The Bulls are 1-27 in road games since joining the Mid-American Conference, notes Chris LaGrow of Buffalo. Actually located in Amherst, N.Y., the school has changed its name from "the University of Buffalo" to "the University at Buffalo." Need a last-minute ticket to a UB game? Not a problem; check the crowds in any of these photos.

**BCS Omens Watch:** Texas had the week off and USC needed all 50 points to defeat Fresno State, so no additions to the omens equation. Jeff Moses of Ithaca, N.Y., notes that back in September, with USC leading Arkansas 49-10, Matt Leinart was still on the field heave-hoeing passes as the Trojans frantically ran up the score.

**General Final Scores Update:** The consensus of users continues to beat all experts at Yahoo! Consensus of users is 106-54; the leading expert is 103-57; TMQ's off-price ultra generic prediction, Home Team Wins, is tied for third at 100-60.

**TMQ Admission:** This is my sixth year of writing this column, and I am proud of the fact that through the period, I have always had at least one item about every single NFL contest played. That's 1,495 games, at least one item on each. But I am sorry, I simply could not think of anything to say about Denver's blowout of the hapless Jersey/B Jets.

**Next Week:** Seriously, Jets -- what about the single wing?

## Readers, Week 11:

(Nov. 23, 2005) -- A recent column accused Kerry Collins of telegraphing a play by staring at his receiver, Joey Porter. **Kristofer Disharoon of Manchester, N.J.**, writes, "If Kerry Collins were staring at Joey Porter, no wonder the pass was intercepted -- Collins must have been craning his neck to see a TV monitor on the sidelines showing the Pittsburgh Steelers game." Joey Porter plays for Pittsburgh, Jerry Porter for Oakland. In haiku:

*Porters everywhere!  
Jerry catches Kerry's bombs;  
Joey hits for Pitt.*



Wonder if body doubles for Monica and Phoebe would join Kylee for a little cheer.

As the world wonders who the Jennifer Aniston body double is, **Pai Chung** proposes she is [Kylee of the Seattle Sea-Gals cheerleading squad](#). According to her team bio, Kylee's most prized possession is "pictures and memorabilia from the past." If she had pictures and memorabilia from the future, we'd want to know about it!

Readers, including **Rev. Stephen Schmidt of Jacksonville, N.C.**, wondered why I did not mention the Packers-Vikings Monday night game in the very column where I discussed my policy of always mentioning every game. Hmm -- that would seem to be somewhat inconsistent, wouldn't it? Explanation: This week's TMQ was filed early Monday evening in order to help NFL.com meet its Thanksgiving week production schedule. So at least the statement was true when I made it! Point I might have offered, instead offered by many readers: During the *Monday Night Football* contest, John Madden declared that a 66 MPH pass by Brett Favre was "the equivalent of 98 MPH pitch in baseball." Readers, including **TJ of Durham, N.C.**, protested, "Wouldn't a 66 MPH football pass be the equivalent of, say, a 66 MPH baseball pitch?"

**Kate Goetz of Pittsburgh** suggests one reason college coaches run up the score is to pad the statistics of their star players. Having high-drafted players reflects well on a coach, and NFL teams are impressed by stats. She also makes a good point about the sex-and-violence equation in movies. (I've been saying Hollywood should offer less bloodshed, more sensuality.) The mother of two teenaged girls, Goetz says she worries less about them watching violent scenes than sex scenes. Why? Most people go through life without ever committing an act of violence, but everyone contemplates sex, so imitation is more likely on the latter: "It seems unlikely that watching James Bond blow things up will encourage my girls to buy plastic explosives, but watching him objectify women might teach them that the way to a man's heart is to behave like a sex object." This raises yet another problem with Hollywood -- when the big studios do present sexuality, it's usually a smirking, ultra-superficial version that makes you long for the scene to switch to something exploding.



Eat this at Thanksgiving, which probably includes tofu turkey.

Last week, I scratched my head over the concept of an "authentic replica." **Shalom Goldberg of Philadelphia** reports that Sabra Foods sells ["real vegetarian chopped liver"](#) made mainly of eggplant. "Perhaps the name is to distinguish it from imitation vegetarian chopped liver, which would contain liver," Goldberg writes.

On the commercialization-of-Christmas front, **Jeffrey Staggs** writes, "On Nov 11, I was in a department store in San Jose, Costa Rica. Not a tourist spot, but a store for locals. And they were playing Christmas carols." **Renee Trnka of Webster, Minnesota** reports a local radio station switched to holiday music format on Nov. 15: "When I woke up this morning, saw snow on the ground and heard Christmas music on the radio, my first thought was, 'Did I sleep through Thanksgiving?'" **Yayoi Nishida of Osaka** reports she has seen Christmas decorations at Japanese malls since early November. At least Japan, being mainly Buddhist and Shinto, takes the straightforward

approach to viewing Christmas as a commercial event. My children were astounded when I explained to them that Santa, reindeer and decorated trees aren't in the Bible. Many who aren't Christian do not like excessive Christmas kitsch -- and many who are Christian aren't crazy about it either.

The year's weirdest stat quirk continues: Green Bay is 2-8, yet has outscored its opponents. **John L. Watson of Fayetteville, N.C.** checked the record books and found that since 1920, some 55 NFL (and old APFA) clubs have finished with losing seasons yet more points than their opponents. Green Bay has already done it three times -- in 1933, 1968 and 1974.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback has noted that Cincinnati's long years of losing caused the Ben-Gals cheerleading squad to be unaccustomed to the need to display professionalism in must-win pressure games. (Professionalism in the NFL cheerleader context means skin or at least skin-tight.) **Jesse Schupack of Broken Arrow, Okla.**, points out it happened again in Week 11. Though kickoff weather was mild for the monster Colts at Bengals contest, Cincinnati cheerleaders wore zipped-up jackets, and the football gods frowned on the home team. Obviously Cincinnati's struggles in big home games this season stems from the cheerleaders' failure to appease the football gods. Hey Ben-Gals: When the going gets tough, the tough remove garments. Meanwhile, TMQ saluted the they-sound-sexier-in-French cheer-babes of the Coupe-Gris-bound Montreal Alouettes. **Eric Soskin of Philadelphia** notes that [Roxane of the Alouettes' pep squad](#) speaks French, is a cheerleader and is also a flight attendant -- triple male fantasy overload!

Yours truly said Indianapolis could cruise all the way to the Super Bowl without having to play a harsh-weather game. **Nate Larson, who grew up in Port Townsend, Wash.**, notes of the Colts at Seahawks Christmas Eve date, "The weather forecast for that day calls for 15-20 MPH winds out of the south and a 60 percent chance of rain, temperatures in the 40s. How do I know this so far in advance? Because the Seattle forecast never changes after Oct. 1."

**Raul Galicia of Guanajuato, Mexico**, reports that because "red zone" means "red-light district" in idiomatic Spanish, broadcasters who call [futbal Americano](#) refer instead to "the zone where you must score." Aside from the fact this expression still suggests the red-light district, it's pretty clunky. Readers: Propose a clever Spanish alternative for "red zone."

**Ashley Tate of Alpharetta, Ga.**, offers her incredibly scientifically advanced analysis of the probabilities that faced Jon "Once I Was A Teenaged Coach" Gruden [when he was deciding whether to go for two](#) and the win at the end of the Bucs-Redskins collision. On ridiculous disclaimers, **Jeff Flowers of Acton, Mass.**, notes the disclaimer on the prescription drug Lunesta warns, "May cause drowsiness." Lunesta is a sleeping pill!

**David Han of Ann Arbor, Mich.**, who speaks Mandarin, suggests I call the Bears the Chicago Ming Ding Xiong rather than the Mingdingxiong. He writes, "They are three separate words: Ming for life or fate, Ding for fixed or determined and Xiong for bear or bears. You wouldn't called Seattle the Blue-mengroup, would you?" I've called the St. Louis team Les Mouflons (French) and Die Morgenmuffel (German). **Ben Christmann of St. Louis** writes, "In keeping with the languages-spoken-in-Switzerland theme for the Rams, I propose the Montone Arrostito -- Italian for 'roasted mutton.' That's what I smelled watching Kurt Warner carve up his former team."



Yeah, SUVs look like this, except with a tiny bit more red.

I chortled that the Range Rover is now available in Vesuvius Orange -- a color named after a natural disaster! **R.S. Gray of Hollywood, Calif.**, reports that He Who Need Not Be Named arrived at his NFL grievance hearing in a Vesuvius Orange Range Rover. There are, Gray notes, parallels between this year's Eagles and Pompeii.

**Eric Runnebaum of Kansas** and **Nate Marik of Nebraska** numbered among many Midwestern readers who thanked CBS for switching away from the preseason-like Broncos-Jets game it inexplicably scheduled for parts of the nation's center and showing the red-hot Indianapolis-Cincinnati matchup beginning with the second half. I don't want to jinx it by saying so, but the networks are doing a better job this season of switching to whatever contest is hot.

**Sig Bedder of Burkhardt, Wis.**, notes, "Following Jake Delhomme's first interception in Chicago, Carolina coach John Fox, wary of the Law of the Other Shoe, immediately called timeout to calm his team." The Bears still scored, though. The Colts have allowed a league-low seven sacks. **Nicholas Aguelakakis of Buenos Aires, Argentina**, points out that at this pace, Peyton Manning will be sacked 11 times on the season -- the same number of times his father, Archie, was once sacked in a single game.

Finally, **Amitai Barth of Great Neck, N.Y.**, [points out this amusing story](#) about a small town that renamed itself Dish, Texas, in exchange for free Dish Network television service for all residents. I would gladly have my town renamed DirecTV, Md., in exchange for being able to receive that satellite carrier and thus obtain NFL Sunday Ticket. Oh, have I mentioned: IT DRIVES ME CRAZY THAT I CAN'T GET DIRECTV!!! This year, DirecTV launched two more satellites, but they're for transmitting high-definition, not improving access to the network. People whose dwellings lack a sightline to the primary DirecTV satellite still cannot sign up for Sunday Ticket until 2010 at the earliest, which is still a really crummy decision by the NFL. At any rate, playing off last week's column, Barth writes that he "would be thrilled to live in *The Progress Paradox Is Still In Stores*, the *Economist* Calls It 'Excellent' and Carrying This Book Into Parties Will Improve Your Love Life, Texas." Amitai, I'll start calling up small Texas towns and offering them hundreds and hundreds of dollars to adopt that name.

## Just try using the TMQ rebate, and Free the Third Quarterback!

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

(Nov. 29, 2005) -- So a Harvard guy comes out of nowhere and wins a huge victory for the Rams. Here, on an *exclusive* basis, is the actual transcript of what St. Louis coach Joe Vitt told Harvard rookie QB Ryan Fitzpatrick on the sideline before sending him in Sunday: "I say, Ryan, my good man. We're in a spot of a jam, if you catch my drift. Way behind. Everyone else injured. It's a Brits-at-Dunkirk thing, old sport. Would you terribly mind putting on that helmet and giving it the old college try? There's a good chap! Cheerio!" As Fitzpatrick led the Rams to their improbable comeback, teammates kept him fired up by shouting, "What ho!" and "Pip pip!" After the game, Fitzpatrick skipped the press conference to attend sherry hour.

Though Yale has a four-term lock on the White House, Harvard rules pro football: Crimson grads Matt Birk (Minnesota) and Isaiah Kacyvenski (Seattle) are also on NFL rosters, and see below for the CFL's Harvard star. Perhaps researchers should check what Harvard is putting in the Yankee pot roast -- actual item from today's Harvard cafeteria menu. But why haven't we beheld the talented Fitzpatrick before? Because as recently as last week, he was the third quarterback, and thus effectively forbidden to play.

There are two absurdities of NFL rosters, first being the inactive list. Rosters have 53 players, but for each game seven must be declared inactive -- forbidden to dress. Inactive players are paid full salaries and receive full vesting: as TMQ has argued, the sole effect of the inactive list is to force owners to pay for players who don't play. Ask any healthy NFL gentleman moldering on the inactive list if he would rather don pads and the answer is sure to be a hearty, "What ho!"

Then there's the strangest category, third quarterback. NFL teams can dress a third quarterback -- but the player so designated may enter the game only if the first two quarterbacks depart and do not return. There is no comparable rule in college or high-school football, where substitution is unlimited. The third quarterback receives full pay and vesting, so again the owner is paying someone to do nothing. Fans are penalized, too. If the third quarterback could play, for most teams he'd hold for placements -- and this might increase the likelihood of fake kicks, among the most exciting plays in football. There might be more trick plays. Not wanting to risk injury to the most important player, most NFL teams have few, if any, trick plays involving the quarterback. Because the second quarterback trains to step in for the first, he doesn't practice trick plays either. If the third QB could play, he might spend his time learning trick plays (two quarterbacks on the field at once, etc.) that fans would enjoy. Free the Third Quarterback!

In other news, fans pooh-pooh the field goal as a consolation prize; everyone wants manly-man touchdowns. But it's hard to score in the NFL, and three points often taste really, really good. Just ask the Giants, who missed three field-goal attempts at the end of regulation and in overtime at the fabulous Qwest Field in Seattle. Ask the Redskins, who missed a figgie to win at the end of regulation. Ask the Bucs, who missed a field goal to tie late against Chicago. Why did Philadelphia beat Green Bay? The Eagles hit all four field-goal attempts. Why did the Patriots take the last Lombardi Trophy? Partly because they were really good at field-goal kicking, hitting 36 of 38.

While everyone's talking about the Colts and Bears, the Broncos and Seahawks have quietly gone a combined 18-4. Both have recently collapsed in the postseason, so skepticism is justified. Still, Denver is sitting pretty at 9-2 with three dreadful teams (Baltimore, Buffalo and Oakland) on its home-stretch schedule. Seattle is sitting pretty at 9-2 with three waterlogged clubs (Green Bay, San Francisco and Tennessee) left on its card: the Hawks could clinch the NFC West on Sunday. Seattle and Denver just showed resolve with overtime wins against quality opponents. Could one or even both be for real?

The Colts are now 11-0. If they keep winning they will lock up home-field advantage with two or even three games remaining. Could Tony Dungy justify going all-out for a perfect season, risking injuries to starters, in two or even three games that mean nothing? Possible incongruity: Arizona beats Indianapolis

in the regular-season finale, ending the perfect-season bid. Excuse me Mr. Green, there are numerous members of the 1972 Dolphins in your office, offering to work out with the team.

**Stats of the Week:** On consecutive weeks, coaches fired by Daniel Snyder -- Norv Turner of Oakland, Marty Schottenheimer of San Diego -- came to Washington and defeated the Redskins.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** Chicago had a 1-yard touchdown drive.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** Tennessee had 461 yards of offense, but just 15 first downs.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** Tom Brady lost for just the fourth time in his career in a game played after Thanksgiving.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** Green Bay is 2-9 and still has outscored its opponents.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** Tennessee quarterbacks have thrown 15 touchdown passes to their teammates and four to the opposition.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** Buffalo's defense has given up three touchdowns in its last three home games and 14 touchdowns in its last three road games.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** Washington has lost 10 straight to the AFC.

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** Seattle has made all of its fourth-down conversion attempts in 2005.

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** Indianapolis has won 20 of its last 22 games -- one loss a meaningless contest in which the Colts had locked up their best seeding and did not play starters.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Susan of the Arizona of Mexico Cardinals, a college student whose bio says her favorite quotation is, "Life is not measured by the number of breaths we take, it's measured by the moments that take our breath away." The number of breaths we take in this fleeting life is amazingly low: a person living 75 years will breathe about 750 million times. Sounds like a lot? Nearly 10 of those went by as you read this paragraph, and they'll never come back. Susan's team bio says her favorite color is "red and green." That's two colors!

**Sweet Play of the Week:** On the first snap of overtime, San Diego faked a pitch left to LaDainian Tomlinson. Antonio Gates blocked and then did a dancer's "turn out," spinning over his shoulder; he ran into the right flat as Drew Brees rolled right, taking a short drag pass 24 yards to set up San Diego's win on the next snap. Only a linebacker was covering the All-Pro Gates. Why? Earlier in the game, Washington had been double-teaming Gates. But then Gates dropped three straight passes; the Redskins loosened their coverage, assuming San Diego would not risk throwing to Gates again. It was sweet that Gates made the play, and sweet that San Diego coaches called a play designed to work the ball to a man who had been dropping it.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Six minutes remaining in overtime, Seattle was sputtering. The Blue Men Group had run 10 overtime snaps for just seven net yards; Seattle coaches were trying to nickel-and-dime Jersey/A with short passes, and it wasn't working. Seattle lined up two receivers right, the outside guy being who-dat D. J. Hackett, 17 career receptions entering the game. The call was D.J. Hackett deep; Jersey/A defensive backs acted shocked and the 38-yard completion set up the winning kick. It was sweet that Hackett made the play and sweet that Seattle coaches called a deep shot to a guy no one had ever heard of.

**Sweet Nullified Play:** Tennessee cornerback Adam "Pacman" Jones lined up as a flanker, took an end-around handoff running right and then reversed field for a 19-yard touchdown against San Francisco; the play was nullified by a penalty. Often the spontaneous reversed-field run leads to spectacular gains; this

play was interesting because Jones was supposed to start one way, then reverse field. Why don't offensive coordinators plan more plays on which the runner reverses field, and the blockers know this is coming? Just a thought.

**TMQ Now Offers a Rebate. But the Column Is Free, So If You Send in the Form You Receive -- Oh, Never Mind:** Recently I bought for one of my teenagers some Bausch & Lomb ReNu contact lenses, advertised as bearing a \$30 mail-in rebate. The rebate turned out to have so much fine print it might as well have been a probate order for the Howard Hughes estate. You had to mail in original receipts for the lenses, plus documentation of your most recent eye examination, plus bar codes from the lens box, plus an "original packing slip." Obviously the rebate was rigged to be impossible to use. Why isn't this consumer fraud? Many products are now marketed with rebates that turn out to have paragraph after paragraph of restrictive fine print. The term "rebate" creates a reasonable expectation the promised payment will be conferred: otherwise advertising should say, "Some buyers have a slight chance of receiving a rebate!" This seems like a job for the Federal Trade Commission -- define "rebate" to mean a payment all buyers receive through a simple step.

**Sour Harvard-Influenced Play of the Week:** Houston 27, St. Louis 17 and the Harvard guy is facing fourth-and-6 on the Texans' 43 with 34 seconds in regulation. The sole, faint Rams' hope is to score an immediate touchdown, then recover an onside with enough clock left to move into field-goal range. Now class, there are 34 seconds remaining and you must score an immediate touchdown. Where oh where should the pass go? *Maybe up the field!* Yet Isaac Bruce got behind the Houston defense, which had no safety way deep: touchdown. Houston seemed to expect some rinky-dinky short pass intended to pick up a first, but a rinky-dinky first down would have left St. Louis no time to win. All Houston had to do was prevent a quick-strike touchdown and the game was won; yet the Texans didn't play deep. Sour bonus: before the touchdown, Houston *called time out*, stopping the clock. St. Louis drilled the field goal that forced overtime with a few ticks remaining. Had Houston not stopped the clock at 34 seconds, there might have been no time for the final field goal attempt.

**Sour Stance of the Week:** Cincinnati leading 10-0, the Tootsie Rolls had possession on the Baltimore 46. Ravens' corner Dale Carter lined up across from red-hot receiver Chad Johnson. Carter stood in a bizarre stance, perpendicular to the line of scrimmage as if his goal was to watch quarterback Carson Palmer, not guard his man. Johnson blew past Carter like he had a 10-yard head start, touchdown. I've watched a lot of football and never seen a cornerback line up perpendicular to the line. I hope I never to see it again.

**Sour Call of the Week:** Tuesday Morning Quarterback fails to grasp the logic of ordering quarterbacks to sprint backward into their own end zones. A week ago, Atlanta coaches ordered Matt Schaub to sprint backward into his end zone; the result was a Tampa touchdown that proved the deciding points in a close game. This week it's Miami 14, Oakland 7, the Raiders have the ball on their 2 on their first snap of the third quarter. Oakland coaches order Kerry Collins to retreat into his end zone for a slow-developing deep pass; safety, and the Marine Mammals never look back. Your own end zone is a dangerous place to be. The goal is to move away from your end zone, not sprint into it.

*Aaaaaiiiiiiiiiyyyyyyyye!!!!* Every week there is one play TMQ watches over and again in rapt fascination; this week it was the first Colts' snap. Indianapolis has the ball on its 20, flanks two receivers right with Marvin Harrison on the outside. Pittsburgh comes out in an eight-man front as if it is first-and-goal on the 1. Peyton Manning sees the overstack and audibles to a fly pattern to Harrison. The ball is snapped, Harrison takes off; Steelers' corner Ike Taylor *just stands there and lets Harrison go deep* while making the high school mistakes of "looking into the backfield," watching Manning. Hey Ike, Marvin Harrison only has 106 touchdown receptions. How about guarding your man instead of staring at the quarterback! An instant later, Harrison has his 107th touchdown reception. The play is compellingly weird for Pittsburgh's unusual set, Taylor's mistake and the fact that Taylor should have known he would have no safety help in the unusual set. Later, when Manning threw a touchdown pass to Bryan Fletcher, Pittsburgh safety Tyrone Carter made the same high-school mistake, looking into the backfield at Manning rather than guarding Fletcher. The Pittsburgh defense would seem to need a little Football 101 this week.

**Psychic Predicts TMQ Will Contain Cheerleader Photos:** After NASA deliberately crashed a probe

into a comet, Russian astrologer Marina Bai filed a lawsuit against the space agency, claiming alteration of a heaven body rendered worthless the horoscope she relies on to make her living. Probably Bai's real purpose was to get some publicity -- hmmm, which we seem to have provided here. TMQ has wondered why phone-service psychics ask for your credit-card number -- wouldn't they just know? -- and why Sydney Omarr, the world's most-syndicated astrologer, failed to foresee his own 2003 death. As pertains to Marina Bai, if she really can predict the future, why didn't she know years ago that the probe was going to smash into the comet, and adjust her horoscope accordingly?

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! (Blowback Edition):** In Dallas' dramatic *Monday Night Football* comeback against Philadelphia, the Eagles made a huge mistake by blitzing eight -- as TMQ noted, the rarely seen mega-blitz is like handing out cards that say, "Please score an easy touchdown." Now it's two weeks later on Thanksgiving Day, Dallas and Denver are tied at 7, the Broncos face third-and-long. Surely the Cowboys won't repeat the very mistake another team just made against them! Dallas sends an eight-man blitz, begging Denver to score an easy touchdown; which it does, on an almost effortless 20-yard touchdown pass to Rod Smith and the Broncos are on their way to a win.

**The Football Gods Were Not Amused:** Cincinnati led Baltimore 31-0 in the second half -- meaning only the greatest comeback in NFL history could have overturned the lead. Yet there was Carson Palmer still in the game. He drove the Bengals to a 34-0 lead with 6:23 remaining in the third quarter, then something seemed to ignite the wretched Ravens. Could it have been the realization Cincinnati was mocking them by running up the score? Baltimore proceeded to register 29 rapid points, forcing Palmer to remain in the entire game while Cincinnati emerged with a shaky 42-29 victory.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkk:** Trailing Atlanta 27-0 at the end of the third quarter, Detroit faced fourth-and-2 on its 40. I could not believe my eyes when Lions' coach Steve Mariucci signaled for the punt unit. Last week, TMQ talked about the problem of "coaching scared;" Mariucci was coaching petrified! You're down by 27 with one quarter remaining and need just two yards to have a ray of hope. The average NFL play gains about five yards; most fourth-and-2 attempts succeed; if you punt, you are screaming out to the world, "I am quitting on the game." (To complete the absurdity, Mariucci went for it on fourth down with the score 27-7 and three minutes remaining -- then it couldn't have mattered less whether Detroit went for it, punted or started square dancing). Now Mariucci is unemployed, and it's fair to ask whether his dismissal is scapegoating to divert attention from years of ineptitude by team president Matt Millen; the Lions are an NFL-worst 20-55 since Millen took the bridge. Note to Millen: firing a coach with a month to go accomplishes nothing, and is a sign management doesn't know what it's doing. At any rate, for the rest of the year this team will be the Cowardly Lions to TMQ. Maybe they could get Bert Lahr as interim coach.

**High Draft Choice Meltdown:** In recent years, the Redskins have used the second overall choice of the draft on linebacker LaVar Arrington, the third overall on tackle Chris Samuels and the fifth overall on safety Sean Taylor. All three melted down in the Naticokes' late collapse against San Diego. Washington leading 17-10 with 3:37 remaining, Arrington lined up as a defensive end and was absolutely *pasted* by undrafted tight end Antonio Gates, whose block made Arrington disappear as LaDainian Tomlinson blew through Arrington's gap for a 32-yard touchdown. Now Washington has the ball back; on third down, Mark Brunell is sacked by the Chargers' Shaun Phillips as Samuels, who was supposed to block Phillips, just stands there watching. Now it's overtime, San Diego on the Washington 41. Sean Taylor is absolutely *pasted* at the point of attack by Bolts' pulling guard Mike Goff, and Tomlinson runs for the winning touchdown. Taylor was so utterly blocked by Goff, a free agent whom nobody wanted in 2004, which Taylor seemed to fold into himself like someone disappearing into another dimension in sci-fi flick.

**Pittsburgh Meltdown:** The Steelers-Colts game was tight until a Pittsburgh meltdown that covered just 27 seconds, albeit spanning halftime. Trailing 13-7, the Hypocycloids had second-and-2 with 27 seconds in the second quarter; Ben Roethlisberger threw an interception, and Indianapolis kicked a field goal just before intermission. Pittsburgh onside kicked to start the second half. Indianapolis recovered and scored a touchdown on the possession; suddenly it's 23-7 and the rest was filler. One reason Indianapolis was able to get a field goal before halftime was that Pittsburgh's Jeff Hartings drew a 15-yard penalty during the interception; he dove low into the player in front of the return man. The *Monday Night Football* announcers attempted a garbled explanation about how it is illegal to crash through one player to get to

another during a turnover. Actually the rule is quite simple and reads, at Rule 12, Section 2, Article 13: "After a change of possession, neither team may block below the waist." Come on John Madden, you're a millionaire from NFL game sales, spend a morning reading the rule book so you can explain things correctly on-air.

**Law of the Other Shoe:** Kansas City leading 19-3, the Chiefs play-faked and threw deep; confused Pats' rookie corner Ellis Hobbs was called for pass interference. On the next snap, the Chiefs play-faked and threw deep; confused rookie Hobbs was beaten for a 52-yard touchdown to Dante Hall, and the Chiefs never looked back.

**Isn't It Too Cold in Edmonton for Swimsuit Calendars?:** Congratulations to the Edmonton Eskimos, winner of a tremendous Grey Cup game. Harvard's Tim Fleiszer turned in a big performance for Edmonton. Fleiszer is both a professional football player and he's handsome; surely all Radcliffe grads are now thinking, "A handsome guy at Harvard? The admissions office must have slipped up." TMQ was rooting for the Eskimos because they are a true 21st century team, having both buff cheer-babes and studly cheer-hunks. Here's cheer-babe Robin and cheer-hunk Andrew. Note the women are scantily attired, the men fully clothed. There is no fairness in social norms about what men and women are expected to flash: which is okay by me so long as traditionalism rules and women show the most.

**If CEOs Could Fly Supersonic, Maybe They Could Stay Ahead of the Federal Prosecutors:** Recently TMQ discussed the disturbing fact that Airbus is designing a VIP version of its new A380 mega-airliner: an entire airliner engineered to carry up to 850 people refitted as a flying luxu penthouse for a handful of plutocrats, or even one single person. Fortune 500 CEOs and third-world tyrants are the target market. This means either the shareholders and workers of public corporations or the oppressed taxpayers of dictatorships would pay for this airborne wretched excess.

Comes now word that a company is working on a *supersonic* corporate jet for plutocrats and foreign dictators. Aerion Corp., a Nevada-based manufacturer backed by billionaire Robert Bass, is developing a supersonic aircraft that would carry a handful of passengers at Mach 1.5, transiting New York to Paris in about four hours. Assuming the plane worked -- so far it exists only in computer animation -- each would cost about twice as much as the snazziest conventionally powered corporate jet. Projected customers are Fortune 500 CEOs and third-world tyrants: here again the bill would be handed to shareholders and workers, or to taxpayers of oppressed nations, in order that a few plutocrats and despots could roar around in ego-boosting luxury. And suppose Aerion succeeds in selling supersonic jets to the super-rich. Supersonic flight entails deafening sonic booms. The old Concorde SST flew supersonic only over the oceans, and Aerion says its design is intended for Mach speed only over water. But if these aircraft end up as playtoys of CEOs and dictators, how long before they demand permission to go supersonic over land, the public's ears be damned?

**Cheer-Babe Professionalism Watch:** Though the air was nippy at kickoff of the Bolts-at-Skins game, Washington cheerleaders displayed outstanding professionalism by wearing their two-piece summer numbers; the football gods rewarded the Redskins with the halftime lead. During intermission, the Redskins cheerleaders changed to jackets and velour pants. Indignant, the football gods handed victory to the visitors. Battle-of-the-bods note: Though the Redskins cheerleaders opened the game wearing barely more than bikinis, the teams' four male flag-bearers not only had on comfy-warm tracks suits, two had earmuffs. The men wearing earmuffs while the women wear bikinis is taking gender-norm inequality a bit far even for traditionalists.

**Why Are You Punting??????:** Trailing 23-21 with 6:30 remaining in the game, Oakland faced fourth-and-1 on its 44. In trotted the punting unit, and it took Miami just five plays to pass the point where the ball would have been had the Long Johns gone for it and failed; Oakland never threatened again. Fourth-and-1 at midfield for a chance to win the game -- why aren't you going for it? The average NFL play gains about five yards; most fourth-and-1 runs succeed. Plus you're 4-6, what do you have to lose? And now you are 4-7.

**Wacky Beers of the Week:** The Sam Adams brewery offers a beer that sells for \$219 a bottle. The \$219 beer is brewed to look and taste like cognac. Hennessy X.O. and Remy X.O. are the finest generally

available brandies, and sell for about \$200 a bottle -- so the beer-based cognac substitute costs more than the exquisite actual cognac! Budweiser has rolled out a cherry-flavored beer that contains more alcohol than regular brew, plus caffeine and ginseng. It's "a distinctive new product for contemporary adults who are looking for the latest beverage to keep up with their highly social and fast-paced lifestyles," the company says. So the alcohol makes you sleepy while the caffeine keeps you awake; maybe the ginseng makes you fast-paced.

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All:** Indianapolis jumps to a 10-0 lead, now Pittsburgh faces third-and-2 on its 41. Out come the Steelers in a four-wide shotgun, incompleteness, punt. Can't anybody here run for two yards anymore?

**How Soon They Forget:** Two weeks ago, Jon "Once I Was A Teenaged Coach" Gruden won by going for it from the 1-yard line with a minute left, rather than kicking for a tie and overtime. Now it's Chicago 13, City of Tampa 10 with 2:56 remaining, the Bucs facing third-and-2 on the Bears' 11. If your goal is victory rather than a tie, this is two-down territory. Run on third-and-2 and again on fourth if necessary, and a first down is maybe 75 percent likely. Instead, the Bucs throw incomplete, then hoist the fateful missed field goal. *AaaaaiiiiiiiyyyyyyyyeEEEE!*

**TMQ's Christmas List:** Add to the festive holiday spirit with this lovely Santa commode set. The toilet seat becomes Santa's hat, the back of the toilet becomes the chimney. The seller declares, "Exclusive!" Wonder why.

**Not On TMQ's Christmas List:** Maybe there's something more tasteless than a Christmas ornament commemorating Hurricane Katrina. The huckster Christopher Radko is heavily promoting the \$39 ornament as something buyers should purchase to support Red Cross relief efforts in Louisiana -- but only 10 percent goes to charity, the rest into Radko's pocket. If you want to show the spirit of the season, give the whole \$39 to the Red Cross. If you buy this shiny vulgarity for your tree, you are telling the world you consider money spent on yourself nine times more important than money spent on the hurricane victims.

**Samkon Gado Play of the Week:** Just-up-from-the-practice-squad tailback Samkon Gado ran over Pro Bowl safety Brian Dawkins on the way to a 33-yard touchdown against Philadelphia.

**More Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization:** The *Wall Street Journal* reported there are only 28 radio stations left in the country that play a classical music format -- versus 500 sports stations, 1,200 talk stations and 2,000 country music stations.

**"Fast Start! I Said I Wanted a Fast Start!" Tom Coughlin Bellowed Above the Stadium Din:** The Giants committed 11 false-start penalties, including five on the same possession.

**Best Blocks:** Jax leading Arizona of Mexico 17-10, Jaguars' fullback Greg Jones went straight up the middle from the Cardinals' 25, and no defender so much as brushed him till he reached the 5. It's pretty fun to run 25 yards for the game-icing touchdown when everyone in front of you has already been knocked to the ground.

**Worst Blocks:** Cowardly Lions coaches may have done poorly at the Thanksgiving Day game against Atlanta, but Detroit players couldn't be bothered with much effort, either. Lions trailing 17-0, Joey Harrington is sacked for an 11-yard loss as linemen Jeff Backus and Kyle Kosier just stand there watching, making no attempt whatsoever to protect their quarterback. Twice against Minnesota, Trent Dilfer was hit in the pocket and lost fumbles; on both plays three Cleveland offensive linemen are standing there doing nothing, making no attempt to protect their quarterback. And they're starting to whisper the "b" word about Bills' quarterback J.P. Losman, but such whispering is premature: after all, Losman has yet to play behind a professional offensive line. Carolina leading 3-0, Losman was sacked as the listless Mike Williams -- fourth overall pick in the 2002 draft and highest-paid player in Buffalo history -- just stood there watching, no attempt to protect his quarterback. Two snaps later, Losman was forced to scramble for no gain on third-and-8 after a three-man Panthers rush almost instantly penetrated six Buffalo block-

ers, including the listless Williams, who just stood there watching. Consistently Losman is getting only two-Mississippi before he has to run for his life; Buffalo's offensive line rivals Houston's for worst in the league.

**Maybe the Saints Could Be Based in New Jersey and Renamed the New York Saints:** Earlier this season the United States Saints lost a "home" game at the Meadowlands. Sunday they won an "away" game in the same place, but Sunday the Saints seemed like the home team as fans booed the hapless Jets throughout. You're forgiven if you did not stay up to watch 2-8 New Orleans battle 2-8 Jersey/B. If you had stayed up, you would have beheld fifth-string quarterback Brooks Bollinger hitting several beautiful deep passes. The fifth-string Bollinger rang up a 107.9 quarterback rating in a losing cause: he looked better than first-overall draft choice Alex Smith has looked in any game so far, better than heavily hyped recent No. 1 picks Kyle Boller and Losman have looked so far. Just something to keep in mind.

**The Football Gods Chortled:** City of Tampa stumbled in 2004 in part because of poor placement kicking, Bucs' kickers going 15-for-24. This season, Tampa kicking is much improved -- new kicker Matt Bryant was 15-for-17 as he lined up for the PAT-like 29-yard attempt that would have tied the Bears-Bucs game at the end. Misery loves company: Jay Feely of the Giants was 23-of-25 when he lined up for the first of three missed attempts to win in Seattle.

**FEMA Asks Funding 1,000,000 Years of New Orleans Levee Studies:** Recently the George W. Bush Administration warned the Social Security Trust Fund would show an \$11 trillion deficit -- *in 10,000 years*. Meanwhile, federal courts ordered the Environmental Protection Agency to impose a two-tier standard for the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste storage facility -- an extremely strict standard for the first 10,000 years (no leaks beyond the equivalent of a single chest X-ray), followed by a somewhat laxer standard for the next *million years*.

Yours truly has three reactions to this goofy pair of developments. First, I worry Social Security will go bankrupt and nuclear waste will break loose in Nevada in exactly 10,000 years -- on the same day! Second, it is hubris for government officials to think they can project conditions far into the future when no one has any idea what's going to happen next week. This 2003 report by the National Academy of Sciences wisely recommends dispensing with worthless million-year projections and focusing our efforts on applying the best nuclear-materials management practices possible using current knowledge. Third, it drives me crazy that the media take wacky ultra-long-range forecasts seriously. Last week, the *New York Times* devoted a lengthy lead editorial to mulling the EPA's million-year regulation; the *Times* concluded the Yucca Mountain facility should not open unless government officials can "demonstrate" it will still be harmless thousands of years from today. Well of course they can't prove that! All this dithering about Yucca Mountain only makes it harder to start new nuclear power plants -- which produce electricity without greenhouse gases, a confirmed environmental threat *today*.

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Furman 14, Nicholls State 12. Located in Greenville, S.C., Furman says its dorms deliver "instant fun and friendship whenever you get together for activities, which can range from fountain hopping to dodgeball." Fountain hopping? Tuition, room and board cost \$33,264 a year, not including toilet paper. After your parents have paid \$133,056 for four years, there is a \$75 graduation fee.

**Next Week:** Only LXVII more shopping days until Super Bowl XL!

## Week 12 Readers:

(Nov. 30, 2005) -- The BCS pairings will be out Sunday, and **Gretchen König of Stuttgart, Germany**, wonders if I have an opinion. By the most amazing coincidence, I do! Here is the astonishingly [complex current BCS ranking](#). TMQ just loves the pseudo-scientific four-decimal-place distinctions -- should USC or Texas falter, Penn State would jump into the title game over LSU owing to Penn State being rated .8938 to LSU's .8850. The BCS has changed its formula seven times in the last eight years, seeking to avoid such outcomes as the mistaken LSU-Oklahoma title pairing (the Trojans should have met LSU) and the mistaken USC-Oklahoma title pairing (Auburn should have met the Trojans). But without a playoff system, there will never be a way to know for sure which teams belong in which bowls -- surely silly pseudo-precise four-decimal-place rankings don't tell us.

Here, read the BCS Committee's 4,993-word press conference about its [latest tweak of the computer formula](#). **Ken Tysiac of the Charlotte Observer** asked the key question: "Why is this system preferable to a selection committee?" BCS officials had no meaningful answer. Selection committees may have biases, or simply make mistakes. But the supposedly objective BCS formulas have generated mistakes in almost every year the system has been used, and brace yourself for another blunder: West Virginia gets a BCS bid while either Ohio State or Oregon does not, though the BCS's own formula makes Ohio State and Oregon significantly superior to West Virginia. Big-college football should go back to a selection committee for bowls, and just admit that what the bowl pairings are about is maximizing ratings and revenue. There will never be a four-decimal-place scientific rankings that work; either institute a playoff system, or bring back the smoke-filled room.

Mexican broadcasters don't use the term "red zone" because it sounds like "red-light district" in Spanish idiom. I asked readers to propose a clever Spanish alternative to red zone. **Noah Bledsoe of Kansas City, Mo.**, proposes, "*Zona Gooooooooaaaaa!!!!!!!!!!!!*" These possibilities come from **Mauricio Ramirez of Tijuana, Mexico**: *Zona Portal* (the gateway to the promised land), *Zona de Máximo Peligro* (maximum danger, for both teams) and *Zona de Cojones* (where the men are men and the Cardinals fumble). **Omar Jalife of Mexico City**, reports that *zona roja* only seems a scandalous term in rural Mexico; in the cosmopolitan cities, people shrug at the phrase and broadcasters use it. **Gonzalo Míguez of Barcelona, Spain**, a former player for the Barcelona Búfals of the Spanish American Football League, reports that in Spain broadcasters and fans simply say "red zone," though *zona de anotación* (scoring zone) is sometimes heard. **Jim Roberts of Lima, Peru**, proposes *cancha roja*, which he says literally translates into English as "red field" but has a nice idiomatic feel in Spanish; also, he notes, "the Spanish word *cancha* comes from the Quechua indigenous language of Peru, showing we can be idiomatic and politically correct at the same time." Finally, **Toby Nieboer of Melbourne, Australia**, suggests *zona de tierra*. He notes, "This will reinforce that pounding the ball on the ground will surely be looked upon with favor by *las dioses de futbol*."

Yesterday, around 1 p.m. ET, Tuesday Morning Quarterback readers crashed the website of the Edmonton Eskimos. Female readers were trying en masse to click the link to male-model-esque Harvard grad defensive end Tim Fleiszer; male readers were trying to click to scantily clad cheer-babe Robin; nontraditional readers of both genders, well, they'll never have to tell which links they were trying. [Here is Fleiszer](#) and [here is Robin](#).

An early-season column cited University of Central Florida as the kind of cupcake opponent that football factories schedule to pad their records. **Jack Curtin of Oviedo, Fla.**, notes UCF finished 8-3, despite playing only four home games. Readers, including **Jesse Schupack**, have noted my off-price ultra-generic prediction, Home Team Wins, has taken a beating in recent weeks: Home teams are only 7-9 this week, for example. Home Team Wins has dropped to 107-69 and now runs last [compared to the Yahoo! poll](#) -- where the consensus of users continues to lead all experts. As a believer in the law of averages, I still expect my ultra-generic prediction to rally and best most touts who predict game-by-game.

**Scott D.**, an alumnus of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga, notes his classmate, He Who Need Not Be Named, was a business major in college. Hmmm: a business major who's thrown himself

out of a job, lost millions in salary and potential endorsement income. Terrell, you shouldn't have cut class. **Jerry Tolk of Falls Church, Va.**, notes that a United States Senator plans to seek publicity, I mean justice, by investigating whether Congress can order the Eagles to [put He Who Need Not Be Named back into pads](#). A week ago, I mused on what would happen if government got involved in overseeing sports. Senator Specter, it was a joke!



**Coupe Gris, Coupe Grey. The Eskimos just know they've won it.**

**Joseph Pitirri of Buffalo, N.Y.**, notes the Grey Cup is named after Albert Grey, fourth Earl Grey and [governor of Canada from 1904-1911](#). Thus it's not Coupe Gris in French, it's Coupe Grey. "I'm sure you wouldn't want your name translated to Gregg Ruisseau de Pâques," he writes. Actually that sounds pretty classy -- I wonder if it would impress the [Alouettes' cheer-babes](#)?

**Patricia Miller of Edgerton, Wis.**, observes Brett Favre burst onto the NFL scene in the early 1990s, just as the Cincinnati Bengals were starting their dozen-year slide; now Favre is fizzling out just as the Bengals return to prominence. "Is there some unknown universal invariant or law of thermodynamics that won't allow both success at the same time?" she wonders. Harvard's Ryan Fitzpatrick threw the game-winning pass to Kevin Curtis. **Joe Wright of Ann Arbor, Mich.**, points out Curtis has the [highest Wonderlic score of any current NFL player](#). Maybe the Rams' "Showtime" attack should be rechristened "SAT Time."



**Kevin Curtis is not only smart, but he can also find the end zone too.**

**Ben Cohen of Basel, Switzerland**, notes that in their last five games, the Eagles have lost whenever outgaining their opponents and won whenever being outgained. **Deuce of Los Angeles** notes that although Neil Rackers has launched the most touchbacks of any kicker, Arizona is last in kickoff defense. Maybe Cards' special teamers are surprised when the kickoff doesn't reach the end zone and they actually have to do something. Stats that must mean something: **Lars Frederiksen of Holstebro, Denmark**, notes both the NFC and AFC have exactly 88 wins while **Tony O'Leary of Charleston, W. Va.**, notes the Browns are 3-3 versus starting quarterbacks and 1-4 versus teams playing their backup quarterbacks. Sunday the Browns face a backup, David Garrard of Jacksonville.

**Katie Carter of Puyallup, Wash.**, asked why Mike Holmgren was able to challenge the late Jersey/A touchdown when Holmgren had already used his two challenges. He'd only used one; the announcers got confused, one prior challenge [came from the "review assistant" upstairs](#). Sometimes NFL coaches seem to challenge calls just for spite. Denver leading 14-7 in the second quarter on Thanksgiving, the Cowboys ran on third-and-2 and pretty obviously made the first down. Mike Shanahan challenged the spot -- though he'd already spent one challenge, meaning spending the next left him no challenge for the second half. (Coaches get two challenges per game; a successful challenge only means you don't lose a timeout, the challenge is spent regardless.) The referee surprised no one by upholding the first down. Come the fourth quarter, officials ruled a Denver player fumbled, and gave possession to Dallas on the Broncos 10, setting up a Dallas touchdown. A challenge likely would have overturned the call, with Denver keeping the ball. But Shanahan was out of challenges and could only watch. Smart use of challenge: When LaVar Arrington appeared to intercept a pass against San Diego, he did so in front of Bolts coach Marty Schottenheimer, whose clear view told him the ball hit the ground. Schottenheimer challenged and the interception was overturned.

I lauded the handsome new Dodge Charger, but lamented it doesn't look more like the Charger that was the centerpiece of the 1969 car-buff cult classic *Vanishing Point*. Many readers, including **Eugenia Orens of Sedona, Ariz.**, noted this is because the movie is a Dodge Challenger, not a Charger. Here is a website devoted to trivia about the [Challengers used in the original flick](#), which is well worth renting, and in the wooden 1997 remake, which is well worth avoiding.



Getty Images

Vince Young beware! The football gods are looking down on you.

Finally, yours truly has been compiling BCS championship omens, wondering -- is USC or Texas more guilty of running up the score, and thus most likely to be disciplined by the football gods? **Scott Morris of Chicago**, attempted a scientific analysis by comparing the playing time of star quarterbacks Matt Leinart and Vince Young. Here's what he found: "Young has been in the Longhorns games for an average of 49 minutes and 19 seconds, Texas holding an average lead of 34.8 points when he left. Leinart has averaged 49 minutes and 31 seconds on the field for USC, leaving with an average lead of 25.7 points. So despite the fact that Young has, on average, played 12 seconds less per game, he has continued playing when Texas held bigger leads." Morris concludes, "Seems pretty clear that Texas better be on the lookout for the football gods if they face USC in the Rose Bowl."

## When it's good to be a total unknown, and get that clipboard out of your pants!

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

(Dec. 6, 2005) -- One of TMQ's maxims -- "Often all a football team needs do is run up the middle and things will be fine" -- applies so frequently I just produced the adage from my AutoText.

Never was this on clearer display than in Buffalo's epic collapse at Miami: or the Dolphins' epic comeback, depending on one's point of view. Leading 23-3, the Bills reached first-and-goal on the Dolphins' 3 with 4:14 remaining in the third quarter. Had Buffalo simply run up the middle three consecutive times, a game-icing touchdown was likely. But even had the Bills run up the middle thrice and been stuffed, the field goal makes it 26-3 and the rushes grind the clock, leaving the Dolphins behind by 23 points with only a quarter to play. Instead Buffalo coaches got cute and called a pass. Interception, plus no time taken off the clock -- and thus began the Bills' epic collapse or Dolphins' epic comeback, depending on one's point of view.

Awful tactics by Buffalo continued throughout the collapse. But then it's hard to blow a 20-point fourth-quarter lead -- awful tactics are required! When you've got a big fourth-quarter lead, the clock becomes your opponent. You must keep the clock ticking both to grind time and so that when the other team looks up at the scoreboard, players say to themselves, "It's too late." Yet in this clock-killing situation, Buffalo coaches kept signaling in passes that clanged to the ground incomplete. The Bills were 0-for-5 passing in the fourth quarter, meaning they stopped the clock for Miami five times. How polite! The Dolphins' winning touchdown came with 6 seconds to play. Had Buffalo simply rushed up the middle for no gain on the five plays when Bills' coaches called passes, time would have run out on the Miami comeback. Instead Buffalo repeatedly did the only thing that could keep Miami in the game -- stopped the clock. It's harsh to say, but nine out of 10 high-school coaches would have handled the fourth quarter better than Buffalo's coaching staff did Sunday.

In meteorological news, overcoat weather is setting in -- which should make it impossible for NFL coaches to stuff their clipboards down their pants. Brian Billick, Bill Cowher and Jim Haslett number among coaches who have stuffed their clipboards down the fronts of their pants often this season; the tastefully named Gregg Williams stuffs his clipboard down the back of his pants. Guys, are you aware this looks very seriously odd? Aren't you worried about reproductive health? Don't you know stuffing your clipboards down your pants went out with Abe Gibrone? NFL teams average roughly \$200 million in annual revenues. Please Ravens, Saints, Steelers and Redskins -- hire someone to hold the clipboards before your coaches start yelling at the officials in falsetto.

A week ago, total unknown Harvard-guy rookie quarterback Ryan Fitzgerald came into the game by surprise and led the Rams to a stirring comeback victory. This week little-known quarterback Sage Rosenfels -- 26 pass completions in five years when he buckled his chinstrap Sunday -- came into the game by surprise and led Miami to a stirring comeback victory. One week after Fitzgerald was unstoppable in his surprise role, he started against the Redskins and looked like he soon will be applying to graduate school. So Rosenfels should feel lucky he won't start this coming weekend. There is a long tradition of defenders mentally clocking out if an unknown backup quarterback unexpectedly enters the game. When Fitzgerald entered the game against Houston, or Rosenfels against Buffalo, you could practically hear the defenders thinking, "We can take the rest of the day off." In contrast, when an unknown reserve quarterback is scheduled in advance to start, the tradition is he gets hammered. Defenders spend a week saying to each other, "We are not going to let that upstart embarrass us like he embarrassed the last guys."

**Stats of the Week:** Minnesota is 5-0 since Brad Johnson took over as quarterback.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** In a span of 12 snaps, the Steelers were intercepted twice and fumbled three

times.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** Chicago's defense gained almost as many yards (140) as its offense (188).

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** Kansas City has won 17 consecutive home games played in December.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** Jake Plummer of Denver has six interceptions; at this point last season, he had 15.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** San Francisco had a scoring drive of minus-4 yards.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** Everyone's saying Rueben Droughns is Cleveland's first 1,000-yard rusher in 20 years -- actually 17 years, since the Browns did not exist for three years of that span.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** In the first 41 minutes, Buffalo had 202 yards passing compared to 89 for Miami; in the final 19 minutes, Miami had 272 yards passing compared to zero for Buffalo.

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** In the Cleveland-Jacksonville game, the teams combined to faced fourth-and-12, fourth-and-12, fourth-and-13, fourth-and-14, fourth-and-21 and fourth-and-24.

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** The Packers have ended their streak of 13 nonlosing years, longest such streak in the league. The Eagles and Denver are next, each with five consecutive nonlosing seasons.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Ryan Theriault of the Buccaneers, whose photo pretty much compels you to say, "Hellllllloooooo, Ryan." A student at the University of South Florida, Theriault has been cheering since before braces. According to her team bio, Ryan's hobbies are camping and canoeing. The Tampa Bay cheerleading squad is run by Sandy Charboneau, who is both a former cheerleader and a former dancer for Alvin Ailey -- which might explain why the Bucs' cheer-babes execute some of the most complex dance moves seen on pro sports sidelines.

**Sweet Play of the Week:** Last week, TMQ lamented that NFL teams don't try to confuse defenses by putting two quarterbacks on the field at once. Maybe the Denver coaching staff readers TMQ! Score Kansas City 21, Denver 14 -- Denver faced second-and-goal on the Chiefs' 7. The Broncos sent in backup quarterback Brad Van Pelt. But starter Jake Plummer did not leave; he lined up far left as a receiver. Chiefs defenders were madly shouting about Plummer, assuming the ball would go back to him on a trick play. The trick was that van Pelt took the snap and ran straight ahead for a touchdown.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** The sports-yak world continues to speak of Drew Brees as unproven -- how much more proof is required? Oakland leading 3-0, San Diego with first-and-goal on the Raiders 6. Brees sprinted out right from the left hash mark, crossed the entire breadth of the field eluding tacklers, then launched a perfect touchdown pass to Antonio Gates just before stepping out of bounds. On the pass, Brees was tiptoeing the sidelines like a wide receiver.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 3:** Minnesota's first offensive snap was the deep out-and-up -- 80-yard touchdown to Koren Robinson. TMQ likes the deep pass on the very first play: often it works because defenders are napping, always it puts the defense on notice.

**Sweet Run-Like Event:** Leading 20-14 with 2:09 remaining, Jacksonville faced third-and-19 on its 35. Everyone was covered; not-exactly-svelte quarterback David Garrard took off up the middle and huffed-and-puffed his way for a 28-yard run that iced the contest. Spenser, Official Youngest of TMQ and a Jax fan, cried out, "Look Dad, he runs just like Larry Tripplett" -- referring to the Colts' oversized defensive tackle who huffed-and-puffed his way to a touchdown with a fumble against Tennessee.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Strategy:** It's Indianapolis 28, Tennessee 3 at the start of the fourth quarter -- why are Peyton Manning, Edgerrin James and the other Colts' starters still on the field? That was sour. Later it

was Indianapolis 35, Tennessee 3 and the Colts took possession with 7:26 remaining. James stayed in, but carried seven consecutive times and the Lucky Charms drilled the clock in the traditional manner. That was sweet. Indianapolis is 12-0 and has won all its games by at least a touchdown, NFL history's longest streak of victories by more than seven points. (The 1942 Bears won 11 straight by at least a touchdown.)

**Sour Then Sweet Tactics:** Twice Hines Ward scored second-half touchdowns on the post pattern; on both plays, Cincinnati defensive backs never jammed or "redirected" Ward, just watched him run down the field. Now it's Cincinnati 38, Pittsburgh 31, Steelers' first down with 2:26 remaining. *Finally* the Tootsie Rolls start bumping Pittsburgh receivers as they come off the line; the game ends with Ben Roethlisberger sacked on fourth-and-13.

**Retreats of the Week:** For two successive weeks yours truly has written, "Tuesday Morning Quarterback fails to grasp the logic of ordering quarterbacks to sprint backward into their own end zones." Make it three consecutive weeks; Washington and Miami gave up safeties Sunday using this tactic. At least the Dolphins were way behind and had the excuse of playing catch-up. The Redskins led 17-7 with 11:59 remaining in the fourth, had first-and-10 on their 6. Inexplicably, 'Skins coaches ordered Mark Brunell to sprint backward into his own end zone, where the ball was knocked loose; only Brunell alertly whapping the rock out of bounds confined the damage to a safety, rather than a St. Louis touchdown. (Brunell was called for TMQ's favorite penalty, "illegal bat;" the Rams declined in order to get the two points.) You're on the 6-yard line and protecting a late lead, why run backward to the place where bad stuff happens?

**Sour Play of the Week:** It's hard to blow a 20-point fourth quarter lead -- awful tactics are required on defense as well as offense! Score Buffalo 23, Miami 17 -- the Marine Mammals faced third-and-10 on their 27 with 1:41 remaining, Miami out of timeouts. Now class, where might the pass go? *Maybe up the field!* Yet Chris Chambers got behind the Bills defense for a 57-yard reception that made possible Miami's fantastic finish. When this play started, Chambers already had 12 receptions for 169 yards -- yet he was covered by third-string cornerback Jabari Greer. Buffalo's starting corners weren't hurt, just nowhere to be seen. Worse, Greer got no safety help; no safety was even in the deep center. Replays show three Buffalo defensive backs standing like topiary in the short slant zones, covering no one at all. The sole Buffalo player who went to the deep center was middle linebacker London Fletcher. Every week there is one play yours truly watches over and over again in rapt fascination, and this week, this was it. Buffalo knows the game is on the line and knows Miami must throw deep; Chris Chambers is having a career day; yet Buffalo has a third-stringer guarding Chambers and a *middle linebacker* is the only deep help. On the winning touchdown with 6 seconds remaining, the Bills dropped seven into coverage against four Miami receivers. Yet with seven to guard four, Chambers -- who to that point had 14 receptions for 234 yards -- again was single-covered by Greer. Three Bills starting defensive backs stood around like topiary, covering no one as the third-stringer battles to save the day. On the final Miami drive, either Buffalo defensive coaches made awful calls or the Bills' starting defensive backs turned into high-school players. Ye gods.

**Plus, Many People Are Not Particularly Human:** Tuesday Morning Quarterback continues to object to the affectation of saying "humans" rather than "people," a silly sci-fi touch considering there are no known other genera of intelligent beings. The BCS organization says it uses a mix of computer rankings and "human polls." Why haven't Vogon polls been included? (You can generate Vogon poetry, the worst in the universe, using this BBC utility.) The *New York Times* declared that the new SAT essay section is "graded by humans." So they won't hire Klingons to grade SATs -- that's discrimination! Elisabeth Eaves wrote of pilotless drone aircraft for Slate, "A drone could detect an incipient forest fire with much greater speed than humans in an airplane." Maybe a Cylon in an airplane could get the job done faster. The *Times* opined that "NASA plans to put humans on the moon again by 2018." Check here for NASA's official "humans space flight" website. Not people in space, humans in space -- in case you were confused about what planet NASA represents.

**News from Space:** A group of astronomers has found the most stable known "clock" in the universe -- a 400-million-year-old white dwarf star designated G117-B15A, located in the constellation Leo Minor. Its pulses of light appear so stable they lose just one second every nine million years, a frequency that might as well be perfection. Here's the paper. If you need something to worry about, very far into the

future our Milky Way might collide with Andromeda, the nearest galaxy. Here from the new Spitzer space telescope is an image of distant galaxies colliding in the past. Check these spectacular images; they depict a star-formation region designated W5, some 7,000 light-years from Earth in the Perseus constellation. The universe is about 14 billion years old, yet stars are *still forming* as part of an unfathomably majestic enterprise.

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All:** Cincinnati finally won a high-pressure game. But Bengals, you got the ball with 2:59 remaining, leading 38-31, and stopped the clock twice (an incompletion and a penalty) before kicking back to the Steelers at 2:26, having taken a mere 33 seconds off the scoreboard. When you're protecting a late lead, it is imperative to keep the clock ticking.

**TMQ's Christmas List:** Catherine Corcoran of Boothwyn, Pa., writes, "Dear TMQ, it's not too late to put this DVD on your Christmas list." She means the cinematic classic *The Making of the Philadelphia Eagles' Cheerleaders Lingerie Calendar* -- 45 minutes of 38 mega-babes cavorting in their underwear. The Eagles' web site warns, FOR MATURE AUDIENCES. But it's the immature part of me that wants this!

**Reached at the North Pole, Santa Told TMQ, "I Knew They Was Gonna Boo Me and Rudolph in Philadelphia, But When They Boomed Mother Teresa, That Crossed a Line":** OK, so things didn't go quite as planned for the Eagles on Monday night. But the Philly crowd began booing the home team in the middle of the first quarter, for crimony's sake. By the middle of the second quarter, the crowd was booing on every other Philadelphia play. All these Eagles have done is produce a Super Bowl trip, five consecutive playoff seasons and 11 playoff appearances in the past 17 seasons. Get a little perspective, Philadelphia!

**The Revenge of the Middle Seat:** Tired with the hassle of flying first class? Can't afford an entire \$400 million A380 jetliner converted to your personal use or your own personal supersonic aircraft? Recently the rich and near-rich have been signing up for "fractional" ownership of corporate jets. A typical deal, offered by companies with names like NetJets and Flexjet, is that customers pay about \$100,000 up front for 25 hours of credits of private jet travel. This makes the price about \$4,000 per flight hour -- going from New York to Los Angeles is about \$20,000, but you have a small jet to yourself and can boast about not having to wait in security lines. Roughly 5,000 Americans have joined such deals, some of which involve much larger up-front commitments. Many who sign are executives billing their companies, in effect passing the invoice for their flight luxury along to shareholders and workers.

Thus yours truly was delighted to read Avery Johnson reporting in the *Wall Street Journal* that there is now such a profusion of private jets plying the skies, the planes often can't get landing slots at high-desirability destinations like airfields adjacent to Colorado ski resorts. "Fractional" jet companies also are having trouble hiring skilled mechanics; the result is frequent technical problems that leave high rollers stranded overnight at tiny general-aviation airports where no regular commercial flights are available. Pay \$100,000 up front and sleep in the terminal!

Runways at chic destinations will get even more crowded if Adam Aircraft succeeds in selling lots of its Adam 700 or Eclipse Aviation sells many of its Eclipse 500. They represent a new category of aircraft, "very light jets" designed to carry a half-dozen people and to provide point-to-point transportation from small airports. (Instead of driving to a big city, getting on a commercial flight and then driving to your destination, you board a baby jet at a small airport and fly from where you are to a small airport where you want to be.) How light is "very light?" The Eclipse 500 has a maximum takeoff weight of 5,640 pounds, about the weight of a Cadillac Escalade. But since the Eclipse 500 weight includes 1,500 pounds of fuel, whereas an Escalade carries less than 200 pounds of fuel, the jet itself weighs less than a car. The manufacturer says a semi-automated cockpit makes the Eclipse 500 "the easiest-to-fly twin-engine aircraft ever built." Semi-automated flight is actually more practical than from a computer standpoint than would be semi-automated driving, since aircraft rarely must avoid other aircraft, whereas half of driving is avoiding other cars. Nevertheless, as the computer steers your Eclipse 500 toward a thundercloud, think about the fact that the plane weighs less than a Cadillac.

**All Cheerleaders of the Week Certified by the American Society for Quality:** Most NFL teams have

someone with the title "quality control coach." Perhaps these gents should join the American Society for Quality, which is "the world's leading authority on quality since 1946." The American Society for Quality will certify a product or practice as having quality, and sets standards for quality-control engineers. Among the standards: "I will use my knowledge and skill for the advancement of human welfare." The American Society for Quality seems to need some quality control in its writing -- just try to figure out what, if anything, this study means. ("If indeed our future is being forged right here and now in our present, only a living, growing, dynamic strategy will allow us to realize it.") And should there be a Society Against Quality? No wait, that already exists -- it's called television.

**Why Are You Punting???????:** Trailing 7-3, the 1-10 Texans punted from the Ravens' 39 yard line. Houston is now 1-11, and this fulfills my obligation to say something about the Houston-Baltimore game.

**Why Are You Punting???????** **No. 2:** The 2-9 Jets punted from the New England 37. The Jets are now 2-11, and this fulfills my obligation to say something about the Patriots-Jersey/B game.

**Why Are You Punting???????** **No. 3:** The 3-8 Cardinals punted from the San Francisco 31, and this fulfills my obligation to say something about the Niners-Arizona game. Preposterous punt bonus: Cleveland punted from the Jacksonville 29. How fares the bold strategy of punting inside the opponent's 40-yard line? The above teams that did this Sunday are a combined 11-37.

**Next Week: Officials Called to Congress to Testify Under Oath About a Pass Interference Call:** Hard on Sen. Arlen Specter, R-Pa., threatening congressional hearings into whether the Eagles could be forced to play He Who Need Not Be Named, Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas, a leading member of the House of Representatives, has announced hearings tomorrow into the BCS selection formula. Two weeks ago, I speculated about what would happen if government got involved in oversight of sports -- Rep. Barton, that was a joke! The BCS formula consistently malfunctions: Oregon slighted while West Virginia advances is this year foul-up. Yours truly has proposed that college football go back to the old smoke-filled-room selection system and simply admit the purpose of the exercise is to maximize ratings and revenue. But however bungling, the BCS is a privately run organization with no relevance to public policy: what possible reason does Congress have for sticking its nose in? Rep. Barton made his reputation as a free-market conservative, the kind of person who believes that government is best which governs least. Unless there's publicity for Rep. Barton involved, apparently.

**Worst Play by a Future First-Ballot Hall of Famer:** Green Bay leading 7-6, the Packers had first-and-goal on the Bears 7 with 24 seconds left in the first half, Green Bay holding a timeout. The timeout means that no matter what might go wrong, Green Bay can stop the clock, kick a field goal and have a four-point halftime lead against a low-scoring team. Instead, Brett Favre, under tackle, heave-hoes a nutty pass that is intercepted and returned 95 yards to the Packers 7, whence Chicago kicks a field goal as the half expires, taking a 9-7 halftime lead. Great Caesar's ghost!

**Worst Play by Someone Who Might Someday Be a Hall of Famer:** The Giants leading 17-3 at the end of the third quarter, Jersey/A faced third-and-5 from its 15. Under pressure, Eli Manning heave-hoed a nutty pass directly to a Dallas defender; the Cowboys scored a touchdown on the next snap, and suddenly it's a tense game. There is a time to plant and a time to reap; a time to dance and a time to mourn; a time to take the sack and a time to throw the ball away. Little brother note: Manning won the Denver game in the closing seconds by throwing a risky pass while falling backward under tackle. Since then, he has thrown while falling backward three more times, and all have been interceptions.

**Worst Play by Someone Who Is Not a Future Hall of Famer:** City of Tampa 10, the United States Saints 3 with 1:30 remaining, the Saints had first-and-15 on the Bucs 25, holding a timeout. The clock situation and the timeout meant the Saints had no need to panic. Aaron Brooks threw a nutty pass into triple coverage, interception, game over.

**The International Society for the Preservation of Rats Lauded the Move:** Loss of biodiversity is a serious environmental issue. Nonetheless, check this report that English authorities are captive-breeding dormice and releasing them to increase the wild mouse population. Mice are ubiquitous on planet Earth;

surely they outnumber people by a hefty margin. Emergency efforts to increase the world's mice?

**Why Are You Kicking??????:** Trailing 21-9, the Cowardly Lions faced fourth-and-7 on the Minnesota 9 at the end of the third quarter. Boom goes the field goal. Detroit was 4-7 coming into the game, why not go all-out to win for the home crowd? And now Detroit is 4-8.

**Fay, Your Date Is Here. I Hope He's Not the Sort Who Likes to Have a Few Bananas And Then Smash Biplanes:** Movie buffs chortle that in the original 1933 *King Kong*, the protagonist seems to grow larger as the movie progresses. This never struck me as strange -- who are we to say what the biology of Triassic-era mega-apes might be! Plus Kong lands in New York, and he's never tasted deli food: maybe pastrami triggers a growth spurt. What drove yours truly crazy about the original was that when Kong roared atop the Empire State Building, the skyscraper was presented out of scale: as many times taller than surrounding buildings, when even in the 1930s it was only somewhat taller. Let's see if this distorted perspective recurs in the remake.

**Lend Me a Blocker!:** Jersey/A leading Dallas 10-0 on the first snap of the second half, Drew Bledsoe tried to make a "stretch" handoff right and was hit by Giants defensive lineman Kendrick Clancy before he could even hand off the ball; linebacker Antonio Pierce recovered and scored the touchdown that proved Jersey/A's winning margin. Guard Andre Gurode barely so much as brushed Clancy, then just stood there watching. Carolina leading Atlanta 7-6, the Falcons went for it on fourth-and-1 on the Panthers 46. Though Atlanta is the No. 1 rushing club in the league, the call was for Michael Vick to play-fake and sprint backward 10 yards. No Falcons lineman even attempted to touch Carolina defensive end Mike Rucker, who blew through to drop Vick for a long loss on what proved the game's key play.

**There Was a Recruiting Scandal When Maharishi U. Signed a Sannyasi Whose Eligibility Had Expired:** Sadly there is no football team at Maharishi University in Fairfield, Iowa. Founded by the Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, Maharishi University offers business and computer science degrees, plus a minor in world peace, which helps you "develop your own consciousness and simultaneously develop world consciousness." There are no intercollegiate sports, but the college athletics department does have rock climbing and ping-pong.

**TMQ's Christmas List No. 2:** Wonder if your neighbor sunbathes starkers? Find out with your very own remote-control spy plane: "Modeled on an AWACS jet, this remote-control plane has a detachable digital camera that takes still photos from hundreds of feet above the ground. The camera records up to 26 high-quality VGA (640 x 480 resolution) photos which can be easily downloaded to any PC via USB for archiving, sharing, or printing." Selling for \$239.95, "flight control is easy to learn for beginners ... two rechargeable batteries are included for repeated flights." So you buy the remote-controlled miniature spy plane and soar it above the neighbor's backyard or the local sorority-house swimming pool, then share the photos with friends! How long until affordable mini spy planes have eavesdropping features too? And couldn't this gadget be employed to see what's on the other side of a hill or inside a military facility? Developing-world insurgents and militias can't afford the complex drones the Pentagon uses, but might order this \$239.95 wonder over the Internet. It will be very creepy if one of these mini spy planes ends up employed by some faction in Iraq or Afghanistan.

**Then Again, Maybe Broncos Coaches Don't Read TMQ:** This column crusades against the slow-developing short-yardage play. When you need one yard, the quarterback should sneak or the tailback dive over the pile, or there should be a quick pitch; slow-developing off-tackle runs play into the defense's hands. Kansas City leading Denver 31-27 with 4:06 remaining, the Flintstones facing third-and-1, a slow-developing off-tackle run was stuffed for a loss; Kansas City punted. Now there is 2:11 remaining and Denver faces fourth-and-1 on its 47. Dive over the pile? Fast pitch? Slow-developing off-tackle run for no gain, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Wisconsin Whitewater 44, Linfield 41 (Division III semifinal). Located in Whitewater, Wis., the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater offers a 1,532-word mission statement that includes such cryptic objectives as "to increase total student FTE in graduate programs from 6.8 percent of total FTE to 8 percent and from 11.6 percent of total headcount to 16 percent." Atten-

dance for the football game was announced at exactly 5,000.

**BCS Omens Watch:** Texas led 42-3, yet Vince Young was still in the game and heave-hoeing passes as the Longhorns frantically ran up the score. A few hours later, USC led 45-6, yet Matt Leinart was still in the game and heave-hoeing passes as the Trojans frantically ran up the score. Lightning flashed and thunder rumbled above my house as the football gods showed their displeasure at these dueling displays of poor sportsmanship. But how can the football gods curse *both* teams at the Rose Bowl?

**Next Week:** I know you don't want to hear this, but -- only one month of full-time football left.

## Week 13 Readers:

(Dec. 7, 2005) -- **Mike Meadows of Harrisburg, Pa.**, agrees that 158.3 is a nutty maximum number for the NFL quarterback rating, but notes, "The problem is that with ERAs and shooting percentages there exists a clear definition of perfection, whereas what is perfect passing? Every pass complete but only for a short gain? Every pass a touchdown? Every pass a 99-yard touchdown?" Consider two quarterback performances. Quarterback A (call him "Peyton") goes 20-for-30 for 250 yards, three touchdowns and no interceptions. Quarterback B (call him "Eli") goes 35-for-45 for 425 yards, one touchdown and two interceptions. Both sound good, but who did better according to the NFL rating formula? Peyton did significantly better, at a 125.6 rating to 95.1 for Eli. The rating formula heavily rewards touchdown passes and heavily penalizes interceptions: a quarterback who throws a lot of complete passes but few touchdowns gets no respect from the equation. For your computing pleasure, here is the easy-to-use NFL quarterback rating formula:

1. Complete passes divided by pass attempts. Subtract 0.3 and divide by 0.2
2. Passing yards divided by pass attempts. Subtract 3 and divide by 4.
3. Touchdown passes divided by pass attempts and divide by .05.
4. Start with .095 and subtract interceptions divided by pass attempts. Divide that product by .04.
5. Add the sum of steps 1-4, multiply by 100 and divide by 6. Sum of each step cannot be greater than 2.375 or less than zero.



Archie? Is that you?

On the Peyton-Eli front, **Dan Maloney of Hamburg, N.Y.**, asks: If Peyton wins the Super Bowl this season and Eli eventually wins it, could Archie Manning be nicknamed Banquo? Sorry, I'm going to force you to figure out that literary allusion yourself. First overall draft pick Alex Smith has thrown for no touchdowns, eight interceptions. **Ben Kessler-Reynolds of Stanford, Calif.**, wonders, "What is the all-time record for interceptions thrown without a touchdown?"

Yours truly praised McFarlane Toys, which makes NFL figurines, for offering a figurine of offensive lineman Willie Roaf. **Derek Fisher of Ottawa, Ontario**, notes McFarlane just released a figurine of Kevin Mawae, complete with realistic tattoo. Maybe the Jets can buy a bunch of Mawae figurines and dress them for games, since the real Mawae is on injured reserve. Fisher wonders -- how long till an Ed Hochuli figurine with bulging pecs and realistic grimace?



The Ed Hochuli figurine -- just in time for Christmas!

Last week TMQ discussed rebate offers so complex they can't be redeemed, and wondered why this is not consumer fraud. **Chris Jarrous of San Francisco** notes the new issue of *Business Week* has a lengthy piece on the gimmicks companies use to make rebates impossible to cash. In the article, Brian Grow and Rishi Chhatwal write, "Fully 40 percent of all rebates never get redeemed." The authors report that one rebate processing firm, TCA Fulfillment Services, markets itself to businesses by boasting that it simply rejects most rebate claims consumers send in. *Business Week* reported several state attorneys general are preparing lawsuits asserting that impossible-to-redeem rebates are indeed consumer fraud.

Recently I noted that a 1990 episode of the sci-fi show *Quantum Leap* appeared to predict the 1996 Super Bowl. **Matt Peterson of Houston** writes "I'll raise you one. In an episode of *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine* that aired in 1995, the characters discuss the best-ever baseball team, and one confidently states the 1999 Yankees were best. In 1999, the Yankees capped off a terrific season -- hailed by some as the best ever -- with a decisive sweep of the Braves in the World Series."

I continue to lament that I cannot get DirecTV because lovely greenhouse-gas-absorbing trees block my home's view of the satellite. This in turn means I cannot get Sunday Ticket; the DirecTV exclusive means the NFL has most unwisely in my opinion essentially prohibited millions of Americans from purchasing Sunday Ticket. **Jasmine Noel of New York City** reports that she can't receive DirecTV in her apartment either, owing to a residential tower next door. On the skyscraper she beholds numerous DirecTV reception dishes. The people in the building next door can get Sunday Ticket, but not her: "I can see the columns of dishes adorning the fire escapes -- GRRRR."

Now that Harvard is making its mark in the NFL, many readers including **Andrew Jensen of Maplewood, Minn.**, recalled the satirical Harvard football fight song written by Tom Lehrer in the 1960s. Lyrics included, "Come on, chaps, fight for Harvard's glorious name! Won't it be peachy if we win the game?" The whole song is [here](#). I referred to the "total unknown Rams quarterback Ryan Fitzgerald" from Crimson land. As many pointed out, he's so unknown his name is Fitzpatrick. One reader declared in lyric form,

You say Fitzgerald, and I say Fitzpatrick.  
 You say Hartford, and I say Harvard.  
 Fitzgerald, Fitzpatrick, Hartford, Harvard:  
 Let's call the whole unknown Ivy League quarterback thing off.  
 -- *Mark Davis, New York City*



Here's a whole flock of Falcons. Or is it Tercels?

**Wendell Boggs of Ripley, Ohio**, notes that although the word falcon is commonly used to mean any bird of the family *Falconidae*, in the sport of falconry, a falcon is a female while the male hawk is called a tercel. Boggs further notes these birds number among the few species in which the female is stronger than the male, this being one reason female hawks are preferred for falconry. So in our age of gender confusion, the Atlanta Falcons have a gender-confused label: they're named after a female bird, but the female of this species is masculine, like a football player. Inevitably this forces us to conclude that the [Atlanta cheerleading squad](#) should be called the Tercels, leading to total gender confusion.

Yours truly praised the handsome retro Mustang and Charger models from Ford and Chrysler, but lamented the lack of a retro Dodge Challenger. **Robert Bryan of Fort Worth, Texas**, reports one is in the works -- [here is a "spy shot"](#). For decades, people have hidden in the woods near automobile proving grounds trying to get spy shots that show -- what, that next year's model will have four wheels? Then again, I'd rather see spy shots of cars than of Lindsay Lohan.

Now in the dairy case is [Milky Way flavored chocolate milk](#). **Eric Koppisch of Colorado Springs, Colo.**, inspected a bottle of this chocolate milk and found it declares, "Warning: Contains milk." Under the category of "auto safety," Brookstone sells a [portable blood-alcohol level detector](#). This sounds like a sensible product; anything that convinces you not to drive after drinking sounds like a sensible product. But as **Andrew Hartness of Gaithersburg, Md.**, notes, the device comes with this disclaimer: "Warning: Do not rely upon results to determine intoxication or ability to safely drive a vehicle or operate equipment." In other words, do not use this device for its intended purpose!

This column chided rookie corner Ellis Hobbs for giving up big plays on two consecutive snaps of the New England-Kansas City contest. **Jeremy Levangie of Boston** notes Pats safety Mike Stone was to blame for the second play, and admitted so to the Boston media. "When a receiver seems 'too open,' the person closest is not always the person in the wrong," Levangie writes. TMQ has been calling the NFL's desert franchise the Arizona of Mexico Cardinals. **Steve Winkelman of Phoenix** suggests instead they be called the Arizona Lucy, recalling the girl who perpetually pulled the football away from Charlie Brown as he tried to kick a field goal. Endlessly Lucy would promise not to do so, and endlessly Charlie Brown would fall for it. Endlessly the Cards promise a winning season, Winkelman says, and endlessly fans like him fall for it. In haiku,

Swipe the ball again!?!  
The Arizona Lucy:  
fans are Charlie Browns.  
-- *Steve Winkelman, Phoenix*

My off-price ultra-generic prediction, Home Team Wins, took another beating and now runs last at 116-76 compared to the [Yahoo! experts](#). **Eric Isaacson**, an associate professor of "informatics" at Indiana University -- that's his department -- proposes this prediction algorithm: "The team with the better record wins; if the same record, then the home team wins." Isaacson's formula is 128-64 this season, which leads all experts in the Yahoo! poll. Like mine, the Isaacson approach has many advantages: you don't need incredible insider information, nor do you even need to know who's playing. But even Isaacson's formula trails the consensus of Yahoo! users, which continues to best all experts.

## Thirteen down three to go for Indy, and mistletoe in the Patriots' training room

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

(Dec. 13, 2005) -- It's Jacksonville's biggest game in years, a rare sellout Alltel Stadium crowd is roaring, it's the Jags' first possession -- and the game is over. Why? Taking the opening kickoff, Jax reached fourth-and-1 on the Indianapolis 43. All week, Jax players had boasted about how they would be physical and fearless with the undefeated Colts. Now it's fourth-and-1 *in Indianapolis territory*, and Jacksonville is punting! The Colts are the best team in the league: You've got to take the fight to them, you can't wimp out on the very first possession!!!!!! Boom goes the punt, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook with 10:46 remaining in the first quarter.

Forget that it took the Colts just six snaps to pass the point where the ball would have been had Jacksonville gone for it and missed. You knew the Colts would immediately roar past that point! Never in my years of watching football have I seen a much-anticipated monster game between two good teams decided so soon: neither team had even scored, yet the game was so totally over. Indianapolis drove the length of the field for a touchdown on the possession, but you knew that, too. Coaches boom a punt on fourth-and-1 because they think it's the "safe" thing to do. Actually it's the risky thing. Three quarters of NFL fourth-down runs gain a first down (74 percent in 2004, to be exact). This means punting on fourth-and-1 in opposition territory passively surrenders a chance of a drive that produces points, in order to hand the ball over to the other side. Plus when coaches go for it in situation like this, they send the message they are challenging their players to go win the game. When coaches order a mincing fraidy-cat punt, they send the message they expect to lose and are already thinking about how to shift blame at the press conference. "Game over" in my notebook on the first series -- well Jax, at least you set some kind of record.

Now the Colts have locked up home-field advantage in the AFC, and tradition says rest your starters. But with three regular season dates remaining plus the bye week, Tony Dungy's starters will not play a meaningful game again until January 14th at the earliest! No NFL team has ever faced such a gap between consequential contests. So here's my two cents: Dungy should make the final three Indianapolis games meaningful by formally announcing that a 16-0 finish is the team's goal. Give the Colts something to play for, an incentive to stay focused. Of course, if any starter looks hurt, immediately sit him. Otherwise go all-out to join the 1972 Dolphins' champagne toast, and let everyone know this is the plan. Colts players are saying the right thing -- we only care about the Super Bowl. You know they desperately want to go 16-0. Letting them try might improve the Colts' Super Bowl odds, by keeping the team focused.

All right-thinking football enthusiasts should root for Chicago on Sunday against Atlanta. Why? Chicago must beat Atlanta in order to prevent Seattle from locking up home-field advantage if it beats Tennessee. If Seattle doesn't lock its best seeding this week and still needs to win the following week, the Colts-at-Blue Men Group contest on Christmas Eve could be a monster game; if Seattle has already locked, the game may instead be a snorefest. The big question for the Ming Ding Xiong ("Bears whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Mandarin) is whether to switch from low-voltage quarterback Kyle Orton to first-draft-choice Rex Grossman. Grossman hasn't taken a snap since September 2004. But he's got more star power than Orton, who has a plodding 60.9 passer rating, and the Bears will have trouble in the playoffs if they remain in the bottom third for scoring. Owing to this, the sports-yak world is likely to spend the week advocating that Chicago switch jockeys. But keep in mind, Grossman is short on experience and his 71.1 career passer rating is not exactly scintillating. Everyone who has played quarterback for the Bears since Jim McMahon has looked underwhelming -- it's a combination of teammates, tactics, weather and the fact that the football gods seem to prefer every Chicago game end with a score of 10-6. My two cents is that the Bears should dance with the one what brung 'em. Lovie Smith could impose cloture on the debate by announcing Orton is Da Man, before a divided locker room develops.

And in other football news, Moo Cows' kicker Kris Brown lines up for the chip-shot 31-yard attempt with 10 seconds remaining, the kick is up, it's way off target -- what a huge relief to Houston fans! The Tex-

ans thus retain a one-game lead over San Francisco in the Reggie Bush sweepstakes. (Aside: the most impressive statistic of Week 14 was that 69,149 Tennessee spectators came to see the 1-12 Texans confront the 3-9 Titans.) With victories Sunday, the Jets and Packers all but dropped out of the Reggie Race, which surely caused some gnashing of teeth in network boardrooms. Can you imagine how great it would have been for NFL marketing to have Reggie Bush in New York? Bearing in mind that for NFL purposes, New York is located in New Jersey.

**Stats of the Week:** Seattle has won its last two by a combined 83-3.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** Not only does Shaun Alexander have more rushing yards than 19 of the league's 32 teams, he has more rushing attempts than four teams. Noted by Todd Sullivan of Nashua, N.H.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** Stretching over two games, Buffalo was outscored 56-0.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** First overall draft choice Alex Smith has nine interceptions and no touchdown passes.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** Tom Brady is 14-0 when the kickoff temperature is below 1.66666667 Celsius (35 Fahrenheit).

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** In his last two games, Chris Chambers has 23 receptions.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** Green Bay is 3-10 and has scored as many points as its opponents.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** In a game the Ravens lost by two points, Baltimore reached the Denver 1, 15, 24 and 35 without scoring.

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** New England has beaten Buffalo in nine of its last 10 meetings, outscoring the Bills by more than double (245 points to 121 points).

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** Indianapolis has scored more than twice as many points as its opponents -- 392 points versus 180 allowed.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Jim Lidstone of Milledgeville, Ga., nominates Alison Preston of the defending champion Patriots. A student at the University of New Hampshire, Preston is majoring in kinesiology and athletic training while minoring in dance. According to her team bio, her goal is to become an NFL trainer. Lidstone, who is chair of the Department of Kinesiology at the redundantly named Georgia College & State University, notes, "If Alison is doing any of her athletic training practicum hours in the Patriots' training room, it's no wonder the New England injury list is so lengthy." That is, guys are declaring themselves injured in order to hang out with Alison. Here, specifically, is why. On an *exclusive* basis, TMZ has learned that Patriots' players are hanging mistletoe all around the trainer's room.

**Sweet Play of the Week:** Game scoreless in the snow at Pittsburgh, the Steelers faced third-and-2 on the Chicago 14. Hines Ward came around from the right, Ben Roethlisberger faked an end-around to him; Roethlisberger scanned downfield as Ward ran to the flat as though finishing off his fake; Roethlisberger turned and flipped the ball back to Ward, who ran for the touchdown.

**Sweet 1950s Play:** Game scoreless, Minnesota faced third-and-1 on the St. Louis 13. Flanker Koren Robinson came in fast motion from the left, then took a pitch right and ran for the touchdown that set the tone for the Vikings' sixth straight win. A flanker in fast motion taking a pitch is the basic play of the Wing T, called the Winged-T when David Nelson was perfecting it at the University of Delaware during the Eisenhower years. Bring back the Winged-T!

**Sweet Special Teams Play:** Everyone raves about kick returners; no one raves about the wedge. On

Antonio Brown's 91-yard kickoff return touchdown that proved the winning points for Washington over Arizona, Brown simply fielded the ball and ran straight up the middle untouched behind terrific wedge blocking. It's pretty fun to run 91 yards straight up the middle when everyone in front of you has already been knocked to the ground.

**Sweet Botched Play:** Leading 14-3, Indianapolis lined up for a figgie. The Colts showed the swinging gate, a high-school standby -- six linemen and a back ran to the far left of the field, while the long snapper, kicker, holder and one back lined up in the center. Normally in high school, the swinging gate leads to a screen pass to the man behind the six linemen set wide, and Jax appeared to expect this. Instead Colts' holder Hunter Smith threw to long snapper Justin Snow, who hiked the ball and then shot into the flat; the pass was just a little high. This reminds that the center does not need to be in the center; the ball may be snapped by anyone on the line.

**Sweet 14-Play Drive of the Week:** Kansas City leading 28-24, Dallas staged a 14-play drive that yielded the winning touchdown with 26 ticks remaining. The Cowboys converted fourth-and-6, third-and-8 and third-and-6. Dallas coaches avoided the pass-wacky urge, calling six rushes on the drive. Because Dallas had been running, when the 'Boys reached second-and-goal on the Chiefs' 1, all Kansas City defenders bought the play-fake, no one so much as trying to cover reserve tight end Dan Campbell. Running a balanced drive was sweet; calling a play for Campbell on the game's biggest snap was sweet, as Campbell had two receptions on the season to that point. Drew Bledsoe looked practically mobile on the drive, moving around to buy time. Dallas did benefit from a significant no-call. With 54 seconds remaining, rookie offensive lineman Rob Petitti wrapped both arms around Kansas City defensive end Eric Hicks and tackled him to prevent a sack: holding should have marched the ball away from the Chiefs' goal. And with 10 seconds remaining and Kansas City on its 42, having one timeout, everyone in the free world knew the Chiefs would throw deep down the middle then call the timeout -- yet Dante Hall was able to get open deep down the middle, 34-yard reception that set Kansas City up for the missed field goal that capped an extremely entertaining fourth quarter.

**Sour Play of the Week:** It was Indianapolis 7, Jacksonville 3 in the second quarter, Colts' ball on their 35. The game had ended on the Jaguars' first drive, but for appearances' sake the teams were still playing. Two weeks earlier against Pittsburgh, Marvin Harrison ran a stop-and-go (in his favorite variation, the stutter-go) and the Steelers' cornerback inexplicably ignored this ultra-prolific receiver, instead making the high-school mistake of "looking into the backfield," trying to guess the play by watching Peyton Manning. Now Harrison runs the same pattern and Jacksonville corner Rashean Mathis, who's been making noises about expecting a Pro Bowl invitation, makes the same mistake! Harrison slows for an instant and Mathis ignores him, looking into the backfield to try to guess the play. Harrison flies past and Mathis appears utterly dumbfounded that the gentleman would go deep. Hey Rashean, the guy only has 107 touchdown receptions, how about guarding him! Now Harrison has 108, after Mathis received an excellent view of the receiver's back. Every week there is one play TMQ watches over and over again in rapt fascination, and this week, this was it. Didn't the Jaguars look at any film? They made *exactly* the same mistake as Pittsburgh did two weeks before.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Plays:** Trailing 10-0 in the third quarter, Carolina faces third-and-2 on the City of Tampa 39. Stephen Davis runs, no gain. Now it's fourth-and-2, Davis runs again, no gain. Considering Carolina prides itself on the power rush, the inability to gain two yards in two tries was quite sour. For Tampa, the sequence was sugary sweet.

**Who Created the Movie Spoiler Website? The Butler Did It!:** Hollywood is struggling through a period of low ticket sales, but this does not keep me from recommending a website called The Movie Spoiler, which reveals the endings of flicks. This allows you to seem clued-in about talked-about movies, even if you missed the first weekend; the entries are also useful for understanding endings that baffled you in the theater. There's an entry for practically every major film. The Movie Spoiler even has an entry for *The Passion of the Christ* -- in case you don't know how that story ends?

**Maybe the Grinch Was Right:** Yes, it's ridiculous the National Christmas Tree at the Capitol is officially the National Holiday Tree: that government often cannot bring itself to state the obvious is one of the flaws of government. How long till someone claims "holiday" is offensive and the name is changed to the

National Seasonal Ornamental Fir? It's a fracking Christmas tree, call it what it is! Hiding behind a euphemism for a Christmas tree is especially absurd because such trees have nothing to do with Christianity; they are a secular symbol of gift-giving. Christmas holds dual status as a religious observation and a secular festival of presents and parties -- many who are not Christians or don't even like Christianity nonetheless put up Christmas trees and hand out presents on the 25th. Santa, Rudolph, stockings by the fireplace, mistletoe: good luck finding any references to these in scripture. Government officials who feel squeamish about speaking the words "Christmas tree" or allowing schoolteachers to say "Merry Christmas" are not only going overboard, they don't even understand that much of the trappings of Christmas are unrelated to religion.

These things said, it is equally ridiculous some commentators are proclaiming a "war on Christmas." Christmas is the most over-celebrated holiday in the history of the world! An entire month of the American year is given to Christmas celebration; far too much attention is paid to Christmas. This is true even for the religious aspect of the day -- theologically, Easter means 100 times more than Christmas. Check this Laurie Goodstein article on the fact that with Christmas falling on a Sunday this year, many churches won't hold services so as not to compete with the orgy of materialism. But then, the overwhelming majority of Western Christians studiously avoid Christ's many teachings against material possessions -- and most churches, for marketing reasons, steer clear of this topic too. Yours truly would like the United States to switch to the Boxing Day custom of England and Canada: on December 25th, Christians go to church and on December 26th, they open gifts. Except in recent practice in Canada and England, Boxing Day has become just an excuse for an extra day off from work, as the presents get ripped open on the 25th anyway. "War on Christmas?" Bah humbug!

**Best Use of TMOQ:** Two weeks ago, yours truly complained that NFL teams don't run enough trick plays involving the quarterback. As if in answer, last week, Denver ran a trick play with two quarterbacks on the field. Again as if in answer, last night, Atlanta lined up Michael Vick as a flanker, then hiked the ball to Warrick Dunn, who lateraled to Vick, who threw a 54-yard touchdown pass to Roddy White. The Saints weren't fooled -- White was double-covered, but leapt over both defenders for the ball. It's been that kind of year for New Orleans.

**Cheer-Babe Professionalism Watch:** Though it was sunny shirtsleeves weather in San Diego on Sunday, the Bolts' cheerleaders wore one-piece Santa outfits that covered far too much! No wonder the home team lost. Attention Chargers' pep squad: when choosing between "naughty" and "nice," for cheerleaders there can be only one choice! Up north in Green Bay, at least Mike Sherman was showing some skin. Kickoff temperature 14 degrees, Sherman -- lampooned last season in this space as Coach Cratchit for wearing Dickensian fingerless gloves during cold games -- had nothing on his hands throughout the contest. His counterpart, Dick Jauron of Detroit, wore heavy snowmobiling gloves. Green Bay victory, naturally.

**Draft Revisionism:** This space has noted that cover-your-eyes awful tackle Mike Williams of Buffalo, fourth overall selection in 2002, is among the major draft busts of recent years. (In Buffalo's defense, the Bills were hardly the only ones wrong about Williams). The next tackle taken in 2002, Bryant McKinnie of Minnesota, selected seventh overall, is so-so. But consider the third tackle selected in 2002, Levi Jones of Cincinnati, taken 10th overall. Jones has developed into a fabulous player; one reason Cincinnati's offense is hot is that Jones is having a Pro Bowl season. Yours truly thinks Levi Jones is the second-best offensive linemen in the league -- after Walter Jones of Seattle, who is TMOQ's NFL MVP to the 81 percent point (See below.) Next time Cincinnati is on the tube, watch No. 76. Nobody gets around him and he "plays to the whistle," which a distressingly small number of NFL offensive linemen do.

I mention Jones not only to praise him, but to make a point about draft commentary: when the Bengals selected Jones, the team was widely derided by sports pundits. It was said Jones had no business going so high, that he wouldn't make it in the NFL or if he did, would never be in the class of Williams or McKinnie, both of whom weigh more. Instead Jones has proven significantly better than the tackles drafted before him, and his relative trimness is one reason -- Jones is fast and active where Williams and McKinnie are roly-poly and sluggish. Of course, no one is ever sure which college players will succeed in the NFL: though certain draft commentators pretend they are sure. Three years later is when a draft can be graded, and three years later it is apparent Buffalo tossed the fourth pick of 2002 out the window

while Cincinnati used the 10th selection wisely -- making it not surprising that today the Bengals are headed to the playoffs while the Bills are in meltdown. As for those touts who said Levi Jones didn't belong at 10th slot, they're right: he belonged higher. If the 2002 draft were held again today, the top half might look like this, with the player's actual draft position in parenthesis:

1. Dwight Freeney (11)
2. Julius Peppers (2)
3. Levi Jones (10)
4. Ed Reed (24)
5. Alex Brown (104)
6. John Henderson (9)
7. Jeremy Shockey (14)
8. Roy Williams (8)
9. Deion Branch (65)
10. David Thornton (106)
11. Clinton Portis (51)
12. Will Witherspoon (73)
13. Javon Walker (20)
14. LeCharles Bentley (44)
15. Albert Haynesworth (15)
16. Pick one of Philadelphia's -- Michael Lewis (58), Lito Sheppard (26) or Brian Westbrook (91).

David Carr, first selection of the 2002 draft, today probably would go late in the first round. Carr has toiled without complaint on a dreadful team; he might be a star on a good club. Joey Harrington, third pick of 2002, today might go in the middle rounds. Mike Williams, fourth selection of 2002, today would not be drafted at all, and he'd have to do some mighty fast talking to get a free-agent tryout.

**Wacky Hotel of the Week:** Next time I fall by Abu Dhabi, I plan to stay at the Emirates Palace Hotel, where rooms start at 1,900 U.A.E. dirham per night, about \$525. The 60-acre facility is the world's most expensive hotel, costing an estimated \$3 billion to construct. To serve 400 rooms, the Emirates Palace has 128 kitchens and pantries. There's a private marina in case you plan to arrive by yacht; otherwise, airport pickup by chauffeured Bentley is included in the price. Suites that cost \$14,000 a night include a butler: probably if you take him home your credit card is charged, like taking home a bathrobe. Just remember two things: One, our SUVs are guzzling the gasoline that enriches the oil sheiks who stay at the Emirates Palace; Two, there are tens of millions of deserving needy Muslims in the world, but the oil money doesn't seem to be going to them, does it?

**Glory Boys Get Dirty:** When San Diego fumbled a kickoff, Dolphins' kicker Olindo Mare got the recovery -- all the way down at the Bolt's 24-yard line. Meanwhile, Tom Brady was penalized for throwing a crack-back block.

**TMQ's Christmas List:** George Bickert of Adairsville, Ga., suggests Santa bring an Air Car, a compressed-air-powered minicar that a Luxemburg inventor hopes to market in France. At night you plug the car into an electrical socket; a motor compresses air; the next day you tool around using the compressed air to provide propulsion. The Air Car is being promoted as zero-emission, though like all vehicles powered by electricity, there's the question of whether emissions are merely being shifted from the tailpipe to the power plant. If Air Cars are charged by electricity from French nuclear power plants -- France generates most of its electricity using uranium -- then the car really is zero-emission, since nuclear-electric generation produces no air pollution or greenhouse gases. So give an Air Car to an environmentalist for Christmas, as long as there's a nice eco-friendly nuclear power plant nearby!

**Samkon Gado Play of the Week:** The fifth-string tailback ran 64 yards untouched to the house behind perfect blocks by Will Whitticker and Mark Tauscher. Since being called up from the practice squad, Gado has 537 yards rushing and six touchdowns.

**Strangest Play Ere the Clock Struck Midnight:** In the Gamebook it simply says "Penalty on GB-65-M.Tauscher, Offensive Holding, declined." Game tied at 13 as the clock crept toward midnight Eastern,

the Packers had the ball inside their 1. Gado took the handoff in the end zone and was surrounded; alertly, he heave-hoed the ball forward in the direction of a receiver, hoping to convert a safety into an incomplete pass. Officials signaled intentional grounding plus holding in the end zone, so it seemed the Lions could take their pick of which penalty resulted in the safety. Then after a lengthy huddle, the zebras decided the pass was legal because Gado was outside the pocket, while the holding did not create a safety because Tauscher was not in the end zone. First, with the ball spotted inside the 1, Tauscher *lined up* in the end zone and never left it. Second and entirely skipped in the discussion, Gado's knee was down! The NFL.com video section, if you are not already acquainted with it, has an excellent angle that shows both my points; click on the Detroit-Green Bay score. On safety calls, attention obsessively focuses on whether the ball gets out of the end zone. If the runner's knee goes down this is irrelevant! Detroit should have been awarded two points, and with those points might have prevailed in regulation.

**Go Win the Game!:** In the Division I-AA semifinals, Northern Iowa scored late to tie the game at 37; Texas State fielded the kickoff and had the ball on its 25 with 1:27 remaining in regulation, holding all three time-outs. In a move that made my jaw drop, Texas State coach David Bailiff ordered his charges to kneel on the ball till the clock expired, passively accepting overtime. Needless to say, in overtime the football gods punished Texas State with defeat. This leads to my point: don't be passive, go win the game! In Super Bowl XXXVI, New England took possession in this same situation: game tied, about a minute and a half left, ball deep in its own territory. The announcers advised Bill Belichick to kneel passively and accept overtime; the Patriots staged an all-out hurry-up drive and kicked the winning field goal as time expired. You've got the ball -- go win the game! On Sunday against the Ravens, Denver took possession on its 20-yard line with 48 seconds remaining in the first half, holding three timeouts, score tied. Do you suppose Denver knelt? You've got the ball -- go win the game! Or at least the half, Denver's field goal as time expired made it 6-3 at the intermission.

**The Vikes Also Started Winning After the Love Boat, But We'll Skip That:** Everyone's noting the Vikings are 6-0 since Brad Johnson took over, but his stats are not that different from the stats Daunte Culpepper posted while the team was going 2-5. Minnesota is also 6-0 since rookie defensive end Erasmus James moved into the starting lineup and the Hyperboreans switched to a 4-3 -- defensive changes may be the secret to the team's improvement. This is the kind of behind-the-headlines insider dope you've come to expect from Tuesday Morning Quarterback. Which is why I wish I was the one who noticed -- I wasn't; this comes from Aaron Schatz of the *New York Sun*.

**I'll Sell You An Authentic Used Tuesday Morning Quarterback Gameday Notebook for a Fraction of This Price:** One annoying aspect of being an NFL player is that with every gentleman's salary annually leaked to *USA Today*, you know if the guy lining up next to you earns more than you do. Now with eBay and similar services letting auction pricing rule memorabilia, you also know if your autograph sells for less than the guy next to you. Some teams have jumped into this market. The Jets, for example, now sell game jerseys worn by players. Currently a John Abraham's worn game jersey sells for \$1,999 -- let's hope laundering is included! -- while a Brooks Bollinger is a veritable steal at \$299.

**Little Brother Watch:** Giants leading 23-20 with 3:35 remaining, facing second-and-5, Eli Manning forced the ball into triple coverage, interception; Philadelphia scored on the possession to force overtime. There is a time to build up, a time to break down; a time to cast away stones, a time to gather stones together; a time to take the sack, and a time to throw the ball out of bounds.

**Stop Me Before -- Hey, It Worked!:** Though yours truly contends blitzing often backfires, of course there are times when the blitz works, and this was a good weekend for blitz aficionados. The deciding play of the Tampa-Carolina game -- Ronde Barber's interception when it was Bucs 13, Panthers 3 and Carolina had the ball on the Tampa 12 -- came off a blitz. The decisive play of the Miami-San Diego game -- Drew Brees' fumble in Chargers' territory when it was Dolphins 20, Bolts 14 with 2:37 remaining -- came off a safety blitz. The punctuation mark of New England's steam-cleaning of Buffalo -- James Sanders' interception touchdown -- came off a blitz. And Eli Manning's overtime interception against the Eagles came off a blitz, though in that case it was fourth down so little brother had to heave-ho the ball.

Note to Jersey/A coaches: the situation was fourth-and-3 on the Philadelphia 35 in overtime, cold weather making a long field goal unlikely. According to the indispensable *Pro Football Prospectus*, source

of the fourth-down conversion stats in today's column, in 2004, 64 percent of runs on fourth-and-3 were successful, versus 43 percent of passes. On fourth-and-3 in today's NFL, defenses assume pass -- 80 percent of fourth-and-3 attempts in 2004 were passes -- and so come out in passing sets that are vulnerable to the rush. Thus, run on fourth-and-3.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkkk:** Trailing Atlanta 28-17 late in the third quarter, New Orleans punted on fourth-and-1, though rushes on fourth-and-1 usually succeed (74 percent success in 2004, to be exact). Trailing 30-17 early in the fourth quarter, New Orleans punted on fourth-and-5, though the average NFL play gains about five yards. Trailing 33-17 in the middle of the fourth quarter, New Orleans again punted on fourth-and-5. All these punts came from New Orleans territory -- but the Saints were losing and by constantly punting quit on the game! You're 3-9 and trailing in the fourth quarter, what is the point of punting? And now you are 3-10. To complete the fraidy-cat behavior, when the count was 36-17 with 2:21 remaining and it could not possibly have mattered less whether the Saints went for it, punted or started square dancing, *then* New Orleans went on fourth down.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkkk No. 2:** Trailing 14-0, Buffalo faced fourth-and-3 on the New England 46. Boom goes the punt, and it took the Flying Elvii just five snaps to pass the point where they would have been had the Bills gone for it and missed. Most fourth-and-3 running attempts succeed (64 percent, to be precise). Plus you're 4-8 and *in opposition territory*, why not go all-out to defeat the defending champions before the home crowd? And now you are 4-9.

**Buck-Buck-Brawckkkkkkkk No. 3:** Trailing Seattle 24-3 early in the third quarter, San Francisco faced fourth-and-2 at midfield. Yours truly could not believe his peepers as the punt boomed. Most fourth-and-2 running attempts succeed (62 percent, to be precise). Plus you're 2-10, why not go all-out to defeat the division leader? And now you are 2-11. In the last two weeks the Bills, Browns, Cards, Jets, Niners and Texans have all punted inside opposition territory on fourth-and-short or while trailing big. It's no coincidence the teams that punt in these circumstances are having horrible seasons. Hey coaches -- victories don't come in the mail. You must at least *try* to win.

**My Luck With Blondes Was Always About the Same as Kong's:** Last week, yours truly was in Manhattan and paused to gaze up at the Empire State Building. I thought, "If I was a 25-ton prehistoric ape who wanted to carry a blonde up the side of this building what, exactly, would I hold on to?" There are ridges on the outside of the Empire State Building, but the ridges, and everything else, are smooth. Currently there is a Fay Wray exhibit in the lobby, and the observation deck at the top is open till midnight. How do I know? The Empire State Building has a website.

**Okay, I Said Something About the Raiders-Jets Game:** Jersey/B leading Oakland 3-0, Ty Law of the Jets intercepted a pass -- and then attempted a lateral to lumbering defensive tackle Dewayne Robertson, who fumbled.

**The Eighty-One Percent All Pros:** Get moving and record your Pro Bowl vote -- balloting ends today. And don't use that wimpy "express ballot" where you only vote for glory boys: go through the whole ballot and force yourself to honor linemen. Even if you have to pick linemen at random, the mere fact of having to pick them may cause you some appreciation for how little attention is paid to these gentlemen who provide roughly half the entertainment value of football.

Needless to say, TMQ has complaints about the Pro Bowl process. One is the express ballot -- if you don't care enough to select offensive linemen, then your vote should not count! Another is stacking of the process in favor of glamour boys. For instance, voters can pick up to three quarterbacks, but only two outside linebackers: even though a football team plays twice as many outside linebackers as quarterbacks. My third complaint is that voting closes before the season is complete. Thirteen of 16 games have been played, 81 percent of the regular season. Yet Pro Bowl rosters will be final before the remainder of the season is played. Why don't all games count in the All Pro equation? Under the current setup, those bound for Hawaii should be called the Eighty-One Percent All Pros. Final complaint: the disclaimer at the bottom of the Pro Bowl ballot says VOID WHERE PROHIBITED. Where, exactly, is it "prohibited" to vote on the Pro Bowl -- North Korea?

**As Brits, They Are Not Eligible for the New Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit:** Here's how the Rolling Stones look today.

**Best Blocks:** One-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three, one-thousand four, one-thousand five, one-thousand six -- that's how long Tom Brady had to scan the field before jogging up the middle for a touchdown on a play that started at the Buffalo 3. Coaches around the league must be saying to their scouting departments: Get me some metaphors! And since we shout out Cincinnati tackle Levi Jones in this column, let's also laud his linemates. Cleveland leading 7-0, Rudi Johnson ran untouched eight yards for the first Bengals' touchdown as simple straight-ahead "drive" blocking by Cincinnati guards Bobbie Williams and Eric Steinbach flattened Browns defenders. Later, Cleveland ahead 14-7, the Cincinnati line again flattened the Browns' front, allowing Johnson to run 32 yards, setting up a field goal.

**Eric, Next Time Say, "The Coaches Did a Really Great Job and None of Us Wanted to Hold That 20-Point Fourth-Quarter Lead Anyway":** It's a cryin' shame there was a flap involving Eric Moulds, who numbers among the most respected veterans in the NFL. Moulds has been a consummate competitor and a model citizen despite constant turmoil at Buffalo: enduring four head coaches and eight starting quarterbacks in his 10-year Bills tenure. Moulds has never complained and until last week always said the right things in public. Moulds' transgression was to criticize Buffalo play-calling during the Bills' meltdown at Miami. As reader Brian Sodeman of Baltimore notes, punishing Moulds was an example of shooting the messenger: the meltdown happened largely owing to play-calling. Buffalo coach Mike Mularkey, who calls the plays, created a huge distraction for his team by suspending a respected leader, rather than simply dealing with the criticism. Several veterans have clashed with Mularkey this season. When one player acts up, it is almost always the player's fault; when multiple players act up, it is almost always the coach's fault. Reader Dan Robb points out this photo of Moulds showing just how far he will go to help the team.

**Hollywood Would Call *Macbeth* a Murder Mystery:** TNT broadcast the *Lord of the Rings* movies last week. How did the network categorize them? They were listed as "action" movies. Somewhere J.R.R. Tolkien is saying, *Aaaaaiiiiiiiiiyyyyyyyyeeeee!* Google the current movie *Ice Harvest*, and you find its genre is listed as "Comedy/Action/Adventure/Suspense/Thriller." Not another comedy action adventure suspense thriller!

**Laveranues Coles Watch:** Last winter, Coles demanded to be traded from Washington because, inexcusably, the Redskins' offense was not designed solely for the purpose of getting him stats. So far this season at his new home in Jersey/B, Coles has 642 yards receiving. His replacement at Washington, Santana Moss, has 1,167 receiving yards.

**Why Aren't You Kicking??????:** Game tied at 3, Baltimore faced fourth-and-9 on the Denver 35 in the ideal field-goal kicking conditions of Mile High. Boom goes the punt, and it took the Broncos just five snaps to pass the point where the ball would have been spotted had the Ravens missed a field goal attempt. Baltimore went on to lose by two points. The Ravens' Matt Stover is 9-for-12 beyond the 40 this season -- why didn't Baltimore go for the field goal?

**Obscure College Score of the Week:** Grand Valley State 21, Northwest Missouri 17 (Division II championship). Located in Allendale, Mich., Grand Valley is perhaps the sole school to use a merchant marine deckhand as its sports image.

**Indy Sked Preview:** Sunday the Colts host San Diego, which is must-win in its race for an AFC wild card. Christmas Eve the Colts are in Seattle, where the 'Hawks may need a win to clinch home-field advantage. So that's two straight serious tests. For the regular season finale, Indianapolis hosts Arizona of Mexico. If the Colts are 15-0, the Cards should be seriously jacked to break the perfect season. The question for that day might be, Can the Colts' second team defeat Arizona's starters? Cardinals fans might not care to know the answer.

**Next Week:** My annual All-Unwanted All Pros -- the league's best players who were undrafted, or let go, or both.

## Week 14 Readers:

(Dec. 14, 2005) -- Last week, a reader proposed this genetic formula for predicting NFL outcomes: "Team with best record wins; if records equal, home team wins." So far that formula has outperformed all experts in the [Yahoo! experts poll](#), but trails the wisdom of crowds as manifested in the Yahoo! consensus of users. Comes now **Chris Miller of Seattle** to propose an improved prediction algorithm: "Home team wins, unless the visiting team has two or more wins than the home team." This week, Miller's formula went 11-5; currently the algorithm is 149-59, which not only bests all the football experts in the Yahoo! poll, it even bests the consensus of Yahoo! users. Preserving the beauty of generic football forecasting -- you don't need incredible insider information, or even need to know who's playing -- Miller's formula represents the best generic prediction formula I've heard yet. The formula has a drawback: early in the season, basically it's my off-price ultra-generic, Home Team Wins. But the later in the season, the more accurate this formula becomes. TMQ will christen the formula Miller's First Theorem and track its performance for the remainder of the season. Will any fulltime professional football expert picking game-by-game be able to best Chris Miller?

TMQ made fun of an English plan to increase the wild dormouse population, which seemed to me a waste of resources given that mice already outnumber *Homo sapiens* by a vast margin: **Paul Bayley of West Sussex, England**, rose to the defense of dormice. Bayley writes, "The ubiquitous mouse to which you refer outnumbering people is the common house mouse, *mus musculus*, which is indeed regarded as a pest. The poor dormouse *muscardinus avellanarius* is in steep decline in England. Its common name derives from an old Anglo-Norman word 'dormeus' meaning 'sleepy one', as it spends three quarters of its life asleep!" Three-quarters of the day asleep -- I could buy into that. **Bob Rios of Riverview, Fla.**, was among many readers to rise to the defense of Vagon poetry. Yours truly described it as "the worst in the universe." Actually, Rios noted, *The Hitchhiker's Guide* specifically says Vagon poetry is only third worst in the universe. My apologies to all dormice and Vagons.



Remember Vince Young, the football gods have their eyes on you!

**Edward Kerwin of Tinton Falls, N.J.**, notes Vince Young campaigned for the Heisman in part by boasting that all his stats came in the first half. In other words, Texas should have run up the score *even more*? "This might push the football gods toward the Trojans," Kerwin supposes. **Adam Jacobi of Iowa City, Iowa**, notes Willis McGahee's performance has declined significantly since he tempted the football gods by declaring himself the league's best back. To the point of McGahee's boast, he was averaging 99 yards rushing per game and 4.2 yards per carry; since the boast his averages have dropped to 48 yards per game and 2.8 yards per carry. **Paul Langelier** adds that at Wilson Stadium on Sunday, Tom Brady had more rushing yards (17) than McGahee (3). Jacobi haikuizes,

Willis McGahee:  
No match for the football gods.  
Keep thy tongue, tailback!  
-- Adam Jacobi, Iowa City

TMQ mentioned the American Society for Quality, some of whose writing is incomprehensible. **Jason Drautz of Denver** reports, "In 1999 my employer, Wall Street darling Rhythms NetConnections, instituted a Quality Team. This group trumpeted their arrival with much fanfare, mandating all employees attend a Quality Fair, a cheesy display of booths and trinket giveaways that never really indicated exactly how they were going to bring quality to Rhythms. One of the trinkets was a coffee cup adorned with the phrase 'The Rhythms Quality Team.' Also on it was the Rhythms logo -- imprinted backward. Hundreds of cups were given away before the Quality Team noticed their mistake." Rhythms went bankrupt in 2002, but surely it was a quality bankruptcy! On the subject of corporate trinkets, **Therissa Libby of Annapolis, Md.**, reports, "Recently I attended the Society for Neuroscience annual meeting, at which hundreds of vendors hawk their wares. Dozens sent me postcards beforehand suggesting that I visit their booths.



The Dalai Lama preaches you should treasure the gifts you receive.

Many offered a 'complimentary gift' or 'free gift' for stopping by. And a gift that is NOT complimentary would be. ...?" First aside: the [Dalai Lama spoke at the Society for Neuroscience meeting](#). Did he receive a complimentary pair of sandals? Second aside: when our daughter was born, a hospital staffer walked in and handed my wife a wrapped baby gift that contained booties, a toy and so on. Later I went over the hospital bill. One entry read, "BABY GIFT -- \$45."

**Pablo Fuentes of Bend, Ore.**, was among numerous readers to flag this well-worth-reading *New York Times Magazine* article about Texas Tech and its pass-wacky coach Mike Leach. It's a tremendous piece, though the writer, *Moneyball* author Michael Lewis, whose sports forte is baseball, presents as Leach ideas some tactics that have been used by others before. (For instance, Texas Tech rarely fields a tight end; during the "run and shoot" fad of 15 years ago, Atlanta, Detroit, Houston and other NFL teams played without a tight end. Leach tries to increase the total number of plays his offense runs in a game; when the Bills went no-huddle in 1990, one of the goals was to increase the number of plays run.) I did not know the sociology of Texas Tech -- Lewis reports most of its players were passed over for scholarship offers at the University of Texas and Texas A&M, higher-status schools. Naturally this underdog factor causes sympathy for the Red Raiders. But bad sportsmanship is bad whether it comes from the favorite or the underdog, and Leach is a bad sport. Lewis describes Leach frantically trying to score more points when already ahead late by insurmountable margins, including calling a timeout with 23 seconds remaining, ahead 56-17, hoping to get one more touchdown. That for me neutralizes the respect Leach might otherwise win for his unorthodox ideas on such issues as line splits and conditioning. College coaches are supposed to be teachers. Leach appears to be teaching his charges is to be poor sports, which will not serve them well in later life. Lewis describes Leach as unpopular among fellow coaches, attributing this to their jealousy over Leach's innovative thinking. Surely that's a factor -- the stodgy always resent the original -- but it sounds to me like Leach deserves to be unpopular.



**WARNING: This Pat the Patriot patch is for collection only. Not intended to be a patch! Huh?**

**Alec Pappas of Tempe, Ariz.**, writes to report he recently bought a [Pat the Patriot throwback patch](#) from the New England Patriots' online store. The package arrived, Alec opened it and found this disclaimer: "WARNING: Attachment of this emblem to another product by sewing, adhesives or any other means will immediately ruin its collectable value and is not permitted without approval of National League Football Properties, Inc." The whole point of a patch is to put it on your jean jacket! Essentially the disclaimer says, "WARNING: Do not use this product for its intended purpose."

Steve Mariucci was fired as Lions' coach a few days after ordering a punt on fourth-and-2 with his team trailing by 27 points. **Sean Keane of San Francisco** notes that in his final game as Forty-Niners' coach, Mariucci ordered a punt with his team trailing by 25 points. **Terence Fails of Nashville** was among the fearless faithful who attended the 1-11 Texans at 3-9 Titans collision and reports that while the announced gate may have been 69,149, perhaps 45,000 were actually present. He also notes that after Houston missed its short field goal attempt on the final play, Texans' center Steve McKinney declared, TMQ-esque, "The football gods must really hate us right now."

Next Tuesday, I announce my annual All-Unwanted All Pros. **William Glocker of Colorado Springs, Colo.**, asks, since I just complained that closing the Pro Bowl voting after 13 of 16 games means the Honolulu-bound should be called the Eighty-One Percent All Pros, shouldn't I call my squad the Eighty-One Percent All-Unwanted All Pros? I only announce mine to sync with the official group; ideally, I'd wait till the regular season is complete. That leaves the question of where the All-Unwanted Pro Bowl should be played. Honolulu is already taken. How about Las Vegas? I know where we could scare up some cheerleaders!

Finally **Sean Boardman of Westbrook, Conn.**, asserts the best Indianapolis can do is 18-1. Why? ABC has the call this February, and in every previous ABC Super Bowl, the NFC has won. Read it and weep, Colts fans: "The previous ABC-broadcast Super Bowls: XIX San Francisco over Miami, XXII Washington over Denver, XXV Giants over Buffalo, XXIX San Francisco over San Diego, XXXIV St. Louis over Tennessee, XXXVII Tampa Bay over Oakland."

## Manly men don't punt, and the Tuesday Morning Quarterback All-Unwanted All Pros

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Dec. 20, 2005) -- Tuesday Morning Quarterback is nothing if not self-referential -- haven't I said that before? -- so let me quote myself. Let me quote a paragraph that has appeared in this space every year since the column's inception, changing only the identity of the first team mentioned: "As the Colts left the RCA Dome field 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 the 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." I expect to keep using those words once a year for as long as I write this column; see special Colts-San Diego analysis below.

In other football news, lately this column has obsessed about teams that punt on fourth-and-short, or in opposition territory, or when way behind. Mentally I shout *why are you punting????* at coaches more than any phrase, more even than *you're blocking my view of the cheerleaders*. Examples from Week 15:

- Trailing Cincinnati by 24-7, Detroit faced fourth-and-1 at midfield; in came the punt unit. The Cowardly Lions went on to lose 41-17.
- Trailing New England 21-0, Tampa faced fourth-and-15 on the Pats' 49 with 7:32 remaining; in came the punt unit. Outraged, the football gods granted the Patriots a touchdown that made the final an embarrassing 28-0.
- Trailing Denver 21-10, Buffalo faced fourth-and-2 on its 28 in the fourth quarter; in came the punt unit. Sure Buffalo was in its own territory, but the Bills were down by two scores, the clock situation was do-or-die and fourth-and-2 is an attractive down -- in 2004, 62 percent of rushes on fourth-and-2 succeeded. I scarcely need tell you Denver took the ball the other way and iced the game at 28-10 with 5:55 remaining.
- Trailing Washington 35-0 late in the third quarter, Dallas faced fourth-and-1 on its 30; in came the punt unit. *When, exactly, will there be a better chance to claw back into the game?* Outraged, the football gods pushed the punt out of bounds on the Cowboys' 45.

These examples could continue at length, not that length is a major concern with TMQ. Going for it may not work, of course -- on the decisive snap of the Chicago-Atlanta game, the Falcons, trailing 16-3, ran on fourth-and-1 and failed. But winning teams are not afraid of fourth down: In the tremendous San Diego-Indianapolis contest, each team badly wanted to win, and each went for it on a key fourth down. On the flip side, there seems a pretty clear relationship between losing and timid punting. All of which makes me wonder: Why do NFL coaches punt in situations like those above? I offer three explanations:

**Explanation No. 1, Least Common** The coach is telling the world, I AM QUITTING ON THIS GAME. This in my view explains Buffalo's punt. The Bills have done fine in the first half in 2005, outscoring opponents 140-138: the second half is a different story, Buffalo outscored following intermission by a worse margin than any team except cellar-dwelling San Francisco, which just became bowl-eligible. (See below.) Buffalo's second half-performance seems the cumulative effect of Bills' coaches making timid decisions as if they assume the game will be lost anyway. As this column has documented, for five years under novice head coaches Gregg Williams and now Mike Mularkey, the Bills have punted, punted, punted in situations where winning teams seize the day. Not only did Buffalo punt on fourth-and-2 when down by 11 against Denver; earlier Buffalo punted from the Denver 33. When coaches don't try to win,

their players get the message and eventually quit too.

**Explanation No. 2, Somewhat Common:** The coach is more concerned with shifting blame than gambling on victory. This in my view was Detroit's situation. Had Dick Jauron gone for it when trailing 24-7, and the gamble failed, sportswriters would have blamed Jauron for a bad call. Instead he took the easy way out and sportswriters blamed the Lions' players for crummy effort. Alternatively, the coach orders a punt because he is more concerned with holding down the margin of defeat than taking chances to trigger a comeback -- this was likely the thinking of Jon "Once I Was A Teenaged Coach" Gruden. Gruden's job is secure, but coaches on the bubble tend to be punt-happy. Jauron and Mularkey are likely to be job-shopping come January 2nd, and don't want blow-out defeats on their resumes. This is what game-theorists call the minimax strategy. Jauron and Mularkey hope to win, but assume they will lose and so attempt to minimize the maximum damage, in this case, to their reputations. When coaches go minimax, they make their own job-shopping more important than victory for their teams.

**Explanation No. 3, Very Common:** "But that's what we always do." Surely this was Dallas' situation, and explains most Preposterous Punts. No one is more obsessed with winning than Bill Parcells, plus Parcells has repeatedly shown he could not give one fig about reputation. Yet he punted on fourth-and-1 while trailing by 35 points. Tradition says punt on fourth down. The assumption is even built into football language -- when a team is stopped on third down, announcers say, "Now they have to punt." They don't *have* to punt. Football coaches are fundamentally a hidebound crowd, and some may actually think, "It's fourth down, we have to punt."

For humanitarian reasons, I'm not going to say much about last night's 48-3 steam-cleaning of the Packers by the Ravens. But let me ask: Why do so many NFL teams send the big blitz even *after* it has backfired? Game scoreless, Green Bay blitzed seven on a Baltimore third down; touchdown pass to Todd Heap. Trailing 14-3, Green Bay blitzed seven on a Baltimore third down; touchdown pass to Randy Hymes, and the rout was on. It's one thing to try a big blitz to see if it will work; another to keep trying the big blitz after it has seriously backfired.

In other football news, hip slang of the moment is to call the quarterback the "manager" of the offense. But in the modern corporate world, everybody's a manager -- retailers who pay minimum wage call every part-time clerk a senior executive vice-president. The quarterback needs a slicker term than just manager. TMQ suggests quarterbacks be called the Chief Information Officer, a trendy title everyone in the corporate world wants. Alternatively, the quarterback could be the Transformational Change Agent.

Tuesday Morning Quarterback sends holiday good wishes to all football enthusiasts, space aliens and mega-babes. Bells are ringing and candles being lit all across the local star cluster!

**Stats of the Week** From Oct. 17 at 9:49 ET to Dec. 18 at 1:18 ET, the Indianapolis Colts did not trail.

**Stats of the Week No. 2** From Nov. 27 at 8:07 ET to Dec. 18 at 2:49 ET, Seattle did not trail.

**Stats of the Week No. 3** New England has won its last three games by a combined 79-10.

**Stats of the Week No. 4** In its last two road games, Dallas has been outscored 52-10.

**Stats of the Week No. 5** In 480 minutes of road play this season, the Jets held the lead for 10 minutes. Stat from Peter Cangemi of Scranton, Pennsylvania.

**Stats of the Week No. 6** 16 players have caught a pass for New England and 10 players have carried the ball.

**Stats of the Week No. 7** Tom Brady is 15-0 when the temperature is below 274.816667 Kelvin (35 Fahrenheit).

**Stats of the Week No. 8** For the second time in three years, Miami won and was eliminated on the same day.

**Stats of the Week No. 9** First overall draft choice Alex Smith has 10 interceptions and no touchdown passes.

**Stats of the Week No. 10** Denver has the most points, yards and first downs in the last decade -- corresponding to the year Mike Shanahan became coach.

**Cheerleader of the Week** Richard Barish of Rockville, Maryland, nominates Valerie of the cutting-edge Eagles Cheerleaders. According to her team bio, Valerie has a bachelor's degree in chemical engineering, had a Pound Puppies lunchbox as a child and on her MP3 player has the Janet Jackson song *All Night*. Valerie, "Janet Jackson" is not the correct answer to NFL-related pop music questions. This year, the correct answer is "The Rolling Stones."

**Sweet Play of the Week** Two years ago, Patriots' right tackle Tom Ashworth was the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Super Bowl MVP. Now he's filling in at left tackle, and admirably so. Game scoreless, the defending champions on the City of Tampa 1, Ashworth lined up as a fullback while guard Logan Mankins shifted to LT. Why mess with the left tackle on a critical play? "This has got to be to Ashworth," yours truly mumbled. So it was, touchdown pass. Linebacker Mike Vrabel, who also lined up eligible and is usually Tom Brady's target on short-yardage trick plays, ran into the end zone with his hand up: the defense reacted to Vrabel and ignored Ashworth. A linebacker running a decoy route for an offensive tackle! Sweet.

New England note one: regularly the Pats have a different starting group on the offensive line, yet week after week, Patriots' blockers outperform most of the league. I counted one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three, one-thousand four, one-thousand five as Brady stood relaxed in the pocket, waiting for David Givens to get open on the 32-yard deep zed-out that got the first touchdown drive rolling. New England note two: Brady quietly has 3,888 yards passing, best in the league. He's throwing deep quite well. Watch NFL tape and many's the team where the quarterback sails the pass beyond a receiver's reach or clangs the pass to the ground at a receiver's feet. When Brady throws, the ball almost always hits the receiver on his hands and in stride.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2** Recently TMQ called for more trick plays involving quarterbacks: Denver, Atlanta and now Baltimore have answered. It's my own little Christmas present! Leading 7-0, the Nevermores faced second-and-7 on the Green Bay 11. Kyle Boller split wide left; receiver Mark Clayton lined up as quarterback; Packers' defenders were shouting about Boller, assuming the ball would go back to him; the trick was that Clayton took the snap and ran right for the touchdown.

**Sweet Front Seven** Pittsburgh's defensive front held Minnesota to a field goal after the Vikings reached first-and-goal on the 3, then later recorded a safety not on a sack but by nailing running back Michael Bennett in the end zone. Last week TMQ described highly drafted Vikings' tackle Bryant McKinnie as a disappointment; jiminy cricket did he look bad on the safety, getting completely stood up on a running play designed to go behind him. Well, at least McKinnie hit someone; Minnesota guard Adam Goldberg whiffed altogether. The NFL.com highlights section has an excellent view of this play; click on the Steelers-Vikings score.

**New Florida Diet Sensation! The St. Johns River Diet** David Garrard looked fleet and sleek on his 13-yard touchdown run. Is it just me, or has this gentleman lost 20 pounds in the mere weeks since becoming Jax's starting quarterback?

**The Football Gods Chortled** "Look Dad, he's cold." That's what Grant, my Official Oldest, said as Michael Vick first came to the sideline at Chicago on Sunday night, kickoff temperature 262 Kelvin (12 Fahrenheit). Vick immediately called for a heavy cape with hood, pulled up the hood and scrunched in. Throughout the contest Atlanta players threw on heavy capes and pulled up hoods and balaclavas the instant they came off the field -- and seemed reluctant to shed those capes to go back out. Bears gen-

tlemen, by contrast, shrugged at the cold and marched around on the sidelines without capes. You may not need to know much more than that about the Chicago-Atlanta contest. On his career, Vick is 1-3 when the kickoff temperature is below 262 Kelvin. And yes, my brilliant advice was that Chicago stick with Kyle Orton; now everyone is praising Lovie Smith for switching to Rex Grossman. Orton played a half and the Bears scored six points, Grossman played a half and the Bears scored 10 points. We'll see.

**Grade Inflation Comes to Sideline Showers** Marvin Lewis got *two* buckets of Gatorade over his head as the clock reached all-naughts. Cincinnati has a league-leading 30 interceptions, a fabulous number. But turnovers are half skill and half luck. It's hard to believe Bengals' interception success can continue at this pace.

**Sour Play of the Week** Pittsburgh 10, Minnesota 3 with 23 seconds remaining in the first half, Vikes' ball on the Steelers' 19. Brad Johnson, don't do anything silly here, because a field goal makes it 10-6 at halftime. Instead pass into *triple* coverage, interception. Ye gods.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Play** All 11 Kansas City defenders fell off Tiki Barber at some point during his 41-year touchdown run. Has anyone ever broken a tackle by every defender on the field on the same play? Very sweet for Jersey/A; for Kansas City, a Sour Warhead.

**Law of the Other Shoe** Things aren't going well for Dallas -- the Potomac Nanticokes lead 21-0 late in the first half. But now the 'Boys have first-and-10 on the Skins' 25. Drew Bledsoe fades back, crazy pass into triple coverage, ball returned to Dallas 38. The other shoe is yet to fall! One play later it's second-and-2 on the Dallas 30 with 21 seconds remaining till intermission. H-back Chris Cooley comes in motion left across the formation. Let's see, to this point, Cooley has two touchdown receptions, maybe Dallas should pay attention to him! Short catch, two very lame missed tackles, touchdown, and the Christmas caroling can start early in Washington suburbs.

Tactics note one: normally teams blitz the immobile Bledsoe -- but the Cowboys know that, so much of their game plan this season has involved quickly getting the ball out to whomever is left open by the blitz. The tastefully named Gregg Williams, defensive boss of the Skins, knows that. He double-crossed Dallas by not blitzing, dropping seven into coverage. Bledsoe scanned for the man left open by the blitz, and saw no one open immediately; he then fell into his bad habit, holding the ball too long, and a four-man Washington rush was able to sack him seven times, plus force bad decisions. Bledsoe was sufficiently confused by the Redskins' failure to blitz that afterward he said Washington must have been playing cover two (zone) when the corners double double-crossed him by playing man (what normally happens on blitzes). Tactics note two: Mark Brunell almost always rolls left. Yet when he rolled left, Washington leading 7-0 and facing third-and-goal on the Dallas 2, the 'Boys defense seemed surprised and ignored Cooley, who had gone in motion left then turned up to the end zone.

**Tuesday Morning Quarterback All-Unwanted All Pros** The Pro Bowl roster will be announced tomorrow on ESPN, and is sure to be heavy on first-round picks and megabucks glamour boys. Congratulations to them. TMQ has always been interested in the different group of NFL players -- those who succeed despite never being drafted or being let go on their first, second or even third tries. Each season Tuesday Morning Quarterback honors the All-Unwanted All Pros: the league's best players who were never drafted or were let go. These are players who have overcome the odds. And think the undrafted don't matter? As Gil Brandt has pointed out, there are 11 undrafted fellows in the Hall of Fame.

To qualify for the All-Unwanted All Pros, a player must have been passed over in the draft; or waived; or changed teams in free agency without his original team making a bona fide effort to retain him; or been traded for the purpose of getting rid of him. Examples: Brad Johnson could qualify for my team because the Buccaneers made no attempt to resign him, while Marco Rivera does not qualify because the Packers wanted him back but lacked salary cap room. Corey Dillon could qualify for my team because the Bengals traded him in order to get rid of him, while Santana Moss does not qualify since the Jets traded him because they wanted the player they got in exchange. To be eligible, a coach must have been fired.

Usually my All-Unwanted All Pros are as strong as the real All Pros except at tackle and cornerback. These have become premium positions where teams spend considerable amounts of money and draft

picks, making it harder for unknowns to break through. This year the weak points of my squad are corner and running back, while my tackles, undrafted or shown the door by someone, are among the league's top performers. As for tailbacks, lately you hear people saying NFL teams have devalued the position, but check the top rushers -- 20 of 30 are first- or second-round draft choices. At any rate I'd pit my All-Unwanted All Pros against the real All Pros any day. My guys would play with more motivation.

An asterisk indicates the gentleman has been let go more than once, or went undrafted and was also let go at least once.

### First team

Quarterback: Trent Green,\* Kansas City.

Tailbacks: Warrick Dunn, Atlanta; Thomas Jones,\* Chicago.

Fullback: Lorenzo Neal,\* San Diego. (Let go four times!)

Wide receivers: Joey Galloway, Tampa; Rod Smith, Denver.

Tight end: Antonio Gates,\* San Diego. (Did not play football in college.)

Offensive line: Matt Lepsis, Denver; Stephen Neal, New England; Willie Roaf, Kansas City; Jeff Saturday, Indianapolis; Brian Waters, Kansas City.

Defensive line: Brentson Buckner,\* Carolina; Bryce Fisher,\* Seattle; Adewale Ogunleye,\* Chicago; Pat Williams,\* Minnesota.

Linebackers: Gary Brackett, Indianapolis; Antonio Pierce,\* Jersey/A; Mike Vrabel, New England.

Defensive backs: Ryan Clark,\* Washington; Ken Lucas, Carolina; Deltha O'Neal, Cincinnati; Brian Russell,\* Cleveland.

Special teamer: Sean Morey,\* Pittsburgh.

Kick returner: B.J. Sams, Baltimore.

Punter: Brian Moorman, Buffalo.

Kicker: Neil Rackers, Arizona.

Coach: Bill Belichick, New England.

### Second team:

Quarterback: Jake Plummer, Denver.

Tailbacks: Reuben Droughns,\* Cleveland; Willie Parker, Pittsburgh. (Parker did not start in college.)

Fullback: Mike Sellers,\* Washington. (Went to a community college, wasn't drafted, was let go twice in the NFL and spent two years in the CFL.)

WR: Plaxico Burress, Jersey/A; Joe Jurevicius,\* Seattle.

Tight end: Jermaine Wiggins,\* Minnesota. (Undrafted and let go three times!)

Offensive line: Rich Braham, Cincinnati, Ruben Brown, Chicago; Mike Goff, San Diego; Ryan Lilja, Indianapolis; Kareem McKenzie, Jersey/A.

Defensive line: Kyle Vanden Bosch, Tennessee; Montae Reagor,\* Indianapolis; Paul Spicer,\* Jacksonville; Gerard Warren, Denver.

Linebackers: London Fletcher,\* Buffalo; Jeremiah Trotter,\* Philadelphia; Marcus Washington, Washington.

Defensive backs: Keion Carpenter,\* Atlanta; Al Harris,\* Green Bay; Dexter Jackson,\* Tampa (unwanted *and* recycled!); Darren Sharper, Minnesota.

Special teamer: Corey Ivy,\* St. Louis.

Kick returner: Reggie Swinton,\* Arizona. (Undrafted, cut twice in the NFL and cut twice in the CFL!)

Punter: Nick Harris,\* Detroit.

Kicker: Adam Vinatieri, New England.

Coach: Mike Shanahan, Denver.

The Tuesday Morning Quarterback Unwanted Offensive Player of the Year is Rod Smith. Still going strong in his 11th season, Smith is Denver's all-time leading receiver and all-time yardage leader; is the sole undrafted player to exceed 10,000 NFL receiving yards and is the NFL's all-time leader for receptions by

an undrafted player. Smith graduated from Division II Missouri Southern, meaning he was Unwanted at the football-factory scholarship level too. He may join those 11 undrafted gentlemen in the Hall of Fame.

The Tuesday Morning Quarterback Unwanted Defensive Player of the Year is Pat Williams. Williams started just 15 games in college, then went undrafted. For years he toiled as a reserve but worked-worked-worked until he became a blue-chip NFL starter -- and got let go anyway. He's had a Pro-Bowl-caliber season for Minnesota, and let's hope Williams hears his name called when the Pro Bowl roster is announced tomorrow.

**Correction of the Year** Actual correction from last week's *San Francisco Chronicle*: "A story about mathematical references mistakenly said that 1,782 to the 12th power plus 1,841 to the 12th power equals 1,922 to the 12th power. Actually, 1,782 to the 12th power plus 1,841 to the 12th power equals 2,541,210,258,614, 589,176,288,669,958,142,428,526,657 while 1,922 to the 12th power equals 2,541,210,259,314,801,410,819,278,649,643,651,567,616."

**Best Blocks** Tiki Barber -- henceforth TTY to this column, for The Toast of New York -- sure looked sweet running for a career-high 220 yards. But the patchwork Jersey/A offensive line was the game's star. Both starting tackles out, aging Bob Whitfield filled one tackle slot while guard David Diehl played the other; reserve Rich Seubert covered for Diehl. All had big days, plus starting guard Chris Snee and center Shaun O'Hara got half a dozen perfect pull blocks, including on Barber's second touchdown run. It's pretty fun to run for a career-best 220 yards when most of the people in front of you have already been knocked to the ground.

**This Single Item Enables Me to Discharge My Obligation to Say Something About Both the Arizona-Houston and San Francisco-Jax Games** Only the Houston Texans could foul up by winning! Ahead 27-19 with 29 seconds remaining, the Moo Cows had fourth down on the Cards' 4 and were in imminent danger of surrendering their one-game lead in the Reggie Bush race. Houston called time-out. Why time-out in this situation? On an *exclusive* basis, TMQ has learned the time-out was called so Houston coaches could discuss whether to deliberately allow a blocked field goal returned for a touchdown. Instead, Houston kicked to make it 30-19. Texans' fans, you may rue this day!

At the very moment the Alltel Stadium scoreboard flashed HOU 30 ARIZ 19 F, San Francisco had the ball trailing 10-9 with 1:06 remaining. On an *exclusive* basis, TMQ has learned that San Francisco coaches ordered first overall draft choice Alex Smith to throw three straight incompletions, ending the game and insuring the Niners tied Houston for worst record. Now there will be a Bush Bowl -- the season-finale meeting between the Texans and Niners on January 1st. Previously expected to be a total woofer, the Bush Bowl could end up drawing national attention. (Note: anything identified as a TMQ *exclusive* isn't true. I make my exclusives up -- that's why I am the only one who has them.)

**If You Used to Be Randy Moss, Press "2"** One catch against the Browns; no receptions in the second half. Trailing 7-6 with 43 seconds remaining, Cleveland had third-and-2 on the Oakland 19, holding two time-outs. Romeo Crennel ordered quarterback Charlie Frye to kneel, then call timeout with five ticks showing. The kick was true, but this seemed a needless tempting of the football gods. Next time try for the touchdown first!

**If You Used to Be the Philadelphia Eagles, Press "3"** Mike McMahon fakes to Ryan Moats, then finds Mike Bartum for the winning touchdown! Who are these guys? Trent Cole, Todd Herrremens, Roderick Hood and Jamaal Jackson all started for the Eagles against the Rams. Jackson is so obscure, the Eagles' depth chart shows him as a grayed-out unknown.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!** The Marine Mammals blitzed seven; Brooks Bollinger heaved a 60-yard touchdown to Doug Jolley, and suddenly Jersey/B leads 17-10. So Miami learned its lesson, right? Clinging to a 24-20 lead, the Dolphins had the Jets facing fourth-and-13 on their own 23 at the end. Straight defense, and the game is likely over. Instead seven blitz, 34-yard pass-interference penalty when a defender desperately grabs an open receiver, and it's a sweaty-knuckles ending.

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All** Trailing by the new economy score of 24-7, the United States Saints faced second-and-goal on the Carolina 1 in the fourth quarter. Run twice or thrice and a touchdown is likely. Cute little pass, interception, the Saints never threatened again. Saints note: a defender's 52-yard run with a handoff after a turnover, which would have put the Boy Scouts on the Panthers' 2 when the game was close, looked like a clean exchange to me, but zebras ruled illegal forward pass. The extra kick Atlanta got at the end of the Falcons-Saints game, the interception on the last play of the Patriots-Saints game -- it's been a perfect storm for this team ever since the actual perfect storm, Katrina.

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All No. 2** Last week's column noted, "In 2004, 64 percent of runs on fourth-and-3 were successful, versus 43 percent of passes. On fourth-and-3 in today's NFL, defenses assume pass -- 80 percent of fourth-and-3 attempts in 2004 were passes -- and so come out in passing sets that are vulnerable to the rush. Thus, run on fourth-and-3." Hey Tampa coaches: read Tuesday Morning Quarterback! Trailing 21-0 in the late third, ball on the New England 39, the Bucs faced fourth-and-3 and the game's deciding play. Sure enough, the Patriots assumed pass and came out in an edge-blitz set that was seriously open for a rush up the middle. Run! Run! Chris Simms dropped back, sack, and TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook. (Yes, I know the Chargers converted a fourth-and-3 by passing.)

**But That Doesn't Mean Always Rush** NFL clubs should go for it more on fourth-and-short. The exception is when a field goal is available -- then, Kick Early, Go For It Late. Trailing 3-0, Jax reached fourth-and-1 on the San Francisco 6 in the first quarter. It's early, take the field goal. Greg Jones up the middle for no gain.

**Wacky Food of the Future** It is possible that someday ethical issues involving the killing of animals for food may be solved by "culturing" meat -- growing animal cells in vats, creating steaks or chops that are biologically identical to the real thing, but without an animal attached. A recent experiment produced "in vitro" meat, though at great expense; this organization advocates the idea. This Dutch researcher is among those studying the concept. His title at Utrecht University? Professor of Meat Science.

**Streak Ends Special** If you're not going to be the first 16-0 team, you might as well be door-lined in a great game! Chargers-at-Colts numbered among the best games in years; it had everything but a baby rescued from a burning building. San Diego gets way ahead; then the Colts tell themselves they are not giving up without a fight, rally to take the lead; San Diego seems about to crack; then the Bolts work-work-work for field position for the field goal that puts them back ahead; then work-work-work to contain the second Peyton Manning comeback; then a who-dat emergency backup player caps the day with an 83-yard touchdown run as the clock ticked down. Wow. Especially noteworthy:

\* Trailing 16-3, Indianapolis took possession on the San Diego 25. Marvin Harrison ran a zed-out to the right, while Manning play-faked then rolled right; beautiful catch to the 1, touchdown on the next snap.

\* Trailing 16-10, Indianapolis had third-and-goal on the San Diego 1. The Colts lined up with three tight ends, receiving threat Dallas Clark to the left, unknowns Bryan Fletcher and Ben Utecht right. (Only TMQ could get "Utecht" and "Utrecht" in the same column.) All three tight ends went out, Fletcher and Utecht heading to the left corner of the end zone, Clark cutting underneath right. Three Bolts' defenders went with the two unknown guys and no one covered Clark.

\* First San Diego touchdown, a deep skinny post to Keenan McCardell. Why not try again? Trailing 17-16 in the fourth quarter and facing third-and-nine, Chargers' coaches called a deep skinny post to McCardell, 54-yard gain that sets up the go-ahead kick.

\* Something you almost never see: a busted play by the Colts' offense. Trailing 10-0, Indianapolis faced fourth-and-goal on the San Diego 1. Manning play-faked and rolled left -- while his receivers all blocked. No one to throw to, Manning was sacked. Total busted play; the Colts' receivers all thought it was a run.

\* Did Indy relax when LaDainian Tomlinson limped out? There's a long tradition of defenders mentally

saying to themselves "the rest will be easy" when the opposition's star leaves. Michael Turner had 327 yards rushing in his career coming into this game, then 85 yards in the fourth quarter.

\* Cheer-babe professionalism: The week after San Diego cheerleaders wore blue Santa outfits that left far too much to the imagination, thus failing to appease the football gods and leading to a Bolts' defeat, the Indianapolis cheerleaders did not repeat the error. They sported scanty two-piece Santa looks that definitely favored "naughty" over "nice." Nevertheless, the football gods felt it was time for the Colts' streak to end.

\* Incredibly technical point! Indianapolis fast-snapped hoping to catch San Diego with 12 men on the field. It worked: Luis Castillo, sprinting madly, barely failed to reach the sidelines. Castillo failed because he ran from the Chargers' defensive huddle at an angle toward the Chargers' bench, rather than straight off the field. If you need to get off the field fast, run parallel to the line of scrimmage, because that path involves the fewest possible steps out of bounds. Coaches actually teach this! I remember my high-school coach screaming this technique at me. My high-school coach was always concerned with getting me off the field.

**TMQ's Christmas List** Why use plain old duct tape when you could wrap broken stuff in festive outdoor prints? (search: TA51331)

**The Twelve NFL Days of Christmas** Speaking of 12, here is my annual NFL holiday song:

On the first day of Christmas the NFL gave to me a T.O. sitting at home.

On the second day of Christmas the NFL gave to me too many Colts' victories and a T.O. sitting at home.

On the third day of Christmas the NFL gave to me three-step drop, too many Colts' victories and a T.O. sitting at home.

On the fourth day of Christmas the NFL gave to me four misdemeanors, three-step drop, too many Colts' victories and a T.O. sitting at home.

On the fifth day of Christmas the NFL gave to me five locations for the Saints, four misdemeanors, three-step drop, too many Colts' victories and a T.O. sitting at home.

On the sixth day of Christmas the NFL gave to me six-year network contract, five locations for the Saints, four misdemeanors, three-step drop, too many Colts' victories and a T.O. sitting at home.

On the seventh day of Christmas the NFL gave to me seven cheer-babes dancing, six-year network contract, five locations for the Saints, four misdemeanors, three-step drop, too many Colts' victories and a T.O. sitting at home.

On the eighth day of Christmas the NFL gave to me eight men inactive, seven cheer-babes dancing, six-year network contract, five locations for the Saints, four misdemeanors, three-step drop, too many Colts' victories and a T.O. sitting at home.

On the ninth day of Christmas the NFL gave to me nine fumbles bouncing, eight men inactive, seven cheer-babes dancing, six-year network contract, five locations for the Saints, four misdemeanors, three-step drop, too many Colts' victories and a T.O. sitting at home.

On the 10th day of Christmas the NFL gave to me 10 scheming agents, nine fumbles bouncing, eight men inactive, seven cheer-babes dancing, six-year network contract, five locations for the Saints, four misdemeanors, three-step drop, too many Colts' victories and a T.O. sitting at home.

On the 11th day of Christmas the NFL gave to me 11 angry owners, 10 scheming agents, nine fumbles

bouncing, eight men inactive, seven cheer-babes dancing, six-year network contract, five locations for the Saints, four misdemeanors, three-step drop, too many Colts' victories and a T.O. sitting at home.

On the 12th day of Christmas the NFL gave to me 12 fired coaches, 11 angry owners, 10 scheming agents, nine fumbles bouncing, eight men inactive, seven cheer-babes dancing, six-year network contract, five locations for the Saints, four misdemeanors, three-step drop, too many Colts' victories and a T.O. sitting at home.

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All** Trailing 21-0, City of Tampa had third-and-1 on the New England 33 midway through the third quarter. There's plenty of time for a comeback -- but it is absolutely imperative the Bucs score on this possession. Run once or twice and the first down is highly likely. Incompletion, incompletion, Patriots' ball. Ye gods.

**TMQ's Christmas List No. 2** One stocking at our house will contain a can of Schokinag European Drinking Chocolate. On the can is stamped, "The Professionals' Choice for the Best Drinking Chocolate." Wait a minute -- there are people whose *profession* is to drink hot chocolate?

**At the Current Rate It Won't Be Long Until the Supercarrier *Jack Abrahamoff*** NASA is "accelerating critical work related to focusing the satellite's huge 18-segment beryllium primary mirror," *Aviation Week and Space Technology* reported last week. The huge 18-segment beryllium mirror is for the \$4.5 billion space telescope NASA hopes to launch in 2013. It is sure to be the cat's meow of space telescopes, much more powerful than the current Hubble Space Telescope. What drives yours truly crazy about the project is that it is not named after an astronomer, like the Hubble. (Edwin Hubble discovered that the universe is expanding.) Instead the telescope will be named after a bureaucrat -- the James Webb Space Telescope, for the man who was NASA's administrator during the 1960s moon race. Webb did a good job, but was simply doing his job: for reporting to work in the morning he should have his name on a \$4.5 billion project? Webb never discovered or created anything; the telescope should be named for someone who had some idea important to the study of the heavens. But then naming large taxpayer-funded objects not after the inspiring of the past, but after highly placed government insiders, is a growing trend. Prowling the seas are the recently commissioned supercarriers *John C. Stennis* and *Carl Vinson*. Stennis and Vinson weren't war heroes or great historical figures: they were political hacks who chaired the Armed Services committees of the House and Senate, and distinguished themselves mainly by never once saying the word "no" to a Pentagon budget request. Ships should have names that evoke greatness and history (for instance the *Stennis* is escorted by the cruiser *Lake Champlain*, which has an inspirational name) while spacecraft have names that evoke exploration and aspiration (such as the space shuttles *Atlantis* and *Endeavor*). At the current rate it won't be long until someone breaks a champagne bottle across a bow and declares, "I christen thee the USS *Acting Associate Deputy Administrator*." (NASA budget note: the Webb Space Telescope has a marketing slogan! Check it here .)

**Obscure College Score of the Week** Carroll of Montana 27, Saint Francis of Indiana 10 (NAIA championship). Carroll quarterback Tyler Emmert won the NAIA MVP for the third consecutive year and finished with a 74-3 record as a starting quarterback in high school and college. None too shabby, Tyler. Located in Helena, Montana, Carroll of Montana calls its sports teams the Fighting Saints -- fairly close to Fighting Quakers as a nickname. Carroll's Department of Communication Studies has five "holistic goals" that include "to teach practical communication skills, such as conflict management skills and relationship-building skills, which can enhance the personal life of students for a lifetime." Huh? The *communications department* says things you can't understand.

**Next Week** There will be a column as usual, but owing to games falling on Christmas Eve and Christmas night, I will not attempt to cover the landscape with something about every contest.

## Week 15 Readers:

(Dec. 21, 2005) -- Last month, Tuesday Morning Quarterback readers crashed the website of the Edmonton Eskimos. I included links to a scantily clad Esks' cheer-babe and a studly Esks' player; male and female readers madly clicking the links exceeded Edmonton's traffic capacity. Well, yesterday, Tuesday Morning Quarterback readers crashed a *United States Navy* website. I included links to the web home of the guided-missile cruiser *Lake Champlain*. Readers en masse wanted to see what a warship website looks like; the *Lake Champlain* website was unavailable owing to traffic much of Tuesday afternoon and evening.



**Getty Images**  
The Superdome could be up and running again, but only for all the Unwanted.

I wondered where my All-Unwanted All Pros could play the first Unwanted Pro Bowl -- Las Vegas seemed a good choice, maybe topless cheerleaders could be arranged. **Mark Highum of Escanaba, Mich.**, countered that an unwanted former NFL stadium would be better: say, the Silverdome or Astrodome. **David Glickler of Kyle, Texas**, proposed Los Angeles: The city is double unwanted, having been abandoned by the Rams and Raiders. **Max Chittister of Antioch, Calif.**, suggests the game rotate annually among cities abandoned by the league: Los Angeles, Houston, Baltimore, Cleveland, Oakland and St. Louis. **Diana Morgenstern of Highgate, England**, says there can be only one place to hold my Unwanted Pro Bowl -- the Superdome in New Orleans.

Last week, yours truly denounced the National Holiday Tree euphemism, saying, "It's a fracking Christmas tree, call it what it is." For those who didn't know, "frack" is the imaginary expletive that outer-space fighter pilots use on *Battlestar Galactica*. **Dace Campbell of Seattle** asks, "Are you suggesting Christmas is an interstellar holiday?" Well, bells are ringing all across the local star cluster! Probably there is excess materialism about Christmas everywhere in the galaxy -- my guess is the silicon-based pod children of Aldebaran 6 rip open dozens of presents in mere minutes and then say, "Is that all?" Many including **Margo Childress of Key West, Fla.**, flagged me that Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert just ordered the name of the national seasonal fir changed to the Capitol Christmas Tree. Fracking right on! *Battlestar* note: In the goofy 1970s version of the show, fighter pilots had two imaginary expletives -- frack and "feldercarb." Yours truly sometimes mumbles "Aw, feldercarb." In the new dark, depressing version of *Galactica* running on Sci Fi Channel, the pilots say frack but never feldercarb. Presumably this is because frack sounds naughty while feldercarb sounds silly. But who can say what might constitute good taste on the opposite side of the galaxy?

Yours truly contended that because Christmas trees have nothing per se to do with Christianity, there is no Establishment Clause problem with having them on public property. **Barry Dredze of Winfield, Ill., countered**, "Even if the tree, Rudolph and so on are secular in origin, nevertheless these elements are recognizable components of the quite undeniably Christian holiday of Christmas. Lack of scriptural reference often has little to do with the cultural affirmations of a particular observation. Take Chanukah, for example. There is no canonized (Hebrew) scriptural reference to candles, latkes, dreidels or even Chanukah itself. The closest we get is the Book of Maccabees in the apocryphal literature and some Talmudic arguments over the method of lighting the traditional candelabra. Nevertheless, Chanukah remains a quite undeniably Jewish festival. I don't care if there's a Christmas tree on the White House lawn, but don't go pretending that some Americans' concerns about official religious triumphalism can be dismissed simply because things that have come to be viewed as religious symbols don't actually arise from theology." Point taken.



Where is the Terminator when you actually need him?

has as many yards (352) as Arizona's No. 1 rusher, Marcel Shipp.

In the *Terminator* movies, the Department of Defense builds a computer network that becomes self-aware and then seizes control of the Pentagon's weapons. Nutty sci-fi? **Mike Enos** notes that Pentagon already is working on a fully networked [Global Information Grid](#). **Todd Bush** notes the Air Force is working on a rifle-sized laser that could incapacitate without killing, by [temporarily blinding an aggressor](#). Bush writes, "It seems 'phasers on stun' may not be that far off."

Stats that must mean something: **Rohit Venkatasubban of Lawrence, Kan.**, notes the Dallas offensive line gave up as many sacks (seven) as the team scored points. **Michael Bauer of Fort White, Fla.**, notes the average score of the last four Monday night games is 38-7 -- blowout city. **Christian Herrera of Managua, Nicaragua**, notes that TTN (Tiki Barber, The Toast of New York) gained more yards from scrimmage in Week 15 than eight entire teams -- Atlanta, Buffalo, Chicago, Dallas, Minnesota, Philadelphia, Tampa Bay and San Francisco.

**Justin Brangman of Bermuda** notes that Atlanta's No. 3 rusher, T.J. Duckett, has as many yards

The Texans and Niners are bowl eligible for the Bush Bowl -- the season-finale Houston at San Francisco game that may decide who gets Reggie Bush. This contest, expected to be one of the all-time woofers, may instead draw national attention and even be a network television game! **Adam Taxin of Philadelphia** points out in haiku that since the Niners have a tailback named Frank Gore,

Sports apes politics?

If Moo Cows beat Squared Sevens,

Bush gets role Gore seeks.

-- Adam Taxin, Philadelphia



Watch out! This Bush (Reggie) and Gore (Frank) could form a deadly combination as running mates.

teams. Maybe they're losing teams because they punt when trailing! But do winning teams go for it on fourth down? They do. **Adam Moyer of State College, Pa.**, notes Cincinnati has gone for it on fourth-and-1 in opposition territory four times this season. San Diego went on fourth down four times in the Miami game alone -- and though the Chargers lost that game, they converted three of four fourth-down tries, establishing the winning spirit that served them so well against Indianapolis. The Colts, the league's best team, have gone for it 10 times on fourth down this season; the Niners, the league's worst team, have tried just eight fourth-down conversions.

Last week, I noted the wacky Emirates Palace Hotel of Abu Dhabi, whose rooms start at \$525 a night. **Herb Vogel of Washington, D.C.**, had a look-see at Emirates Palace website and discovered this claim making the hotel 94 years ahead of its time: "The Palace boasts 302 superior rooms and 92 magnificent suites each combining the ultimate in luxury with 22nd century technology." **Matthew Saal of Austin, Texas**, counters with the even-more-swank [Burj al Arab of Dubai](#), whose rooms start at about \$1,200 a night and all include "luxurious bathroom with Jacuzzi and full-size Hermes amenities." Much of the [hotel is finished in 24-carat gold](#) and one of the restaurants, the Al Mahara, gives diners the impression of being underwater: "Entry is aboard a three-minute simulated submarine experience."

Finally, **Tim Susman of Mountain View, Calif.**, asks, "Has TMQ ever written 'game over' in his notebook and then had to scratch it out?" No; every time I've ever written this, the game has, in fact, been over. But if I ever do write "game over" and it turns out the game is not over, I promise I won't tell you.

## Why clean air is an environmental menace, and Mallo Cups come back!

*By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com*

(Dec. 27, 2005) -- All year Tuesday Morning Quarterback has been crusading against fraidy-cat kicking, especially the supposedly "safe" punt that actually makes the team more likely to lose -- see last week's column for copious examples. But the big question of Christmas weekend, and you're forgiven if you were wrapping presents and missed it, involves a punt that backfired. And in this case, the punt was correct.

Atlanta-Tampa had gone to overtime. The Falcons had the ball, fourth-and-2, on their 24 with 1:08 remaining in the fifth quarter, the Bucs holding one timeout. During the regular season, a game that is tied after five quarters ends as a tie. Jim Mora of Atlanta ordered a punt: that is, he played for the tie. City of Tampa got a long return and kicked a field goal as time expired, eliminating the Falcons from the playoffs. Since then, the sports-yak world has been saying Mora the Younger fouled up royally because a tie would have eliminated the Falcons from the postseason anyway. But it wouldn't have! Had that game ended tied, the Falcons would now be 8-6-1, with a best finish of 9-6-1. If the Cowboys and Redskins both lose this weekend to finish 9-7, Atlanta at 9-6-1 would best those marks and the Falcons would enter the playoffs. True, an Atlanta victory against Tampa would have given the Falcons a better shot at the postseason: but actually only slightly better, owing to an array of tiebreakers we can skip here. Mora the Younger was faced with the choice of going on fourth-and-2 deep in his own territory, knowing a failure would all but hand the game to Tampa and thus eliminate Atlanta; or playing for the tie and hoping a couple other teams lost the following weekend. Mora did the smart thing by punting, and it's time the sports-yak world noticed. As for Tampa's long punt return, well, I've reviewed the tape and have not noticed Mora in cleats on the field during that play.

In other football news, Megan Manfull of the *Houston Chronicle* reported that in the first half of the Texans-Cardinals game two weeks ago, David Carr was given the green light to call his own plays; the result was a 24-point half for a team that averages 16 points per game. In the second half, Houston coaches took over the playcalling; the result was six points. So naturally Houston learned its lesson and let Carr call his own plays this weekend, right? Coaches called the plays for the Moo Cows, Manfull reports. Houston scored 20 points, about its average.

Have you ever seen a better argument for Tuesday Morning Quarterback's longstanding contention that many NFL quarterbacks should call their own plays? Jim Kelly was the last NFL quarterback to call his own plays on a regular basis, and that worked out pretty well as you may recall. In the last decade, playcalling by quarterbacks has become almost unknown. Peyton Manning has authority to call plays at the line: which seems to work out pretty well. On a *Monday Night Football* game in 2000, the Jets trailed the Dolphins 30-7 at the end of the third quarter and Jersey/B coaches, despairing, gave Vinny Testaverde authority to call his own plays. That seemed to work out pretty well as the Jets stormed back to win 40-37. Rookie quarterbacks shouldn't call their own plays, and playcalling from the sidelines is often effective. (New England, Seattle etc.) But in the contemporary NFL, coaches seem to insist on always calling the plays because this makes the coaches seem important. Winning is what's important. Often having the quarterback call the plays is good for the W-L ratio, because it gets the offense into a rhythm and keeps offensive personnel charged up.

Houston's loss means the season-finale Texans at Niners game, previously expected to be one of the all-time woofers, may determine who gets the No. 1 choice in the draft and hence the chance to nab Reggie Bush. When it looked like the Houston-San Francisco game would decide the first choice straight up, James Brown of Fox cleverly suggested NFL bylaws be amended for this one weekend to specify that the winner of that game, not the loser, receive the first choice. Now the picture is muddled. If 2-13 Houston falls to 3-12 San Francisco, the Texans get the first pick. Should Houston win, the issue becomes complex. San Francisco and Houston would be tied at 3-13: but Green Bay, Jersey/B and New Orleans can all also finish 3-13. If multiple teams finish 3-13, draft order will be decided by the strength-of-schedule

barometer, which is the cumulative winning percentage of opponents played. Elias Sports Bureau calculates that New Orleans appears to have a slight edge for worst strength-of-schedule if there is a five-way 3-13 tie, so the Saints might end up with the first selection. But cumulative winning percentage of opponents changes weekly, so we may not know until Sunday night who lands the first draft pick. What this all means is that there is tremendous drama in the final weekend of the season -- but drama at the bottom of the standings, not the top as per usual. Fans in cities across the country will be obsessively following the Houston-San Francisco score, the New Orleans-Tampa score, the Bills-Jets score. Games that would be expected to hold scant interest may instead be fantasy blockbusters. Only in America!

Because this weekend's games were played on Christmas Eve and Christmas, today's column does not contain quite the usual avalanche of examples from the weekend's action. It does contain a lot about candy. Christmas always turns my thoughts nostalgically toward candy: see some confectionary nostalgia below. See below as well my thoughts on the final ABC *Monday Night Football* game.

And Happy New Year to all football enthusiasts, space aliens and mega-babes. Champagne corks are popping all across the local star cluster!

**Stats of the Week** Jacksonville is 7-1 when Ernest Wilford scores a touchdown.

**Stats of the Week No. 2** Last year Michael Vick made the Pro Bowl despite being 21st in passer rating; this year he made the Pro Bowl despite being 24th.

**Stats of the Week No. 3** In the Atlanta-Tampa game, the teams combined to face fourth-and-25, fourth-and-18, fourth-and-15, fourth-and-14 and fourth-and-11.

**Stats of the Week No. 4** In the Washington-Jersey/A game, three players threw touchdown passes for the Redskins (Mark Brunell, Clinton Portis and Patrick Ramsey) while two players threw touchdown passes for the Giants (Eli Manning and Brunell).

**Stats of the Week No. 5** Shaun Alexander has more touchdowns than nine entire teams: Arizona, Baltimore, Buffalo, Cleveland, Detroit, Houston, Jersey/B, New Orleans and San Francisco.

**Stats of the Week No. 6** Arizona leads the league in something! Two-point conversions.

**Stats of the Week No. 7** Eric Moulds has 19 receptions in the two games since returning from his suspension.

**Stats of the Week No. 8** First overall draft pick Alex Smith still has 10 interceptions and no touchdown passes.

**Stats of the Week No. 9** Kansas City has won 18 consecutive home games in December.

**Stats of the Week No. 10** This is not a misprint: the maligned Kansas City defense held a good team, San Diego, to 233 yards and one score in a big game.

**Cheerleader of the Week** Jenny of the Carolina Panthers' Top Cats. Jenny holds a bachelor's in mechanical engineering from Clemson University and, when she isn't flouncing, works as a mechanical engineer. Maybe she could have a quick look at the drawings for refurbishing the Superdome!

**Sweet Player of the Week** In case you missed it because you were wrapping presents, 43-year-old Ray Brown started at guard for the Washington Redskins on Saturday and played a terrific game as Clinton Portis ran for 108 yards and 'Skins quarterbacks were sacked only once. Graying geezers have kicked in NFL games before, but has anyone older ever started on the line?

**Sweet Player of the Week No. 2** When was the last time a linebacker caught two touchdown passes in

the same game? New England had the ball on the Jersey/B 1 and then on the Jersey/B 2; both times Vrabel reported eligible and lined up left as an extra tight end, then ran a crossing pattern right at the back of the end zone, touchdown. Both times the Jets acted surprised, though Vrabel scored on this pattern earlier in the year, and also ran a crossing pattern right in a goal-to-go situation in Week 15. Vrabel has six receptions in his career -- all six for touchdowns.

**OLs Run Wild!** While linebacker Vrabel was catching touchdown passes, offensive tackle Tom Ashworth spent most of the evening playing tight end or fullback, leading the blocking as New England surprised Jersey/B by rushing 50 times. How can Bill Belichick afford to use Ashworth, a starting-quality tackle, as an extra situation blocker? Because who-dats Brandon Gorin and Nick Kaczur are having great seasons at tackle for the defending champions. Gorin came to New England as a free agent unwanted by other teams; Kaczur, a Canadian, is a rookie late third-round draft choice, taken 100th overall last April after the glamour-boy tackles had already been nabbed. When is the sports world going to notice how well Kaczur is performing at left tackle for the Flying Elvii? And how is it that while other teams spend megabucks and high picks on offensive linemen yet still have terrible blocking, the Patriots continue to line up unknowns on their offensive line and nobody gets anywhere near Tom Brady. Bet you can't even name New England's offensive line coach.

**Best Pair of Drives** Trailing 24-17, City of Tampa took possession on its 35 with 4:10 remaining and staged an 11-play, four-rush drive that ended with the tying touchdown on fourth-and-1 from the Falcons' 6 with 31 ticks left in regulation. In overtime, the Bucs staged a five-play all-passing drive that resulted in the winning field goal, with 19 seconds remaining before the contest would have been declared a tie.

**Best Purist Drive** Trailing St. Louis 20-17, San Francisco took possession on its 25 with 9:11 remaining. The Squared Sevens ran on eight out of nine snaps on the drive, scoring the winning six.

**So Larry, You Drank So Much of the Exquisite Rare Whiskey That You Can't Remember How It Tasted?** Recently, a British businessman paid £32,000 -- about \$58,000 at the time -- for a bottle of Dalmore 62, a rare Scotch that dates to 1868 and is considered the world's finest whiskey. The businessman and a friend proceeded to drink the entire contents at a hotel bar, taking along the empty bottle as a memento.

**Best Blocks** Shaun Alexander is leading the league in rushing and in touchdowns, and in my experience, no running back has ever blocked for himself. Something must be going right for the Blue Men Group offensive line. Indianapolis leading 3-0 on Christmas Eve, Shaun Alexander ran left two yards into the end zone untouched by human hands as left guard Steve Hutchinson and left tackle Walter Jones knocked their men backwards onto their keisters. How many untouched touchdown runs does Alexander have this season? If anyone wants to review the films and let me know, use the link at Reader Animadversion. Warning: this will take a while as there are 27 Alexander touchdowns to review.

**The Apartment Has a Lovely View of the Torture Chamber, and If You Sign the Lease Today, We Throw In a Designer Straight Jacket** The Danvers State Insane Asylum in Massachusetts -- often considered the institutional embodiment of the mistreatment of the mentally ill and, since it closed in 1992, used for filming horror movies -- has just been sold to a Virginia-based development company and will be converted into 497 high-end apartments and condos. Danvers has a chunk of prime real estate near Boston, one of the country's hottest housing markets. Apparently, deals are in the works to convert other closed asylums for the mentally ill into luxu dwellings in New York and South Carolina. In addition to apartments and condos, the Danvers project will add to the huge, creepy facility a fitness center and office park. Need a last-minute holiday present? How about *Abandoned Asylums of New England*, a picture book. Every coffee table should have a copy!

**The Menace of Clean Air** CLEANER AIR MAY SPEED GLOBAL WARMING, the *New York Times* headlined last week. Huh? The apparently nutty story reports the British technical journal *Nature* contains a study showing that air pollution prevents global warming; with air pollution declining markedly in Western nations at least, global warming would be expected to accelerate. Actually this is quite logical. Air pollution contains soot and other tiny dark particles that hang in the air and reflect sunlight back into space.

As air pollution declines and the sky becomes clearer, more sunlight reaches the ground. This suggests polluted sky would tend to cool the Earth, while clean sky would tend to allow warming. So maybe it's not such a mystery why global mean temperatures declined in the first half of the 20th century, then rose in the second half. In the first half of the 20th century, thick, dark smoke pollution from unregulated coal-burning was ubiquitous in Western nations -- London's killer smog of 1952 killed several thousand people, while a blanket of coal-burning smog killed 21 people in Dorona, Pennsylvania, in 1948. Significant areas of the planet were shrouded in pollution-caused clouds during the first half of the last century, and these clouds reflected away sunlight.

Decades of ever-more-complex pollution-control mechanisms on power plants, vehicles and industrial facilities have eliminated smoke pollution in the Western world, though this scourge continues in China and India, while greatly reducing fine soot. All forms of air pollution have declined dramatically in the United States: Overall air pollution is down 36 percent in the last 15 years alone, despite big increases in population, economic output and energy use. And despite the commonly heard political claim that George W. Bush has "rolled back" or in some way softened the Clean Air Act -- it's the reverse, Bush has issued a series of rulings making the Clean Air Act more strict -- air pollution has continued its trend of decline during the Bush presidency. (Links to the relevant trend studies are here.)

So the air is getting cleaner, which will accelerate global warming. Clean air -- it's hazardous! Talk about postmodern concepts. The new study didn't surprise me because 16 years ago yours truly wrote, for the *Los Angeles Times*, an article warning about such zany interaction of pollutants. My 1989 article noted that declining air pollution would be expected to accelerate global warming. I also noted that one reason ultraviolet radiation from stratospheric ozone depletion never caused the predicted harm is that ground-level ozone in urban smog reflected away the UV rays. But watch out, I wrote in 1989: "This means it's only safe to sunbathe in a smoggy location such as Los Angeles, not in some dangerously clean place like Hawaii." Today that zany equilibrium has shifted. Los Angeles air quality has improved very dramatically -- just one stage-one ozone alert in Los Angeles in the last six years, versus 100 or so per year during the 1970s -- while stratospheric ozone depletion is no longer a threat owing to the ban on CFCs. Anyway it sounds weird, but the fact that air quality keeps improving really is one of the reasons climate change is becoming more of a concern.

*Nature* note: This journal is generally considered the world's number-two hard-science publication, following the American journal *Science*. Surely *Nature* yields to no one when it comes to dense-ness -- the current issue contains, for example, a paper titled "Genomic Sequence of the Pathogenic and Allergenic Filamentous Fungus *Aspergillus Fumigatus* ." (The paper lists 98 authors.) Yet *Nature* also offers podcasts <http://www.nature.com/nature/podcast/index.html>. You might want to download the Christmas special podcast: "Why dancing and sex go hand-in-hand, how reindeer beat winter blues, pursuing the star of Bethlehem, wines that rock and saving the spirit of tequila."

**Manly Man Play of the Week** Leading 20-7 with 13:33 remaining, Kansas City faced fourth-and-3 on the San Diego 35 in bad weather. This is the Maroon Zone -- where a field goal may be too far but a punt would be preposterous. The Chiefs went for it; 11-yard pass to Larry Johnson. A moment later Kansas City went for it again on fourth-and-14 from the San Diego 28, incompleting. But the successful fourth-and-3 had killed enough clock to preclude a Bolts' comeback.

**Manly Man Stop of the Week** Washington 35, Jersey/A 20, the Giants faced fourth-and-6 on the Nanticokes' 26 with 10:26 remaining. The Giants do the manly man thing by going for it; six-man blitz, incompleting. I told you I loved the big blitz!

**Manly Man Lack of Punts** When complaining about coaches launching fraidy-cat punts on fourth-and-short though behind or in opposition territory, TMQ often observes, "Is there even one chance in a million Bill Belichick would have done that?" Never was this on better display than in the final ABC *Monday Night* contest. Four times New England faced fourth-and-short in Jersey/B territory, all four times Belichick went for it, converting all four. All four fourth-and-short attempts sustained drives that led to touchdowns; three of the four were straight-ahead rushes, not wacky passes. When you go on fourth-and-short in opposition territory, you keep the ball and get points; when you passively punt to the other team, all you do is help the opposition. Why is this so crystal clear to winning coaches like Belichick, yet

such a mystery to the many non-winning NFL coaches who keep ordering punts on the downhill side of the field? (Note: One of the fourth-and-short conversions came when the Jets jumped offside, though the runner made the first anyway. Belichick also ordered a fourth-and-long Maroon Zone conversion attempt that ended in a fumble.)

**Nostalgia Food of the Week** A common wistfulness is for the candy that existed in one's youth. When I wax nostalgic on this subject, I think of the old Neilsons Four Flavours bar and Bonomo's Turkish Taffy. Nostalgia for the Four Flavours betrays my beautiful Canadio-American heritage, as this candy was made by Neilson of Canada. The bar had four pockets of flavor (vanilla, chocolate, peanut butter and caramel) wrapped in chocolate. I remember passing happy summer hours in deep, fervent contemplation of what was the ideal order in which to consume the four flavours. Neilson produced many fine confections, its Jersey Milk chocolate -- made with the milk of Jersey cows -- also a nostalgia favorite. Neilson was started in 1893 as an ice-cream firm by William Neilson, who attached his family house to the large factory the firm began building in 1910 in Toronto. In 1987, Neilson, at the time a viable firm, went heavily into debt to stage a leveraged buy-out of Cadbury of Canada. The move proved a business fiasco; in 1996, Cadbury Schweppes of the United Kingdom acquired the Neilson-Cadbury enterprise and retired the Neilson brand. The Four Flavours bar passed into history.

Then there was Bonomo's Turkish Taffy. Victor Bonomo started making his taffy on Coney Island after World War II, selling Bonomo's as a low-cost alternative to the Milky Way, then the cat's meow of candy. During the peak of taffy popularity, Bonomo employed 350 people in his Coney Island candy plant, churning out as many as 100 million bars per year in chocolate, vanilla, strawberry and banana, Michael Kaufman has written. In 1980, the Bonomo firm was purchased by Tootsie Roll Industries, which in 2004 sold \$420 million worth of candy, but none of it Bonomo, having retired the product in 1989. I fondly remember, as a child, smacking a bar of Bonomo's on the table to shatter the taffy into bite-sized pieces.

Why have I told you all this? First, this is Tuesday Morning Quarterback -- I don't have to have a reason. Second, I am pleased to report that French Chew Taffy ([click on taffy](#)), sold online by the nostalgia firm Hometown Favorites, is every bit as good as Bonomo's. French Chew doesn't crack with quite the same satisfying smack, but tastes deliciously like Bonomo's; Boomers, get some today. Maybe if enough people buy French Chew, Tootsie Roll Industries will put Bonomo's back into production. For its part, Hometown Favorites is Baby Boomer throwback heaven. The company sells Chuckles, Charms, Necco wafers, Mallo Cups, Beemans gum -- a veritable candy time machine for the 1960s. This year for Christmas, we filled the kids' stockings with 1960s candy ordered from Hometown Favorites, explaining they were getting the candy that mom and dad got in their stockings as children. When the box from Hometown Favorites arrived, immediately I bit into my first Mallo Cup in 35 years. Turns out Boyer Candies, founded by Bill, Bob and Emily Boyer during the Depression as a door-to-door candy sales firm operated from the family kitchen, still makes Mallo Cups and Smoothies in Altoona, Pennsylvania. They even still have the little paper coin inside! The paper coins even still bear the cryptic instruction, STICK ON TAPE TO AVOID DELAY. Save 500 Mallo Cup points and send them to Altoona to receive a dollar bill: a transaction that was only attractive when Mallo Cups cost a dime and a first-class stamp was four cents.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again!** Vikings leading 17-10 in a game Minnesota had to win to stay alive, Baltimore faced third-and-7 on the Vikes' 47. Seven-man blitz, easy 47-yard touchdown strike to Mark Clayton. Now it's Minnesota 20, Baltimore 17, and the Ravens are in almost exactly the same down-and-distance in almost exactly the same place -- third-and-8 on the Vikings' 39. There's the snap, and you're not serious! Again the seven-man blitz, this time an easy 39-yard touchdown strike to Derrick Mason. As Tuesday Morning Quarterback has been noting this season, it's one thing to try the mega-blitz to see if it will work; quite another to call the mega-blitz again after it has already exploded in your face the first time.

Vikings note: Two weeks ago, Analyze This asked whether Mike Tice, Brad Johnson, Zygi Wilf or Ted Cottrell was most behind the team's midseason turnaround. Now we know the answer was: None of them were! Tice, Johnson, Wilf and Cottrell were the same people when the team opened 2-5 as when it went 6-0 as when it wheezed out by reverting to 0-2. During the early losing streak, Minnesota had bad luck with bouncing balls and a tough schedule; during the victory streak, the ball bounced the Vikes' way and only one opponent had a winning record; the last two weeks, the football gods have been unkind

and the opponents motivated. Of course coaching and ownership matter -- see above the example of Cottrell's calls hurting the Vikings' chances at Baltimore. But coaches and owners are not idiots in the weeks the team loses and then suddenly geniuses in the weeks the team wins. Usually they're the same people.

**Attempted Christmas Present for Browns' Fans** Trailing the Steelers 41-0 at Cleveland Browns Stadium, ball on the Pittsburgh 13 with 43 seconds remaining, Romeo Crennel called two timeouts hoping for a last-second score that would avoid a shutout.

**Steve Smith's Christmas Present for Cowboys' Fans** Dallas leading Carolina 17-13, Panthers' receiver Steve Smith lost his cool and grabbed an official. Smith was tossed, and Dallas went on to win with a touchdown with 29 seconds to play.

**Really Not a Christmas Present for Raiders' Fans** Trailing Denver 22-0, Oakland faced fourth-and-10 on the Broncos' 25 at the start of the fourth quarter. Field goal, and great -- now we're only down by 19 points! It's one thing to make the priority avoiding a shutout when there are only seconds remaining, another thing to do this when there is still enough time to win the game.

**Christmas Present for Bills' Fans** Terence McGee returned a kickoff and an interception for touchdowns as Buffalo upset the favored Bengals in Cincinnati. On an *exclusive* basis, TMZ has learned that McGee cried "Happy Christmas to all, and to all a goodnight!" as he ran for the game-icing score with 35 seconds remaining.

**Cheer-Babe Professionalism Watch** Kickoff temperature a nippy 50 degrees on Christmas Eve, the high-aesthetic-appeal Redskins Cheerleaders came out in barely there two-piece Santa outfits that definitely favored naughty over nice. Needless the say, the football gods rewarded Washington with victory.

**Trust Us, We're Experts** TMZ uses Comcast broadband, and recently there appeared in my Comcast email box a "very brief eight-question survey" from the company. The survey contained 14 questions. When I hit "submit," my computer crashed.

**Tom Brady Also Has More Male Modeling Income Than John D. Rockefeller** According to this article by Peter Dobkin Hall of Harvard University, John D. Rockefeller, who in the late 19th century was the richest man in the world, on his 1894 federal tax returns listed precisely \$1,247,252.65 as his income. That sum equates to about \$26 million today. This year Tom Brady signed a contract that guarantees him about \$32 million. A football player signed for more than *the richest man in the world* earned about a century ago.

**Could There Be An NFL Recruiting Scandal?** Last winter free agent Troy Brown re-signed with the Patriots for less than he might have received elsewhere, but by staying in New England was able to obtain an extension of his endorsement contract with Banknorth. So overall, Brown may come out ahead by staying put -- and the football gods were pleased to see him join the ever-thinner ranks of players who spend an entire long career with the same team. The Patriots had nothing to do with Banknorth's offer to Brown, which was smart marketing for the bank -- but this does raise the question of whether the equivalent of college boosters will enter the NFL arena.

Many college scandals have turned on wealthy boosters giving prospects what the college cannot -- cars, cash and other valuables. At the NFL level handing out cash is perfectly fine, with the proviso that the salary cap imposes a limit. Suppose an NFL team was too cap-strapped to sign a desired free agent. What's to stop a local business from just coincidentally hiring that player for a lucrative endorsement deal? Or a local wealthy person who supports the team from inking the player to a personal-services agreement? The NFL has no hope of regulating private spending by companies or people with no relationship to the league, and a local business might win valuable publicity if its endorsement money persuaded a high-profile free agent to join the city's team. Just something to keep in mind.

**Was There a New England Training Room Scandal?** In my December 13th column, I supposed the real reason for the Patriots' lengthy injury list was that this woman, who is studying to be an NFL trainer, is working in the trainer's room: Patriots are faking injuries in order to hang out with her. Reader Jim Lidstone of Milledgeville, Georgia notes that New England listed 14 players on its injured report for the week of that column -- but for yesterday's Pats-Jets game, listed only two players, New England's shortest injury list of the year. Lidstone speculates, "Bill Belichick must have read TMQ, realized what was really going on, marched down to the training room and said, 'All right you guys, everybody back on the field.'"

**So There I Was in the Kalahari Bush, Confronting the Beast Itself. The Guide Ran, But I Wasn't Afraid. I Held My Breath. Slowly the Vicious Combination of Plaster of Paris and Synthetic Fur Crept Toward Me...** Want to appear to be a big-game hunter without hurting any animals -- or ever hunting? Sculptor Merikay MacKenna produces faux taxidermy game trophies. Here for example is her \$395 faux gemsbok head. The aardvark head trophy is particularly charming: Aardvark hunting requires skill and daring! Maybe someday big-game hunts will come with the disclaimer, "No animals were harmed during this hunt." MacKenna also makes a unicorn trophy head. Yours truly is tempted to get one and hang it over the fireplace just so visitors will say, "Gee, did you really have to shoot that poor unicorn?"

**Britney, Love the Navel Makeup. Tell Us About Your Latest Video. Wait, What's That Noise, Did Something Happen on the Field?** So ABC's run of *Monday Night Football* began with a 36-21 Jets loss and ended 555 games later with a 36-21 Jets loss. Though there were many memorable moments in those years, TMQ joins Paul Zimmerman of *Sports Illustrated* in being glad the ABC suzerainty of Monday Night Football has concluded. If you approach NFL games, broadcasts and licensing as products, there is only one NFL product whose popularity has been declining, and that is ABC's *Monday Night Football*. Why? Tuesday Morning Quarterback thinks because the network tried to present Monday Night as a prime-time celebrity-fest rather than as a football game -- and football games are more interesting than celebrities.

When *Monday Night Football* ratings began to decline some years ago, ABC reacted by adding more graphics, flash and celebs while focusing ever-more of the broadcast on the booth crew, not the game. But maybe ratings were declining *because* ABC kept adding more graphics, flash and celebs and focusing ever-more of the broadcast on the booth crew, not the game. During the 1970s, the Monday Night formula of loudmouthed booth crew and celebs dropping by drew attention because it was different. Then it ceased to be different and became simply tedious. Celebs as a group are fundamentally airheads, and it grew ever-more annoying that ABC would cut away from the action to gush over some airhead who was obviously there solely for self-promotion and had nothing to say. Meanwhile loudmouthed booth types wear out their welcomes in a way that typical announcers do not: and though some *Monday Night Football* announcers did well, mainly they wore out their welcomes. Viewers began to watch *Monday Night Football* with the sound off, to escape the grating self-praise of the booth crew. Endlessly ABC tried to shift the focus away from the field and into the booth. This was a formula for failing ratings -- even as all other NFL broadcasts, including ABC's own postseason coverage, did well with viewers by focusing on the field.

The final ABC Monday Night broadcast was like a send-up of everything that went wrong with this vehicle. Endlessly the focus was shifted from the field to celebrity clips and features about former announcers. ABC seemed to decide in advance that Jets-Pats would be a lousy game, and failed to notice that instead it was a really interesting game, with the defending champions playing starters throughout, seeking the third seed. Linebackers were running pass patterns, but the network kept insisting on shifting the attention to 1970s fashion nostalgia. At one point Al Michaels, normally a skilled announcer, became so wrapped up in the booth-centric self-focus of the broadcast that he got confused about which teams were on the field, praising Bill Belichick for a defensive move when it was the Jets playing defense. (Hint: the Jets wear green.) But to know who was on defense, you would have had to have been watching the game! Check out ABC's upcoming wild-card and Super Bowl coverage and you will not encounter this problem; the focus will be where it should be, on the contest itself. And ESPN, as you don the Monday Night Football mantle, please don't repeat the errors of your predecessor. We watch for the

football, not the announcers.

**Just a Minute, I'm Re-Booting My Toothbrush** Oral-B has introduced the first computer-chip-equipped toothbrush. How long until one of these things merges with the new five-blade computer-chip-equipped Gillette razor and attempts to take over the world? No need to settle for a computer-equipped toothbrush, though, when you can power-wash your teeth.

**Put Down the Sandwich, Kid. That's a Bootleg PB&J. We're Taking You In** As reported by Sara Munoz of the *Wall Street Journal*, federal patent number 6,004,596 was granted to J.M. Smucker Co. for -- a peanut-butter-and-jelly sandwich recipe.

**Obscure College Score of the Week** 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. Annually when small colleges turn off their lights for the season, this column says this: "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 boys try to get girls' cell phone numbers and car alarms go off in the parking lot." I'll be saying that annually so long as I write this column. (Note the editors in the year 2035, make it "while boys try to get girls' neocortex tightbeam codes and fusion-car malfunctions create nanometer singularities in the parking lot.")

**Next Week** There won't be a Reader Animadversion tomorrow. It will resume next week.

## Five thousand thanks to Primetime, and Scooter McLean would have gone for two!

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Jan. 3, 2005) -- While loads of attention was paid to the final ABC broadcast of *Monday Night Football*, a much more important era ended Sunday night -- the final Sunday night ESPN broadcast of *NFL Primetime*, hands-down the best show of its kind in the business. *Primetime* had a huge impact on the expanding popularity of professional football, and also on how viewers approach and appreciate the sport; plus, during much of its 19-year run was the highest-rated cable television show. *Primetime* has been far more important to the evolution of the NFL than *Monday Night Football*, yet folded its tent and stole off into the desert with barely a mention. And unlike the gooey three-hour self-congratulation festival that ended ABC's Monday night reign, *Primetime's* signoff was brief, dignified and classy. What a blunder! The fact that the signoff was classy is probably why the media ignored it.

The same new contracts that move *Monday Night Football* to ESPN next season also move the Sunday evening package from ESPN to NBC. The peacock network gets an exclusive on highlight shows from the end of the doubleheader game Sunday afternoon until midnight Sunday. So *Primetime* might still run at 12:01 a.m. Monday, or prior to the new ESPN Monday night telecast. But its status as the go-to show every Sunday of the NFL season is now concluded. Even if *Primetime* is still around on Monday next fall, it will no longer possess the immediacy of the old show.

And what a fabulous show *Primetime* was! For 19 years it offered highlights and intelligent commentary on every NFL contest, roughly 5,000 games in that span. *Primetime* was all football, no filler -- no celebrities, no dancing bears. *Primetime* altered America's approach to football by raising the bar for understanding the game. In the *Primetime* reality every fan was expected to review plays and discuss tactics: which is now the standard among millions of web-armed football fanatics. *Primetime* didn't show only touchdowns, it showed failed runs, incompletions, players going the wrong way. The format devoted about three minutes to each game, long in television terms. The *Primetime* production staff did a top-notch job of picking out the interesting plays in every game, sometimes airing edited highlights only minutes after the late games concluded. At around 8 p.m. Eastern on the final show, not long after Doug Flutie's wacky drop kick, *Primetime* aired the tape of Scooter McLean drop-kicking in 1941. My guess is the *Primetime* staff did not report to work on New Year's morning expecting someone to run through the halls yelling, "We need that 1941 reel of the last drop kick!" There it was, cued up.

Telling about the success of *Primetime* is that its core figures, Chris Berman and Tom Jackson, were with the show all 19 years, appearing in around 400 broadcasts. Many sportscasters wear out their welcomes -- significantly, ABC was never able to assemble a *Monday Night Football* booth ensemble that didn't wear out its welcome. On Sunday when I tuned in *Primetime* for about the 400th time, it was just as good to see Berman and Jackson's faces as it had been the first time two decades ago. Sure, Berman said "he -- could -- go -- all -- the -- way" too often, and the set for the final seasons looked like a computer reboot error. But this show was just plain good. Please NBC, now that the Sunday highlights slot is yours, don't give us celebs yakking and a few quick shots of touchdowns. Make your show hardcore football, which was the key to the popularity of *Primetime*.

One more valentine: the signoff was short, sweet and elegant. ESPN showed tape of the first *Primetime* 19 years ago, when Berman and Jackson were notably thinner. Nodding to sportscasting tradition, Berman began that first broadcast by saying "Hello again everyone," though there had been no previous episode. After the 1987 clip the two announcers thanked each other and called each other friend; they shook hands and smiled and the show was over. No self-obsession, nothing misty: a black guy and a white guy, a washed-up jock and a sports nerd, shaking hands to end 19 years lost together in the NFL parallel universe. It was a really nice moment, and made me wish those 19 years were just starting, not concluding.

Wham! That's the sound of another door slamming behind another NFL coach. Coaches and front-office

types are being fired willy-nilly this week. Don't NFL owners realize that for every winning team there must be a losing team? But actually there is business logic to the annual fire-a-rama that concludes the NFL season. At the major college level, almost every football-factory team makes a bowl game, meaning supporters are automatically psyched about next year and will snap up tickets. At the NFL level only 12 of 32 teams advance to the postseason, meaning 20 unhappy sets of fans. Bummer; more specifically, a bummer that might discourage the customers from including expensive tickets in their annual household or corporate budgets. By cashiering the head coach, NFL teams create optimism that next year will be significantly better than this year: and that's important for the annual offseason push to sell tickets and luxury boxes.

In other football news, Atlanta, Cincinnati and Tennessee rolled over and played dead so thoroughly in Week 17 that spectators should have thrown dog biscuits. See my thoughts below. And Flutie converted the first drop kick in 64 years. This means the NFL is on a pace for another drop kick in 2070. The question is -- will Flutie kick that one, too?

**Stats of the Week:** At 5:44 Eastern on Jan. 1, 2006, first overall draft pick Alex Smith threw his first NFL touchdown pass.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** At 3:44 Eastern on Jan. 1, 2006, Patriots backup quarterback Matt Cassel threw his first touchdown pass *since 1999*.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** LaDainian Tomlinson passed Lance Alworth to become San Diego's all-time leader for yardage -- and Tomlinson is only in his fifth year.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** Jacksonville is 8-1 when Ernest Wilford scores a touchdown.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** Eric Moulds had 27 receptions in the three games after returning from his suspension.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** Larry Johnson of Kansas City had 164 more yards rushing than the entire Cincinnati team.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** Tiki Barber had 178 more yards rushing than the entire Oakland team.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** Shaun Alexander has 100 touchdowns in 96 NFL games.

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** Green Bay won a game by 49 points and lost a game by 45 points. Noted by numerous readers, including Paige Norman of Evanston, Ill.

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** Philadelphia won a game by 39 points and lost a game by 42 points.

**Stats of the Week No. 11:** Washington won a game by 35 points and lost a game by 36 points -- in consecutive weeks.

**Stats of the Week No. 12:** Arizona finished first in passing and last in rushing.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Jim Hickey of Andover, Mass., nominates Tiffany of the Raiderettes, a former Miss Modesto Hawaiian Tropic. According to her team bio, Tiffany holds a green belt in kenpo karate, got her degree in criminal justice and "her goal is to become a correctional officer." Tiffany, cuff me!

**Sweet Play of the Week:** The entire Giants offensive line, but especially Luke Petitgout and David Diehl, got great blocks as TONY (Tiki Barber, The Toast of New York) ran 95 yards for a touchdown against Oakland. On the run, Barber was brushed by a Raider, but no one ever put a solid hit on him. It's pretty fun to run 95 yards when everyone in front of you has already been knocked to the ground. Amani

Toomer and Plaxico Burress got downfield blocks *way* down the field. Burress, especially, has done well this season with downfield blocking. Burress sounded a bit like a crybaby after last year's New England-Pittsburgh AFC Championship Game, when the Steelers lost and Burress complained about why the ball didn't come to him more. After Burress has looked so very good this season, including his 78-yard touchdown catch, TMQ wonders: Last year at Pittsburgh, why didn't the ball go to him more?

**Sweet Defensive Play:** City of Tampa fans were getting nervous as the visiting United States Saints, expected to roll over and wag their tails, instead were threatening to deny the Bucs the NFC South title. Tampa leading 20-13 late in the fourth quarter, the Saints had fourth-and-3 on the Bucs 43. Tampa brought seven defenders to the line as if to mega-blitz, as many NFL teams do in this situation; Saints backup quarterback Todd Bouman checked off to a slant; at the snap all apparent blitzers dropped into coverage, four rushing. Expecting a slant man to be open because of the blitz, Bouman looked both ways and seemed dazed to see everyone guarded; he held the ball, sack, fumble, Tampa score and the Bucs never looked back. NFL teams are conditioned to check off to the slant in the face of a big blitz, so showing the big blitz and then dropping into coverage can confuse the heck out of quarterbacks.

**Manly Man Play of the Week:** If you want to win, this column preaches to not punt the ball away on fourth-and-short. Jersey/B leading Buffalo 17-16 in the third quarter, the Jets faced fourth-and-1 on their own 33. Herm Edwards handled it like a manly man, and the run gave Jersey/B a first down. Two snaps later the other shoe fell for Buffalo, a 45-yard completion that set up a Jets score.

**Sour Play of the Week:** It's Giants 30, Raiders 21, Oakland facing fourth-and-goal on the Jersey/A 1 with 2:58 remaining. The call was quarterback sneak, and Kerry Collins was stopped shy. Three Raiders didn't hit anyone -- they just stood there. Of course Oakland failed: for this critical snap, it was eight-on-11. (The NFL.com video section has an excellent view of this play. Go to the highlights tab and click the Raiders-Giants score.)

**Sour Play of the Week No. 2:** Baltimore leading Cleveland 13-6 in the third quarter, Ed Reed of the Ravens intercepted, then lateraled to Samari Rolle, who lateraled to Chad Williams, who fumbled attempting a third lateral. The Nevermores ended up with the ball and kicked a field goal for a 16-6 margin, but you could see the Browns get riled up by this play -- Baltimore was acting as though it was toying with Cleveland. When the clock reached all naughts, the scoreboard read Cleveland 20, Baltimore 16.

**Lucy Pulls the Football from Arizona Fans Again:** Trailing Indianapolis 17-13 with 7:28 remaining, the Arizona of Mexico Cardinals staged a 17-play drive that ended on a fourth-down game-winning touchdown with 13 seconds left -- only to see the review assistant overturn the call and void the score.

**Sweet 'N' Sour Team:** Mark Brunell sure looked like his old self by firing beautiful, deep passes to Santana Moss and James Trash, plus running on third-and-8 for a late conversion that nearly iced the Skins' playoff invitation. But Washington keeps rolling Brunell left (he's left-handed) on short-yardage downs, and it's fooling no one. Philadelphia leading 17-7, Washington had third-and-1 on the Nesharim 6; Brunell play faked and rolled left, fooling no one, incompleting. Philadelphia leading 20-17, Washington facing third-and-3, Brunell play faked and rolled left, fooling no one, incompleting. Washington leading 24-20 with 3:25 remaining, facing third-and-3, Brunell play faked and rolled left, fooling no one, incompleting. All three plays were designed to go to H-back Chris Cooley, and all three times Eagles defenders, knowing what was coming, swarmed over Cooley. Memo to Redskins coaches: *Everybody in the free world expects Brunell to play fake and roll left on short-yardage downs.* This was the single most predictable action in the NFL this season, and Washington needs to fix the problem before the playoffs commence.

The second-most predictable action this season was Buffalo play faking then throwing to blocking back Daimon Shelton in the flat on short-yardage downs. Shelton is a hard working blocker, but possibly the slowest person ever to line up in an NFL backfield. (William "The Refrigerator" Perry was actually surprisingly quick for his size.) In three games before Week 17, Buffalo failed at the goal line by trying to throw to Shelton in the flat on third-and-goal; each time the defense appeared to have been notified by mail where the ball was going. Sunday, the Bills facing third-and-goal at the Jets 4, Buffalo play faked and

threw into the flat for Shelton, who was immediately stopped for a 1-yard gain, the Bills settling for a field goal in a game they would ultimately lose by four points. So many Jersey/B defenders were around Shelton on this play it was as if there had been a bright flashing arrow pointing to him at the snap. Though the early call to Shelton meant the predictable play had backfired four times in a row, later in the game Mike Mularkey called it again! Interception returned for a touchdown.

**Choo Choo!:** Every year my American Flyer train from boyhood chugs around our Christmas tree. The custom of a toy train circling the tree doesn't make much sense -- what have trains to do with trees? -- yet is one of my favorite aspects of Christmas. As a boy I had a decent train set but intensely envied one friend with the much-higher-status "layout" trains running through model towns. (My prized train possession was an American Flyer oil drum loader accessory; a little man would drive an oil drum across a platform and drop it into a gondola car. Sadly mine got lost in a move and so far I've failed, scouring eBay and similar sites, to find a 1960s-original replacement.) When my wife and I started having children, I thought, "Together with them I'll build the train layout I dreamt of as a kid." What an idiot I was! None of my kids had any interest in train sets, as few contemporary children seem to. And such a shame since, if I'd spent on trains all the money I've spent on electronics and video games for the kids, by now we'd have -- maybe half a layout.

Toy trains are enjoying a renaissance, but it's middle-aged men reliving their boyhoods, not kids, driving the market. A *Washington Post* story by Linton Weeks on model-train marketing -- the typical buyer is a 52-year-old male. Lionel has come back into existence; its product quality is way up over the 1960s, and next month the company will introduce its first all-new train in 50 years, an Acela model that tilts as it transits curves, just like the real Acela. Maybe the brakes will fail just like the real Acela! Lionel now owns American Flyer, once its bitter competitor, and makes some American Flyer-branded products, but it's just not the same if it doesn't come from the Gilbert Hall of Science. (A.C. Gilbert, the greatest of all toymakers -- creator of the Erector Set and American Flyer -- once had a toy store on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan called the Gilbert Hall of Science.) The hot toy trains of the moment are made by MTH Electric of Columbia, Md. MTH trains have excellent quality, plus the company has brought digital electronics to the toy train. MTH locomotives and operating cars can be purchased with wireless control, allowing features to be remotely operated. In 1960s-style layouts, the only way to make a train speed up or slow down was to vary the current in the track. That meant arrays of transformers, plus all locomotives and operating cars on the same track would do the same thing as current varied. Wireless control allows better management of train movement and lighting effects: it's a very cool new feature. Gawk at MTH products and you can easily imagine sinking \$5,000 into the layout you dreamed of in childhood.

**Somewhere Tice Is Drinking a Duff Beer:** Mike Tice may today be filling out online job applications, but he at least departed with a win. The Vikings leading 10-3, Chicago went for it on fourth-and-1 at the Minnesota 36 with 1:56 remaining in the first half. The Vikings front seven held. Then Minnesota staged a snappy 10-play drive that resulted in a touchdown with seven seconds showing. This was the way Vikes fans thought the whole year would be.

**Please Mr. Newsome Sir, Now Can I Have That Raise?** Here's the cleverest end-zone celebration in some time. Adalius Thomas of Baltimore scored against the Browns at Cleveland. Thomas ran over to a banner that shows a larger-than-life figure of Browns all-time leading receiver Ozzie Newsome, and politely kissed the Newsome figure's behind. Ozzie Newsom is now general manager of the Baltimore Ravens.

**Easy -- Just Check the Average American Waistline:** DEFINITION OF INFINITY EXPANDS FOR SCIENTISTS: Recent headline from the *Wall Street Journal*. Infinity means "without limits." How can something that has no limits expand?

**Who Are These Guys?** Five players, including Matt Mauck and Quinn Gray, attempted passes in the Jacksonville-Tennessee collision. Vernand Morency started at tailback for the Texans. Brooks Bollinger faked to Cedric Houston then threw deep to Jerricho Cotchery. Keyshawn Johnson of Dallas fumbled when hit by DeJaun Groce of St. Louis; Drew Wahlroos dove for the ball, but O.J. Atogwe recovered. Did the 2006 preseason start early?

**The CEOs Already Knew What "Inept" Means:** Merriam-Webster's online dictionary announced the most-looked-up word of 2005 was "integrity." Corporate CEOs across the country must have been checking the definition, hoping for loopholes. The remainder of Merriam-Webster's top 10 looked-up words of 2005 were, in order: refugee, contempt, filibuster, insipid, tsunami, pandemic, conclave, levee and inept. TMQ offers a newspaper headline composed entirely of the most-looked-up words of 2005. In newspaper fashion, I even misuse "levee" as a verb: INSIPID CONCLAVE OF TSUNAMI PANDEMIC REFUGEES LEVEES INEPT FILIBUSTER IN CONTEMPT FOR INTEGRITY.

**New Year's Gift for Kansas City, the Networks:** "Don't take Plummer out!" they were screaming in Kansas City. The dynamic of Saturday's Denver-San Diego game was that if the Bolts won, the Chiefs would be eliminated and Pittsburgh gets the sixth AFC wild card, finalizing the AFC field. If Denver won, the Steelers and Chiefs would determine the sixth spot with their play. Thus Kansas City badly wanted Denver to win, and Kansas City fans rooting for the Broncos is a phenomenon not often observed. Network executives wanted a Denver victory, too, because if San Diego won and the AFC playoff card locked up, then the Cincinnati-Kansas City and Pittsburgh-Detroit games became ho-hum; whereas if Denver won, Sunday's Pittsburgh and Kansas City contests would be played with the postseason on the line. So when Denver punted on fourth-and-1 from midfield in the first half, Chiefs fans and network executives were screaming "Go for it! Go for it!" When Denver coaches twice called the safety blitz with San Diego near its goal line, leading to a safety and a fumble, Chiefs fans and network executives were screaming "Blitz more! Blitz more!" When Marty Schottenheimer ordered a punt on fourth-and-3 with 3:53 remaining and San Diego trailing 23-7, every Pittsburgh fan exclaimed, *Aaaaaiiiiiiiyyyyyyyyeeee!*

**No New Year's Day Gift for Kansas City:** Come Sunday, the Chiefs' hopes rested on a Detroit upset of Pittsburgh. Steelers leading 35-21 in the fourth quarter, the Cowardly Lions faced fourth-and-2 on their 41 -- and in trotted the punt unit. Every Kansas City fan exclaimed, *Aaaaaiiiiiiiyyyyyyyyeeee!*

**Cheer-Babe Professionalism Watch:** Why, exactly, did Dick Jauron punt when down by two touchdowns in the fourth quarter and only facing fourth-and-2? Rather than going all out for a win, Jauron was using what game theorists call the minimax strategy -- trying to minimize the maximum damage to his reputation by containing the margin of defeat. Of course, in this application the minimax approach served Jauron, not his team. And why, exactly, did Marty Schottenheimer order a punt on fourth-and-3 with 3:53 remaining and San Diego trailing by 16 points, meaning two touchdowns and two deuces tie the game? The decision made absolutely no sense, unless Schottenheimer was simply disgusted and decided to quit on the season. But there were people on the San Diego sideline who did not quit, who showed total determination, who was utterly focused on victory. The cheerleaders! Chided in this column three weeks ago for being severely overdressed on a sunny day home game that San Diego lost in an upset, the Charger Girls (their formal name, which TMQ has long maintained should be changed to Charger Women) made amends. Bolts cheerleaders came out in their bikini-like two-piece summer numbers. When it began to rain in earnest in the third quarter, and coaches for both teams donned parkas, San Diego cheerleaders stayed two-piece throughout the contest. Wet cheer-babes -- why didn't the NFL marketing department think of that years ago? The football gods must have decided in advance that San Diego would not win this game, as the home cheerleaders produced one of the most outstanding exhibitions of professionalism in NFL annals. Charger Girls, TMQ salutes you.

**In Coke's Next Commercial, Lions Meet Kangaroos:** That Coke holiday commercial was cute -- baby polar bear meets the baby penguin, then everyone has a Coke and "Little Saint Nick" plays. But it is likely no polar bear has ever laid eyes on a penguin, except in zoos. Penguins live in Antarctica, polar bears in the boreal Arctic. I realize penguins and polar bears also don't drink Coke or listen to the Beach Boys. But it would be nice if the naturalist details were correct.

**Why Are You Punting??????? (Matched Set):** Schottenheimer wasn't the only coach who quit on a game on New Year's Eve. Giants leading 20-14 in the third quarter, Oakland faced fourth-and-1 on its 15. Norv Turner sent in the punt unit. If you can't gain one single yard, why did you even bother showing up for the game! (Yes, later Oakland would fail from the Jersey/A 1.) Outraged, the football gods allowed Chad Morton of Jersey/A to return the punt to the Oakland 2, where the Giants scored to make it 27-14. Then Giants leading 30-21 with 7:22 remaining in the fourth quarter, the Raiders faced fourth-and-10 at midfield; again, Turner sent in the punt unit. You're 4-11, what have you got to lose! Go all

out to try to give the home crowd a finale win! And now you are 4-12.

**Shaun Alexander Untouched Touchdown Run of the Week:** The most potent blocking one-two punch in the league this season has been Seattle left tackle Walter Jones and left guard Steve Hutchinson. Running left behind them against Green Bay, Shaun Alexander walked into the end zone untouched yet again. Tuesday Morning Quarterback asked readers to review Shaun Alexander's many touchdowns and determine how many were untouched. Ian Simcox of Preston, United Kingdom, applied strict criteria and said seven were untouched and on six others, Alexander was only brushed by a defender. Tomás Guillén of Mexico City applied liberal criteria and maintained that on 15 touchdowns, no defender contacted Alexander enough to alter his stride. Untouched addendum: Larry Johnson of Kansas City was untouched on his 49-yard touchdown run against Cincinnati.

**You're Too Good:** On New Year's Eve when everyone else was out partying like it was 1929, the NFL.com staff posted the updated league standings table *90 seconds* after the San Diego-Denver game ended.

**Let's Turn on the Air Conditioner and Build a Fire:** TMQ lives in the suburbs and has an old refrigerator in the garage -- having a lot of worthless stuff in the garage makes me feel patriotic. If you put a refrigerator in the garage, the compressor, which is designed to work at room temperature, shuts down when the air drops near the freezing mark. Then you have the absurdity of a device designed to keep things cold becoming warm inside because it's cold outside. But never fear, suburban technology is here -- in the form of the Whirlpool garage refrigerator. The garage refrigerator contains a heater that warms the compressor when the temperature dips below freezing. Yes, a device designed to keep things cold contains a heater so it will continue to make cold air when making cold air is unnecessary because it's cold out. Only in America! When I went shopping for garage refrigerators, I knew there would be a high-tech, energy-consuming answer to my problem. Check out Whirlpool's new line of fancy garage appliances, marketed under the slogan, "It's time to rethink the garage." How long until home buyers want a garage with faux-granite countertops and a bathroom with Jacuzzi?

**The 50-Man Defense:** You're forgiven if you were not up 'till midnight Eastern watching the final play of the Michigan-Nebraska bowl game -- but the officials weren't watching, either. Nebraska led 32-28 with two seconds remaining, Michigan ball on its 36. The Wolverines threw the hook-and-ladder, and then started lateraling. There were five laterals and two fumbles on the play -- see the final entry here -- which resulted in Michigan's Tyler Ecker running down the right sideline to the Nebraska 13, where he was tackled. But the instant the clock hit all naughts the Cornhusker sideline rushed the field; at least 50 Nebraska players, coaches and team officials in sport jackets coming onto the gridiron while the play was still in progress. Two Michigan coaches also came onto the field during the play. *Why were no penalties assessed?* The NCAA rulebook -- see section FR114, 9.2, under "conduct of players" -- specifies it's a 15-yard unsportsmanlike penalty to enter the field during a live ball. That's 15 yards *per incident*, meaning about 50 unsportsmanlike conduct penalties could have been assessed against Nebraska, plus two against Michigan. The result would have been offsetting penalties and Michigan replays the down.

But TMQ thinks a different rule should have been enforced -- the "unfair acts" provision. You've probably never heard of the "unfair acts" clause -- I've watched far, far too much football and never beheld this rule invoked, but it seems tailor-made for what happened at the Alamo Bowl. See page 116 of the NCAA rulebook; Article 3.C states, "If an obviously unfair act not specifically covered by the rules occurs during the game, the referee may take any action he considers equitable, including assessing a penalty, awarding a score or suspending or forfeiting the game." For Nebraska to flood the gridiron with 50 players and team personnel during a play, with the game's outcome on the line, was an "obviously unfair act" -- it deprived Michigan runners of roughly half the field. Watch the replay; as the ball madly bounces, all the Michigan runners move toward the right, because on the left side of the field is a 50-man wall! It's pretty hard to score against a 50-man defense. Yet Michigan *almost did score against a 50-man defense*, which tells us the Wolverines might indeed have gotten a touchdown and won the game had Nebraska not committed an "obviously unfair act" by denying Michigan access to half the field. (From an officiating standpoint it makes no difference whether Nebraska intended to be unfair or simply rushed the field by accident because the Huskers thought the game was over; whether a penalty is committed intentionally

or by accident is irrelevant.)

Every coach from the high school level up knows that extra players cannot run onto the field during a play. Every coach knows that if players do run onto the field during a play, the penalty is harsh. Nebraska's *entire team* ran onto the field during the game-deciding play -- yet not a single yellow flag. That's spectacular officiating ineptitude. Maybe the Sun Belt Conference zebras working this game were anxious to head to the locker room and didn't care about doing their jobs properly. Whatever the explanation, "Sun Belt Conference officials" will now be synonymous with incompetence, while "Alamo Bowl" will now be synonymous with botched game supervision. That leaves the question of how. Had the game been adeptly officiated, the unfair acts rule would have been enforced. You can make a case the referee should have awarded Michigan a touchdown: Otherwise you're saying that whenever a runner breaks into the clear, it's legal for 50 guys to walk on the field and stand in his way. Here is what I think would have been the "equitable" resolution: The ball should have been placed at the Nebraska 13, the point the runner reached, and Michigan given one untimed down.

In case you're wondering, the NFL's equivalent provision, Rule 11.2.2.2., states, "The referee may award a touchdown when a palpably unfair act deprives the offended team of one." So if the Alamo Bowl situation happened in the NFL, officials could have awarded six points, but could not have dreamed up an "equitable" solution such as allowing one more snap. Another provision allows the commissioner to reverse the outcome of an NFL contest if a team commits an "extraordinarily unfair act" that has "a major effect on the result of the game," which pretty much was the Nebraska-Michigan situation.

**Here Boy! Here's Your Biscuit!** Atlanta, Cincinnati and Tennessee rolled over and played dead. In Cincinnati's case, did Marvin Lewis actually want to lose? It's not that the Tootsie Rolls had nothing to play for: A victory would have assured Cincinnati of the third seed, thus giving the team at least a chance of hosting the AFC Championship Game. But the third seed was likely to open against Pittsburgh while the fourth seed likely to entertain Jacksonville. Though Jax is 12-4, there's been some whispering about how good the team really is, while the Steelers are red-hot at the moment. Cincinnati ended up with the third seed anyway when New England lost, and hence opens against Pittsburgh anyway. But the Bengals looked so awful it left me wondering if they were trying to choose their first-round opponent. The defending champions, by losing, assured themselves of a Jax visit. But besides having Matt Cassel, a guy who had not thrown a touchdown pass *since high school*, at quarterback for most of the game, New England did try like crazy to win and nearly succeeded. As for Atlanta -- ye gods did the Falcons look listless. Michael Vick not only never engaged the warp drive, he didn't even use the impulse engines; during his stint on the field he seemed to be jogging like it was a walk-through. And it's not that Atlanta had nothing to play for: Victory would have allowed the Falcons to post back-to-back winning seasons for the first time in franchise history. Instead, Atlanta barely went through the motions, before the home faithful to boot. And sure the Falcons felt disappointed, but a number of disappointed teams (Buffalo, Cleveland, Green Bay, Jersey/B, Kansas City, Miami, New Orleans and Philadelphia) nevertheless went all out to preserve their pride. In the offseason, Falcons coaches and veteran leaders need to take a long look in the mirror and ask themselves if they have heart.

As for the Tennessee rollover, yours truly can only say, "Good Titans! Here's your biscuit!"

**Probably the Commercial Was Taped in June and Slated to Run the Day After the Super Bowl:** On New Year's Eve, yours truly heard a Campbell's soup radio commercial in which a simulated Philadelphia Eagles' player says to Donovan McNabb's mother, "Mama McNabb, thanks for cleaning out my locker." Hey, it's been a disappointing year -- but the Eagles were playing the next day! Don't write the epilogue when the season isn't over!

**Retired Broadcaster Watch:** In his final game, Deion Sanders carried once for no gain. Deion, I can't write as fast as I used to, either.

**Stop Me Before I Run Blitz Again!** Philadelphia leading 20-17 in the fourth quarter, Washington had first-and-10 on the Eagles 22. Philadelphia coaches called a max run blitz -- seven guys crashing the line straight ahead to stop the run, not at angles to converge on the quarterback. Clinton Portis cut back behind a great block by tackle Chris Samuels; once across the line, there was no one left to beat, Red-

skins touchdown and there is rending of garments and gnashing of teeth in Dallas.

**Okay, Google "What Should We Call on Third-and-8?"** Joel Price, webmaster of the Chargers web site, discovered that if you type the words "difficult schedule" into the Google search box, the first thing it finds is the 2005 schedule of the San Diego Chargers. Though San Diego faithful blame their no-playoffs season on a sked that required them to fly to the East Coast four times; the Bolts were 3-1 in those contests. It was at home in sunny San Diego, where the team was only 4-4, that disaster befell. And what went wrong with the Chargers? From the point at which they had played a magnificent game at Indianapolis to end the Colts' win streak, San Diego finished 0-2 and was outscored 43-14. Anemic scoring in the final two Bolts games is particularly puzzling, since prior to that San Diego was posting 29 points per game, best scoring pace in the league. Anyway, I sure don't want to hear "we should have been in the playoffs" from the Chargers faithful. No, you shouldn't have. You finished 9-7.

**BCS Forecast:** USC and Texas enter the national championship on a combined 53-0 run. Bearing in mind this column's motto is All Predictions Wrong or Your Money Back, here is my forecast: USC in a walkover.

**Bush Bowl Recap:** Game tied at 17, Houston's Kris Brown attempts a 31-yard goal line late in the fourth quarter, no good! Now there are 59 seconds in regulation and San Francisco has the ball on the Moo Cows 35 -- no field goal attempt to win, the Niners punt! Now it's overtime and Houston has fourth-and-2 in San Francisco territory -- no try for the first, the Texans punt! Boy, did both sides do their utmost to lose the Bush Bowl. Unfortunately for San Francisco, an interception late in the fourth quarter gave the Niners the ball on the Texans 21, from where it prove impossible for San Francisco to avoid scoring. Houston would have gotten the first pick had this game ended tied after five quarters, so the Texans always had the inside track! And if Reggie Bush turns out to be a star -- of course, who knows? - - Brown, who also missed a 31-yard field-goal attempt that would have sent the Houston-Tennessee game into overtime, will be the Texans' retroactive MVP for 2005.

**Next Week:** My annual "longest award in sports" -- the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP.

## Week 17 Readers:

(Jan. 4, 2006) -- Was there a uniform conspiracy? As noted by **Timothy Silva** among many, during Washington's five-game winning streak, the team wore its white road jerseys every game, even when playing at home. Meanwhile, the Giants won the NFC East by one game over Washington. Jersey/A, you'll recall, played an unprecedented nine home dates versus seven on the road, owing to the Saints' scheduling quagmire immediately after Hurricane Katrina. Of course, it was chance the Giants were the first team slated to play in New Orleans following the flood. Nevertheless, the bonus home date helped propel Jersey/A to its division crown. For NFL purposes, this year both New York and Louisiana were located in New Jersey! The master schedule, announced years ago, has New Orleans at the Giants in 2006. **John Burns of Calgary, Alberta**, offers a clever suggestion: The Giants should give that game back and play it in Louisiana. If Jersey/A had seven home games next season after nine home games this season, that would balance the cosmic scale. And a reader haikuizes,

Jersey/A moves on.

Reg season: first team ever

8-and-1 at home.

-- **Brian Finney, Gilbert, Ariz.**

**Tom Treweek of Albuquerque, N.M.**, reports that in his neck of the woods, CBS scheduled the Cincinnati-Kansas City game, but switched to Miami-New England when the former became a blowout; while Fox scheduled the Panthers-Falcons game, but switched to Tampa Bay-New Orleans when the former became a blowout. This is the way it should be -- switch to the best game. **Andy Cliver of Philadelphia** was among many to note that I committed the common blunder of misspelling James Thrash of Washington as James "Trash." Sorry, and this must drive James Thrash crazy.

Last week's column on nostalgic candy lauded French Chew Taffy as the closest thing to Bonomo's Turkish Taffy, greatest taffy ever. **Anna Guido** of the *Cincinnati Inquirer* reports that French Chew Taffy is made in downtown Cincinnati by Doscher's Candies, which is currently producing 12,000 bars per day [using a recipe from 1871](#). **Matt Winkelmann of Cincinnati** adds that to honor the Bengals playoff run, Doscher's just released a Who-Dey taffy wrapped in brown and orange stripes.



**An acronym that long has got to mean something. Here's to you, Tiki.**

The column also mentioned the Jersey Milk bar once sold by the old Neilson candy company -- chocolate made with milk from Jersey cows. **Noah Bledsoe of Kansas City, Mo.**, notes that if the NFL produced Jersey Milk chocolate, it would be called the New York Milk bar. But should Tiki Barber, known to this column as TTNJ (The Toast of New York), be known instead as TTNJ (The Toast of New Jersey), as **Stephanie Blackmon of Montclair, N.J.**, maintains? I call the Giants Jersey/B because they play in New Jersey. Barber, in contrast, can perform in New Jersey yet still be toasted in New York. Maybe we should call him TTNYNJMSA, "The Toast of the New York-New Jersey Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area."

Though I normally dislike fraidy-cat punting, I defended Jim Mora for punting with a minute remaining in overtime against Tampa -- it was that rare situation where playing for the tie made sense, because had the game ended tied, Atlanta would not have been eliminated from the postseason. Many including

**Daphne Breyer of Savannah, Ga.**, countered that although Mora the Younger should have punted, his sin was not realizing until the last minute that a tie would keep the Falcons alive. Had he realized, she supposes, Mora would have begun playing for the tie when Atlanta got the ball back on its 16 with two minutes remaining in overtime. (During the regular season, an NFL game that is tied after five quarters ends as a tie.) Instead, the Atlanta sideline called passes on all three snaps before the punt, seeming to believe the Falcons had to win to avoid elimination; two throws fell incomplete, stopping the clock and allowing Tampa time to take the ball in the other direction for the winning kick. Atlanta should simply have run three times to move the clock, Breyer and other readers contended.

Whether Mora mistakenly believed Atlanta had to win, we may never know. Obviously we've all seen the film clip of him shouting into a cell phone during the final drive. Perhaps Mora was speaking to the National Academy of Sciences, and you don't have to read lips to suspect was shouting, "What???? Play for a tie??? Why wasn't I told????!!!" Atlanta seems to have gone into its most important date of the season without having charted every possible playoff permutation. All the Falcons had to do was download the playoff permutations grid posted each week late in the season at NFL.com. Then when overtime began in the Falcons-Bucs game, a team official could have highlighted the line that corresponded with the outcomes of the games already finished, and immediately known a tie would keep Atlanta alive. A team official will be at the ready with the permutations grid whenever Atlanta kicks off in December next year, we can be certain.



Michael Vick had trouble staying upright in Chicago because he was wearing too much clothing.

A recent item on Michael Vick's wheeze-out at Soldier Field noted that the successful NFL gentleman must shrug at the cold. **Scott Durfee of Houston** points out [this photo of J.P. Losman and Kelly Holcomb](#) practicing in chilly Buffalo; Holcomb wears naught but a short-sleeved tee under his red QB jersey, while Losman has layered up with a heavy sweatshirt. Guess who performed better this season, Durfee asks.

As midnight approached on Christmas and most were gathered round the hearth, **Rich Meyer, a soldier at Fort Richardson, Alaska**, was watching the Baltimore-Minnesota game and observed a truly Preposterous Punt. The Vikings were must-win to stay alive for the postseason. Trailing 24-20, Minnesota faced fourth-and-1 on the Baltimore 38 with 8:13 remaining in the fourth quarter -- and Mike Tice ordered a punt. I don't need to tell you the Ravens took the ball in the other direction, scoring at the two-minute warning to ice the game, ending Minnesota's season and ending Tice's tenure. You're must-win, it's late and you need to gain just one yard. You're in opposition territory. Why are you punting???????? Footnote: In Tice's first

game as Minnesota coach, the final contest of the 2001 regular season, the Vikings were down 12-3 with a couple minutes to play and facing fourth-and-short; Tice sent in the punt unit. So his Vikings career began and ended with Preposterous Punts.

The coal mine tragedy in West Virginia brings this to mind: Every time you flip a light switch, remember that hard-working men die so the power in your house will run. This should have been a week of celebration in West Virginia, considering the Mountaineers' biggest bowl win in years, but instead it is a week of heartbreak. My thoughts turned to one West Virginian I know, Mike Florio, who runs the independent website Profootballtalk.com, and who had a relative die in a coal-mine accident some years ago. Underground coal mining is hard, draining, claustrophobic work that destroys your health - - and that's when things go well! Do not take that light switch for granted. As for Florio's web site, lately it's been drawing considerable attention. Florio's invective can be over the top -- at this point it is incumbent on him to say which players, coaches and football executives he thinks *aren't* bad -- and since Florio traffics in gossip, it is important for readers to bear in mind that gossip is frequently wrong. But Profootballtalk.com was the hot independent football web site of 2005.



Yes, I also have the hot dogs and chips. Over.

The latest Coors Light commercials show the Love Train roaring backward in time through Super Bowls past, including Super Bowl III, played in Miami in 1969, and Super Bowl X, played in Miami in 1976. Spectators in these digitally created commercials hold cans of Coors as the beer appeared in those years. **Michael Rodriguez of Lake Worth, Fla.**, protests -- Coors was not sold east of the Mississippi until the year 1981. [Here's a history of Coors](#). The beer was never banned in eastern states, as urban legend has it; until the 1980s, Coors simply lacked the production and distribution capacity to sell outside the Rocky Mountain region. (Many believe the urban legend because in the 1977 movie *Smokey and the Bandit*, hundreds of policemen are chasing Burt Reynolds to stop him from "illegally" transporting a trunkload of Coors to an East Coast party.) So the new Coors Light commercials really aren't as realistic as they appear. But then my guess is there are no time-traveling levitated trains, either.

## Case closed on the blitz, and the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to SuperBowl.com

(Jan. 10, 2006) -- I don't wish to alarm you, but the football season is nearly over. High school gridiron is long since completed; college just turned off the lights; there are only seven more NFL contests. Count 'em and weep: four divisional dates, two championships and that Super Bowl thing you might have heard about. Football is on the verge of *stopping*. Can that be legal?

America's wives, moms and girlfriends may find this difficult to believe, but there is more time when football is not played than when it is. Revise that previous sentence, since the demographic of female football enthusiasm is ever-increasing: America's spouses, parents and significant others may find this difficult to believe, but there is more time when football is not played than when it is. Consider Mondays: Each year, there are two Monday nights without football for every one with. Real-games-that-count football runs from the first week of September to the final week of January, give or take a bit depending on the calendar. That's seven months without football for every five months with. Can that be legal? And those long seven months are nearly upon us. Savor the contests that remain.

Congratulations to Shaun Alexander, *Associated Press* NFL MVP. Of the 51 winners of this distinction, all but five have been quarterbacks or running backs, and perhaps you guessed no offensive lineman has received the garland. Which is the reason this column annually bestows the coveted "longest award in sports" -- the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP. This year I'm going to force you to scan *way* down to see who wins.

"The Redskins blitz 60 percent of the time!" Thus Ron Jaworski gushed recently on ESPN's *Monday Night Countdown*. Sportscasters and sports touts love to extol the blitz. This was my annual weekend to chart every play of every game and prove, with stats, my contention that usually the blitz actually favors the offense. Tampa ran 66 plays and Washington blitzed six times -- that's nine percent, Jaws. And a good thing the Redskins did not blitz more; otherwise they would have lost. See a blitz stats blizzard below.

**Stats of the Week:** New England has won 10 consecutive playoff contests, all started by Tom Brady.

**Stats of the Week No. 2 :** Joe Gibbs is 17-5 in the postseason.

**Stats of the Week No. 3 :** In its last four road appearances, Carolina has outrushed opponents by an average of 128 yards per game.

**Stats of the Week No. 4 :** Carson Palmer, who played two snaps, had more passing yards than Mark Brunell, who played an entire game. Noted by Tim Lowes.

**Stats of the Week No. 5 :** Counting penalty downs, Cincinnati ran 11 consecutive snaps inside the Pittsburgh 20.

**Stats of the Week No. 6 :** Jacksonville finished 4-1 under David Garrard and 8-4 under Byron Leftwich.

**Stats of the Week No. 7 :** The Patriots defense allowed an average of 111 yards rushing in its first 11 games and an average of 57 yards since.

**Stats of the Week No. 8 :** Washington had more return yards (155 yards) than offensive yards (120 yards).

**Stats of the Week No. 9 :** One week after out-rushing an opponent by 186 yards on the opponent's

field, the Giants were outrushed by 182 yards on their field.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** James Kallgren nominates Kathryn Kainor of the Denver Broncos. According to her team bio, Kainor is a software engineer who works as a "consultant to a software company." The bio does not say in what capacity: Does she consult on software, or on cheers for software? Here is a software cheer: "Zero one zero one, launch the program, get it done!" Here's another: "Pixels hard drives bytes and floppies, don't call us if you fail to make copies!" Another: "DOWN-load, DOWN-load!" Note: If you worry that the modern thong bikini covers *way* too much, the Broncos' cheerleader calendar is at the cutting edge of solving this problem.

**Sweet Plays of the Week:** Charlie Weis may have decamped to Our Lady, but New England still has sweetness in play-calling. Game scoreless, the defending champions faced third-and-6 on the Jax 11. Troy Brown lined up as a slot man, ran a short buttonhook, stood immobile for a moment as if giving up because the ball wasn't going to him -- this is an old touch-football trick -- then spun back in, touch-down. Now it's New England 7, Jacksonville 3. The Patriots direct-snap to tailback Kevin Faulk, who hands off to Andre Davis on the end-around; first down. During this play, Tom Brady leapt into the air as if trying to field a bad snap, which is an old high school trick. Now it's first-and-goal on the Jax 3 on the same possession. David Givens lines up right and comes in "slide" motion toward the center, as if to be an extra blocker for a power run; at the snap he goes into the end zone and does a turn-in, Brady play-fakes, touchdown. Note to other NFL teams: Maybe one reason the Patriots have won three of the last four Super Bowls is that every week they vary their play-calling.

**Sweet Tactics of the Week:** Knowing Cincinnati gambles for the big turnover, Pittsburgh lured the Bengals' defensive backfield into mistakes. Cincinnati leading 17-7, the Steelers with first-and-goal on the Bengals 5, Ben Roethlisberger looked left, drew the safeties left, then snapped back to throw the slant right to Hines Ward, touchdown. Several times Roethlisberger looked one way and threw the other way, drawing the safeties out of the action. Then there was the prettiest little play you will ever see. Pittsburgh leading 21-17, the Steelers had third-and-3 on the Cincinnati 43. Flanker Antwaan Randle El, a college quarterback, lined up as a tailback. The direct-snap went to Randle El as Roethlisberger jumped into the air, simulating a bad hike -- that high school standby! Randle El ran right, all Pittsburgh players "down" blocked right. Roethlisberger drifted out to the left, deeper than Randle El, who threw him a crosstown lateral that would have been a disaster had it not been on target. Roethlisberger then pitched a 43-yard touchdown pass to Cedrick Wilson, who was uncovered. After the score, Cincinnati defensive backs were pointing at each other about who was to blame. When teammates yell about blame during a game, they might as well hit the showers and head out for a blueberry-almond martini.

**Tootsie Rolls Notes:** Note 1: All season the Bengals have been living high on interceptions. Yours truly warned three weeks ago, "Turnovers are half skill and half luck. It's hard to believe Bengals' takeaway success can continue at this pace." During the regular season Cincinnati finished No. 1 with 44 take-aways, almost three per game -- then failed to record a takeaway in its playoff loss. Turnovers are half skill and half luck. They're great when they happen, but you cannot rely on them. Note 2: When things aren't going your way, often the solution is to get back to basics. Run the ball. Don't try for an improbable super-fast score, just get some positive plays, recover your rhythm, prevent panic from taking hold. Cincinnati had been ahead 17-7 and feeling good; now the Steelers had just moved into a 21-17 lead. Cincinnati gained possession on its 34 with 5:07 in the third quarter, which is all the time in the world. What mattered was to avoid panic and get the run working as it has in every Bengals victory this season. Instead, Bengals coaches acted as if there were 30 seconds left in the game and an instant score was the sole hope. First down, long pass called; sack. Now it's second-and-19 and Pittsburgh, correctly anticipating a pass-wacky overreaction by Cincinnati, came out with a *two-man* defensive line, two linebackers and seven defensive backs. Run! Run against these skinny guys! Four-yard pass, then a penalty makes it third-and-20. Again Pittsburgh showed a mere two DLs. Run! Sack, punt, Pittsburgh scores the other way to make it 28-17.

Cincinnati went into full-blown panic mode when there was no need, when the Bengals were only down by four points in the third quarter. From the point at which Pittsburgh took its 21-17 lead at the 5:07 mark of the third quarter, Bengals coaches called just *one* running play for the remainder of the game, a contest in which Cincinnati averaged 4.2 yards per rush. Falling behind 31-17 with 10:29 in the fourth

quarter -- enough time to score two touchdowns using a balanced attack -- the Bengals went incompletion, incompletion, incompletion, punt, and TMZ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

**Sweet Reserve of the Week:** Game scoreless on a cold night, New England lined up for a field-goal attempt, spot at the Jax 28. It's hard to kick field goals in the cold because the ball condenses. Direct-hike to Adam Vinatieri, who pooched; long-snapper Lonie Paxton hustled to down the rock at the Jaguars 4.

**Sour Reserve of the Week:** The defending champions leading 7-0, Jacksonville mounted its first drive, reaching first-and-10 on the New England 44. Reserve Alvin Pearman took the handoff running left, had a nice gain, saw he was about to be tackled, put both hands around the ball -- and fumbled. How can you fumble with both hands around the ball? Just to prove it was no fluke, later Pearman dropped a pass.

**Sour Repetition of the Week:** Game scoreless, Chris Simms looked into the left flat and threw to a double-covered receiver running the short out, interception. Now it's Washington 17, City of Tampa 10 with 1:05 remaining, Bucs' ball at midfield. Chris Simms looked into the left flat and threw to a double-covered receiver running the short out, interception.

**Sour Tactics of the Week:** Trailing 17-3, City of Tampa reached second-and-goal on the Washington 2. The Bucs came out super-jumbo with extra tight ends and no wide receiver, Mike Alstott up the middle for no gain. On third-and-goal, the Bucs came out super-jumbo with extra tight ends and no wide receiver, Simms bootleg touchdown. Now it's Redskins 17, Bucs 10 in the fourth quarter, Tampa faced third-and-1 on the Nanticokes 19. The Bucs came out super-jumbo with extra tight ends and no wide receiver, Alstott up the middle no gain. Now it's fourth-and-1. To this point, three times on power downs the Bucs have come out super-jumbo with extra tight ends and no wide receiver, for a net of 2 yards. Did they use a different tactic now? The Bucs came out super-jumbo with extra tight ends and no wide receiver, play-fake, incompletion, Washington ball.

**Sour Tactics of the Week No. 2:** In 2004, the Jaguars used a low-risk plodding offense. This season things were supposed to change. But through most of 2005, Jacksonville has continued to plod, and Saturday at Next One Will Have Six Moisture-Sensitive Vibrating Blades with Remote Control, Make Coffee, Walk the Dog, Receive High-Resolution GPS and Improve Your Love Life Field, the Jaguars wheezed out with as plain-Jane a game plan as yours truly has beheld. No reverse or end-around. Short crossing pattern after short crossing pattern, quick out after quick out. Jacksonville's first attempt to throw deep did not come until 13:54 remained in the fourth quarter and Jax was already doomed at 28-3. The play that sealed Jax's fate, Asante Samuel returning an interception 70 yards for the touchdown that made it 28-3, came when Jacksonville was running a quick out -- for about the 300th time. Samuel knew what was coming. Seriously, Jacksonville, that was one of the most predictable, repetitive game plans I've ever seen.

**My Name Is Geek, James Geek. I'm a Secret Agent for the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency. Seriously, It's a Real Agency. Hey, Don't Leave, I'll Buy You a Vodka Martini :** Your tax dollars fund the Central Intelligence Agency, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the National Security Agency (which breaks codes) and the National Reconnaissance Office (which operates spy satellites). Merely the existence of the National Security Agency and National Reconnaissance Office once were secrets -- government officials were supposed to pretend they had never heard of either. Now both have websites; the National Security Agency site includes a cool Flash intro you can skip if you're in a hurry. Last fall the once-super-secret National Reconnaissance Office hosted a reception to honor participants in Poppy, an electronic eavesdropping program of the Cold War. Super-secret agency hosts cocktail party!

But even most conspiracy freaks have never heard of the National Geospatial Intelligence Agency, which makes satellite maps of Earth's surface, plus tracks the movements of ships and planes. Right now the NGIA is seeking permission to fly Predator and Global Hawk military drones above the United States, to record an ultra-high-resolution map of the nation's surface. Planning to sunbathe nude? The NGIA may digitally map your anatomical proportions. The unmanned drone aircraft operating above Iraq and Afghanistan are "flown" by operators sitting in offices at air bases in Arizona, New York and Texas. A

regulatory dispute is brewing because the Federal Aviation Administration mandates that above the United States, only licensed pilots with an instrument-flight rating can fly an aircraft higher than 18,000 feet; the FAA wants this rule applied to the NGIA's remote-controlled drones. The NGIA, the technical journal *Aviation Week* recently reported, is claiming that as a spy agency it can ignore FAA air-safety regulations and use people who aren't pilots to fly the drones above the United States -- maybe out-source operation of the drones to India? The NGIA even claims it can order airspace closed, presumably to prevent pilots of civilian aircraft from snapping pictures that show government drones are conducting spy flights in America's own skies. Having good digital maps of the country's surface might be a valid policy objective. But a secret agency wants to suspend aviation safety rules in order to use military aircraft to spy on the United States. When, exactly, are the establishment media going to notice this story?

**Professor Dumbledore Lives! In the NFL, and I'm Guessing in the Next Potter, Too :** When Joe Gibbs came back, yours truly highlighted his 16-5 postseason record and opined, "TMQ considers this the single-greatest accomplishment by an NFL coach." Now he's 17-5.

**Untouched Touchdowns of the Week:** Carolina leading 10-0 in the third quarter, the Cats gave to Steve Smith on an end-around left; center Jeff Mitchell pulled, pasting the only Giant on the left and allowing Smith an untouched 12-yard touchdown run. When your center pulls to lead a wide touchdown run, that's sweet. In Cincinnati, Willie Parker of the Hypocycloids hoofed an untouched 19-yard screen pass touchdown behind perfect blocks by Alan Faneca and Kendall Simmons.

**Put Down That Bracket and Keep Your Hands Where I Can See Them:** My compromise with my Baptist upbringing is to be pro-topless but anti-gambling. Gambling destroys lives. No one should care how much Donald Trump loses at the roulette wheel, but average people are seduced with false promises of instant wealth and gamble away money they need to pay their bills. Government lotteries, which exist to bilk the poor and working-class, are as much to blame as any glittering casino or offshore sports book. That government lotteries market their tickets in convenience stores and liquor stores, places catering to the poor and working-class, ought to be a source of outrage. Since the global capital of toplessness is Las Vegas, my anti-gambling views cause me to have conflicted opinions about Nevada's glitter city. While gambling's main contributions to human existence are unhappiness and regret, erotic dancing seems something that celebrates one of the pleasures of this short life. I'd be perfectly content if Vegas was a city built on topless showgirls rather than slot machines.

My anti-gambling views declared, let me offer my annual sure-fire never-fails 800-number recorded-message free lock: bet the home teams in the NFL divisionals. Since the current playoff structure was adopted in 1990, home teams in the divisionals are 49-11. In all professional sports, no subset of teams enjoys the advantage known by NFL home teams in the divisionals round. Usually they are the best teams to begin with. They're playing at home. And they just finished a bye week, relaxing in hot tubs as their opponents were out in the cold being pounded.

How can I be anti-gambling and give this advice? Gambling is harmful when it causes addiction or when the money-stressed wager what they cannot afford to lose. Of course there's nothing wrong with tossing \$5 into a workplace pool for fun. Yet technically office pools are illegal -- except in Vermont, where the state legislature has specifically allowed workplace pools on the NCAA basketball tournament.

**Net Points Stats:** Which is the better statistical denominator, yards or points? I asked Spenser, my 10-year-old, and he immediately answered, "That's obvious, points." It's not obvious to the NFL. According to the official stats table, the number-one defense of 2005 was Tampa, which allowed fewest yards per game. Chicago allowed the fewest points per game. TMQ would like to propose a third way to measure a defense: net points, this being points allowed versus points scored. Consider that the Bears defense allowed 202 points this season, 12.6 points per game. But the Bears defense also scored 35 points (we'll assign the defense credit for PATs) on four interception returns and a blocked kick. So the Chicago defense gave up a net of 167 points, or 10.4 net points per game. That's spectacular.

Of course my system isn't perfect: a fumble returned to the opposition 1-yard line won't count under a net-points calculation, for example. But the basic idea seems promising. Readers, tinker with the net-

points idea and see if you can come up with something superior to the NFL's official system for grading defenses based on yards alone.

**"Often All a Football Team Needs Do Is Run Up the Middle and Things Will Be Fine," BCS Edition:** They lit up the University of Texas tower in orange with a No. 1 on the side to celebrate the Longhorns' victory in the national championship. Man what a good game: two seconds after it ended I thought, "Why didn't I tape that to watch again?" There aren't many football games you'd actually want to watch a second time. Vince Young's performance -- um, that was adequate. Yours truly thought the Texas line won the game on both sides of the ball, though by a small margin since the game was so close.

The decisive play was not, as the sports-yak world said, the fourth-and-2 attempt by USC with 1:54 remaining. The decisive play came two snaps before. Leading 38-33, the Trojans had second-and-7 at the midfield stripe with about 2:15 remaining. On the night, Reggie Bush and LenDale White combined to average 6.2 yards per carry. Run here and run again on third down, and the first down that seals the game is likely. Instead USC called a flat pass to fullback Brandon Hancock, a spot player with nine receptions on the season; clang. Hancock caught the ball on the same play in the third quarter, but that meant Texas had already seen the trick of throwing to the guy you've never heard of -- three Longhorn defenders were around Hancock. The incompleteness on second-and-7 stopped the clock. Had USC rushed on that down, seconds would have continued to tick away and probably the clock would have run out on Texas. This is so basic, yet coaches mess it up all the time: when you're ahead at the end, *keep the clock moving!* By stopping the clock with an incompleteness, USC left enough time for Texas to score the winning touchdown with 19 seconds showing.

**Sideline Sartorial Watch :** Kickoff temperature 61 degrees in Cincinnati, the Bengals' cheer-babes did their best to appease the football gods by wearing skimpy two-piece numbers. But what was CBS sideline reporter Bonnie Bernstein doing in a fur jacket?

**Football Is Going to Stop?** Here is the actual transcript of a recent counseling session:

DOCTOR. Vat zeems to be der problem?

ME. It's the TV, doc. It's gone.

DOCTOR. Zomeone ztole your television? You need a policeman, not a psychiatrist.

ME. I mean gone from on television. College football. It's gone. The BCS championship was the last game. College football used to be on Saturdays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays -- I think I was addicted, doc. Now I can't get the stuff anymore.

DOCTOR. Ach, I know. Even I would watch zos Wednesday night MAC games.

ME. I love MAC games. One night there was a team with submarines on their helmets playing a team with some name like Ohio University of Florida at Ohio of Ohio. Great game! But now I turn on the television and there's no more college football.

DOCTOR. Vell, you can watch der NFL.

ME. Not for long! Doc, there are only seven NFL games left. Then football stops!

DOCTOR. Football actually stops at some point? This is legal?

ME. This is serious.

DOCTOR. I recommend years of analysis. The therapy won't do you the slightest bit of good, but at \$125

an hour, it will certainly be beneficial for my mental health.

ME. Doc, you've got 12 postgraduate degrees. Tell me, were you able to cure yourself or do you still have problems?

DOCTOR. Of course I have problems! It's just that my problems are a lot more interesting than yours.

**They Sure Lost As a Team:** After an outstanding season, Jersey/A went down without a fight on its own turf. Carolina played well and had a smart game plan, focusing the attack on the Giants' depleted linebacker corps, which by the second quarter was accepting volunteers from the audience. The Panthers defense played the game that touts have been saying all season it could play: Jersey/A, third-ranked in scoring, never got farther than the Carolina 39.

But why was there no fight from the Giants, so little emotion on the Jersey/A sideline? By the second quarter, score only 7-0, heads were hanging and expressions blank around the Giants bench. Eli Manning was staring off into space, rather than red in the face and urging his teammates to fire up. When Jersey/A's second-half opening drive stalled, the Giants seemed as a team seemed to wave the white flag at that early point. Jeremy Shockey got the ball pulled out of his hands by a Carolina player, and responded by putting for the rest of the game rather than getting psyched. (TMQ wishes voters would stop sending Shockey to the Pro Bowl on rep: He'll never realize his potential as long as he talks a better game than he plays.) Plaxico Burress gave up, not bothering to break up an interception on an errant pass his way. Last season, his Pittsburgh teammates accused Plaxico of disappearing during the Steelers-Patriots title game; last week this column wondered if his Pittsburgh teammates were wrong; this week this column understands his Pittsburgh teammates' view. As noted by numerous readers including Chris Johnson, once it became 20-0 the Giants strolled lackadaisically to the line instead of running to the line to work the hurry-up. On its drive beginning with 13:33 remaining -- still hope of a comeback -- Jersey/A used more than 20 seconds per play, which is a quitter's pace. You're being paid millions of dollars to chase a ball, maybe you could hustle to the line!

As for Jersey/A coaching, Tiki Barber was right to say the Giants were outcoached. The truism is, "Win as a team, lose as a team." If you lose, it is axiomatic you were outcoached: Coaches can't expect to be exempt from responsibility when things go poorly. Two examples. First, in October, Little Brother won the Denver game by throwing a touchdown on a crazy falling-backwards heave-hoe under tackle. At the time yours truly cautioned that pass was lucky, and Manning had to be broken of the habit. Numerous interceptions Eli has thrown since the Denver game have come on crazy falling-backwards heave-hoes, including the killer interception vs. Carolina. Little Brother's significantly increased interception rate in the second half of the season links to crazy falling-backwards heave-hoes. Why haven't coaches corrected this? Second, Carolina leading 10-0 in the third, the Giants faced fourth-and-7 on the Panthers 41. Sure, fourth-and-7 is a tough down. But the defense couldn't get Carolina off the field: The Panthers had converted five of nine third downs to that point. Meadowlands crowd energy was waning. This was the moment for Giants coaches to take a risk to change the flow of the game. Fortune favors the bold! Punt, and even the football gods quit on the Giants.

**Stop Me Before I Blitz Again! (Annual Stats Edition):** Didn't mean to pick on you, Jaws; many sportscasters and sportswriters overstate the degree of blitzing. Consider the four games this weekend. There were 463 offensive snaps and 57 blitzes -- 12 percent blitzing. That's probably a little lower than the league average, which I'd guess at around 15 percent. But then the wild-card entrants, being winning teams, are better than the league average. Winning teams blitz less than losing teams. The chicken-or-egg question I'll leave to you.

Washington has been blitzing less in the second half of the season, and here's an instance where injuries may actually have helped a team. The Redskins suffered cornerback injuries in November. As pointed out by James Collins, football coach at my kids' high school, cornerback injuries meant the tastefully named Gregg Williams had to provide safety help for the corners, which in turn meant Williams began calling few blitzes. Washington's defensive performance immediately improved. In their first 11 games, the Redskins allowed 20.3 points per game; during the team's six-game winning streak, which coincided with dinged-up cornerbacks and few blitzes, Washington has allowed 13.1 points per game. Elite corner

Shawn Springs is expected back for the upcoming Washington at Seattle contest. For heaven's sake, tastefully named Gregg, don't use that as an excuse to go blitz-wacky.

Now to my incredibly scientifically advanced methodology. When I run items noting blitzes that back-fired, readers protest that some blitzes do work and that down-and-distance must be factored in. To accommodate these concerns, when I chart the entire weekend my blitz calculation centers on long-yardage downs -- those plays when defenses are likely to blitz, and the offense knows that. I define long-yardage downs as first and more than 10, second and 8 or more, and third or fourth and four or more. I calculate average yards per play, first downs achieved, touchdowns, turnovers committed and kicks forced. When the defense gains yardage on a turnover, I count that as negative offensive yards; a stop on fourth down is counted as a takeaway. I also track blitzes that occur when not expected, on downs other than long yardage downs.

Here are the blitz numbers for the last two years; now the numbers for this weekend. On 158 long-yardage downs there were 113 instances of conventional defense and 45 blitzes. Offenses averaged 4.3 yards gained per play against conventional defense and 8.7 yards per play against the blitz. Offenses scored three touchdowns against conventional defenses, a 2.6 percent touchdown rate, and three touchdowns against the blitz, a 6.7 percent touchdown rate. Offenses gained 19 first downs against conventional defense, a 16.8 percent first-down rate, and 15 first downs against the blitz, a 33.3 percent first-down rate. Conventional defense forced 27 kicks, a 23.8 percent forced-kick rate; blitzing forced four kicks, a 8.9 percent forced-kick rate. Conventional defense achieved five takeaways, a 4.4 percent turnover rate by the offense. Blitzing achieved two takeaways, an identical 4.4 percent turnover rate by the offense. Conventional defense scored one touchdown for the defense, while blitzing produced no defensive touchdowns.

This is pretty much a slam-dunk for conventional defense over the blitz. Sure, blitzing is effective sometimes, but on the whole blitzing allowed twice as many yards per offensive play, twice as many first downs per play and three times as many touchdowns per play. Blitzing forced the offense to kick less than half as often per play as conventional defense, while producing turnovers only at the same rate.

Offensive touchdown rates are especially revealing. This season the NFL touchdown rate for all offensive plays was 3.7 percent, 1,172 touchdowns on 32,021 offensive snaps. On expected-blitz downs, conventional defense allowed touchdowns at a rate of 2.6 percent while blitzing allowed touchdowns at a rate of 6.7 percent. This suggests blitzing on expected-blitz downs is to blame for a disproportionate share of NFL offensive touchdowns. Consider the decisive play of the Jacksonville-New England contest. The Patriots led 14-3 in the third quarter, and faced third-and-13 on their 37 yard line. Had Jax played straight defense, a forced kick was statistically likely. Instead Jaguars' coaches called for a six-blitz that included a blitzing safety. This left only middle linebacker Mike Peterson to cover Pats' tight end Ben Watson -- who broke Peterson's tackle and ran 63 yards for the touchdown that ended Jacksonville's season. Want to generate a touchdown for the opposition's offense? Call a big blitz on a down when the offense expects you to blitz.

Blitzing when it's not expected? Blitzes not on long-yardage downs resulted in 2.7 yards gained per play, no offensive or defensive touchdowns, forced kicks at a 8.3 percent rate and turnovers at a 16.7 percent rate. That is, surprise blitzing (on first-and-10, for example) works quite well.

Finally, just as announcers and sportswriters overstate the degree of blitzing, they also overstate the degree of big-blitzing. It's common to hear sportscasters bellow, "They were blitzing eight men!" Most blitzes are five-man; six-man blitzes are invitations for an offensive touchdown, seven- or eight-man blitzes exceedingly rare. Counting all blitzes (on long yardage downs and surprise downs), in this weekend's games there were 49 five-man blitzes, seven six-man blitzes, one seven-man blitz and no eight-man blitz. But then, the teams that played this weekend were winning teams, so they know to use the big blitz sparingly. My guess is if you broke it down you'd find losing teams are much more likely to big-blitz than winning teams.

**Abramoff's Eighth-Grade Lunch Money Was Funneled Through an Indian Casino:** Now that the nattily attired Jack Abramoff has pleaded guilty to felon counts of bribery, fraud and tax evasion, he has

among other things rendered himself "libel-proof," meaning you can say almost anything about Abramoff without fear of legal action. The worst punishment for crooks is of course going to the slammer, but the second-worst punishment may be losing libel protection: it means you spend the rest of your life ridiculed with few if any limits on those who ridicule you. In Abramoff's case, it couldn't have happened to a nicer guy! Check this *Los Angeles Times* report by Faye Fiore and Martha Groves, which says Abramoff violated student-council election rules in middle school. And check Katharine Seelye's story from Monday's *New York Times* -- Abramoff was also in the pay of the sinister Magazine Publishers Association. *Magazine publishers have creepy lobbyists who break knees?* Imagine the closed-doors conversion: "Okay senator, either *InStyle* magazine gets the Pentagon advertising contract for its annual celebrity underwear issue, or I release this photo or you and your intern to the press."

**Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP:** Who's most valuable -- the best player, the player hardest to replace? Can you be most valuable on a losing team? I don't know the answers to any of these questions: all awards are at some level arbitrary. So this year I have altered the Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP premise a bit. I considered only those from the 12 playoff clubs, the teams whose season outcome is incontestably "valuable." I name one Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP from each playoff team. First the honorable mentions, then the winners:

Chicago: Brian Urlacher  
 Cincinnati: Levi Jones  
 Denver: Matt Lepsis  
 Indianapolis: Tarik Glenn  
 Jacksonville: Mike Peterson  
 Jersey/A: David Diehl  
 Pittsburgh: Troy Polamalu  
 Tampa: Ronde Barber  
 Washington: Marcus Washington

Two notes on the runners-up. Matt Lepsis, a rock at left tackle for the 13-3 Broncos, went undrafted in 1997. Who are Scott Sanderson, Bob Sapp, Scott Scifres and Paul Wiggins? Offensive tackles chosen on the first day of that year's draft, all long since OOF -- out of football. Levi Jones, whom this column has been touting, would have been one of my winners until the Pittsburgh game: Jones had a weak performance, plus committed the offensive lineman's cardinal sin of hitting his man once then standing around watching. That Cincinnati offensive linemen were standing around watching in the team's first post-season appearance in 15 years does not speak well for the esprit of the Bengals. Now the winners:

Second runner-up: **Stephen Neal, New England.** The Patriots have so many Non-QB Non-RB MVP types it's hard to know where to begin. Willie McGinest, for example. Six years ago when I watched McGinest I thought, "This guy's a showboat." Now when I watch McGinest I think, "This guy belongs in Hawaii." (Hmmm, what changed at New England six years ago -- oh yes, Bill Belichick clocked in.) Tedy Bruschi is the Flying Elvii's emotional MVP. Matt Kaczur, the 12th offensive lineman taken in the 2005 draft (picked 100th overall), has played better than many of the NFL's megabucks left tackles, and kept the Patriots offensive line from collapsing when veteran tackle Matt Light went down injured. Russ Hochstein, a guard who had never played center in the pros or college, kept the Patriots offensive line from collapsing when veteran center Dan Koppen went down injured. But Neal has been a blocking machine this season. Neal earns extra gold stars because he did not play football in college.

First runner-up: **Steve Smith, Carolina.** This award is designed for those who aren't glory boys, but Smith's achievements cannot go unnoted. Smith led the league in receiving yards and tied for first in receiving touchdowns; he added two rushing touchdowns, and plays special teams. Stars who line up on special teams get bonus love in this column. Every team that's faced Carolina has game-planned for Smith, yet failed to stop him. Probably Smith is the league's "most valuable" player in the sense that his loss would hurt most: Seattle might still be in the playoffs without Shaun Alexander, but Carolina would be sitting at home watching on television without Smith.

The Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP: **Walter Jones, Seattle.** There's a reason Alexander led the league in rushing, and that reason is fabulous blocking. There's a reason Alexander

had 15 untouched touchdown runs, and that reason is fabulous blocking. There's a reason most of Alexander's record-setting tally of touchdowns occurred when he was running left, and that reason is that the left side of Seattle's line -- Jones at tackle and guard Steve Hutchison -- is fabulous. Repeatedly this season, Jones just leveled the man in front of him, even when the defense expected Alexander to run left: for instance in the Blue Men Group-Eagles game on *Monday Night Football*. Repeatedly when Alexander broke into the secondary, the very large Jones has hustled to accompany him: Check the tape of Alexander's 52-yard touchdown against Tennessee, Jones made the finishing block *20 yards* downfield. And repeatedly, Jones got no help in passing blocking: not needing a back or tight end to help the left tackle freed more targets for the Hawks' passing game. If ever an offensive lineman should have been the NFL MVP, it was this year, and it was Walter Jones.

Cautionary note: there is a *Sports-Illustrated*-cover-like jinx on the TMQ Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP this award. Numerous past recipients have immediately experienced some form of bad luck; the details are here and here. Walter Jones, Steve Smith and Steve Neal -- be really, really careful around the hotel swimming pool in the next few weeks, okay?

**Why Are You Kicking??????:** Trailing 28-3 in the fourth quarter, Jacksonville faced fourth-and-17 on the New England 23. I just looked at the color-coordinated play chart on my wrist, and I don't have a lot of fourth-and-17 plays. But this is the postseason, there is no tomorrow, Jack Del Rio cannot seriously in a million years be sending in the field-goal unit. What good would a field goal do -- cut the deficit to 22 points? Didn't Philadelphia famously convert a fourth-and-26 in the playoffs? Outraged, the football gods pushed the field-goal attempt wide.

**This Week's Stargate Complaint:** *Stargate SG1* and its spinoff *Stargate Atlantis* just kicked off their second-half seasons, and TMQ readers will be pleased to learn the title sequences, complete with lush theme music, are back. Jolly good show! Now let's work on the writing. There's no doubt sci-fi premises grow ever-harder to dream up. (The scriptwriters' meeting: "How about they land on a planet populated by mimes who can only talk in charades?") But *Stargate Atlantis*, which started off promising, is sliding downhill owing to weak scripts. Most episodes are predictable variations on: Good guys get captured, then rescued.

**Next Week:** At this stage of the playoffs it's survival of the fittest -- but will there be intelligent design in game plans?

## Wild Cards Readers:

(Jan. 12, 2006) -- Of the eight teams still standing, six have cheerleaders -- including the super-glamorous [Washington Redskins cheerleaders](#) -- while two, Chicago and Pittsburgh, have no pep squad. **David Kennedy** notes Chicago disbanded its old Honey Bears cheerleading unit a few weeks after winning the 1985 Super Bowl. Team management worried that the Honey Bears were too sexy, though by today's standards they would probably be considered overdressed. Can it be coincidence the Bears have not returned to the Super Bowl since offending the football gods by removing scantily attired mega-babes from the sidelines? For their part, the Steelers have never had a pep squad. **David Willis of Aliquippa, Pa.** proposes the [Pittsburgh Penguins cheerleading unit](#) as an alternative. This 21st-century organization has both buff cheer-babes and ripped cheer-hunks; here are [Alanna](#) and [Chris](#).



**We limited this picture of the Milky Way to 180 pixels wide.**

Item from last week: "DEFINITION OF INFINITY EXPANDS FOR SCIENTISTS. That's a recent headline from the *Wall Street Journal*. Infinity means 'without limits.' How can something that has no limits expand?" **Philip Lawford of Harpenden, England**, writes, "The headline clearly states it is the definition, not infinity itself, that is expanding. Perhaps from an original definition of 'something that has no limits' an expanded definition could be 'something that has absolutely no limits.' Later, the definition could expand again, perhaps to 'something that has absolutely no limits whatsoever' and then the definition again expand, ad infinitum." **Eric Jablow of Herndon, Va.** notes that in mathematics there are expanding definitions for infinity; [see the "continuum hypothesis"](#).

Omens anyone? **J.J. Leaver** notes, "When the Eagles hosted the Seahawks earlier in the year they honored all-time defensive great Reggie White at halftime, then got shut out. When the Giants hosted the Panthers on Sunday they honored all-time defensive great Lawrence Taylor at halftime, then got shut out." **Chad Evans of New York City** observes, "At the beginning of the Washington-Tampa game, Raymond James Stadium was awash in a sea of white flags the team gave out to fans upon entrance. I wonder if the sight of thousands of Bucs' faithful signaling surrender before kickoff may have inspired Washington."



**When their fans waved the white flag, the Bucs might as well have thrown in the towel.**

Of all clubs, shouldn't the Buccaneers, a pirate-themed franchise, be aware of the significance of the white flag? In haiku,

Crowd waves the white flag  
before the game even starts.  
Bucs doomed to defeat.

-- **Chad Evans, New York City**

**Sandy Grimwade of Bala-Cynwyd, Pa.** -- apparently the secretary's fingers were on the wrong home keys when this town was named -- took issue with my statement that *Nature* is the world's No. 2 technical journal, trailing *Science*. Grimwade writes, "Journal quality is often measured by Impact Factor, which is the average number of citations to all the papers published in a journal. The current impact factor of *Nature* is 32.182, based on 878 articles published. For *Science* it is 31.853, based on 845 articles published. Close, but *Nature* publishes more articles and gets slightly more citations per article." Wait, this is like arguing over hundreds of seconds in 40-yard dash times. Or thousandths; love that pseudo-scientific third decimal

place. Even if you assume total citations are what really matter -- measures of quality are usually more important than measures of quantity -- *Nature's* number is 1 percent higher than *Science's*. Hard to believe that is statistically significant.



Maybe fans will leave the lights on now that MNF will have an earlier kickoff.

**Karim Moore of Laurel, Md.**, supposes that the declining ratings of *Monday Night Football* -- sole product in the NFL universe that is steadily less popular, not more -- stems from its 9 p.m. Eastern official start time and 9:10 or so actual kickoff time, owing to celebrity yakking before the opening whistle. ESPN's Sunday night games, start time 8:30 ET, have done fine in the ratings, Moore notes. We'll soon find out if this is the problem as ESPN, which takes over *Monday Night Football* next season, will start games at 8:40 ET. ESPN, knowing the numbers of its Sunday night telecasts, might be on to something.



Here we see ... oh, wait, that's no robot.

A previous column expressed lack of enthusiasm for the fact that a current Pentagon computer networking project sounds distressingly like Skynet, the mega-computer that becomes self-aware and then triggers nuclear war in the *Terminator* flicks. **Todd Bush of West Palm Beach, Fla.**, points out that a Japanese firm already is claiming to have [made a machine that is self-aware in a very limited sense](#). "The ground-breaking technology could eventually lead to robots able to express emotions," the company claims. I feel lack of enthusiasm for this development, too, though perhaps millions of college women would prefer "robots able to express emotions" to their current boyfriends. **Chris Caswell of Houston** notes that one Boris Volfson has [obtained a patent for a spacecraft propelled by "spacetime curvature imbalance."](#) Official Brother Neil Easterbrook reports the current cover story of *New Scientist* asserts [hyperdrive actually will be possible](#), though notes dryly that proponents are "hazy about the details."

Here are stats that must mean something. **Steve Doolet of Toronto, Canada**, points out that for the first time under the 16-game format, no team finished 7-9. **Gustav Eriksson of San Francisco** notes the six AFC playoff qualifiers finished 20-4 against the NFC, while the six NFC playoff qualifiers finished 12-12 against their rival conference. Though Deion Sanders numbers among the fastest players ever, **Andrew Hartness of Gaithersburg, Md.**, notes that on offense, Sanders finished his career with nine carries for minus-14 yards. **Alisa Greene of Virginia Beach, Va.** reports the Eagles were the first team ever to go from winning every game in their division one season to losing every game in their division the next season.

Yesterday an item pointed out the National Reconnaissance Office, which operates spy satellites, now has a web site -- quite a change from when the agency was so super-secret, government officials denied its existence. Numerous readers including **Emily Vogelsang of Daytona Beach, Fla.** noted the National Reconnaissance Office now not only has a web site: [it has a marketing slogan](#). Last week, I rechristened Tiki Barber as TTYNJSMSA, "The Toast of the New York-New Jersey Standard Metropolitan Statistical Area." **Michael Axelrad of Denver** reports government agencies no longer use the acronym SMSA; in 2003, the Office of Management and Budget ordered the country divided into [Core-Based Statistical Areas](#). So maybe Tiki must be TTYNJCBSA. **Bradley Jensen** relates that the Census Bureau, with traditional government flair for brevity, now calls the area in question the [New York-Newark-Bridgeport NY-NJ-CT-PA Combined Statistical Area](#). Using airport codes, this changes Tiki to TTLGAJFKTEBEWRBDRNYNJCTPACSA. Or perhaps just TT408, "The Toast of Census Bureau Region 408," the agency's jaunty shorthand. He's still a star to me regardless of what happened against Carolina.



**Shouldn't the NFL spot Pittsburgh seven points for making them play against Peyton Manning in Indy?**

My item on the "unfair acts" rule buried in football rulebooks -- the referee can award a touchdown if a team does something "extraordinarily unfair" -- caused numerous readers, including **Steve Nations of Oak Park, Ill.**, to note that the rule has been invoked at least once. The scene was the Cotton Bowl of 1954, Rice versus Alabama. Rice's Dicky Maegle was sprinting in the clear for a touchdown. Alabama's Tommy Lewis jumped off the bench, came onto the field and tackled Maegle. The referee awarded a touchdown to Rice, which went on to a 28-6 victory -- and Rice has not won a bowl since. **Pallos Levente of Budapest, Hungary**, adds that once during a water polo world championship in Vienna, an Italian player who thought the match was over jumped into the pool; officials awarded a penalty shot that caused an overtime.

An item last week praising the cool new MTH toy trains caused **Matt Mitchell of Apopka, Fla.**, to note MTH also sells licensed NFL toy locomotives and cars. MTH steam engines with digital electronics, Mitchell reports, will as they chug around the track play the broadcast tape of memorable moments from your favorite team's Super Bowl appearances. This sort of thing is quite controversial among train hobbyists: some think toy trains should mimic only the real thing, others think they should do whatever strikes your fancy. [Here's an MTH Bump-n-Go trolley](#) with a Steelers' logo. Shouldn't it be a Bump-n-Run trolley?

My off-price ultra-generic prediction, Home Team Wins, has really struggled, now only 154-106, [which ranked me last](#) compared to the Yahoo! poll. At least we can rest assured that the consensus of Yahoo! users continues to outpace all experts in that poll. My generic final score prediction, Home Team 20 Visiting Team 17, has come true four times this season, including in the San Francisco-Houston collision of Week 17. **Chris Miller's** generic prediction formula (home team wins unless visiting team has at least two more victories) is 173-87, which bests the leading Yahoo! expert but still trails the wisdom-of-crowds consensus. Comes now **Aditya Sood of Seattle** to propose an even more incredibly scientifically advanced generic predictor, "Home team wins unless the visitor has a 'Pythagorean Winning Percentage' greater than .125 than the home team. Pythagorean winning percentage is calculated as: Points scored squared divided by (points scored squared + points allowed squared)." Sood says this predictor is 179-81, though there is no way I'm going back through 260 games to figure out if that is so.

Finally **Eric Richardson of Fairfax, Va.**, notes kickoff temperature at Cincinnati this Sunday was 61 degrees. Back in 1982, also in the second weekend of January, a postseason game was played at Cincinnati, the famous "bare arms game," kickoff temperature 9 degrees. Fifty-two degrees warmer in 23 years. Of course this does not prove global warming. Most of the effect must be natural variation. Most of the effect ...

## The football gods go mainstream, and Vikings to win Super Bowl in 2.1 billion years

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Jan. 17, 2006) -- "It takes time to move on from a game like this and try to make your peace with the football gods," Peyton Manning said after the Colts collapsed in the playoffs yet again. "Me and the Football Gods Kinda Like the Steelers," reads a headline in today's *Washington Post* sports section. A tipping point has been reached on TMQ's football gods concept -- suddenly it's everywhere. Lately the phrase has been in numerous sports columns, heard on the Fox NFL midgame show and elsewhere. This morning I typed "football gods" into the Google News search box. It returned 382 recent uses of the phrase in the global news outlets Google scans every 15 minutes.

Here's the thing -- I am the one who channels the football gods. Each offseason I journey alone to a distant mountaintop to beseech them for wisdom on line splits, hard counts and the best cheerleader swimsuit calendars. During the season, the football gods pass their messages to mortals through this column. Often I feel they are taking over my fingers as I write! Well, either the football gods or my AutoText. I'm the man to see if you wish to contact Grabthar, chief of the football pantheon; Lambasthor, god of halftime tirades; Bardok, god of offensive line play; Sheer and Micro, sister goddesses of cheerleading; Nike, goddess of football marketing. (The football gods were the subject of the very first Tuesday Morning Quarterback in 2000; the complete pantheon is at the bottom of this 2004 column.) Peyton, if you journey with me to the distant mountaintop, perhaps the football gods will reveal what you must do to reach the Super Bowl. Of course, they would expect an offering. Maybe you could autograph the stuff in their shopping cart.

Man what a fabulous game was Steelers at Colts! I'm glad Troy Polamalu's now-they-tell-us interception was inexplicably reversed, glad Jerome Bettis fumbled, because these gaffes made possible an ending that will be talked about for years. And the right team still won: there is no doubt Pittsburgh was the best team on Sunday. The table seemed set for Indianapolis: two comfy home games, then a 311-mile bus ride up I-75 to Detroit for Super Bowl XL. Why do the Colts endlessly deflate in the playoffs? I'll speculate below as part of my annual postseason-special analyses of each game. Meanwhile the Tuesday Morning Quarterback Defensive Player of the Year is Ben Roethlisberger. When Nick Harper took off with the fumble, there was only one gent between him and Indianapolis victory. The quarterback's open-field tackle when all seemed lost saved the day.

All four games this weekend were top-notch: this was among the best, most exciting divisionals weekends in NFL annals. High caliber of play is one reason visiting teams won two of the four divisional contests. You won't see many years when that happens, though home teams are still 51-13 in the divisionals since the current playoff format was adopted. Come the championship round, the home-field advantage practically disappears. Since the current playoff format was adopted, home teams are 17-13 in conference championships, a .566 winning figure that is lower than this year's .597 home-team winning fraction for regular-season games. In the championships, the bye week is a dim memory, all contestants were pounded the week before. And every player knows he is one 'W' away from that Super Bowl thing you might have heard about.

**Stats of the Week:** In 33 of their last 35 games, the Indianapolis Colts averaged 30.6 points. In the other two, both season-ending defeats in the divisionals round, the Colts averaged 10.5 points.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** Bill Belichick and Joe Gibbs both lost on a day they entered a combined 28-6 in postseason play.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** In two games at Chicago, Steve Smith had 26 receptions for 387 yards.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** From the fourth quarter of the Tampa game till the second quarter of the

Seattle game, Washington's offense staged eight consecutive three-and-outs.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** Chicago, whose 61 points allowed at home was the lowest regular season total ever for points allowed at home in a 16-game season, allowed 29 points in its home playoff game.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** In their previous 10 playoff games, the Patriots committed a total of six turnovers; on Saturday they committed five. Noted by reader David Myszewski of Newark, Calif.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** At one point, Ben Roethlisberger had 147 yards passing to zero for Peyton Manning.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** At one point, Jake Delhomme had 169 yards passing to two for Rex Grossman.

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** Once a combined 24-4, Chicago and Indianapolis finished a combined 1-5.

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** Seattle is on a pace to win another playoff game in 2028.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Phil Ryan of Redding, Calif., nominates Rebecca of the San Francisco 49ers. According to her team bio, Rebecca is a PhD student in psychology and has had one of her grad-school papers published. A cheer-babe who footnotes! Yours truly, who occasionally teaches college courses, would be happy to extend my office hours to help her work on her bibliography.

**Sweet Play of the Week:** Seattle holding a slim 7-3 lead in the third quarter, the Seahawks faced third-and-3 at midfield. Washington blitzed six, no rusher getting anywhere near Matt Hasselbeck, thanks to excellent blocking including from Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP Walter Jones. Joe Jurevicius ran a quick stop. Hasselbeck saw there was no safety behind Jurevicius and motioned him to streak up the field; 31-yard completion and Seattle takes a 14-3 lead on the possession. It was strictly a "go down to the lamppost and cut toward the blue car" play.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Game scoreless, Pittsburgh faced third-and-3 on the Indianapolis 6 on the opening drive of the game. The Steelers lined up empty backfield, three receivers left and two right; the Colts seemed surprised by this set at the goal line. Antwaan Randle El, closest of three on the left, simply ran a quick turn-in, touchdown.

**Sweet Skinny Player of the Week:** Scoring to take a 7-3 lead, Denver kicked off to New England. Kicker Todd Sauerbrun made the tackle that caused a Patriots' fumble, Broncos' recovery and soon a 10-3 Denver lead.

**Sweet Drive of the Week:** Indianapolis had come to life and scored to make it 21-10 at the start of the fourth. Pittsburgh staged a 12-play drive that included 11 clock-grinding rushes. The drive may have ended in a punt with 6:12 remaining, but took so many minutes off the clock there would be no time left for any theatrics. Right?

**Sweet Manly Men Plays:** Three occasions in the second half, the Colts or Steelers faced fourth-and-short. All three times they went for it and converted. Trailing 21-3 in the third, Indianapolis faced fourth-and-2 on its 36. The punt team started in; Peyton Manning waved them off, the Colts converted and scored a touchdown on the possession. Ahead 21-10, the Steelers faced fourth-and-1 at midfield in the fourth; the Steelers converted. Three snaps later, Pittsburgh faced fourth-and-1 on the Colts' 42; the Steelers converted. All these were the situations where losing teams launch mincing fraidy-cat punts. Teams that want to win go for it on fourth-and-short.

**Sour Call of the Week:** Seattle leading 7-3, the Blue Men Group prepared to punt with 30 seconds in the first half. To that point the Redskins' offense had recorded six points in its last five quarters. The situation dictated a 10-man rush to try to block the punt; what good would it do if the low-voltage Skins'

offense got the ball deep in its territory with seconds remaining? Washington rushed only a handful, trying to set up a return; got the ball on its 30 with 18 ticks left; and ran up the middle to kill the first-half clock. Why didn't Washington go after the punter?

**Sour Blocks of the Week:** Seattle leading 14-3, rain making a long field goal unlikely, Washington went for it on fourth-and-13 from the Seahawks' 33. The Hawks rushed three, yet got a sack as Bryce Fisher -- an Air Force veteran released twice in the NFL, and first-teamer on TMQ's All-Unwanted All Pros -- blew past highly drafted megabucks tackle Jon Jansen. When three rushers overwhelm five blockers, that is sour.

**By Reading This Subhead, You Agree to Any Terms NFL.com May Impose in the Future:** Everyone hates the long legal agreements to which you must click "accept" in order to use software. No one reads the agreements, nor are you expected to do so; the buttons might as well say "I have not read this agreement but nonetheless accept since I have no choice in the matter." Take-it-or-leave-it agreements are called "contracts of adhesion." Rental car paperwork, for example, is a contract of adhesion. You can't arrive at a Hertz counter and announce you wish to see someone in authority to negotiate a contract for a car. The clerk hands you the standard Hertz contract -- hoping you won't read it -- and you either sign or go elsewhere. Recently, Tuesday Morning Quarterback has noticed contracts of adhesion popping up all around. I needed to send an iPod back to Apple for service; first I had to accept to a 2,138-word agreement. In order to register to track UPS packages online, I had to agree to a 4,115 contract of adhesion. It contained this gem: "UPS may revise and update these Terms and Conditions at any time. Your continued usage of My UPS will be conditioned upon Your agreement to the revised Terms and Conditions." I was not only agreeing to the current terms, I was agreeing to unspecified future terms! So far, the hands-down champion is this 32,781-word "terms and conditions update" Hertz recently emailed customers. "We urge you to read the entire updated Terms and Conditions carefully from beginning to end and to contact Hertz if you have any questions," the header said. The update is 62 pages single-spaced!

**Washington at Seattle:** Last week, Tuesday Morning Quarterback noted the Redskins' defensive performance improved late in the season because Washington's cornerbacks were hurt, which forced the tastefully named Gregg Williams to give the corners safety help and, in turn, prevented Williams from calling blitzes. I cautioned, "Elite corner Shawn Springs is expected back for the upcoming Washington at Seattle contest. For heaven's sake, tastefully named Gregg, don't use that as an excuse to go blitz-wacky." Springs played, Williams resumes his blitzing ways, and surely as the night follows the day, blitzes were Washington's downfall.

Seattle's opening possession, the Seahawks faced third-and-4. It's the first expected-blitz down of the contest, first test of whether the tastefully named Gregg can resist the urge to go blitz-wacky. *Aaaaaaiiiiiiyyyyyeeeeee!* Big blitz, 37-yard completion to Darrell Jackson. Now Seattle leads 7-3 and faces third-and-3, six-man blitz, 31-yard completion to Joe Jurevicius. Now Seattle leads 14-3 and faces second-and-8, another blitz, another 37-yarder to Jackson. Now the play that ended Washington's season: Seattle leads 17-10 with 5:17 remaining and faces third-and-6. Six-man blitz and blocking back Mack Strong, 17 rushing attempts on the season, takes a draw for a career long run of 32 yards. A few snaps later it was 20-10 and Washington's goose was cooked. At Seattle when the Redskins played conventional defense, things went well; when Washington blitzed, the Blue Men Group gained yards in big bunches. And how many sacks or interceptions resulted from Washington blitzing? None.

**Please Tell Me This Study Wasn't Federally Funded:** Hugh Blee of San Francisco notes this study by researchers at the federally funded Los Alamos National Laboratory. The study purports to conclude soccer the most interesting major sport because it is the one in which a team with a poor record has the best chance of defeating a team with a good record.

**Tis Better to Have Rushed and Lost Than Never to Have Rushed At All:** Endlessly, Tuesday Morning Quarterback repeats -- on short-yardage downs, an NFL team is far more likely to succeed with a rush than a pass. Nevertheless, New England went for it on fourth-and-1 from the Denver 36; pass incomplete. Then Denver went for it on fourth-and-1 from the Patriots' 3; pass incomplete. Can't anyone

run up the middle for 1 yard anymore?

**By the Time the Probe Reaches Andromeda, the Bills and Vikings Will Have Won the Super Bowl:**

Today NASA plans to launch New Horizons, the first probe bound for the planet Pluto. In addition to high-tech gizmos, New Horizons will carry a tiny vial of the ashes of Clyde Tombaugh, the self-taught astronomer who discovered Pluto in 1930. The voyage to the ninth planet will last about a decade, despite New Horizons being the fastest object ever constructed by humanity. The probe's peak speed will be 47,000 miles per hour, which sure sounds like a lot. Yet that works out to 13 miles per second, versus light traveling at 186,000 mile per second, meaning New Horizons will move at 0.00007 percent of the speed of light. At this velocity the probe would require about 60,000 years to reach the nearest star beyond our sun, Alpha Centauri C; about 43 million years to reach the center of the Milky Way; about 2.1 billion years to reach Andromeda, the nearest galaxy like ours.

**New England at Denver:** Through the Belichick-Pats Super Bowl run, the football gods have loved this team. Everything's always gone right. Fumbles have always bounced New England's way. Fingertip catches and shoelace tackles have always happened for the Flying Elvii but not for opponents. The officials have always called things Belichick's way -- see more on that below. Tactics and playcalling have always been brilliant. Adam Vinatieri hits every pressure kick. And Tom Brady has consistently put the ball at the center of the receiver's number. NFL touts commonly speak of Brady as a leader and a winner but an average passer. Yours truly believes Brady has one of the best arms in football history. The ball is always right on the receiver's hands, in stride.

At Denver, everything that could have gone wrong for New England went wrong: Bill, better check the exact wording on that contract you signed with the guy with the tail and cloven hoofs. Denver blitzed a great deal, enough that the Broncos should have self-destructed. New England picked up the blitzes. New England allowed no sacks despite as many seven-man rushes as you'll ever see in a single game, and despite a third-string player, Tom Ashworth, starting at left tackle. But after Pats' blockers picked up the blitz, *Brady missed the open receiver*. Half a dozen times when Denver big-blitzed, a receiver was open for a substantial gain, and Brady's pass sailed over his head or clanged near his feet. For instance, start of the fourth quarter, Denver leading 17-6, New England facing third-and-4 on the Broncos' 25: Denver big-blitzes, Troy Brown is open for a touchdown, Brady sails the ball off target. On the next snap, Vinatieri honked a pressure kick!

New England made dumb mistakes on numerous plays. For instance Brown, normally a reliable player, muffed a fair catch, setting up Denver on the New England 15, touchdown to follow. Coaches competed with players to commit mental mistakes. When New England went for it on fourth-and-1 from the Denver 35, the game was scoreless. Going for it meant passing on a 52-yard field-goal attempt, though Vinatieri has a career-long from 57 and Colorado altitude adds about five yards to a placement kicker's range. Okay, so if you try for the first down you'll run, right? Surely a details-oriented coach like Belichick has seen the stats that rushes on fourth-and-1 succeed 74 percent of the time. Instead pass incomplete, ye gods.

Then there was the play where *everything* went wrong for the defending champions. Denver leading 10-6, New England faced third-and-5 on the Broncos' 5 at the end of the third. Not a bad place for a draw, which might work or lead to a field goal that makes it 10-9. Instead the Patriots pass; Denver big-blitzes; Troy Brown, in the slot left, inexplicably makes no attempt to block blitzing safety Nick Ferguson, who rushes directly over Brown; Ferguson pressures Brady, who instead of throwing the ball away or taking the sack -- often it's a smart play for a quarterback to throw the ball away or take a sack -- heaves a terrible pass that is intercepted by Champ Bailey and returned 100 yards to the New England 1. Not just a terrible pass, but a terrible *sideways* pass, the kind most prone to long interception returns. Instead of three points for the Pats, seven points for the Broncos. This was the game's decisive play, and on it: bad call by the coaches, botched blocking, bad decision by Brady. I guess the football gods had seen enough of the New England Patriots for a while.

Denver played a terrific game, and Broncos' faithful will protest I have said naught about that. New England has won three of the last four Super Bowls: its demise is simply the story of this contest. I'll

hope to have many complimentary things to say about Denver next week, okay?

**"They're Blitzing 110% of the Time, Clint!"** Last week, Tuesday Morning Quarterback noted many television announcers inaccurately describe use of the blitz: never was this on clearer display than in CBS's call of Pittsburgh at Indianapolis. The Steelers blitzed 14 times on 57 Colts' snaps; four blitzes in the first half, 10 in the second. Several blitzes worked, especially the fourth-down sack with 1:27 remaining that constituted Apparent End of the Game Number Two. Several backfired. The Dallas Clark 50-yard touchdown catch that started the Indianapolis comeback occurred on a six-blitz, Reggie Wayne's 24-yard catch to set up the next Indianapolis touchdown came against a blitz, and Wayne's two-point conversion catch after that touchdown came against a blitz. So whether the blitz was good or bad for Pittsburgh could be debated. But you'd never know any of this from the way announcers Dick Enberg and Dan Dierdorf yakked. What follows is paraphrase; I wrote as fast as I could.

"Pittsburgh has got to start putting pressure on Peyton Manning by blitzing," Dierdorf decreed in the fourth quarter, just after Clark scored a long touchdown against a blitz. Several times in the fourth quarter, *after* Pittsburgh started blitzing often, Dierdorf announced that Pittsburgh needed to start blitzing. For his part, Enberg declared in the fourth, "The reason for the Colts' comeback is that Pittsburgh has stopped bringing pressure. In the first half, the Steelers were rushing five, six, seven men all the time and shutting Peyton Manning down. Now they are dropping into coverage and letting Manning go to work." First, Pittsburgh ran no seven-man blitz during the game. Okay, shrug that off as a slip of the tongue. More important, in the first half the Steelers may have *looked* like they were blitzing often -- see more below -- but actually blitzed only four times, and during that half held the Colts to three points. When in the second half the Steelers began blitzing often, what the announcers recommended, they quickly surrendered two touchdowns and nearly blew their big lead.

Listening to Enberg and Dierdorf talk about a game considerably different from the one being played in front of them, all I could figure was that they were trying to impose a simplified storyline on a contest they were only half-watching. The simplified storyline was that Pittsburgh blitzed a lot in the first half and contained Indianapolis; then stopped blitzing in the second half and that's why Indianapolis came back. Neither was true, but this kind of storyline makes the announcers seem to understand what is transpiring, plus fits television's need for oversimplification. Neither Enberg or Dierdorf made much of the instances when blitzing backfired on Pittsburgh; pointing that out would have ruined the one-dimensional storyline. For that matter, Polamalu's interception, Apparent End of the Game Number One, came when the Steelers were in a conservative three-man rush. Still the CBS booth crew insisted the Pittsburgh blitz was working and regular defense was not. Perhaps Enberg and Dierdorf went into the game having already decided what the storyline would be, then paid no attention to actual events that did not fit their preconceived notions. They would hardly be the first sports announcers guilty of this.

**Pittsburgh at Indianapolis:** The Steelers had smart game plans on both sides of the ball. On offense, Pittsburgh threw deep early, especially to the tight end. This seemed to rattle the Colts defense, since Pittsburgh had run mostly short, conservative pass routes early in its regular-season defeat in the RCA Dome. Extremely technical note! Pittsburgh offensive linemen seemed to have spent extra time practicing against the spin moves that Tony Dungy-coached defensive lines use, because Steelers blockers were ready with the right technique -- step back a bit while the DL spins then pop him as he finishes spinning. The Pittsburgh offensive line played well, little-known left tackle Marvel Smith having a much better game than his counterpart, well-known Colts left tackle Tarik Glenn. After the Hypocycloids took a big lead, they resisted the urge to go pass-wacky, running, running, running to advance the clock while keeping Peyton Manning comfortably seated.

On defense, the Steelers game plan was to show the big-blitz early, then back off. This worked to perfection. Indianapolis apparently had spent the week preparing for the big-blitz, and surely wanted to be big-blitzed; there's nothing Big Brother likes more than being blitzed. Repeatedly in the first half, Pittsburgh safeties or cornerbacks crowded the line, bouncing up and down as if to blitz; repeatedly Manning audibled to quick slants or ups; then the Steelers' apparent blitzers dropped into coverage and Manning did not see, as he expected, someone open right away. For instance, Indy facing third-and-8 on its first possession, the Steelers showed a seven-blitz, crowding the line with jacked-up players; then rushed only four, incompleting as Manning appeared confused. Leading 14-0, Pittsburgh sacked Manning to

create a third-and-24, followed by a punt, using the same tactic of showing the big blitz then backing off. After only showing the blitz in the first, the Steelers came often in the second, with mixed results as noted above. The bottom line was holding the Colts to 18 points in their home dome, and that means Pittsburgh played tremendous defense.

Now to the Lucky Charms' collapse. The Indianapolis offensive line, which has played so well all season, had a horrible game; Glenn, especially. Pittsburgh's show-the-blitz-then-backpedal seemed to confound Colts' blockers, although every NFL team uses this trick at least occasionally. Well, every NFL team except the Colts, who almost never blitz or even fake blitzing -- which means the Indianapolis offensive line doesn't see this much in practice. Perhaps the Colts' "scout team" impersonating the Steelers' defense was running all-out blitzing in practice, and when the Steelers instead backpedaled, the blockers became bewildered. The Colts' offensive game plan called for establishing the run early, and weak blocking prevented this from working. Yet for some reason it was well into the third quarter before Colts coaches switched to the gonzo down-the-field tactics that the team executes so well; and the Colts did not go hurry-up till the end, though hurry-up might have negated Pittsburgh's elaborate presnap defensive movement.

For their part, Indianapolis defensive coaches were slow to react when Pittsburgh began running the ball almost exclusively in the second half, rushing on 11 consecutive downs in one stretch. On short-yardage downs by Pittsburgh, Indianapolis did not use an overstack run defense -- staying in a backed-off passing defense set that allowed the Steelers to convert a third-and-1 and third-and-2 in the third quarter. When Bettis ran for 9 yards on the third-and-2, setting up a Steelers' touchdown, he ran through a gap that Indianapolis tackle Montae Reagor vacated by using a *spin* move on the play. The spin is a pass-rush move -- why pass rush on third-and-2? Indianapolis did not begin to stack the box against the Steelers' run until the waning moments.

Technical stuff aside, the Colts' latest postseason breakdown seemed also to do with coaching and psychology. If the December suicide of his son James caused Tony Dungy to lose interest in football, no one can fault that. If the death gave the Colts as a group bad karma, maybe Sunday's collapse was fated. But this is hardly the first time a Dungy-coached team has come into the playoffs with great expectations and wheezed out: Dungy is now 102-58 in the regular season and 5-8 in the postseason. Dungy often says playoff games are just another game -- but they're not. The farther you go in the postseason, the more important game plans and psyche-up become. Indianapolis seemed to have nothing specific in its game plan for Pittsburgh, while the Steelers had clearly studied what San Diego did to the Colts and tailored a highly specific game plan. As for psyche-up, Dungy has said he doesn't believe in it. He should. Before Sunday, the last victory for the Colts' starters had been on Dec. 11, while the last time the starters played together was Dec. 18. The Indianapolis starters were a month removed from game speed and game energy. Yet the Colts held low-key practices the week before meeting Pittsburgh, then looked sluggish and not sharp in the first half. In the second half they played fine: but by then, were climbing out of a hole.

Try to bear in mind it was just last month the Colts were 13-0 and many serious sports commentators (well, if there can be "serious" sports commentary) were saying Indianapolis would go 19-0 and prove the greatest football team ever. From that point, the Colts went 1-3 and failed on the first steps of a Yellow Brick Road leading straight to the Super Bowl. Tony Dungy-coached teams, and Peyton Manning-quarterbacked teams, consistently choke in the playoffs. At this point it can't be just some fluke.

**Coach Cheney Would Have the Quarterback Line Up in an Undisclosed Location:** New Bills' general manager Marv Levy is interviewing head-coach candidates, but initially declined to take himself out of running for the post. On an *exclusive* basis, TMQ has learned the first screening question Levy planned to ask candidates was, "Have you been inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame as a coach?" There is precedent for running a selection process, then choosing yourself. Recall that in 2000, Dick Cheney was chosen to interview possible vice-presidential running mates for George W. Bush, and reported to Bush that the best possible running mate was none other than Richard Cheney. Perhaps Levy could name Cheney as the Bills' coach, while Levy assumes the Vice Presidency. Cheney would be overheard on the Buffalo sideline screaming, "What do you mean I'm not allowed to order an air strike

against the other team's bench?"

Memo to Marv Levy: one way to create a sense of optimism about return to glory would be to ditch the Bills' new uniforms, ugliest in the league, and return to the handsome red, white and flag blue look of the team's Super Bowl run. Not to put too fine a point on it, but red, white and flag blue is the single most successful color scheme in world history. Can it be coincidence Buffalo's recent woe has coincided with the switch from handsome uniforms to unsightly duds? Buffalos' new road uniforms resemble children's pajamas, while the new home uniforms make the Bills look walking bridge abutments. It's known that owner Ralph Wilson dislikes the new uniforms. Marv, just switch back. All will be forgiven!

**Hidden Plays:** Hidden plays are ones that never make highlight reels, but stop or sustain drives. The determining play of the Washington at Seattle game was the Redskins' missed 36-yard field goal attempt with 8:06 remaining. But what happened on the down before? Washington faced third-and-4 on the Blue Men Group 18, trailing 17-10. Redskins coaches called a *seven-step drop* -- Mark Brunell sprinting more than 10 yards backward. When Brunell wound up to throw short to Santana Moss, he had to heave the ball like crazy just to get it back to the line of scrimmage; incomplection, then the decisive missed kick. If you only need 4 yards, why is your quarterback sprinting backward 10 yards?

**Sideline Sartorial Watch:** A week ago at Cincinnati, kickoff temperature 61 degrees, Bonnie Bernstein wore a fur jacket on the sidelines. Saturday night at Denver, kickoff temperature 54, Bernstein wore pink gloves. She looked smashing -- but what's with fur and gloves in mild temperatures? Meanwhile Stephen Carey of Littleton, Colo., reports he attended the Broncos game and saw a direct correlation between cheer-babe professionalism and Denver success. At kickoff, Carey says, the Broncos cheerleaders wore bulky long-pants outfits; immediately Denver fell behind. For the second quarter the cheerleaders switched to extremely revealing numbers they would wear in the halftime show, immediately Denver scored 10 points and took the lead. In the second half, the cheerleaders wore the first-quarter outfits but with parts discarded, Carey says; Denver held the lead throughout.

**Carolina at Chicago:** Boo! Boo! The Soldier Field crowd was lustily booing Rex Grossman in the second quarter, when he had two passing yards. Barely a month ago the same crowd lustily booed Kyle Orton and chanted GROSS-man, GROSS-man. Bears fans should have been booing their defense. History teaches that if a football team spends the week before a game complaining about not getting enough publicity, that team gets pounded when kickoff arrives. A year ago, Cal should have made the BCS, and spent the week before its bowl game grouching about lack of press; come kickoff of said bowl, Cal was pounded. This season, Texas Tech spent the week before its bowl game whining about lack of admiration for its supposedly unstoppable Offense of the Future; come the bowl, Texas Tech lost as the Offense of the Future scored 10 points. Last week, the Bears defense whined about not getting enough love, though it seemed to yours truly the Chicago defense has been constantly praised. Come kickoff, Chicago defenders surrendered 29 points and 434 yards. The Bears defense looked like a bunch of preseason who-dats, and at home against Carolina's backup tailbacks to boot.

Consider the second play from scrimmage. Steve Smith, the league's best receiver and a gentleman who caught for 169 yards on his last visit to Chicago, lines up right and runs a fly; the Bears big-blitz, leaving no safety help; corner Charles Tillman is singled on Smith; Tillman makes the embarrassing high-school mistake of "looking into the backfield," trying to guess the play rather than guard his man; Smith blows past Tillman for an essentially uncontested 58-yard touchdown. Just a screw-up? Third quarter, Carolina leading 16-14, the Panthers face second-and-20 on the Bears' 39. Smith, who had 176 yards receiving on the night to that point, again lines up right and runs a fly; the Bears big-blitz, leaving no safety help; *third string* cornerback Chris Thompson is singled on Smith; Thompson makes the embarrassing high-school mistake of "looking into the backfield," trying to guess the play rather than guard his man; Smith blows past for an essentially uncontested 39-yard touchdown. Chicago defensive coordinator Ron Rivera has been hyped recently as a head-coaching candidate -- Sunday, with an extra week to prepare, he seemed a county recreation league flag football coaching candidate. *Twice* Rivera left the league's most dangerous receiver going deep one-on-one with no safety help, against corners who obviously had not been coached to concentrate on their man, rather than lazily stare into the backfield.

Carolina seemed to lack the killer instinct early. Leading 7-0, the 'Cats faced fourth-and-8 on the Bears'

34; John Fox ordered a punt that rolled into the end zone for a net gain of 14 yards. The field-goal attempt would have been 51 yards; kicker John Kasay has hit from 52 this season, and has a career high of 56. On the next series, still ahead 7-0, Carolina faced fourth-and-1 on the Bears' 45. Again Fox ordered the punt, though the odds of converting a first down were good. Otherwise it's hard to fault much of what Carolina did. The 'Cats offensive line was terrific -- after surrendering eight sacks in the first Carolina at Chicago game, it gave up just one. The Panthers defensive line consistently outplayed the Chicago offensive line. Chicago defensive tackle Tommie Harris made the Pro Bowl; during the bye week, Bears' faithful bellyached that the team's entire defensive line should have. This is another instance of playing poorly after complaining about not getting enough hype; Carolina's defensive line looked significantly better than Chicago's. And the Carolina game-planning was smart: the Panthers went deep early, surprising the Bears. The late end-around to Smith, setting up the touchdown that proved the winning margin, was an unusually good call. The call was made by Dan Henning, who got drummed out as offensive coordinator at Jersey/B by endless New York media claims that he didn't know how to call a game.

Back to the meltdown of the Ming Ding Xiong, "Bears, whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Mandarin. Chicago seemed to assume that Carolina would run exactly the same game plan the Panthers used in their earlier visit to Soldier Field. Why would Carolina use again a game plan that failed the first time? Smith's two touchdown catches came against the blitz, and those were hardly the only Chicago blitzes to backfire. Panthers leading 7-0, the 'Cats faced third-and-9. Play conventional defense and a stop is likely; instead six-blitz, 46-yard completion to Smith -- single-covered yet again! How in heaven's name could Steve Smith have been allowed loose deep *three times* by a defense that spent the week boasting about being as good as the 1985 Bears? Plus the Bears had an extra week to prepare, why did they seem discombobulated? It's Carolina 23, Chicago 21, Panthers facing second-and-goal on the Bears' 1. Chicago tries to substitute and gets caught with the wrong personnel on the field; various Bears are pointing at each other, unsure whom to cover; "call time out!" yours truly is crying. The Bears did not call time out, easy touchdown to backup tight end Kris Magnum, who was not covered by anyone. *Saving a timeout was more important than stopping a touchdown?* Note to the Bears defense: You sure can talk, next time try performing.

**Law of the Other Shoe:** Yes, everyone assumed Polamalu's interception would count -- but you could see the Steelers celebrating on the sidelines during the replay review. Never celebrate until all-naughts on the scoreboard! When the interception was overturned, the other shoe fell: the Steelers let Indianapolis fly down the field for a touchdown in four snaps. And a quick word about that football cliché, "Get on the ground." When you find yourself with the ball in a game-winning situation, get on the ground! If Polamalu had simply cradled his catch and stayed down, things would have been fine; his getting up and trying to run caused the fateful review. When the Steelers were at the goal line in Apparent End of the Game Number Three, Bettis fumbled because he was struggling for an extra yard. In that situation, run through a hole if it's there, otherwise get on the ground. Of course, football enthusiasts were glad for these small errors by Polamalu and Bettis, because they made possible the memorable finish.

**This Year's New England Officiating Complaint:** Several times in recent seasons, this space has complained that the Patriots seemed to be living charmed lives with the officials: not just the pass interference no-calls late in the Indianapolis at New England AFC Championship game, but the rareness of the two most damaging penalties (defensive pass interference and offensive holding) called against the Flying Elvii throughout the team's Super Bowl run. Here is a 2004 column complaining that officials aren't calling enough penalties on New England, complete with a video clip of NFL Vice President of Officiating Mike Pereira countering my arguments.

Today I rise to defend New England as victim of bum calls. The Patriots leading 3-0 with 1:51 remaining in the first half, Ashley Lelie went deep, covered by Asante Samuel. The two players brushed against each other slightly in the end zone as the ball sailed over Lelie's head. (The NFL.com video section has an excellent view of the play; click the Patriots-Broncos score). No flag was thrown. When no yellow appeared, the crowd groaned loudly, and *then* an official flagged New England for pass interference: ball spotted on the Pats' 1, Denver scored to take a 7-3 lead. Samuel and Lelie brushed each other an equal amount and each was looking back for the ball; the situation seemed exactly what is described in the incidental-contact rule. Rule 8.2.5: "Actions that do not constitute defensive pass interference include but are not limited to incidental contact by a defender's hands, arms or body when both players are competing for the ball... if there is any question whether contact is incidental, the ruling shall be no

interference." Watch the replay and try to find the pass interference. But what really frosted me about the call was that the official seemed to throw the flag in response to the crowd, not the play. If the official thought it was interference, okay, then he reaches for yellow as soon as he sees the foul. Instead the ball sailed by, the players ran out of the end zone, and only after the crowd groaned did a flag sail. Officials should *never* react to the crowd. Note that with 31 seconds remaining in the Colts-Steelers game, there was a nearly identical play in the Pittsburgh end zone and officials properly ruled it incidental contact.

Bonus defense of New England: when Champ Bailey fumbled near the Pats' goal line, it sure looked like the ball rolled into the end zone and out of bounds, rather than going out at the Pats' 1 as zebras ruled. Instead of New England ball on the 20, Denver had possession on the 1 and scored on the next snap. No one expects a middle-aged side judge to keep pace with an NFL cornerback as he sprints 100 yards, so the fact that the official who made the call on the field didn't have a good view was not his fault. But replay showed the fumble rolling into the end zone. Alter these two calls, and right now we might be getting ready for a Pittsburgh at New England AFC championship.

**Next Week:** Should NFL coaches be hired as day laborers so they are easier to fire?

## Divisional Playoffs Readers:

(Jan. 18, 2006) -- The Rose Bowl was such a terrific game, I lamented that I did not tape it to watch again. **Lou Trumbo of Whittier, Calif.**, reports that for \$2, you can download from iTunes a compressed version of the Rose Bowl; the file plays on a computer or an iPod. That iPods can show complex video images on their miniscule screen is amazing in technical terms. But watching a football game on the miniscule screen? "There's the ball -- no wait, that's one of the players -- no, maybe it's the mascot."



Now starting at tight end for the Carolina Panthers

...

Many readers, including **Claire Benney of Mount Holly, N.C.**, noted I misspelled Carolina tight end Kris Mangum as "Magnum." This error must drive him crazy, though perhaps he doesn't mind if women mistake him for Tom Selleck. Also Mangum is not the Panthers' reserve tight end, he is the starter. Which makes it all the worse that Chicago's defense had no idea where he was on the game-winning play! **Chris Wagener of Minnetonka, Minn.**, points out, "Green Bay's new coach Mike McCarthy just set some kind of record for shortest tenure as the NFL's youngest head coach. He was the youngest for a grand total of four days. The Jets' new head coach, Eric Mangini, is now the youngest head coach." **Nick Johnson of Salt Lake City, Utah**, supposes, "I wouldn't put much faith in the Seahawks this weekend. So far this season, Cat teams (Panthers, Jaguars, Lions, Bengals) are 10-1 verses Bird teams (Eagles, Seahawks, Cardinals, Falcons, Ravens). The only Bird victory over a Cat happened on Thanksgiving Day when Atlanta beat Detroit." In nature, cats kill birds but it's rarely the other way around.



Before Romeo and Juliet, there was ... implied sex.

**Matt Campbell of Des Moines, Iowa**, reports that a *Des Moines Register* review of *Tristan and Isolde* cautioned viewers of "implied sex." Implied sex? Actually, I got a lot of that when I was dating. **Tyler of Trenton, N.J.**, reports that the town name of Bala Cynwyd, Pa., is not a transcription error -- many towns around Philadelphia were [named for Welsh places or persons](#). Cynwyd, it seems, was the [son of Cynfelyn ab Arthwys](#), while the original town of Bala, Wales, has a picturesque location on Lake Tegid.

The recent blizzard of anti-blitz statistics prompted **Danny Oppenheimer of Princeton, N.J.**, to suppose that occasional blitzing is necessary if only to keep the offense worried, just as the occasional deep incomplection can be useful to keep the defense honest. **Keagan Sacripanti of Monroe, N.C.**, supposed that the core problem isn't the blitz, it's the big-blitz of six men or more. When you big-blitz, someone's sure to be open, and it's just a question of whether the quarterback can spot that person and deliver the ball fast. Five-man blitzes, on the other hand, apply extra pressure but leave sufficient defenders to cover the receivers. Maybe next year I'll track the difference between the five-man blitz and the big-blitz to determine if blitzing more than five is the core cause of blitzing that backfires.

**Paul Scansaroli of Downingtown, Pa.**, wonders, "If a team playing a 3-4 defense sends a linebacker as the fourth rusher, does that count as a blitz?" No, a 3-4 team sending a linebacker is not a blitz. Television announcers may overstate the frequency of blitzing by 3-4 teams such as Pittsburgh by crying "blitz!" whenever they see a linebacker in the pass rush, but a linebacker in the pass rush of a 3-4 team only adds up to four rushers. Most 3-4 teams rush a linebacker on most passing downs, making this a conventional tactic for a 3-4 front. Once a TMQ reader proposed that a 3-4 defense sending one linebacker should be called a "spritz." Probably the best term for what a 3-4 defense does

on most passing downs is a "zone rush" -- the rush is composed of the three linemen plus one linebacker or defensive back, only adding up to four, but creating confusion about where the fourth rusher will come from. Sometimes Pittsburgh drops one defensive lineman into coverage and rushes two linebackers or a linebacker and a defensive back. That still adds up to four, but would be called a blitz by most television announcers. If the number of rushers adds up to four, it's not a blitz. Be sure to see [Pat Kirwan's recent column on the blitz](#). The Colts hardly ever blitz, according to Kirwan's numbers; just 38 blitzes on 953 opposition snaps in 2005, or 4 percent blitzing. The Steelers blitz most, he shows; 317 blitzes on 998 opposition snaps, a very high 32 percent blitzing, since the league average is somewhere between 15 and 20 percent. (On Sunday, the Steelers blitzed on 25 percent of Colts' snaps.) I checked with Pat and for the Steelers, or anyone playing a 3-4 front, he counts it as a blitz only if at least five players rush.

Regarding the upcoming AFC championship, **John Baker of Tallahassee, Fla.**, notes Bill Cowher is 1-4 in AFC championships, and all those games were played in Pittsburgh; maybe he's actually better off on the road. Denver, on the other hand, is 6-1 overall in the AFC championship; I sure wouldn't want to play the Broncos in this game. **Aaron Applebaum of Columbus, Ohio**, thinks the Steelers have already won the battle of the omens. Since the Cleveland Browns came back into existence, he notes, each year they have lost to that season's eventual Super Bowl winner; "and of the four teams left, only the Steelers beat the Brownies this year." Surely the Broncos have already won the battle of the sidelines, as they will be urged on by the red-hot-babes [Broncos Cheerleaders](#), while Pittsburgh has no cheerleading unit. But I was wrong to assert, as many readers, including **Ted Merklin of Saint Marys, Pa.**, pointed out, that Pittsburgh has never fielded a pep squad. From 1961-69, there were the Steelerettes. You can view a tribute to them [here](#), plus play the delightfully cheesy 1960s Steelers' fight song. Last week's column noted that in 1985 Chicago disbanded its Honey Bears cheerleading squad because Bears management worried the Honey Bears were too sexy; probably this was not the issue with [the Steelerettes](#). Compare any photo of the barely clothed, warm-to-the-touch Broncos Cheerleaders of today with the librarian-like Steelerettes of the 1960s, and how can you doubt that we live in an age of progress!

On super-secret agencies that now have web sites, **Ed DeJesus of Norwood, Mass.**, points out that the National Security Agency now not only has a web site, it also has a [web site for kids](#). **Laura D'Arcy of Bakersfield, Calif.**, noted the mysterious National Geospatial Intelligence Agency technically insists on calling itself the [National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency](#). That hyphen makes its acronym NGA, not NGIA as I said. Hmm -- NGA is also the acronym for the [National Governors Association](#). Did the novice spooks at the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency not know that when the agency was named in 2004? Or did they deliberately choose a name whose abbreviation sounds like a public-interest organization? That's right, the National Geospatial-Intelligence Agency even has a *cover acronym*.

Governors note 1: Four years ago when many states were running deficits, governors Republican and Democrat alike demanded federal bailouts. [Now most states are running surpluses](#), and how many have offered to give the money back? Governors note 2: Most states are running surpluses because tax revenues have risen, fiscal 2005 corporate taxes paid to states being 11.6 percent higher than projected, according to the governors' annual [Fiscal Survey of the States](#). Wasn't George W. Bush derided in polite circles when he said federal tax cuts would result in rising government revenue?



**A helmet toss is a clear sign of one who is rueful.**

Finally Mike Vanderjagt -- isn't that a brand of flavored schnapps? -- honked the game-ending kick and knocked Indianapolis out of the playoffs. For a man advertised as the most accurate kicker in NFL history, this is Vanderjagt's second Big Honk in as many seasons, since he missed a field goal to tie on the final play of the Colts' season opener at New England in 2004. At any rate, many readers, including **Rob Uccello Jr. of Millbury, Mass.**, reminded that Tuesday Morning Quarterback once had a running item predicting Vanderjagt would honk the biggest kick of his life. That running item, headlined "You'll Rue the Day You Didn't Miss," appeared while Vanderjagt was on his record-setting streak of 42 consecutive made field goals, and urged him to miss a couple unimportant kicks so his luck would not run out before a big kick. Specifically, [I observed of Vanderjagt during the streak](#), "This gentleman is now all but assured of honking a big kick in the playoffs." They're ruing in Indianapolis, really ruing.

## Seattle plays box-and-one on Steve Smith, and is Miss America a space alien?

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Jan. 24, 2006) -- Finally someone had a game plan for Steve Smith! The Giants and Bears let him go deep single-covered, seeming to have no idea, just no idea at all, that Smith is the league's leading receiver. On Sunday, the Seahawks had two and sometimes three gentlemen around Smith. He was jammed off the line. There was always a safety on his side when he went deep. Usually there was a linebacker beneath him so he couldn't run the quick slant or catch the hitch screen. The Seahawks played football's first box-and-one defense! Naturally Smith was shut down, proving he is a member of genus *Homo*, not a space alien. Seattle's box-and-one advanced the Seahawks to the Super Bowl, but left two questions. First, why didn't the Giants and Bears game-plan for Smith? This remains quite mysterious. Second, when the Hawks were doubling or tripling Smith, who was open? Somebody from the Panthers *had* to be open -- and that somebody did not find the ball fluttering his way.

In other football news, Harvard grad Marv Levy is now the Bills' general manager and Yale alum Dick Jauron the Bills' coach, giving Buffalo an all-Ivy front office. Pip pip, you chaps! On an *exclusive* basis, TMZ has learned that the Bills will replace their locker room with a lecture hall; players will be required to write term papers; the traditional Gatorade shower in the moment of victory will become a fino sherry shower served with priscutto and melon. Fans will cheer, "Please see fit to exert reasonable effort!" After bad calls the crowd will shout at the officials, "We beg to differ!"

And in other football news, during the offseason the Broncos acquired, to much laughter, Cleveland's entire low-performing defensive line. During the regular season the Cleveland expatriates performed well, garnering much praise. But there was no Cinderella finish: on Sunday, they turned back into the 2004 Cleveland Browns defensive line. You could practically see Gerard Warren and Courtney Brown beginning to resemble pumpkins as the game progressed! Two years ago, Denver's defense finished the regular season fourth-ranked, then gave up 41 points in the Broncos' playoff loss. One year ago, Denver's defense again finished four-ranked, then gave up 49 points in the Broncos' playoff loss. This season, the Denver defense fell to 15th, but retained consistency by disappearing in the team's playoff loss. What is it with the Denver defense? See speculation as part of my championship-round analysis special.

**Stats of the Week:** Ben Roethlisberger is 14-1 in road games.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** After outrushing opponents 346-128 in its first two playoff contests, Carolina was outrushed 36-190 in its third.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** In his last nine games, Matt Hasselbeck has 16 touchdown passes versus two interceptions.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** In its last four playoff appearances, Denver has been outscored 78-137.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** Shaun Alexander has been stopped on third-and-1 just once this season.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** Pittsburgh's seven consecutive wins have come by an average score of 29-12.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** In Denver's first nine home games, the Broncos trailed for a total of 47:49. In its final home game, the AFC Championship, Denver trailed for 49:11. Noted by Dave Myszewski of Newark, Calif.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** League-leading receiver Steve Smith barely had more receiving yards (33)

than Seattle backup quarterback Seneca Wallace (28).

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** Pittsburgh and Seattle enter the Super Bowl on a combined 20-1 run.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Kristina Hoyer of the Denver Broncos. According to her team bio, Hoyer is a business development manager at Office Depot, and dances or plays lacrosse to relax. She says the hardest thing about being a cheerleader is "overcoming cheerleader stereotypes, especially in the business world." We know what you mean by that, Kristina. But bear in mind, lots of upper-management types in Fortune 500 corporations are basically cheerleaders, if unable to dance and nowhere near as pleasant to look at as Hoyer. Suppose in corporate boardrooms, instead of simply saying "Yes sir" to whatever perfidy is proposed by the CEO, upper management actually did cheerlead? Here's how a corporate cheer would sound: "Cook those books, inflate that bonus!" Another: "Laptops expense account interns blackberries, the boss denies all knowledge of inadvertent alleged fraudulent misrepresentation of certain unintentional diversions to offshore entities!" (Okay, that one needs some work, but the corporate legal department insisted on input.) Another boardroom cheer: "PLEA-bargain, PLEA-bargain."

**Sweet Play of the Week:** Early in the game, on obvious-passing downs Pittsburgh was bringing a wide receiver in motion back toward the formation as an extra blocker against Denver blitzes. Now it's late in the first half, Steelers leading 10-3 and facing third-and-9 on the Broncos' 23. Antwaan Randle El lines up left and comes in motion back toward the formation as if to help with blitz-blocking; at the snap he cartwheels and takes a flare pass in the left flat, first down; the Steelers score on the possession to make it 17-3. Denver ignored Randle El because the Broncos assumed he would be the extra blocker -- sweet.

**Smart Plays of the Week:** Game scoreless, Pittsburgh faced third-and-3 on its first possession. Ben Roethlisberger threw a quick out to Hines Ward; Champ Bailey broke on the ball seemed likely to intercept, with nothing but grass ahead; Ward reached back and yanked hard on Bailey's arm, causing the ball to pop up into the air; Ward caught the deflection for a first down. The first down was nice, but the key element of this play was that Ward turned into a defender, preventing Denver from taking possession and perhaps scoring a quick six. When the ball is improperly thrown, too many receivers just stand there and watch the interception. Later, Pittsburgh leading 10-3, Jake Plummer heave-hoed into the end zone. The pass was underthrown and likely to be intercepted; the Broncos' Ashley Lelie extended to knock the ball away, and Denver got a field goal on the series. Receivers -- when the pass is bad, do your duty!

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 2:** Game scoreless, Seattle backup quarterback Seneca Wallace, who's fast, trotted onto the field. Surely the Carolina defenders said to themselves, "It's some crazy two-quarterback trick play." Wallace lined up as a receiver, then ran a stop-and-go, making a beautiful 28-yard catch. The trick was that there was no trick -- Cats' defenders seemed shocked that a backup quarterback would simply run a regular pass pattern. The Qwest Field (henceforth to this column Qwest Megaphone) crowd roaring at military-afterburner decibels, on the next play the other shoe fell for Carolina. No one covered tight end Jerramy Stevens down the middle on a seam route, touchdown.

**Sweet Play of the Week No. 3:** Seattle led 17-7, but Carolina was making a push. The Hawks faced third-and-3. Matt Hasselbeck dropped back to pass, then scrambled right toward the first-down marker. As he began to fall out of bounds, Hasselbeck shifted the ball from his right hand to his left hand because the left side of his body was closer to the marker, then extended his left hand across the line: first down and Seattle scores on the possession to make it 20-7. Hasselbeck not only performed a feat of dexterity, he knew exactly where the marker was.

**Sour Blocks of the Week:** Seattle leading 17-0, Carolina faced third-and-16 on the Blue Men Group 32 in the second quarter. Whatever you do, Cats, don't get sacked out of field-goal range! Three Seattle defenders rush; five Carolina blockers block; sack by Rocky Bernard, and Carolina punts. Three rushers overcome five blockers -- *Aaaaaiiiiiiiiiyyyyyyyyeeeee!* Earlier in the day, Denver trailed 27-17 with 5:02 remaining and faced fourth-and-10. Mike Shanahan did the manly-man thing by going for it. Pittsburgh rushed three, Denver had five blockers, sack and the Broncos' season concludes. Three rushers over-

come five blockers -- *Aaaaaiiiiiiiyyyyyyyye!!!!*

**The Winner Was Chosen by Slot Machine:** So Miss America was crowned in Las Vegas, then wandered around looking for a shoreline to jump at. TMQ suspects this pageant is on its last legs, as it were, and not just because the walkway gods will punish the sponsoring outfit for abandoning Atlantic City. The Miss America event shifted to Vegas, yet did not seize the chance to modernize by converting the swimsuit competition into a strip-tease competition complete with strippers' poles! It continues to drive TMQ crazy that Miss America goes to incredible lengths to assemble a collection of bikini-clad mega-babes, then offers few pictures. Here, click the thumbnails of swimsuit-heat winners Kristi Glaskas of Virginia or Julia Bachison of Utah. Libby Copeland of the *Washington Post* reported that in the press materials handed out by the sponsors, winner Jennifer Berry, Miss Oklahoma, declared she loves to watch reruns of the sitcom *Full House* -- the show that launched the insufferable Olsen twins into the world. Suppose you were a Miss America contestant and your guilty pleasure actually was watching reruns of *Full House*. Why would you reveal this fact, which makes you sound like an airhead? Anyway, surely Jennifer Berry is a fine person and good at ballet, but she doesn't appear especially pretty. Can we even be confident she is of this Earth? Scan here in Turn for the Judges, a delightfully goofy beauty-pageant website, to find a photo of Miss Texas with the Lombardi Award finalists.

**Second Babes-and-Broadcasters Compliant:** CBS offered only a couple brief glances of the red-hot-babes Denver Broncos' cheerleaders who, as noted by many readers including Shawn Cook of Memphis, Tenn., were fully clothed. Fully clothed cheerleaders surely undercut Denver's chance of being favored by the football gods. Kickoff temperature was 34 degrees, but bear in mind, the Philadelphia Eagles' cheerleaders have worn leotards and halter tops under these conditions. Being red-hot the Broncos cheerleaders managed to radiate sex appeal despite excessive clothing, in this case cowboys outfits that made yours truly say, "Giddyup!" And unless I missed it, FOX never showed the glamorous Seattle Sea-Gals at all. Hey networks, you're *supposed* to look at the cheerleaders! In primetime, the networks now give viewers a nonstop degrading torrent of juvenile sexual smirking and vulgar glamorization of improbable violence. But when it comes to showing fit, beautiful women who are dancing in a public place and wish to be looked at, about that the networks become squeamish.

**Pittsburgh at Denver:** Not only have the Steelers won seven straight, they have not trailed since the third quarter of the wild-card round. In the divisionals, the Steelers scored on two of their first three possessions; Sunday, on their first four possessions. Pittsburgh jumped on Indianapolis and made the Colts play catch-up, then jumped on Denver and made the Broncos play catch-up. Seattle coaches better worry about the first quarter.

The Steelers opened by passing, and though the team's 17 attempts in the first half was a standard total, Denver seemed surprised that Pittsburgh passed so much right away, including seven called passes on its first possession. Why Denver found this surprising was another matter, considering the Hypocycloids also opened by passing against Indianapolis the previous week, also calling seven passes on the first possession. This team as come a long way in terms of offensive sophistication since the Steelers opened by mainly running up the middle in last year's AFC championship game. Meanwhile, good offensive line play would prove a common theme for the two conference champions. Steelers' blockers turned the Cleveland West crew on the Denver defensive line back into pumpkins, with guards Alan Faneca, who's well-known, and Kendall Simmons, who ought to be well-known, having particularly good days. Roethlisberger now has a spectacular won-loss record as a starter, and Sunday played a masterful game, making clear he is leading the Pittsburgh effort, not being dragged along in its wake.

Defensively the Steelers crossed Denver up by hardly blitzing at all, though again Broncos' coaches should have anticipated this tactic, since the previous week Pittsburgh had crossed Indianapolis up by hardly blitzing at all, at least in the first half. Most of Pittsburgh's big defensive plays -- the two interceptions and the third-and-10 stop that led to the Broncos kicking a short field goal when the game was still close -- came against conventional fronts, not the blitz. On Monday, the sports-yak world was making much of the fact that Bill Cowher is 102-1 when his team takes a lead of 11 points or more. Of course he's more likely to win when he's ahead! (Those stats about how Team X has a winning record when leading going into the fourth quarter drive me crazy.) But though Cowher's teams usually don't lose the lead because they run to manage the clock in the second half, poor clock management was the only flaw

in Pittsburgh's game Sunday. Leading 27-10 and gaining possession in the early fourth quarter, Pittsburgh took just 1:32 off clock before punting, then on its next possession took just 1:38 off clock before punting. Incomplete passes when the Steelers should simply have run were the culprits in both cases.

Denver lost at home for the first time since November 2004; maybe the law of averages simply caught up with the Broncos. Certainly with a Super Bowl ticket at stake the Colorado oxygen-depletion advantage, which normally helps the team win at Denver, meant less as every player went firewall-throttles. Offensively, the Broncos just looked bad. They had trouble running, though entered the game as the league's No. 2 rushing club: the Broncos' longest rush was seven yards. Denver's first-half possessions went: Punt, fumble, field goal, interception. By halftime, the team was down 24-3 and abandoned the run, though should not have, for defenders tire at 5,280 feet in the second half. From the second quarter to the third quarter, Denver went 20:03 without a first down, which was just disastrous. Don't blame this game on Plummer reverting to Mistake Jake. Spectators didn't see any other Denver offensive players performing well, either: The blocking was below average and the great Rod Smith had a killer drop on a third down when the game was still close. Coaches made a nice call by sending Ashley Lelie deep down the middle on a second-and-1 for the touchdown that briefly brought Denver back into the contest: if you pass on a short-yardage down, go for the home run, not some dinky sideways thing. But Denver's failure to switch to the hurry-up in the fourth quarter was inexplicable, and this was a coaching error. With the score 27-10 and less than 9 minutes remaining, Denver was still huddling up and taking its merry old time. After Plummer went out of bounds with 8:24 remaining, the Broncos casually jogged back into a huddle, perhaps believing the clock would stop. Denver coaches did not object to the slow huddle on this play, seeming not to know the five-minute out-of-bounds rule -- see the Phil Simms item - - and coaches are paid to know the rules. Pittsburgh, ahead 27-17 with six minutes remaining, the Broncos were still huddling and taking their jolly good time to approach the line.

Over on defense, the Broncos opened by big-blitzing too much, just as they had against New England a week ago. In that contest, Tom Brady repeatedly missed open receivers when Denver rushed six, so the Broncos paid no price for excessive blitzing. On Sunday, Denver blitzed on each of the first four Pittsburgh third downs: Roethlisberger hit the open receivers and the result was one Pittsburgh touchdown, two Pittsburgh first downs and one incompleteness. Give Denver coaches credit for realizing the blitz was not working: for the rest of the game, Denver played mostly straight defense. That didn't work either, which leads to the question of why the Broncos' defense has lately been stout in the regular season, then attenuated in the playoffs.

My preseason preview noted, "For the last two years, Denver has led the NFL in schizophrenia. The Broncos have gone 20-12 in the regular season, 0-2 in the playoffs." Now over three seasons Denver is 33-15 in the regular season and 1-3 in the postseason. In that preview, I hung recent Denver disappointment on postseason evaporation of the Broncos' running game and defense -- exactly what happened Sunday. Why does the Denver running attack shine in the regular season then wheeze out in the playoffs? Incredibly scientifically advanced answer: I don't know. Regarding the defense, answers seem clear: excessive blitzing that invites big plays, an overrated defensive backfield, predictable defensive game plans, and defensive coaches who act surprised when the opponent is prepared for the predictable defensive game plan. This season Denver was second against the rush but 29th against the pass. If you're 29th against the pass, you better not act surprised when your championship-game opponent opens by passing a lot.

At this point in his career, John Lynch is a linebacker, not a defensive back. This season Lynch made the Pro Bowl on rep, since he's not even the best safety on the Denver team. (That's Nick Ferguson.) Denver got its great rush-defense stats partly because Lynch excels at run defense and played up in the line much of the time: but that meant when opponents passed, often Lynch was unable to help. Lynch has been up in the line so much lately, including on Sunday, the Broncos have been playing what amounts to a 4-4-3, which is a high-school look! A 4-4-3 stops the run but gets shredded by the pass. On Sunday, Lynch had just three tackles despite spending much of the game at the line, while making no big play. Megabucks corner Champ Bailey also made no big play, and for the second consecutive year was unimpressive in the Broncos' crunch game. As noted by reader Emanuele Fadini of Turin, Italy, on Roethlisberger's 12-yard touchdown pass to Cedric Wilson, which put the Steelers ahead 10-0, Bailey was making the high-school mistake of "looking into the backfield" trying to guess what Big Ben would do: Champ lost track of Wilson, who ended up unguarded. Bailey too made the Pro Bowl largely on rep: what sense

does it make for a team that's 29th against the pass to have two defensive backs bound for Hawaii? "A lot of teams throw the ball against us, they just don't normally succeed," Denver corner Domonique Foxworth said after the game. Actually, practically everybody who throws the ball against Denver succeeds. Sunday, the Broncos' pass defense paid the piper.

**King's Horror Novel *The Voicemail Menu Has Already Been Optioned*:** Last week, Stephen King released a new horror novel called *Cell*. It's about -- demonic cell phones. I'm tempted to write a horror novel in which a beautiful woman is stranded in a gothic cathedral on a remote island and chased down lonely, dark corridors by a strange creature making clacking noises. The thing gets closer and closer, keeps getting bigger, bullets bounce off it until at last she realizes it is a supernatural typewriter churning out thousands of pages of formula horror novels in which people get chased down lonely, dark corridors by strange creatures. And it can't be stopped! Here are other possible Stephen King books based on everyday items:

- *Vente Latte*. A spunky recently divorced single mom is stranded in a deserted Starbucks on an abandoned super-secret military base on a remote island during a power failure. The espresso maker comes to life as a hideous beast controlling an army of extra-shot double-half-skim peanut-caramel lattes. The recipes alone evoke horror! The heroine must defeat the living lattes without burning her hand on the coffee, which is *very* hot.
- *Individually Wrapped*. An evil multinational corporation prepares to market individually wrapped portions of toothpaste. A mysterious Indian shaman appears and recites an ancient Native American chant about not misusing the Earth. Suddenly everything that's individually wrapped comes to life seeking vengeance! Beautiful housewives die horribly when attacked by slices of American cheese. Handsome hunk college students die horribly when attacked by printer ink cartridges that were not recycled. In the finale, the sinister CEO is trapped in a gigantic abandoned warehouse at a deserted corporate research facility deep in the woods during a hailstorm. All the wasteful environmentally damaging products the company was testing -- prescription food, disposable one-use-only shoes, remote-control bras -- come to life and attack him.
- *Double-A*. We're surrounded by devices that work on batteries. We use the batteries until they fail and then toss them into the trash. What if *the batteries are angry about being thrown away*? What if a supernatural demonic being from another dimension gave the batteries the power of revenge? Remember, they're full of deadly acid.

**Carolina at Seattle:** In the Cats' first two playoff games, Jake Delhomme threw toward Steve Smith 24 times and was rewarded with 22 completions for 302 yards and three touchdowns. At Seattle, Delhomme threw toward Smith 11 times and was rewarded with five completions for 33 yards, no touchdowns, an interception and a lost fumble. Note that despite Smith's sideline histrionics about the Panthers not trying to get him the ball, the rate at which Delhomme threw toward Smith was about the same in all three games. But the results were drastically different because this time Steve was covered! Seattle leading 7-0 early, Carolina faced third-and-10. Delhomme threw toward Smith, who had four Blue Men Group members nearby; interception and a moment later Seattle leads 10-0. Give the Seahawks credit for selling out to stop the opposition's best guy. But each time Smith drew a crowd, somebody else had to be open -- yet Carolina kept going to Smith. Eleven times Delhomme threw to Smith, resulting in almost nothing; four times Delhomme threw toward Drew Carter, and the result was 88 yards gained and a touchdown. Throughout the contested portion of the game, yours truly kept yelling at the tube, "Look for Carter!" It didn't matter that Smith is the league's most explosive player. Seattle sold out to neutralize him; Carolina should have forgotten Smith and worked the ball to other receivers. Also, when you can't get the ball to Smith by passing, you can always hand it to him. Smith had four carries for 38 yards in the postseason coming into Seattle, yet never took a handoff in the game.

While Carolina's offense -- albeit down to its fifth-string tailback -- was sputtering, the Cats' defense dropped from superhuman to mortal too. (Announcers called fill-in Jamal Robertson a fourth-stringer, but he was the fifth possibility, since Stephen Davis, DeShaun Foster, Nick Goings and rookie second-round draft selection Eric Shelton were all injured.) The Carolina corners are aggressive, so Seattle ran variations on the stop-and-go; these were effective, especially for the Darrell Jackson touchdown that put the Seahawks into a commanding 27-7 lead. Running stop-and-go or slant-and-go actions against Carolina seems an obvious strategy, yet the Panthers appeared unprepared. When Seattle faced third-

and-27 on the Carolina 38, everyone in the free world knew the Blue Men Group would try an intermediate-length pass to get into field goal range: everyone except the Carolina defense, which allowed a 17-yard completion followed by a field goal on the next snap. And John Fox may have outcoached Tiki Barber's guys, but this game was decisively outcoached by Mike Holmgren and his staff. Fox even quit on the game, something I've never seen him do. Trailing 27-7, Carolina faced fourth-and-10 on its 32 with 10:54 remaining. Yours truly could not believe his peepers when Fox signaled in the punt unit. This is the playoffs, there is no tomorrow, you're down by three touchdowns in the fourth quarter! Boom went the punt, and the football gods were so disgusted they only allowed the kick to travel 21 yards. I scarcely need tell you it took Seattle just four snaps to pass the point where the ball would have been had Carolina gone for it and missed; the Blue Men Group scored on the possession to ice the game. I scarcely need tell you that as the punt boomed, TMQ wrote the words "game over" in his notebook.

Now to praise for Seattle. Its offensive line, best in the league, was simply spectacular, including an especially good outing by guard Steve Hutchinson, who was barely edged by linemate Walter Jones for Tuesday Morning Quarterback Non-QB Non-RB NFL MVP. The greatest challenge facing Pittsburgh in the Super Bowl may be overcoming the excellent blocking provided by Seattle. And probably it shouldn't be mentioned for jinx reasons, but Seattle receivers held the ball. The Blue Men Group defensive front hasn't gotten much press -- seriously, how many Seattle defensive linemen can you name without looking? -- but played very well. Little-known Bryce Fisher, a seventh-round draft choice who's been let go twice, dominated number-one-drafted megabucks Carolina tackle Jordan Gross; and if you've never heard of Chartric Darby, you're about to. On three consecutive possessions, Seattle, leading 27-7, punted in the Maroon Zone -- punting from the Carolina 41, then 34, then 42. Each time I thought Holmgren might go for it or order a field-goal attempt; each time his defense kept Carolina stuck in its own end as the clock ticked-ticked-ticked. The Panthers, remember, came into the game with a hot high-scoring offense, and couldn't get out of the shadow of their goal line at money time. This year, Seattle's defense was just 17th-ranked against yards, but seventh-ranked against punts. Often the defenses that are better against punts than against yards are the ones still standing at the end.

**"It's Going to Be a Run Unless It's a Pass, Clint":** As this column likes to note, coaches have good games and bad games just like players. Announcers have good and bad games too, and Sunday was not Phil Simms' finest hour as a broadcaster. Willie Parker of Pittsburgh appeared to fumble, with Denver recovering; Parker's elbow was on the ground before the ball came out, so the Steelers challenged and the play was reversed. As the CBS booth crew watched the slo-mo replay over and over while referee Terry McAulay had his head under the hood, Simms repeatedly declared that it was a fumble because "only his elbow was down." If an elbow is down the play ends! Rule 7.4.1.e specifies that when the runner "touches the ground with any part of his body except his hands or feet, the ball shall be declared dead immediately." Simms also confused the right and left tackles for Denver, blaming one for the other's mistake. When Pittsburgh launched a punt that was initially spotted as downed on the Denver 3, not only did replays clearly show the Steeler who downed the punt had his foot on the goal line, my 10 year old, Spencer, said as the play was live, "That's a touchback." Yet while McAulay again had his head under the hood for the review that led to a reversal and a touchback, Simms repeatedly declared the ball would be spotted on the 3. When Denver brought its offense to the line at fourth-and-1, Simms opined, "They might be planning to draw the Steelers offsides." After Denver ran a play and converted, Simms immediately said, "I had no doubt the Broncos were going for it." Of course if you or I were broadcasting an NFL game, we'd make mistakes too. But Sunday, Simms was lucky CBS didn't have a reserve announcer warming up on the sidelines.

Lately, TMQ has been impressed with the Troy Aikman-Joe Buck duo on FOX -- they seem to pay closer attention to the game than do most announcers. Aikman isn't snazzy, but he's rarely wrong. On Sunday, though, in the fourth quarter with Seattle holding a big lead, Aikman complained that the Hawks' runner messed up by nearly going out of bounds and stopping the clock. That would have been correct when Troy was playing. But the rule has been changed: now the clock only stops when a runner goes out of bounds in the final two minutes of the first half or final five minutes of the second half.

**Didn't the Sun Just Set Twice?** Readers should enjoy the fun new book *The Velocity of Honey* by Jay Ingram, which concerns whether everyday truisms can be scientifically confirmed. Finding that hit home to me: it's actually true that time seems to speed up as you age. The internal biological clock runs more slowly each year, Ingram says, while the world continues to run at the same speed; this makes time

seem to accelerate. Suppose in youth your internal clock ran at 100 units per hour, and the world ran at the same speed. In middle age your internal clock is down to 50 units per hour while the world continues to run at 100 units; this causes you to perceive the world as running at 200 units. As we were putting up the Christmas stuff last month, I thought, "Didn't we just take this stuff down?" Whereas when I was a boy there was nothing, nothing farther away than Christmas. *The Velocity of Honey* contends that our internal clocks are gaining speed, thus making time seem to pass slowly, only until about age 20; from then on the internal clock is losing speed and the passage of time seems to quicken. This may make sense in evolutionary terms, since natural selection only "cares" about the fitness of an animal until the age of reproduction, leaving us to our fates after that. As someone who feels the acceleration of time keenly -- my oldest is a 6-foot-3 high-school junior, and it just wasn't that long ago he was sleeping on my shoulder -- let me extend the standard advice to the young: Enjoy every day because the days are few. A person who lives the current American life expectancy gets about 29,000 days on this Earth. When you're young that may seem like an infinity; you will be amazed how quickly it seems like a rapidly diminishing shortage.

**Zebras Look Good in the Bud Ad, on Field:** After a shaky outing in the divisionals round, NFL officials did a slap-up job Sunday. Tuesday Morning Quarterback thought Ed Hochuli was right to withdraw the flag that appeared to negate Steve Smith's punt-return touchdown -- maybe there was an infraction, but it had no impact on the play. When there's doubt about whether a penalty was committed, officials should not hesitate to pick up the flag.

**Disclaimer Watch (Dodge Edition):** In ads for the Dodge Ram pickup, the stereotypical hick character who climbs atop the delivery tractor-trailer to gawk at the new truck exclaims in a transport of joy, "And that new transmission saves gas!" The tiny disclaimer at the bottom says, EPA ESTIMATE 14 MPG CITY, which is pathetic fuel economy -- the truck's MPG scores just 1 on the EPA scale, where zero is worst and 10 is best. In television ads for the Dodge Charger, the handsome Charger tools down a suburban street and tough guys on choppers appear to follow; they transform into cute kids on bicycles. The disclaimer says CLOSED COURSE. Closed course? Apparently the entire town is closed, since the Charger and the bicycles are the sole things visible anywhere; there are no other cars, or even any parked cars. The disclaimer also says DO NOT ATTEMPT. The Charger is moving slowly in a straight line. Do not drive at the speed limit in a straight line!

**Failure to Read TMQ:** This space pointed out two weeks ago that when you're behind but there is ample time remaining, "Don't try for an improbable super-fast score, just get some positive plays, recover your rhythm, prevent panic from taking hold." Run your normal offense, don't go pass-wacky, get a touchdown then reassess. Trailing 24-3, Denver took over on its 3 for its first possession of the second half. There's an entire half to play -- don't panic! Instead pass, pass, pass for a net of minus-2 yards, Denver punts. In an earlier similar situation, trailing 27-7, Carolina took possession on its 1 midway through the third quarter. Don't panic! Instead pass, pass, draw for a net of 3 yards, punt. Many coaches assume that when you're behind, you must abandon the run. If the defense doesn't have to honor the run, your chances of a comeback pretty much vanish.

**Next Week:** No football game this weekend -- can that be legal?

## Conference Playoff Readers:

(Jan. 25, 2006) -- Stats that must mean something: **Aaron Henning of Holmen, Wis.**, notes, "Three of the four coaches in the NFC North were fired. The remaining one was named NFL Coach of the Year." **Ty Lieberman of Los Angeles** notes, "Super Bowl XVI, the only other Super Bowl held in [the Detroit area], also featured a team from the NFC West (San Francisco) versus the now AFC North (Cincinnati)."



The only Super Bowl played in



This sucker's got five blades up front and a POWER BUTTON in the middle.

**Matt Bruce of Alameda, Calif.**, reports, "2006 will mark the second season in a row that the reigning NFC champion's non-conference schedule consists of: at Denver, at Kansas City, vs. Oakland, vs. San Diego. Next year will also mark the second season in a row that the reigning AFC champion's non-conference schedule consists of: at Atlanta, at Carolina, vs. New Orleans, vs. Tampa Bay. Looking ahead to 2007, the teams with those non-conference slates are Green Bay and Minnesota, Houston and Indianapolis." This, Bruce suggests, makes the Packers and Vikings early favorites to win the NFC next season, the Texans and Colts early favorites in the AFC.

Gillette's newest product has five blades and a silicon chip; TMO now calls the place where the Patriots play Next One Will Have Six Moisture-Sensitive Vibrating Blades with Remote Control, Make Coffee, Walk the Dog, Receive High-Resolution GPS and Improve Your Love Life Field. **Dane Drutis** reports that Gillette has bought Super Bowl advertising time to promote the five-blade razor. Dog-walking feature to be mentioned? **Paul Steinbeck of New York City** notes this recent *New York Times* [article on the five-bladed Gillette](#). Note the article ran in the *fashion* section! "Hey baby, want to come up to my apartment to see my computerized shaving system?"

**Linda Sacripanti of Indian Trail, N.C.**, reports that the Keagan Sacripanti whose letter was [quoted in a recent TMO](#) is her 12-year-old son. One wonders, is Keagan the youngest person ever quoted in TMO? I supposed that with a Harvard-Yale nexus now running the Bills, the traditional Gatorade shower will be replaced with a fino sherry shower on the Buffalo sideline. **Conrad Felber of Sudbury, Ontario**, counters that Oloroso sherry would be more trendy and apropos since it's dense and sweet, like victory. Felber supplies what Elias Sports Bureau says is this column's first-ever sherry-based haiku:

Replace Gatorade  
shower with fino? Be hip,  
go Oloroso.  
-- Conrad Felber of Sudbury, Ontario

**Jessica Goodpeace of Nashua, N.H.**, wrote to protest ads airing during NFL championship games for the anti-cholesterol drug Zetia; the spots show actors and actresses dressed as a medical-school attending physician and his young residents, all praising Zetia. She comments, "If I want a second opinion, should I hire a different actor?" Yours truly has no idea whether Zetia is a good drug. But its warning disclaimer should say: "CAUTION: Side effects may include believing you are a doctor, dressing up in labs coats and pretending you are in medical school." In med school, do attending physicians really race from place to place while teaching their residents? The phony doctor and his fake students

in the commercial start talking in a library, then are in a classroom, then are walking through the med-school quad *without any interruption in the conversation*, as if being teleported as they speak. Here, the same actors [pretend to be doctors on the company's web site](#). Want some sound medical advice? [The Mayo Clinic website](#) has an excellent free medical encyclopedia with professionally written, fact-checked entries on diseases, therapies, pharmaceuticals and similar matters: it's a great resource. And there's no reason the Mayo Clinic website, or any website or publication of a reputable health-care institution, shouldn't accept Big Pharma ads touting prescription drugs. But the other day the Zetia phony-doctors ad was running on the Mayo Clinic site, and something tells me the real physicians of that hospital were not thrilled.



Why does time seem to accelerate as we age? **Scott Leonard of Topeka, Kan.**, speculates, "As we grow older each unit of passing time is a larger share of our remaining lives. Example: When a child is seven, as is my son, a year is around 1.4 percent of his expected remaining lifetime. For a person of 50, each year is about 4 percent of his remaining lifetime. By 70, a year is about 15 percent of the remaining lifetime." Perhaps we sense the passage of time based on how much of the future we're using up, and the older we get, the faster we use up what is left.

**Now we understand why Ralph Wilson and Marv Levy want the Bills back in the Super Bowl ASAP.**

A recent column noted with lack of enthusiasm that advanced atom smashers may become capable of creating miniature black holes.

**Chris Manes of Chicago** reports that a researcher studying recent work at the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider at Brookhaven National Laboratory on Long Island claims the device has already [inadvertently created a tiny black hole](#). Here, Brookhaven counters that the accelerator merely [created an "imaginary black hole"](#) -- wait, isn't that the federal budget? Brookhaven further asserts the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider "cannot possibly produce a true, star-swallowing black hole." Why do I not find this weasel-worded statement reassuring? You can imagine the meeting with the Brookhaven legal counsel: "Just tell them it can't make a black hole that would swallow the sun. Don't mention the swallow-the-Atlantic-Ocean problem. The postdocs think they have a solution for that."

**Chris Manes of Chicago** reports that a researcher studying recent work at the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider at Brookhaven National



**Holly Kleinsasser would look great in this, Jaguars fans, and it's on sale for only \$300!**

Finally **Holly Kleinsasser of Sioux Falls, S.D.**, explains the key omen of recent bad fortunes for NFL teams -- namely, Holly's consumer habits: "In 2003, I bought a Raiders sweatshirt immediately following the Super Bowl. They've had bad karma ever since. In 2004, I bought a Tennessee Titans sweatshirt. They've been terrible since. For Christmas last month, I bought a New England Patriots sweatshirt. I am soooooooooooooo sorry Patriots' fans! Now it's 2006 and hmmm, clerk, does that Indianapolis Colts sweatshirt come in heather gray?" My advice to teams that hope to win next fall: put Holly Kleinsasser on your payroll, and pay her to [purchase your opponents' apparel](#).

## Let 'em all in, *Playboy* goes tasteful, plus truly cosmic thoughts

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Jan. 31, 2006) -- There are 15 finalists for the Pro Football Hall of Fame, selections to be made this Saturday. Sportstalk radio is already debating the choices, while the Hall of Fame electors will hold a solemn quasi-Solomonic session in which formal arguments pro and con are presented for the finalists. We could skip the theatrics -- and correct the fundamental problem with administration of the Hall of Fame -- with a simple expedient. Let 'em all in.

Sure, you can quibble about the finalists. Harry Carson, for instance, has said he will refuse induction, though everyone knows this is empty talk. John Madden holds one of sports' all-time futility records, having lost six of seven conference championships; but he's earned a place in football lore and belongs in Canton if only for his video game. And who was the better blocker, Rayfield Wright or Gary Zimmerman? I don't know, you don't know -- nobody will ever know. The answer does not matter if we simply let 'em all in.

The fundamental problem with administration of the Hall of Fame is that too few are being allowed entry. In 1963, the first Hall class, knew 17 inductees. In 1966 and 1967, eight were admitted; then an informal limit of seven was adopted. Most Hall classes since have been fewer than seven, with a low one year of three. In the last two years, only four were chosen; in the two years before that, only five. This is way too few! The more people in Canton, the greater the chance someone who makes the pilgrimage will see his or her favorite player. We're not awarding the Nobel Prize for Medicine here, simply highlighting the memorable personalities whose stories belong in a museum devoted to football lore. The Hall of Fame has fallen behind in this core mission, and needs to start honoring larger classes in order to catch up.

Consider that of this year's finalists, each is certain to be chosen eventually, barring some future felon conviction. So let 'em all in now and move on! Even if seven are picked this weekend, that would still leave eight and no additional slots for next January. Check this year's semifinalist cut. Dermontti Dawson, Fred Dean, Richard Dent, Ken Stabler, Roger Wehrli, Ralph Wilson Jr., George Young: These are just the behind-the-back slam dunks for Canton among the semifinalists. Then check the 2006 preliminary nominees, a list that includes Ken Anderson, Steve Atwater, Bruce Armstrong, Jim Covert, Todd Christensen, Ben Coates, Chris Doleman, Curley Culp, Kevin Greene, Charles Haley, Kent Hull, Joe Jacoby, Mike Kenn, Clay Mathews, Art McNally, Sam Mills, Lemar Parrish, Steve Sabol, Donnie Shell, Clyde Simmons, Phil Simms, Fred Smerlas, Steve Tasker, Paul Tagliabue, Joe Theismann, Jessie Tuggle, Jeff Van Note and Everson Walls. I've cited only those who seem pure Canton; others on the preliminary list might qualify, too. At the recent pace of four or five inductees annually, it could take a decade to place the garish yellow jacket on the deserving of the current preliminary list alone. And that's not counting the many additional gentlemen who will become eligible. Bruce Mathews, Bruce Smith and Emmitt Smith are all already in the pipeline for first-ballot induction, with other worthy candidates breathing down their necks. Why have so few been tapped for Canton recently? Surely the selectors would argue they are choosing only the best of the best, but that's total hooey. Nobody knows who the best of the best are! The occasional luminary such as Walter Peyton is elected by acclimation; most Canton inductees are subject of Talmudic debate exactly because nobody can be sure which the best are. Who was better, Troy Aikman or Warren Moon? I don't know, you don't know, nobody will ever know -- it is impossible to account for the dependent variables, especially differences in teammates. All we know is that both had storied careers, so let 'em both in. For the Canton board to pretend it can arrive at some pseudo-scientific determination of who was great and who merely near-great is vanity on the selectors' parts.

My suspicion is the real reason few have been tapped for Canton in recent years is professional jealousies among the media selectors. Individual selectors often choose a player to champion for each go-around. Everyone who doesn't like the person arguing for the player settles petty scores by running down the guy he champions. The result is the group becomes more concerned with knocking candidates out than letting them in. This may make sense to media types looking for excuses to stab each other in

the back, but makes no sense to football lovers who want the Hall of Fame to include every memorable player. It's not the Nobel Peace Prize -- let 'em all in! Only downside to admitting the entire 15: That mid-August outdoor induction ceremony in the blazing sun will run awfully long.

In other news my 10-year-old, Spenser, asked, "Dad, how can you write a Tuesday Morning Quarterback in a week when there's no football?" Five thousand words from now you'll know! See below for a few truly cosmic thoughts to keep you going until VI:XXXVIII Eastern on Sunday. And why did Les Mouflons become Die Morgenmuffel? See my long-promised glossary of TMQ nicknames below. **Cheerleader of the Week:** Kayla Drawdy of the Buccaneers. Like several Tampa cheerleaders this season, the mere sight of her pretty much forces one to say, "Hellllllloooooo, Kayla." Drawdy is a student at the University of South Florida, and recently posed for *Playboy*. One sign of the decline of Western civilization is that *Playboy* no longer requires women to disrobe: she kept her top on. Who would have thought *Playboy* would go tasteful on us! Here is Drawdy's diary of the experience, which relates that spending three days on a beach and batting your eyes at the camera is work; that sounds true. The Bucs' swimsuit photo of Kayla is here.

**Guilty of Being Fake:** The new primetime show *Injustice* focuses on "cases of justice run amok, cases in which an innocent person has been wrongly convicted of a crime." No one doubts the innocent are sometimes convinced, and surely a striking percentage of those wrongly behind bars in the United States are black. But promotion for this show suggests wrongful conviction is an everyday event -- society is so callous and government so malevolent, the innocent are jailed left and right. This *New York Times* article cites studies suggesting about 4,000 of the 15 million felony convictions in the United States since 1990 were unjust -- an awful number, but representing an incorrect-conviction rate of 0.027 percent. Even one innocent person jailed is an outrage. If more than 99.9 percent of the convicted are in fact guilty, that does not sound like a system "run amok."

Anyway, suppose the premise of *Injustice* is right and the wrongfully jailed are everywhere. Then *why is this a made-up fictional show*, rather than a news program that names the names of the wrongfully convicted, tells their stories and demands their release? ABC would be performing a significant public service by exposing actual cases of unjust conviction, plus naming names of the prosecutors and judges responsible for any travesty of justice. That the network is instead merrily dreaming up imaginary victims suggests there are not legions of the wrongfully jailed: Plus that producers wish to present police officers and prosecutors as evil villains twirling their mustaches, whereas most actual undeserved convictions result from errors rather than malice. *Injustice* does not focus on "cases," as the network claims -- everything in the program is phony. If the show really did focus on cases, it would be tremendously important.

**Coaching Carousel Update:** Ten head coaches in the ejector seat -- that's high even by NFL standards. Two dynamics result in pro coaches being fired with much higher frequency than big-college football coaches. The first dynamic is the definition of success. Since almost every big-college team goes to a bowl almost every year, almost every year can be defined as successful -- and why fire a successful coach? In the NFL, 20 of 32 teams fail to make the playoffs, meaning the majority of NFL seasons are considered disappointments. That means the majority of NFL coaches are viewed as having failed, which leads to the annual coaching heave-ho. The second coach-firing dynamic concerns the offseason sales push. Because big-college teams almost always have a winning season, supporters almost always line up for next year's tickets. In contrast, by season's end 20 of 32 NFL fan bases are hopping mad. Firing the coach makes the customers feel avenged, while creating optimism that next year will be better. Such optimism is essential for season ticket and luxury box sales, which occur in the offseason.

Who you hire as coach may, in turn, be influenced by the marketing situation. Some NFL teams could sell every seat and luxury box if Daffy Duck was wearing the headphones. Since 1960 the Packers have sold every seat, and their legendary ticket waiting list would stretch from here to the outer moons of Meepzor. Because of this, Green Bay did not worry about choosing the little-known Mike McCarthy as new coach. (Read McCarthy's mission statement -- he promises, "We will attack the voyage.") The Broncos, Giants, Redskins and others are assured of sellouts regardless of who's at the helm. Arizona, by contrast, hired Dennis Green, partly in hopes that having a prominent coach would be good at the turnstiles. And it's worked with Cardinals ticket sales being up each of the last two seasons. Jacksonville,

another team that struggles to sell tickets, may be handicapped at the gate partly because its coach, Jack Del Rio, is not high profile. The Bills brought Marv Levy back into the organization in part because he is beloved by Buffalo faithful; merely having Levy sitting in an office at team headquarters thumbing through *Street & Smith's* creates optimism, and thereby helps move the tickets. Several teams with vacancies would have liked to hire a well-known, successful head coach if for no other reason than that this would boost sales. The problem is that a disproportionate number of today's high-profile, successful head coaches work at colleges and don't want to leave. Pete Carroll, Urban Meyer, Jim Tressel -- NFL clubs would love to have 'em. But they are ensconced at football factories where winning seasons and long-term tenure are nearly guaranteed. An orangutan could get six Ws and become bowl-eligible at Ohio State, though would look nowhere near as spiffy in a sweater vest. For any successful big-college coach who jumps to the pros, the odds dictate most years will be losing seasons and most tenures short.

Coach-as-marketing-feature now applies even to coordinators. Twenty years ago, football enthusiasts had little idea who the coordinators were, let alone who the linebackers or tight ends coach might be. Now with ESPN and the Internet having democratized access to sports information and millions obsessively following every detail of the NFL year round, sportstalk radio shows call for the heads of the coordinators pretty much whenever there's an incomplete pass. I don't know if there are stats on this, but it seems assistant coach tenures are at an all-time low: Many teams are firing offensive and defensive coordinators on an almost annual basis, which can't be good for continuity or quality of play. Some assistant coaches are better than others, of course, but it's silly to think firing the assistants and bringing in a batch of new assistants who were themselves just fired is going to make a huge difference. After the 2003 season, the Jets fired their defensive coordinator, hiring Donnie Henderson; after the 2004 season, fired their offensive coordinator, hiring Mike Heimerdinger; after the 2005 season, showed the door to Henderson and Heimerdinger. Next autumn, on both sides of the ball Jersey/B will have its third new coordinators in three seasons.

Carousel oddity No .1: Jim Bates, who did a great job in Miami as defensive coordinator, went to Green Bay and did a great job there too, only to receive cab fare to the airport. When Bates took over the Packers' defense was ranked 25th; in one season he improved the Pack to seventh, and during a year when the team's offense struggled. Now he's scanning the want ads, wondering if you really can make \$20,000 a month from home in your spare time. Yes, there were bureaucratic politics involved -- but come on.

Carousel oddity No .2: Mike Mularkey resigned as coach of the Bills, saying he wanted to spend more time with his family. A week later Mularkey took a job as offensive coordinator of the Dolphins. Apparently a couple days with his family was all he could stand! Mularkey and Herman Edwards of the Jets, both of whom were under contract for next year, won release from their commitments essentially by declaring they were in a bad mood about their teams and shouldn't be kept around to put everyone else in a bad mood. The NFL must be wary of tolerating this sort of thing on the part of coaches. If any coach can say, "I don't like it here anymore and therefore don't have to honor the promise I made by signing a contract," how will players be prevented from saying the same?

**Amazing New Stress Cure:** Last week's column included an item on the book *The Velocity of Honey*, which is about whether commonly believed truisms can be scientifically confirmed. A few days later this study by the English researcher Stuart Brody found men and women have lower blood pressure and experience less stress for about a week following intercourse. This seemed scientific confirmation of a widely held belief among the married, namely that couples get along better if they've had sex recently. Brody speculates that intimacy boosts production of the hormone oxytocin, which in obstetrics is used to induce labor, but also has a mood-elevating and calming effect. So sex simulates a hormone that gives you a pleasant afterglow, making everything seem better for a few days.

A small point and a big point about this come to mind. The small point is that since studies show married people get more sex than singles (see the book *The Case for Marriage* by the University of Chicago sociologist Linda Waite), lack of this afterglow hormone may be causing single people to be stressed out. The big point is that this study seems part of the answer to a mystery of biology: Why human beings alone among mammals engage in sex at almost any time, plus have far more sex than is necessary for reproduction. I've long thought the fact that sex is so very pleasurable is one of the arguments for God.

Evolution did not need to make sex delightful; perhaps a loving Maker wanted us to experience physical joy with each other. The Garden of Eden stories have a sexual undertone, and a happy one: In the state of innocence, God expected men and women to enjoy life.

Switching to science, evolutionary psychologists speculate that the steady human desire for sex evolved to help ancient males bond with ancient females; men would stick around for more nooky, and in the meantime, assist women with the long phase of dependency human children require. Now Brody's study suggests another evolutionary pathway for the human desire for getting busy. If frequent sex lowers blood pressure and reduces stress, this may make the sexually active more fit in Darwinian terms, and thus more likely to pass along their genes. I don't know if "Hey baby, how's your oxytocin level?" will ever work as a pickup line, but Brody's study does indicate anyone in a committed relationship is advised to get horizontal. Science endorses sex!

**For Those Who Came in Late:** Michelle Keller, a staffer at Trinity International University in Deerfield, Ill., writes that she and her husband "waste endless amounts of time on Tuesdays reading your column and Instant Messaging each other about our favorite comments." Hmmm -- Trinity International is a Christian school, yet its athletic mascot looks strangely like a Roman legionnaire from Christ's era. Michelle reports she is sometimes confused by the column's team nicknames, and requests a glossary. Here it is, noting not all NFL teams have TMQ cognomen: **Arizona of Mexico Cardinals:** Also known to the column as the Cactus Wrens because the cardinal is indigenous to only a small portion of Arizona, while the cactus wren is the state bird. Note one: males of the Northern cardinal -- *cardinalis cardinalis* - - have bright red plumage, so player uniforms are correct in bird-watching terms. The female cardinal has yellowish-brown plumage. Doesn't this mean Arizona cheerleaders should wear yellowish-brown outfits? Note two: for realism, Cardinals linebackers should sing in the spring. Note three: There is a player from Indiana of Pennsylvania on the Arizona of Mexico roster.

**Atlanta Typos:** Their black alternate uniforms look like smudges on a printer's trial run.

**Baltimore Nevermores:** Why there is no gigantic animatronic raven cackling at the main entrance to M&T Bank Stadium? Why doesn't the Ravens' crowd chant "Nevermore! Nevermore!" instead of "defense!" **Cincinnati Tootsie Rolls:** For their Halloween costume orange-and-black outfits.

**City of Tampa Buccaneers:** The city is Tampa, while Tampa Bay is a body of water. Presumably the team represents the city, not the water. (Green Bay Packers are fine because the city is named Green Bay.)

**Cleveland Browns (Release 3.0b):** When this team returned to the NFL, I called them the Cleveland Browns (Release 2.0). When they briefly rose to playoff stature, the name became Cleveland Browns (Release 2.1). Now that they are starting over under Romeo Crennel, it's (Release 3.0b), the beta version. Obviously the public beta!

**Chicago Ming Ding Xiong:** "Bears whose outcomes are decided by fate" in Mandarin.

**Detroit Peugeotts:** Check the logo. Considering the Lions are owned by the Ford family, it is puzzling why the team image promotes a competing car manufacturer. TMQ is temporarily calling this franchise the Cowardly Lions, owing to its season.

**Houston Moo Cows:** What a lovely cow-inspired logo the Texans have! Plus the team calls one of its colors Liberty White. Sure looks like copy machine white to me.

**Kansas City Flintstones:** Jim Wagner of Kansas City, Mo., points out ">his hometown's formal name is "the City of Kansas City", and suggests this column call the team the CKC Chiefs. I prefer the Flintstones -- check the helmet logo.

**Jersey/A Giants:** For NFL purposes, New York is located in New Jersey. When Jersey/A plays at a certain sports facility, the place is known as Giants Stadium. If you stand at the very top of a certain

sports facility, you can see New York in the distance.

**Jersey/B Jets:** When Jersey/B plays at a certain sports facility, the place is known as Meadowlands Stadium -- are the Jets junior partners or what? Adav Noti of Rockville, Md., has proposed that until such time as the Jets' performance improves, the team be Jersey/C.

**Miami Marine Mammals:** Dolphins are not fish. Hostile crowds should chant, "Squish the nektonic organisms!"

**Minnesota Hyperboreans:** In Greek mythology, the Hyperboreans lived far north in a land of perfect climate and perpetual light -- sort of like a domed stadium. Presumably, the Hyperboreans also always lost when they played outdoors in January.

**New England Flying Elvii:** The helmet image resembles an airborne Elvis. Two years ago, readers engaged in earnest debate about whether the plural of Elvis is Elvii or Elves. Please don't write me about this anymore, okay?

**Oakland Long Johns:** Referring not to underwear but the brigand Long John Silver. The new Raiders coach should be introduced with a parrot on his shoulder.

**Philadelphia Nesharim:** Philadelphia is the sole NFL team whose logo faces right to left; all others face left to right or are symmetrical. Nesharim means Eagles in Hebrew, which reads right to left.

**Pittsburgh Hypocycloids:** That do-dad on the helmet is a hypocycloid. Here is how to form one.

**Potomac Nanticokes:** The Nanticokes were the principal indigenous people of the Potomac River basin when Europeans arrived. Also I sometimes put quotation marks around the "Washington" part of "Washington" Redskins, as this franchise practices in Virginia, performs in Maryland and does not so much as keep a post office box in the District of Columbia.

**San Francisco Squared Sevens:** The square of seven is 49. **Seattle Blue Men Group:** The new monochrome blue uniforms the 'Hawks will wear at the Super Bowl make them look like they just fell into the same pot of finger paints used by the Blue Men Group. Patrick Whitesell of Anchorage, Alaska, has proposed an alternative cognomen. He notes there is no actual bird called the seahawk. There is, however, a blue-footed booby, and it's a clumsy seabird -- perfect for Seattle's riparian pass-dropping stereotype. Thus, Whitesell proposes I call the team the Seattle Blue-Footed Boobies. Yours truly has been to the Galapagos Islands and seen blue-footed boobies in their environment. Maybe I could make my fortune by producing an epic documentary called *March of the Boobies*. There is also a red-footed booby. Surely in booby high school, the birds taunt each other by squawking, "Doesn't have blue feet, doesn't have blue feet." Seahawks note: click "Motown Bound" to watch a video of the glamorous Sea Gals practicing their routines for Sunday. But hey, Seahawks, the host of your video refers to the cheerleaders as "girls." They're women.

**St. Louis Les Mouflons:** The mouflon is the Corsican sheep whose male's curved horn is used for many depictions of a ram's horn. The Rams cheerleaders also are significantly curved! I recommend St. Louis fans vacation at the lovely Hotel les Mouflons in southern France, where recreational activities include musculation. Just as NFL teams have alternate jerseys, TMQ has alternate cognomen. This year I've been calling the team Die Morgenmuffel -- "the slow starters" in German. Also, Muffel is German for mouflon.

**Tennessee Flaming Thumbtacks:** Check the logo.

**United States Saints:** Until their location is resolved. Also sometimes the Boy Scouts, owing to their logo, and sometimes during the current season, the Boy Scouts of America.

**Cosmic Thought Follows:** George Cushway of Chandler, Ariz., was among many readers to note that last week a team of astronomers led by Jean-Philippe Beaulieu of the European Southern Observatory in Chile announced they had discovered the first reasonably Earth-like planet beyond our solar systems. The planet, designated OGLE-2005-BLG-390Lb, orbits a red dwarf star 28,000 light years away, near the center of the Milky Way. About five times the size of Earth, the planet is made of rock like ours, not gas like Jupiter. The discovery of OGLE-2005-BLG-390Lb will never have any impact on your life -- yet the question of whether Earth-like planets are rare or common might eventually turn out to be among the most important matters in human history. As recently as the early 1990s no "extrasolar" world, or planet beyond our star system, had been glimpsed. Because planets don't generate light, radio waves or other electromagnetic emissions, distant planets are difficult to detect. In 1991, the first extrasolar planet was discovered, orbiting a pulsar -- a stellar object that emits so much radiation, life on a planet near a pulsar is hard to imagine. In 1995, astronomers found a distant planet orbiting a star similar to our sun. That world is a gas giant like Jupiter and arcs its star in a long elliptical orbit, meaning the planet is almost always in deep freeze, again making life difficult to imagine. Other Jupiter-like or even bigger planets have been found (Jupiter is about 11 times the size of Earth), but orbiting so close to their stars that their surfaces are likely to be boiling. In 2001, Debra Fischer of the University of California at Berkeley discovered a gas planet orbiting a sun-like star called 47 Ursae Majoris. That planet moves around its star in an approximately circular orbit as do the planets of our solar system. Now the Chile-based astronomers have found the first extrasolar planet made of rock and at least similar in size to Earth. The progression of discoveries is obvious. As astronomers refine their techniques and acquire better equipment, they seem to be walking ever closer to finding another world that is the sister of Earth.

The Milky Way contains an estimated 100 billion stars. Probably most do not have planets with conditions suitable to the one form of life we know is possible, carbon-based organic life. (Maybe there are other forms of life, but since we don't know what they are we don't know what conditions might be required.) Our solar system is about halfway out from the galactic center, and this is probably the area with the conditions for the one kind of life known possible. Toward the center of the Milky Way, stars are much closer together -- not only might the "night" sky of planets near the center of the Milky Way be bright, more important, packed-together stars may mean radiation levels that rule out organic life. On the fringes of the galaxy, planets are thought to be unlikely because the nebulae from which heavenly bodies form may not contain much in the way of heavy elements. So of the 100 billion stars in the Milky Way, maybe a third or so seem to have a chance of shining on an Earth-like planet.

Such a world would have to orbit its star in the "continuously habitable zone," the distance far enough away that the planet does not overheat yet close enough that it does not freeze. Earth sits dead astride the continuously habitable line for our star, Sol. Venus, closer in, has a 900-degree surface temperature and Mars, farther out, below-zero surface temperatures. About 20 years ago, an astronomer named Michael Hart calculated that the "continuously habitable zone" for an Earth-like planet is so narrow, had our world been about one percent closer to the sun it would be uninhabitably hot and about one percent farther away, would be a snowball. Other scientists have estimated that the "continuously habitable zone" is somewhat wider, but not much. This suggests that even if there are sun-like stars orbited by Earth-like planets, unless those worlds are in exactly the correct orbital band, they will be hostile to carbon-based life.

There are other reasons distant Earth-like planets might be unwelcoming. Earth's circular orbit means consistent solar warmth and light. In many solar systems discovered so far, planetary orbits are elliptical -- worlds spend a long time far from their stars and frigid cold, then short periods very close and superheated. Not attractive. Moreover the type of solar system we have, with gas giant planets in outer orbits, may be essential. Jupiter and Saturn have far more gravity than Earth, and capture most comets and asteroids falling inward toward our sun. Because most big objects entering the solar system get vacuumed up by the gas giant planets and crash on them, few get far enough toward the inner solar system to cause a cataclysmic strike on Earth. If Jupiter and Saturn were not where they are, comet strikes like the one that wiped out the dinosaurs might be regular events.

To sum: probably most stars are in the wrong part of the galaxy for life, and probably most Earth-like planets will not be in a "continuously habitable zone," or will be in solar systems with elliptical orbits or without protective gas giants. (Occasionally I am tempted to scream at my kids, "You don't clean up your rooms, you don't eat your vegetables and you don't appreciate that you live in a solar systems with two

outer gas giants!") So let's suppose one star in 10,000 has an Earth-like planet plus all the other correct conditions. There are 100 billion suns in this galaxy: that would suggest *10 million planets like Earth* in the Milky Way alone.

Now the relevance to human history. Supposing there are 10 million planets like Earth in our galaxy alone -- and God only knows, in the full sense of that phrase, how many in the far larger universe beyond -- there are 10 million places where the divine may have placed living things like us. Or if we are natural in origin, there are 10 million places where other thinking life may have arisen naturally, or may do so in the future. If the origin of life was wholly spontaneous based on chemistry, we ought to assume it was not some improbable fluke but an outcome likely to occur, and will occur in other places, too.

Supposing there are 10 million Earth-like planets, the galaxy may be rich with other beings who are friendly or unfriendly; surely in either case contact with an alien civilization will be a zero event for the rest of human history. So far all SETI projects -- Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence -- have found no hint of artificially generated radio, laser beacons or similar signals anywhere in the galaxy. (Subscribe to *The Atlantic Monthly* and you can read my story on the frustrating history of SETI.) But the galaxy is vast and SETI projects only in their infancy.

Should we worry about alien warships appearing? Right now most physicists believe there will never be any way around the light-speed barrier, and if so, zipping between distant worlds will always be impractical, rendering combat between distant worlds always impractical, too. Suppose eventually there will be spaceships moving at 99 percent of light speed, the fastest speed possible under physical law as now understood. Such speed would be quite a feat as the faster object so far, the New Horizons space probe just launched, will have a peak velocity of far less than a thousandth of one percent of light. But the Relativistic Heavy Ion Collider, which TMQ has been complaining about lately, pushes gold atoms to 99 percent the speed of light, so if we can do it to atoms today, assume we will do it to entire spaceships someday. At 99 percent of light speed it's a 45-year flight from here to 47 Ursae Majoris, not terribly attractive for a military strike. And 47 Ursae Majoris is close by cosmic standards; at 99 percent light speed, an attack run against the somewhat Earth-like OGLE-2005-BLG-390Lb would take 28,000 years. Unless there is hyperdrive, intergalactic combat won't happen. (Yes, scientists once believed there could never be heavier-than-air flight, and were wrong.)

Yet even if light speed proves an absolute barrier, spaceships might still someday take very long journeys: one-way journeys. Suppose there is an Earth-like planet orbiting 47 Ursae Majoris. Someday a more advanced, and let's hope harmonious global society might launch a gigantic spaceship, its passengers in suspended animation, to transit to that world and establish a colony, those departing assuming they would never come back. Suppose that colony was a success and a millennium later launched its own gigantic transport ship to the next Earth-like world. In this fashion, Eric Jones of Los Alamos National Laboratory once estimated, humanity might colonize every habitable planet in the galaxy in just 50 million years -- the blink of an eye in celestial terms. Departure ceremonies for colony vessels leaving human worlds for good might be the great tear-jerker events of the far future.

Now here's the cosmic thought I have been working up to. Suppose the reason SETI projects have found no hint of other beings is because *we are the first*. The universe is 14 billion years old, yet stars are still forming; to us the universe seems inexpressibly old, but compared to itself, the cosmos may glisten with morning dew. If life is divinely created, who can say what God's timetable calls for; if intelligent life evolves spontaneously, maybe it takes 14 billion years to establish the right circumstances. If we are the first, and if as increasingly seems there are many worlds similar to our own, someday trillions or quadrillions of human beings may live across the galaxy, and be so diverged from the *Homo sapiens* of today it will seem hard to believe they all descended from the same man or woman of ancient Africa. Someday your far descendants' children may look upward at the night sky of a distant world and ask their parents to point toward Earth.

For a list of known extrasolar planets and their locations, check the Extrasolar Planets Encyclopedia maintained by Jean Schneider, a French researcher. **Your Honor, My Lawyer Will Be Here As Soon As She Finishes Giggling:** Paradox: Why is actress Jenna Elfman, who's tremendously good-looking, nevertheless not pleasant to look at? Maybe it's the shows she is in -- or maybe that she really is always

playing herself. The network promo for Elfman's latest, "> *Courting Alex* : "A comedy about an attractive, single, semi-workaholic with one simple goal, to find true love while balancing a career as a successful lawyer." That's three simple goals! No wonder she's never satisfied. And to twist an old line, anyone with Jenna Elfman for a lawyer has an attorney with a fool for a client.

**You Are Now Free to Move One-Tenth of an Inch:** Bad enough that airlines continue shrinking the distance between coach seats at the very time Americans are getting taller and larger. What really frosts yours truly is when the honey-voiced flight attendant comes on the P.A. after takeoff and invites passengers to get comfortable by reclining their seatbacks. The person who reclines may become more comfortable, but the person behind ends up with a seatback in his nose, and all leg room vanishing. Airlines that cared would forbid coach passengers to recline seatbacks unless there is no one in the seat directly behind them. Whoops, I said, "airlines that cared." So take matters into your own hands with the Knee Defender, a pair of brackets that insert into the tray-table brace. Knee Defender makes it impossible for the person in front to recline the seatback.

**Laveranues Coles Watch (Final):** Coles demanded to be traded from Washington because, inexcusably, the Redskins offense was not designed solely for the purpose of getting Coles stats. In his new home at Jersey/B, Coles finished the season with 845 yards receiving and five touchdowns. His replacement at Washington, Santana Moss, finished with 1,595 yards receiving and 10 touchdowns.

**Next Week:** That Super Bowl thing you might have heard about.

## Super Bowl Bye Week Readers:

(Feb. 1, 2006) -- The five-blade computer-chip-enabled Gillette Fusion razor is about to land in stores. **Claudia Deutsch** of the *New York Times* warns to brace for an advertising blitz -- Fusion ads will run during the Super Bowl, on *Lost* and *24*, in the *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue. Hers was the second *New York Times* article in a week devoted to the advent of the five-blade razor -- hey Multicolored Lady, TMQ was years ahead of this story! **Bill Sonnevile of Rochester, N.Y.**, reports the Fusion actually has six blades -- five on the front plus a sixth on the back for mustache trimming. This activates [TMQ's Law of Razors](#), which has reliably predicted razor marketing trends so far. The law holds that the number of blades will increase to the factorial of the highest number of blades in the previous century. Since there is now a six-bladed razor, in the 22nd century there will be a razor with 720 blades, as 720 is the factorial of six (6x5x4x3x2x1). Meanwhile, my latest nickname for the place the Patriots play -- which this column now calls Next One Will Have Six Moisture-Sensitive Vibrating Blades with Remote Control, Make Coffee, Walk the Dog, Receive High-Resolution GPS and Improve Your Love Life Field -- must be reassessed. It becomes Next One Will Have Seven Moisture-Sensitive Vibrating Heated Titanium Blades, Make Espresso, Raise Llamas, Monitor Atmospheric Pressure on the Moons of Meepzor, Improve Your Love Life and Play a Constructive Role in the Middle East Peace Process Field. My name for the stadium can't get any longer because now it is 251 characters, right up against the Word limit of 255 for an automatic entry.



**Those terrible towels might do more harm than good for the Steelers on Super Bowl Sunday.**

**Maria Spiegel of Yale University** -- and also of **Steeler, Pa.**, temporarily a town -- reports, "My sister is naming her new dog Polamalu and my father sent me a festive Steelers' wreath, hand-crafted of black-and-gold lace for the modest female fan. Yet we Spiegels have been outdone by our hometown. Check out the [news coverage of the name change](#): "I bet they're waving Terrible Towels in Steeler, as across Pennsylvania. But do Pittsburgh fans seriously think the Seahawks are afraid of *towels*? Reports are that Pittsburgh supporters significantly outnumber Seahawks faithful in Detroit. But if they outnumber them on Sunday too, won't that backfire? Bill Cowher wants to treat the Super Bowl as an away game for the winning-on-the-road Steelers. Presumably he doesn't want a sea of yellow towels waving in the stands.

Statistics that must mean something: **William St. Amand** notes that excluding the Pro Bowl, Sunday's Super Bowl will be the first NFL game ever played in February that does not include the New England Patriots. The three previous February Super Bowls were the three recent Flying Elvii wins, meaning New England is 3-0 in February while no other NFL franchise has ever won a February game. **Jim Lidstone of Milledgeville, Ga.**, reports only one team finished 2005 in the NFL top 10 rankings for both offense and defense -- the Arizona Cardinals. **Bowen Kerins of Salem, Mass.**, observed of yesterday's column, "Five thousand words divided by no games -- that's an infinite amount of words per game, just what I expect from TMQ."

Yesterday's column called Jupiter 11 times larger than Earth. **Grant of Bosse Washington, D.C.**, notes, "Jupiter has a mass 300 times that of Earth, [and a volume over 1,000 times](#)." He adds, "I expect more accurate astronomical observations in NFL columns."

**Stephen Koers of Indianapolis** notes I left my Colts' nickname, the Lucky Charms, off the cognomon list. Lucky Charms? Check the logo.

Numerous readers, including **Danny Friedlander of Denver**, noted a recent *New York Times* [article by a conservative scholar that said](#), "Among serving United States Court of Appeals jurists, the three

outstanding judges are Richard A. Posner, Frank H. Easterbrook and J. Harvie Wilkinson III. By the citations yardstick these three judges, especially Judge Posner and Judge Easterbrook, wield unrivaled influence." Hey White House, how come you keep missing the chance to appoint the unrivaled, outstanding Official Brother?

Seahawks' Shaun Alexander, Matt Hasselbeck and Walter Jones were not harmed when their van was involved in a fender-bender near Ford Field. **Glenn Studeviant of Tucson, Ariz.**, asks, "Should all of those stars be in the same van? Shouldn't they be moving separately, like the vice president never rides on Air Force One with the president?" That makes sense to me, especially since Alexander, Hasselbeck and Jones are more important than the vice president. To twist Babe Ruth's line, they've had a better year.

Yesterday's column noted there is no actual bird called the seahawk. **Michelle Plesko of Kirkland, Wash.**, countered that osprey are commonly nicknamed sea hawks. **Paul Curtis of Brooklyn, N.Y.** adds, "The word osprey is derived from the Latin *ossifragus*, 'bone breaker.' Surely a good name for a football team! [See more in this birding blog.](#)" **Jordan Al-Kahtani of Seattle** pointed out that the clumsy blue-footed booby isn't the right bird to represent the Seahawks, since this season there was no pass-dropping problem in the Emerald City. Of the new unis that caused TMQ to call this team the Blue Men Group, **Jeff Peterson of Binghamton, N.Y.**, writes, "I am convinced the color of their uniforms isn't an actual color. It's not blue, it's not green. I have been calling it 'bleen.' I would also accept 'grue,' but 'bleen' is funnier." Seattle's media guide says the color in question is Seahawks Blue.

**Steve Robinson of Ottawa, Ontario**, asks, "What is the official NFL policy on reading TMQ at NFL headquarters on Park Avenue? Does everyone there get to take most of Tuesday afternoon to read your poetic musings, or like the rest of us, do they have to minimize NFL.com and pretend to be working every time Paul Tagliabue walks through the cube farms?" **Chris Coady of Vancouver, British Columbia**, asks, "Could you make the printable version of TMQ look like a boring business report so that I could read it during meetings?"



**Ken Lucas on his blown coverage on backup QB Seneca Wallace: "See, what had happened was ..."**

I speculated that when backup quarterback Seneca Wallace lined up as a receiver against Carolina in the NFC Championship Game, Cats defenders were so sure it would be a trick play they were fooled when Wallace simply ran out for a pass. **Carla Kemmel of Port Orchard, Wash.**, points out this [Seattle Post Intelligencer article reporting that's exactly what happened](#). It quotes Matt Hasselbeck as saying that Panthers corner Ken Lucas, lined up across from Wallace, was screaming to his teammates, "'Quarterback is in the game, watch the trick play.' When we snapped the ball, he was maybe not fully ready to cover." In light of numerous recent TMQ items on how the sports press exaggerates the frequency of blitzing, readers alerted me to this morning's [Washington Post sports section story](#), which declares Pittsburgh employs "constant" blitzing, that "the blitz was primarily responsible for [the Steelers] eliminating the top-seeded Indianapolis Colts" and that "heavy rush" caused Jake Plummer's two interceptions in the AFC title game. The Steelers blitzed on 25 percent of the Colts' snaps, a little high by league standards but hardly "constant." More important, [as this column has shown](#), in the first half at Indianapolis, Pittsburgh blitzed four times and allowed the Colts three points; in the second half, Pittsburgh blitzed 10 times and allowed 15 points, the second-half switch to big-blitzing nearly being the Steelers' undoing. And those Jake Plummer interceptions? Neither came against a blitz. On one, Pittsburgh was rushing four. On the other, rushing three.



Getty Images

**If only we could turn back the passage of time.**

Finally, many readers weighed in on the topic of why time seems to accelerate as we age. **Don Scott** suggested, "When we are younger, each unit of passing time is fractionally larger. One year of my 16-year-old daughter's life is 1/16th of her total life span, while one year of my life is 1/46th, which is why it seemed to her to take forever to get her driver's license, and it seems to me like I just got mine." He adds, "At least for us older readers it will seem like no time before the 2006 season starts." **Deanna Julich of Cedar Rapids, Iowa**, similarly supposed, "As we age, each year seems to pass faster because it becomes a smaller percentage of the life already lived. When you're four, a year is 25 percent of your life, so it feels like a long time. When you're 25, like I am, a year is four percent of the life you've lived. When you're 63, a year is only 1.58 percent of your life. Each unit of time seems to go by faster because it shrinks as a portion of your life." **Barry Fox of Helena, Mont.**, adds, "To a three-year-old, living until the fourth birthday requires living 33 percent of their entire life span again. To a 60-year-old the same year represents less than two percent of life span. The 60-year-old would need to live to 80 to pass through 33 percent of life span again -- and that too would seem like quite a long time." **Don Kemler of Alkmaar, the Netherlands**, supposes it's not the passage of time but changes in the supply we are sensing: When there's a lot of your own life ahead, time seems plentiful and when there's less ahead, time seems scarce. **Sean Thompson of Burton, Ohio**, supposes that with each passing year, we have more memories; the memories get stacked and squeezed in our brains and hence seem closer together. **Douglas Harms of Hollywood, Calif.**, supposes, "As we grow older, we gain more responsibilities and unavoidable nuisances that must be dealt with; nothing makes valuable time disappear faster than a set of dodge-proof chores." **Greg Miskin of Bellevue, Wash.**, suggests time seems to accelerate because we become accustomed to its passage: "The first occasion you drive to a new location seems to take a long time. Subsequent trips pass more quickly. This can be attributed to the amount of attention paid during the first trip that is not required afterward. During the first run, we don't know what is important so we pay attention to everything. After the first time, the mind only needs to keep track of the few significant landmarks. Much of life is this way." **Ken Leiphart of Camp Hill, Pa.**, supposes, "Time drags when you are a kid because you can't wait to grow up, then flies when late in life because you'd much rather not get older."

That last speculation gets, I fear, to the core of the matter. When we're young, we want time to speed up and therefore it crawls. When we're old, we want time to slow down and therefore it flies. Nature's revenge is giving us the opposite of our wish. My 10-year-old, Spenser, cannot wait for VI:XXXVIII Eastern on Sunday and the start of the Super Bowl -- he says it's taking much too long. From my perspective, kickoff will come all too soon.

## Pittsburgh resplendent, and read this column at 64 million times the speed of light!

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Feb. 7, 2006) -- So what did the Super Bowl prove -- that defense trumps offense? That roughneck football trumps finesse? That a team that loses three defensive starters during a game will fade in the fourth quarter? Yours truly thinks the larger lesson of this Super Bowl is that the team that starts the most originally drafted players usually wins. Pittsburgh started 17 players that it drafted and Seattle started 10.

Sports fanatics obsess over the top of the draft -- should No. 1 be Reggie Bush, Matt Leinart or Vince Young? -- yet it is the sum of a team's drafted players that matters. Being winners, Super Bowl teams normally start a high number of originally drafted players. On Sunday, 27 of 44 starters were originally drafted by Pittsburgh or Seattle. Last February when New England beat Philadelphia in the Super Bowl, 26 of 44 starters were originally draftees of the Pats or Eagles. Pick a game between weak teams and the equation is often different. This season when Oakland played Cleveland, 15 of 44 starters were original draftees.

At first blush, starting originally drafted players may seem only to mean that a team is not wasting its draft picks -- no small consideration. But other factors are at work, including time commitments and salary-cap management. Most draftees sign for at least three years, and a three-year rookie contract is really a four-year commitment owing to the "restricted free agent" rule governing the fourth year. Restricted freedom -- what a postmodern concept! Four-year commitments mean a drafted player will be with his team a substantial chunk of time, long enough to learn the coach's system and worldview. Established veterans who move as true free agents often sign agreements that are announced as long-term deals but actually last a couple years at most. Coaches strongly prefer players committed to the team for a long period, and such commitments correlate with winning. In turn, the fact that the player knows he is committed to the team for four years gives him incentive to be team-spirited and get along with others, unlike mercenaries of the Terrell Owens ilk. And through the four years of an NFL rookie commitment, the player knows he is building up to the day he becomes a true free agent and can sign with whoever offers the largest bonus. Players working their way toward their first chance at true free agency are highly motivated.

The next reason it's important to have lots of originally drafted players is the cap. First-round choices cost a bundle, but other draftees are quite affordable in cap terms. Let me offer examples from last year's Super Bowl, because the 2005 season is not yet in the *USA Today* sports pay database. Last year's Super Bowl starting center for New England, Dan Koppen, a fifth-round choice, earned \$340,000, well below the Patriots' median of \$660,000. Having low-drafted, moderately paid but successful players such as Koppen enabled the Patriots to free up salary cap space for the \$2.1 million earned by Rosevelt Colvin or the \$1.7 million paid to Corey Dillon, two stars. Today the fourth- or fifth-round draft choice who starts is worth his weight in gold, because his relatively modest pay keeps the salary cap under control.

This leads to the next point, that it's successful choices from any round, not necessarily the glamorous first round, that matter. The Steelers started six originally drafted first-rounders -- plus two second-round choices, four three-round picks, four fourth-round choices and a fifth-round choice. Strong drafting below the first round was essential to Pittsburgh's success, including a Super Bowl MVP, Hines Wards, who went in the third round. But then, only three of the last 11 Super Bowl MVPs have been first-round draftees.

In other football news, the Super Bowl was broadcast on five-second delay as a stopgap against the Rolling Stones' colorful language or malfunction of cheerleaders' tops. The Redford-Newman movie *The Sting* was premised on exploiting a slight delay between when horseracing finishes were known at the track and the results went out over teletype. All week, yours truly kept trying to think of some way cell-

phone broadcasts from Ford Field, going out real time, could be exploited to trick the billion people watching the five-second-delayed broadcast. Alas, I didn't succeed. Today's column was, however, written on five-adjective delay.

**Stats of the Week:** In succession Pittsburgh held the league's fourth-highest scoring team, Cincinnati, averaging 26.3 points, to 17 points; the league's second-highest scoring team, Indianapolis, averaging 27.4 points, to 18 points; the league's seventh-highest scoring team, Denver, averaging 24.7 points, to 17 points; the league's highest-scoring team, Seattle, averaging 28.2 points, to 10 points.

**Stats of the Week No. 2:** Seattle dropped as many passes (five) as Super Bowl MVP Hines Ward caught.

**Stats of the Week No. 3:** Franchises making their first Super Bowl appearance are 4-14 against franchises that already have a Super Bowl appearance.

**Stats of the Week No. 4:** Pittsburgh won despite Ben Roethlisberger finishing with a 22.6 rating. If every pass a quarterback throws falls to the ground incomplete, his rating is 39.6.

**Stats of the Week No. 5:** At one juncture Seattle had run 43 plays and committed no turnovers, yet scored just three points.

**Stats of the Week No. 6:** Pittsburgh has the league's longest-serving coach (Bill Cowher, 14 seasons) and also the most regular-season victories in the period (141). Noted by Judy Battista of the *New York Times*.

**Stats of the Week No. 7:** At 7:16 Eastern, in the second quarter, Pittsburgh recorded its initial first down.

**Stats of the Week No. 8:** Ben Roethlisberger is 27-4 as a starter.

**Stats of the Week No. 9:** Pittsburgh and Seattle finished on a combined 21-2 run.

**Stats of the Week No. 10:** Pittsburgh finished on an 8-0 run, winning by an average of 28-12.

**Super Bowl Cheerleader No. 1:** (Sea-Gals Super Bowl special.) Normally the Super Bowl is TMQ's favorite game not because of that deciding-the-Lombardi thing but because it is the sole NFL contest to which both teams bring cheerleaders, meaning half-naked mega-babes flouncing everywhere you look. Because the Steelers do not have a pep squad, today's annual Super Bowl cheerleaders special will be Seattle-only. Mike Koehler of Kansas City, Mo., nominates Trina of the Sea-Gals. Koehler reports that if you listen to the Seattle's team video section interviews with cheerleaders leaving the field after the Seahawks' NFC championship win, Trina seems to say that the fact the Sea-Gals were scantily attired played a role in the victory. How very TMQ-esque! According to her team bio, Trina owns a dance studio and is a graduate of Western Washington University of Bellingham, Wash., which has one of TMQ's favorite campuses.

**\$88 Billion Dollars Worth of Junk? Sounds Like the Hollywood Summer Movies:** A recent technical article in *Science* magazine estimated there are in orbit 9,000 pieces of space junk, with a total mass of about 11 million pounds. If the current-dollar cost of reaching orbit is about \$8,000 a pound -- this estimate averages expensive United States launch systems with their cheaper Russian and Chinese counterparts -- that suggests humanity has spent \$88 billion launching debris into space. This isn't the cost of launching the valuable stuff, such as weather satellites or planetary probes; rather, the cost of launching the junk. Space junk is tracked by the United States Strategic Command, whose FAQs page says you cannot tour STRATCOM headquarters but can watch a 10-minute video of what's inside.

**Rumsfeld to Joint Chiefs: There's Been Some Mistake, We Missed 15 Countries:** Just before

Super Bowl kickoff, Al Michaels welcomed U.S. armed forces members "serving overseas in 175 countries." Yours truly thinks grateful thoughts about the men and women defending our liberty, and the concept of liberty, by serving overseas. Yet there are 191 nations in the world. We have troops stationed in 175 of them? Make that 176, including here. We have soldiers in *92 percent of the world's nations?*

**Pittsburgh Analysis:** You're going to watch a lot of football before you see a team have a better streak on defense: eight straight wins allowing an average of 12 points, culminating in a Super Bowl triumph allowing 10 points to the league's highest-scoring team. Throughout the playoffs Pittsburgh had great front-seven play, superb tackling -- tackling is overlooked as essential to good defense -- and nary a coverage breakdown. Despite the Blitzburgh hype, the Steelers blitzed less as the pressure cranked up. During the regular season Pittsburgh blitzed on 32 percent of opposition downs, highest figure in the league. But against Cincinnati in the first round of the playoffs blitzed on 18 percent of Bengals' downs; in the second round, blitzed on 25 percent of Colts' downs; in the AFC championship, on 16 percent of Broncos' downs; in the Super Bowl blitzed 10 times on 77 Seattle downs, 13 percent. Thirteen percent is actually a little lower than the league-wide average for blitzing. One of the most effective defense tactics is to build up a reputation for blitzing like mad, then in pressure games, show the blitz but back off. New England used this approach in its three Super Bowl runs. Pittsburgh just used the tactic in four straight playoff contests, and each time, the opposition quarterback seemed to expect more blitzing than he got, then be surprised when the "hot" read receiver wasn't open immediately after the snap.

On offense, the Steelers began the game by passing just as in their previous two playoffs wins, Pittsburgh coaches calling six passes and three runs in the first quarter. When these plays didn't work, Pittsburgh staging three consecutive three-and-outs to start the contest, Seattle avoided a Steelers fast start and seemed to have an excellent chance to win. But Ben Roethlisberger did not become discouraged or tentative. Steelers' coaches kept calling plays and formations with wrinkles: once a double tight end on second and long, once a Texas Tech look with wide splits and standup stances on the offensive line, and of course the reverse pass by Antwaan Randle El. Note that earlier, Pittsburgh ran an end-around to Hines Ward; that the first receiver taking the ball sideways ran with it set Seattle defensive backs up for biting the second time a Pittsburgh receiver took the ball sideways. Another clever action: leading 21-10 with 4:45 remaining, the Steelers faced third-and-6. They lined up in the shotgun; Roethlisberger faked a sweep to Willie Parker; Randle El faked a backslide block, then spun around and took a low-risk shovel pass seven yards for the first down. Roethlisberger's fabulous play on third-and-28 in the second quarter, Steelers trailing 3-0, was fabulous for two reasons. First, he knew Seattle defensive end Grant Wistrom, like many D-ends who play for sack stats, tends to charge straight up the field, ignoring his "underneath" responsibility. When Roethlisberger saw Wistrom charge straight up the field, he quickly scooted to the underneath area, buying time. Then Roethlisberger stopped on a dime at the line of scrimmage and waited till the last conceivable instant before throwing a 37-yard strike to Hines Ward, placing the ball at first-and-goal on the Seattle 3 and leading to Pittsburgh's first touchdown. What is Roethlisberger, a 10-year veteran?

Well as Pittsburgh played and well as Steelers' coaches coached, there were multiple calls that made me cover my eyes. Leading 14-3 midway through the third quarter, Pittsburgh faced third-and-6 on the Seattle 7. If the Steelers run here, maybe they get a first down or touchdown; anyway the field goal makes it a 17-3 lead and Seattle trails by two touchdowns against a strong defense. Tis better to have rushed and lost than never to have rushed at all! Instead pass, interception returned to the Steelers' 20, the Hawks make it 14-10 three snaps later. Plus the call was a slant-corner to Cedrick Wilson -- Wilson scored a touchdown on this pattern in the AFC championship, and from about the same point on the field. Surely Seattle had scouted Pittsburgh's previous game! Indeed, the Blue Men Group seemed to know what was coming.

Now it's Pittsburgh 14, Seattle 10, Steelers facing third-and-2 at the end of the third. Neither Jerome Bettis nor Willie Parker were on the field; shotgun formation, pass incomplete, punt. To that point Pittsburgh was averaging 7.1 yards per rush: Tis better to have rushed and lost than never to have rushed at all! After the Pittsburgh punt, Seattle marched to the Steelers' 1 before the questionable holding penalty -- see below -- stopped the Blue Men. It's amazing to think that for all the second half power-rush prowess of the Steelers, they came perilously close to blowing the Super Bowl by going pass-wacky on third-and-short late. But that's the only criticism I can think of about the Pittsburgh performance, and it's not much, is it? (On its next possession Pittsburgh again faced third-and-2, ran, converted, and scored the

icing touchdown the following snap. Pittsburgh also ran and converted on a third-and-3 with 3:51 remaining, rendering the clock situation hopeless for Seattle).

**More Proof of the Decline of Western Civilization:** The first State of the Union address, delivered by George Washington in 1790, was 1,087 words long and contained this magnificent passage: "Knowledge is in every country the surest basis of public happiness. In one, in which the measures of government receive their impression so immediately from the sense of the community, as in ours, it is proportionately essential. To the security of a free Constitution it contributes in various ways: By convincing those who are entrusted with the public administration, that every valuable end of government is best answered by the enlightened confidence of the people: And by teaching the people themselves to know, and to value their own rights; to discern and provide against invasions of them; to distinguish between oppression and the necessary exercise of lawful authority; between burdens proceeding from a disregard to their convenience, and those resulting from the inevitable exigencies of society; to discriminate the spirit of liberty from that of licentiousness, cherishing the first, avoiding the last, and uniting a speedy but temperate vigilance against encroachments, with an inviolable respect to the laws." Last week's State of the Union address was 5,432 words long and contained such passages as, "We'll fund additional research in cutting-edge methods of producing ethanol, not just from corn but from wood chips" and "Tonight, let me speak directly to the citizens of Iran."

**And Speaking of *The Progress Paradox* :** The language of the State of the Union Address might have been a letdown compared to the past, but on the other hand, by going here anyone in the world can immediately get the text of the speech at close to zero cost, plus hear it read in Arabic, Farsi, Hausa and other languages. So are we better off or worse off? Yet another progress paradox. Two hundred years from now, George W. Bush's 2006 speech may be considered an exemplar of ornate formal elocution.

**Mystery Explained:** Pittsburgh leading 7-3 with 13 seconds remaining in the first half, the Steelers called timeout even as Seattle, facing third-and-6 on the Hypocycloids' 36, was close to letting the play clock run out. Al Michaels and John Madden evinced disbelief that Pittsburgh would call time in that situation. Here's why. The Steelers lined up with only five in the tackle box; Matt Hasselbeck noticed and was shifting the Hawks from the spread to an 'I' formation for a run up the middle; Bill Cowher realized what Hasselbeck was doing and called time. Given the clock, Seattle took too long to change sets. But Cowher's reaction was smart -- a run up the middle might have produced a significant gain. As it was Seattle threw incomplete, then missed a long field-goal attempt.

**Imagine Trying to Explain This to Someone in Bangladesh :** The latest Abercrombie & Fitch catalog sells "premium destroyed" jeans for \$198 a pair. The pants, which appear to have been found at the bottom of a mine shaft, offer "handcrafted abrasion details" and "one-of-a-kind destroyed elements on every pair." I know ugly pants are trendy, and I'll skip the obvious comment about a society so lazy we hire someone to wear out our jeans for us. (Guess I didn't skip that obvious comment). Let's hone in on the obscenity of spending \$198 on worn-out jeans merely because the purchase confers transitory, shallow status. If you've got \$198 to spare, spending that sum on this self-indulgent vanity item should make you feel awful about yourself -- it proves you are so insecure and weak-willed, a cynical marketing conglomerate can trick you into wasting your money. Whereas you could give the same amount to the Global AIDS Fund and feel really good about yourself. In the corporate suites of Abercrombie & Fitch, they are laughing out loud at their own customers for being so unbelievably stupid as to pay \$198 for a product that's *advertised* as in poor condition. At the A&F website, be sure to click on the "Diversity and Inclusion" tab, a masterpiece of hot-air corporate gibberish. It should say, "Unless you're well-to-do, weak-willed and gullible, we don't want to include you."

**Hall of Fame Update:** The voters took six, most since 2001, though Tuesday Morning Quarterback still thinks they should have elected all 15. Anyway, a large group is a good start. Now the next problem: six of the last 10 Hall of Fame inductees were quarterbacks. My experience is that on the field, quarterbacks do not outnumber all other players combined. Casual fans may only care about quarterback. But shouldn't the Canton electors, all of whom earn their livings as football commentators, know enough about the sport to pay as much attention to linemen as to quarterbacks?

**Disclaimer Watch (Media Edition):** Notice in last week's *Boston Globe*: "Attention subscribers: Confi-

dential credit and bank card account information of *Boston Globe* and *Worcester Telegram & Gazette* subscribers who pay for their home delivery subscriptions by credit card was recently inadvertently disclosed on the back of slips used to label bundles of the *Worcester Sunday Telegram*."

**Disclaimer Watch: NFL Edition :** *The 2005 Official Playing Rules of the National Football League* contains these disclaimers, pointed out by Stephen Carter of Yale Law School: "Where the word 'illegal' appears in this rulebook, it is an institutional term of art pertaining strictly to violations of NFL rules. It is not meant to connote illegality under any public law ... The word 'flagrant,' when used here to describe an action by a player, is meant to indicate the degree of violation of the rules ... 'flagrant' in these rules does not necessarily imply malice on the part of the fouling player." So don't arrest me for roughing the punter! These disclaimers suggest someone in the NFL legal counsel's office had too much time on his or her hands: When the Queen is taken in chess, there can't be a prosecution for regicide. (There have been a couple prosecutions involving hockey games, but these entailed criminal assault, not hockey penalties). At least the disclaimers in the NFL rulebook are actual disclaimers, that is, disclaiming any pretense NFL rules constitute law. Most small-type statements commonly called disclaimers are warnings or contracts. The *Boston Globe* "disclaimer" above is actually a warning: "We accidentally published your credit card information and there is nothing you can do about it."

**Globalization Goes Literary:** Adjacent is the cover of the new Chinese edition of *The Progress Paradox*. For every sale I get two yuan, about 25 cents -- minus my agent's commission of four cents, of course.

**My Introductory Rate is \$500 for a Phone Call to Discuss Writing Better Subheads Than This:** Bonnie Bernstein has started a phone consultation service for aspiring sportscasters. For a \$1,250, she will talk to you on the phone and "evaluate your appearance, body language and voice inflection." Another \$2,150 buys three follow-up phone calls. Note that even at these prices, Bernstein refuses to pay postage; if you want your demo tape back, you must include a stamped self-addressed envelope. Any economist will tell you knowledge has monetary value: if Bonnie can offer a pointer that increases the aspiring sportscaster's income by more than \$1,250, then her fee is money well-spent. Is there a \$1,250 pointer about body language? While you ponder that, Tuesday Morning Quarterback Enterprises is now offering phone consultation services to aspiring football columnists. For just \$1,250, I will read your sample column then talk to you about it over the phone. Here's how the consultation might go:

ME: Well, "take my wife, please" is kind of an old line.

YOU: Did you like my anti-blitz item?

ME: Great, yeah -- hold a minute, will you? That's my other line.

*Twenty minutes later*

ME: Okay, I'm back. Your time is almost up. You need a snappy close, something like, "Next week I'll reveal how to predict the exact final score of every NFL game with flawless accuracy."

YOU: Wow -- how can anyone do that?

ME: You'll have to purchase my follow-up call.

YOU: Do you accept Krugerrands?

**Rookies Sit in the Back:** In 2004 Boeing ended production of its venerable 757 jetliner; the 757 has been relegated to retired status on the company's product list, along with the DC-8. But the plane bows out in glory as the aircraft of the new Airlines New York-to-London Eos, which employs 757s designed for 200 passengers reconfigured for 48 with lay-flat sleeper seats, and as the team plane of the Seattle Seahawks. Several NBA clubs have their own jetliner, a trend that began about a decade ago. For sports teams that travel constantly, this indulgence might even result in an extra victory here and there. By

contrast NFL clubs travel 10 or 12 times annually, so a charter flight would seem to be all that's required. The Seahawks are the first NFL franchise to have a large jetliner, and needless to say the fact that owner Paul Allen is one of the world's richest people is a factor. Will this trigger an airborne arms race in which other NFL owners buy jetliners to prevent the Seahawks from having a travel-comfort advantage?

**Super Bowl Cheerleader No. 2:** Carly Cozine-Hansen. Featured in this *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* article by Claudia Rowe, pointed out by reader Rich Fong, Cozine-Hansen is in law school at Seattle University and works in the U.S. Attorney's office in Seattle. In college she was a journalism major, but seems to have recovered from that experience.

**No Higher Power Is Guiding "Intelligent Design" Politics :** Yours truly thinks the "intelligent design" idea is being given the short shrift by the mainstream media. Yes, some intelligent design advocates want to use I.D. as a Trojan horse to put religious doctrine into public schools -- forbidden by the First Amendment, and wisely so in the opinion of this churchgoer. And some intelligent design advocates believe young Earth creationism, a nutty idea for which there isn't one iota of scientific evidence. But as they mock the notion of intelligent design, the mainstream media is systematically avoiding a substantial question mark in evolutionary theory: it does not explain the origin of life. That organisms evolve in response to changes in their environment is well-established -- anyone who doubts this doesn't know what he or she is talking about. But why are there living things in the first place? Darwin said he had no idea, and to this day science has little beyond wild guesses about the origin of life. Maybe life had a natural origin that one day will be discovered. Until such time, higher powers or the divine cannot be ruled out. Exactly because I think intelligent design is a more important concept than the mainstream media will admit, I really wish right-wing screwballs would stop advocating I.D. -- they're giving the idea a bad name! First, it's common to hear them say evolution can be disregarded because it's "just a theory."

This is ill-informed. In everyday usage, "theory" can mean a conjectural or unlikely claim. ("See, I have this theory why Maria Sharapova would go out with me.") In science, a theory is an idea that has well-accepted supporting principles, has been tested successfully and that no one has falsified; in science the word theory conveys high standing. For instance, first relativity was an analytical idea, then a hypothesis, then after many years of testing was acknowledged as a theory. When in 1996 Pope John Paul II called Darwinianism "more than a hypothesis," he was choosing words precisely. Many on today's anti-science right appear ignorant of such basic precepts as the definition of the word theory.

The screwball fringe keeps proposing I.D.-related legislation that shows it doesn't even understand the limits of evolutionary theory. Two years ago some science illiterates in Cobb County, Ga., got the local Board of Education to mandate stickers on biology textbooks reading, "Evolution is a theory, not a fact, regarding the origin of living things." Evolution has *nothing to do* with the origin of living things. The core quandary of Darwinian logic is that we can imagine how living things evolve but cannot imagine how they came into existence in the first place. Now a know-nothing Utah state representative has proposed this bill that "requires the State Board of Education to establish curriculum requirements and policies that stress that not all scientists agree on which theory regarding the origins of life ... is correct." Hey, Utah state legislature, *there are no theories on the origin of life*. A few biologists have made wild guesses involving RNA, clay or hot ocean vents, but no scientist has offered anything nothing remotely near the level of a testable theory. (The details on that point) Given the presence of life is so mysterious, a creator God may be why we are here. But please, science illiterates, stop attempting to enact rules about intelligent design; you are ruining the idea.

**Seattle Analysis :** My, the Seattle clock management was weird at the end of both halves, culminating with the score 21-10, the Hawks facing third-and-10 on the Steelers 27 with 27 seconds remaining in the fourth quarter and throwing a rinky-dinky flat pass to Jerramy Stevens, who was tackled in bounds, all but officially ending the game. A flat pass to the tight end with 27 seconds remaining? This was the last of many mental errors by Seattle coaches and players on a day when the Seahawks mostly played well, but sure didn't think well.

Seattle did not have anything distinctive in its game plan. Through the playoffs, Pittsburgh had run different looks on offense and defense each week -- New England also varies tremendously from week to

week -- while having at least a few special plays for each game. The Seahawks seemed to run their usual stuff, and though they run their usual stuff well, deprived themselves of the extra edge of game planning. The Hawks attempted no reverses or end-arounds on offense (coaches did call a punt-return reverse that could not be executed, owing to a high Pittsburgh punt) and called no flea flicker or other gadget play: Pittsburgh ran three plays in this category, resulting in two first downs and one touchdown. Seneca Wallace made only a brief appearance -- because what, coaches were saving him for next week? Lack of forethought was shown on defense, too. The Hawks defense played well, considering losing three defensive starters: Seattle held Roethlisberger to a net of 123 yards passing on 21 attempts, picking him off twice. Reader Jim Hickey of Andover, Mass., notes Roethlisberger's 22.6 passer rating was lower than his age of 23. But on the game-icing touchdown, Randle El to Ward, the Seattle secondary was fooled, though during the regular season Randle El threw off that action three times. And it wasn't just the backups who were fooled; megabucks corner Marcus Trufant is the one who let Ward go. The five dropped passes? Any team can drop one in a game -- Ward had a bad drop, but went onto to become MVP. Five drops shows lack of concentration; one of the drops would have put Seattle in a goal-to-go. Consider Matt Hasselbeck finished 29 for 46 for 273 and had five dropped. If those five were caught, Monday morning people might have been talking about Hasselbeck's MVP award.

The game's two critical moments for Seattle were coaching mistakes. The Blue Men lead 3-0 midway through the second quarter, faced fourth and the length of a football on their own 26. *Aaaaaiiiiiiiiiyyyyy-eeeeee!* I cried aloud to the football gods as Mike Holmgren sent in the punter. Sure it's your own territory in a close contest. But you have the league's leading rusher; he averages 5.1 yards a carry. Shaun Alexander has been stopped on a third-and-1 or fourth-and-1 only once all season. And it's the Super Bowl, don't mince around, *go win the game!* I scarcely need tell you the Steelers soon passed the point where the ball would have been had the Seahawks gone for it and missed. Holmgren's fraidy-cat punt brought Pittsburgh to life. To the moment of the punt, the Steelers had 44 net yards and one first down; on the possession following the punt they gained 69 yards and scored a touchdown. Endlessly, Tuesday Morning Quarterback reiterates that when a coach goes for it in a situation like this, he sends his players the message he is challenging them to win the game. When a coach punts in a situation like this, he sends his players the message he is afraid of losing. Seeing this punt boom, Pittsburgh sensed fear and immediately pounced.

Now it's Steelers 21, Seahawks 10 with 6:28 remaining in the game, Seattle facing fourth-and-13 at midfield. I could not believe my peepers when Holmgren again sent in the punter. Sure fourth-and-13 is a long down, but this is the Super Bowl, there is no tomorrow! Down by two scores late in the fourth quarter you must, absolutely must, go for it. Punt and even if you force a three-and-out the clock situation is nearly impossible. Plus, at that point, three of Seattle's defensive starters were sidelined with injuries, greatly reducing the chance of a three-and-out. Pittsburgh converted two first downs and held the ball until the two-minute warning, at which point Seattle's goose was cooked. As the punt boomed, you know what words I wrote in my notebook: GAME OVER. Bad enough when coaches quit on a regular-season game; with 6:28 remaining, Mike Holmgren quit on *the Super Bowl!* It's hard not to suspect he was more concerned with holding down the margin of defeat than going all-out to try for victory.

**"Hey Boy! Download!"** Sony announced it will end production of Aibo, its \$2,000 robot dog, which Sony insists on calling the ERS-7M3. "Here, ERS-7M3!" The company says the fake dog's software enables buyers to "interact with a mature ERS-7M3 or reset it to puppy stage." You can set the \$2,000 device to chew your shoes? Fact that creeps me out: Sony claims it sold 150,000 Aibos.

**Cross-Generation Message to NFL:** TMO's 15-year old, Mara Rose, watched the Stones' halftime show slack-jawed. "These guys should be in some house in Florida that has wind chimes," she said. "They should be listening to the radio and saying to each other, 'Oh look, a boat is going by.'" There's a cross-generational message there, NFL. McCartney, the Stones -- next year how 'bout a halftime act that will appeal to viewers not yet eligible for Social Security? Meanwhile kids, have a look at the Stones' faces and Mick's wasted physique. Kids, this is what happens when you do drugs, okay?

**Donald Rumsfeld Already Tried Softening His Name to Rummy and It Didn't Work:** In the run-up to the Super Bowl, Washington state Governor Christine Gregoire announced she was "softening" her name to Chris. For some reason *The Associated Press* countered it will continue to call her Christine. If

this all seems absurd -- "Christine" sounds plenty delicate, while "Chris Gregoire" sounds like a guy -- many politicians have gone through similar consultant-driven transitions. James Carter signed presidential documents "Jimmy Carter." When he started thinking about running for president, Senator Robert Dole began calling himself Bob Dole. William Jefferson Clinton signed legislation "Bill Clinton." Maybe in today's Pacific Northwest, for a female governor to make herself sound like a guy appeals to the huge demographic of gender-confused voters. Gregoire's Super Bowl prediction was Seahawks 24, Steelers 17. The governor's spokeswoman, Holly Armstrong, told reporters her boss was not influenced by local concerns: "She really did her homework on this one and read the analysts," Armstrong said. So the governor was sitting in the 26-room Washington governor's mansion, pouring over web sites and noting, "Gil Brandt says the Seahawks have a plus-23 sack differential, but Peter King says Bettis has a 40-pound weight advantage on Lofa Tatupu, and here John Clayton says ..."

**This Week's Stargate Complaint:** The Stargate shows began with an intriguing premise -- ancient device allows explorers from Earth to travel anywhere in the galaxy, but they can only take what they can carry. The main Stargate show, *SG-1*, recently passed *The X Files* to become the longest-running sci-fi series ever. But as scriptwriters struggle to come up with plots, now our heroes are cavorting around the universe in a huge faster-than-light starcruiser, the *Daedalus*, that bears more than passing resemblance to the starship *Enterprise*. It seems friendly aliens gave Earth a set of starcruiser plans. Never mind that defense contractors would still have to build the thing: Imagine Halliburton's cost overruns for starship construction!

Anyway my complaint is that the Stargate spinoff show *Atlantis* takes place in the city of Atlantis in the Pegasus galaxy, DDO216 to astronomers, a location the characters describe as 3.5 million light years from Earth. The *Daedalus* is described as requiring 20 days to reach Atlantis. This means the ship is traveling at 64 million times the speed of light! And that's without taking into account inertia and momentum; assuming periods spent accelerating and braking, cruise velocity of *Daedalus* would be significantly higher than 64 million times the speed of light. (Unless there is "inertial damping," one of the great fantasy technologies of sci-fi -- this allows a starship to jump instantaneously from rest to hyperdrive without ripping itself apart.) Maximum warp speed in *Star Trek Voyager*, the only *Star Trek* series that attempted to address galactic distance in a coherent way, was about 1,000 times the speed of light. In the Scottish writer Iain Banks' science fiction novels, a far-future human society called The Culture builds ships capable of 250,000 times light speed, and this is marveled over in elaborate detail. Hey Iain, on Sci-Fi Channel, they're already up to 64 million times light speed!

**Best Blocks:** The Super Bowl matched the league's best offensive lines, and this is as it should be, offensive line play being the first element in football success. Alan Faneca of the Steelers would have been my choice for MVP: His perfect pull-trap block created the Willie Parker touchdown run that was the game's biggest play. All the Steelers' offensive linemen performed well, so let's name them: Faneca, Jeff Hartings, Kendall Simmons, Marvel Smith and Max Starks. Simmons had a perfect pull-seal block on the Hines Ward end-around. Seattle blockers did reasonably well, clearing the way for the first 100-yards-plus rushing day against Pittsburgh in the postseason. But on what turned out to be the game's deciding snap -- Seattle facing third-and-8 on the Pittsburgh 47 with 6:36 remaining, trailing 21-10 -- no Seahawks offensive lineman even attempted to block Deshea Townsend, who got the sack that preceded the fatal punt. Center Robbie Tobeck turned the wrong way and ended up blocking air. Why are the Pittsburgh and Seattle offensive lines so good? One reason is seven of the 10 were originally drafted by their teams. Four of five players on both offensive lines have been starting together for four years, meaning they know each other's moves. Offensive line moves are more important than spectators realize: think of Tobeck turning the wrong way. Teams seeking success ought to follow the Pittsburgh and Seattle offensive line model -- invest draft choices in blockers, then keep them together as a unit for an extended period.

**Zebra Critique:** Four of the six big officiating decisions went against Seattle. Does this mean a pro-Steelers bias, as some in the sports yak world are saying, or perhaps a slap at Mike Holmgren by the officiating guild? (Holmgren ripped the officials after the Giants-Seahawks contest; conspiracy theory says the zebras were seeking vengeance.) The two decisions that favored the Hawks were the fourth-quarter replay reversal that gave possession, initially awarded to Pittsburgh, back to Seattle; and the no-call of a block in the back by Seattle during Kelly Herndon's record interception return. Of the four big decisions that favored the Steelers, two seemed correct to me. On the offensive pass interference nullify-

ing Seattle's first touchdown, Darrell Jackson pushed off with the ball in the air and gained advantage by doing so. Had the physics of the play been exactly the same, except Jackson a defender, television announcers would have been screaming, "Interference!" It's true, as some said, that Michael Irvin often got away with push-offs -- but he shouldn't have. And when Roethlisberger dove for Pittsburgh's first touchdown, at game speed I thought, "He didn't make it." But replays showed the tip of the ball above the goal line, and Rule 3, Section 38 reads, "A touchdown is the situation in which any part of the ball, legally in possession of a player inbounds, in on, above, or behind an opponent's goal line."

On the flip side, the holding penalty against Sean Locklear, nullifying what would have been a Seahawks' first-and-goal on the Pittsburgh 1 in the fourth quarter, seemed a bad call. On almost every Pittsburgh offensive play, a Steelers blocker grabbed as briefly as Locklear grabbed on the down in question; if it was illegal for one team, it should have been illegal for both teams. Owing to the dubious penalty, instead of first-and-goal, Seattle ended up throwing an interception on third-and-long. That interception undid the Seahawks, as they staged a 13-play, 81-yard drive that ended in no points, and undid the Super Bowl itself, converting what might have been a fabulous ending into a lackluster fourth quarter. Seattle faithful also have a legitimate complaint that the fourth-quarter 15-yard penalty on Hasselbeck for "low block" was inexplicable. The rulebook states that during a turnover, neither team may block below the waist. But Hasselbeck wasn't blocking -- he was making the tackle. Check the official Game Book, at 10:54 of the fourth quarter. The league's own Game Book credits Hasselbeck with the tackle on a play where the penalty could be valid only if Hasselbeck was not making a tackle!

**Patriots Announce Stadium to be Renamed: Next One Will Have 11 Trans-Dimensional Nano-probe-Embedded Force-Field-Projecting Blades Field:** Reader Josh Byrne of Philadelphia relates the news that Gillette's six-blade razor has already been trumped -- Hitachi just released a 10-bladed razor, which "plays at invariable speed, ensuring the overall effectiveness." As noted last week, TMQ's Law of Razors holds that each century will see a razor with blades equal to the factorial of the highest number of blades on a razor of the previous century. This means that in the 22nd century, someone will market razor with 3,628,800 blades (10x9x8x7x6x5x4x3x2x1).

**Super Bowl Cheerleader No. 3:** Kiara Bright, also featured in the *Post-Intelligencer* article. According to her team bio, Bright is a public relations major who's working on a novel. Just don't sell it as a "memoir!" Go here for photos and videos of the Sea Gals' calendar shoot, which was done at Qwest Mega-phone, not some exotic Tahitian beach.

**Hidden Plays:** Hidden plays are ones that never make highlight reels, but stop or sustain drives. Pittsburgh leading 14-10 early in the fourth quarter, Seattle faced first-and-20 on the Steelers 29. Hypocycloids tackle Casey Hampton, who rarely pressures the passer, got a sack that made it second-and-25. Hasselbeck ended up throwing his interception on third-and-long; Pittsburgh came back the other way to score the icing touchdown. Hampton's 5-yard sack does not look like much in the stats, but altered the dynamic of what might have been Seattle's go-ahead possession.

**Super Bowl Ad Watch:** The Stunt City ad was the only memorably clever commercial; it was so funny viewers might have missed the product being promoted. That was Degree antiperspirant; click the extra-silly "director's cut." Blockbuster ran ads for a service that promises "free movies every month" for \$9.99 a month. Let's review what the word "free" means, please.

**I'd Like to Know the Story Behind the Story of This Story:** During the week before the Super Bowl, thousands of reporters are in one place chasing zero news. Pressure for a scoop is immense, if only to justify the eye-popping expense account. ("Umm, Clint, you spent \$3,000 on sushi for an unnamed source?") Last Thursday, the *Washington Post* ran a story in which Redskins officials denied a report by Mike Florio of Profootballtalk.com, who had reported that Adam Schefter of NFL Network was reporting that Peter King of *Sports Illustrated* was about to report that Terrell Owens might be traded to Washington. Quadruple-tiered reports of something that only *might* happen! Edward R. Murrow, eat your heart out.

**Wacky Martini Watch:** Lysa Whitt of Cincinnati noted a trendy Chicago night spot, Reserve, sells a \$950 martini. Most of the price stems from a ruby dropped into the glass: Don't swallow the ruby! Re-

serve calls itself "an up-tempo ultra-lounge." I don't believe I've ever been in an ultra-lounge of any tempo. Stephen Fenton of Boston notes this from the *Boston Globe*: "At Todd English's Bonfire restaurant you can sample winter concoctions, including a cinnamon-rimmed sparkling pomegranate martini made with apple cider, champagne and pomegranate vodka and topped with an apple slice. There's also a candy-cane martini made with Stoli Vanilla, Godiva White Chocolate liqueur and peppermint schnapps, and garnished with crushed candy cane." I wonder if a martini containing Dramamine is served at the Todd English restaurant aboard the *Queen Mary 2*. Stirrings, which makes high-end drink mixers, offers a chocolate martini. The TMQ blueberry-almond martini is seeming more normal all the time.

**Next Week:** The season is over -- let the recriminations begin! My annual Bad Predictions Review.

## Post-Super Bowl XL Readers:

(Feb. 8, 2006) -- **Yancy Deering of Cincinnati** [points out this Reuters](#) story saying a record number of Britons called in sick Monday. The story cryptically attributes this national outbreak to "widespread dissatisfaction with holiday allowances combined with a post-Christmas comedown." Huh? Deering points out that the Super Bowl kicked off a few minutes before midnight Sunday, London time. Now, why do *you* think record numbers of Britons called in sick Monday?

A recent column referred to the town of Bala, Wales, as being on "scenic Lake Tegid." **Christopher Hilton of London, United Kingdom**, notes saying it that way scrambles English and Welsh. In Welsh, the waters are called Llyn Tegid; in English, Bala Lake. "Translating one part of the name and not the other seems a bit like referring to the watercourse dividing Texas from Mexico as the River Grande," Hilton writes. He adds that the river flowing from Llyn Tegid is the Dyfrdwy. Here is information on [estuary protection in the Dyfrdwy](#).



Until Peyton Manning wins the big game, his elite status will remain in question.

Since I channel the football gods, **Darlene Kempton of Beech Grove, Ind.**, asks what guidance they would give Peyton Manning to overcome his post-season struggles. Darlene, I journeyed alone to a distant mountaintop (actually a distant parking lot, I was in a hurry) and this is what the football gods told me to tell Peyton: don't do any more television ads, endorsements or paid personal appearances until you make the Super Bowl. Surely at this point you can't need the money. You do need to win the big game, and the clock is ticking. The product endorsements will always be there, while the chance to play with top-notch teammates like you have today will not last. Forget the promotional stuff and concentrate on football, nothing else. Dedicate yourself to being the guy who waved off the punt unit on fourth down.

**George Paik of Scottsdale, Ariz.**, reports that I was right after all to describe Jupiter as 11 times larger than Earth. "The diameter of Earth is 12,756 kilometers, while the diameter of Jupiter is 142,800 kilometers, which is 11.2 times that of Earth," he writes. "Of course, if you increase the diameter of a sphere by X, you increase the volume by X cubed." That's how I could be right to say Jupiter is 11 times larger and last week's reader could also be right to say the planet's volume is more than 1,000 times that of ours. It is important that astronomical observations in NFL columns be accurate!

On team nicknames, **Jennifer Hamilton of Laramie, Wyo.**, protested my City of Tampa designation on the grounds that Buccaneers are pirates who would be based on ships, that is, in Tampa Bay. (The city is Tampa; the water body is Tampa Bay.) **Hilary Avertick of Montreal, Quebec**, adds that Tampa Bay is commonly used to mean the entire region, not just the water body. **Brian Miller** protested that I left out of my nickname glossary the Denver Cursors -- the Broncs' "rollerball" uniforms make them look like computer cursors racing around the field.



Life imitates art as the Texans play out Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*.

**Philippe Poulin of Laval, Quebec**, suggested I call the Miami's team the Miami Tursiops, which is Dolphins in Latin. **Craig Duda** protested my calling Cincinnati the Tootsie Rolls when the candy's dark-brown-and-orange wrapper more closely resembles a Cleveland Browns' uniform. True, but I already had a good nickname for them, the Cleveland Browns (3.0 Beta), and lacked one for Cincinnati. [Go here for a recipe for Tootsie Rolls cheesecake](#). On the Texans' calling one of their colors Liberty White, **Thomas Buttry of Arlington, Va.**, noted that in Ralph Ellison's great novel *Invisible Man*, "The nameless protagonist works briefly for Liberty Paints, which prides itself on having the whitest of white paints. Perhaps you can start calling the Texans the Invisible Men." No, that's their offense.

**Eric Johnson** supposed that the coach of the New York high-school girl who scored 113 points in a basketball game should have been criticized for poor

sportsmanship for leaving her in. The team she was playing had won only four games and was [totally overmatched in a 137-32 defeat](#). Runaway defeats are a problem in girls' high school basketball; Ed Grezinsky of Murry Bergtraum High School, who left Epiphany Prince in the game long after she should have exited, needs a course in remedial sportsmanship.

Last week I chided the new ABC drama *Injustice* and said that if wrongful conviction really is an everyday event, as the show claims, it should be a news program exposing actual cases, not a fiction with made-up victims. Studies suggest there have been about 4,000 unjust felons convictions since 1990, out of about 15 million convictions, an unjust-conviction rate of far less than one percent. But, **Gary Caldwell of West Palm Beach, Fla.**, pointed out, "4,000 unjust convictions over 15 years comes to about 266 unjust convictions per year, and if the court systems work a five-day week, that's almost exactly one unjust conviction per day -- an everyday event as the show says." **Jeffrey Anbinder of New York City**, noted [the nonprofit Innocence Project](#) does document specific real-world cases of unjust conviction, and that the Court TV program *Stories from the Innocence Project* presents some of these cases in documentary style. Anbinder further notes the estimate of 4,000 of 15 million wrongful convictions is only for those case that result in total exoneration: often evidence is ambiguous, and reasonable doubt may linger. **Michael Isaacs of London, United Kingdom**, [points out this BBC show](#) that also documents actual travesties of justice. I'll repeat my previous point: if ABC aired a news program that named names of the actual wrongfully convicted and demanded their release, that would be a huge public service. Instead, a fabricated show masquerading as realism does a disservice on a critical issue.

Yesterday's column asked how the Super Bowl could be beamed to United States soldiers in 176 of the world's 191 nations -- have we invaded almost every country? Many, many readers, including **Cassie Conners of Venice, Calif.**, noted most American embassies and consulates overseas are guarded by United States Marines, which probably accounts for the large number. **Edgar Lopez of Miami** added, "Though as any member of the Corps will tell you, Marines are not soldiers."

Yesterday's column complained that six of the last 10 Canton selections were quarterbacks; more linemen please! **Kris Kelso of Nashville, Tenn.**, writes, "Maybe the problem is that it's called the Hall of *Fame*. How many linemen achieve fame? How many linemen do product endorsements or remain in the public eye after their playing careers end? Maybe the museum at Canton should be renamed the Hall of Success or something more open to inclusion of those who were great but not famous." Yesterday's column said Dan Koppen of the Patriots is "worth his weight in gold" because he's a fine player yet earns only a cap-friendly \$340,000. **Elliot Cunningham of Winnipeg, Manitoba**, notes, "At his listed weight of 296 pounds, at today's trading value of gold at \$551.10 an ounce, Dan Koppen is worth \$2,600,009.60." Hmmm, his agent may wish to point this out to New England management.



Maybe we can learn a thing or two from the dolphins.

I wrote that people "alone among mammals" desire sex at almost any time, not under a hormone-controlled mating cycle as in the animal kingdom; I suggested this is an indication men and women have a loving Creator who wants us to experience pleasure in life. **Nick Hale of Sackville, New Brunswick**, noted dolphins also engage in sex more often than needed for reproduction. **Bastian Feles of Hamburg, Germany**, pointed out that the bonobo chimpanzee engages in very frequent coupling, and apparently for fun; **Greg Cymbala of Parker, Colo.**, cited this article showing the bonobo is more similar to *Homo sapiens* [genetically than other chimpanzees](#). Dolphins and bonobos are arguably the highest animals other than humans. Sex: an advanced higher activ-

ity!

Many readers, including **Stephen Peelor of Playa del Rey, Calif.**, noted of my calling the Steelers the Pittsburgh Hypocycloids that the do-dad on the side of their helmets is a specific type of hypocycloid, [an astroid](#). Thus, Pittsburgh Astroids is under consideration. I call the Eagles the Philadelphia Nesharim because theirs the sole NFL logo that faces right to left, and Nesharim means Eagles in

Hebrew. **Brent Riha of Baltimore**, observes, "To make it more like Hebrew, shouldn't you call them the Nesharim Philadelphia?" Or maybe the Mirahsen Aihpledaliph.

Several readers proposed nicknames for the Buffalo Bills. Once I called them the Buffalo Roberts -- a bit more formal, don't you think? But that one lacked staying power. The name Buffalo Bills was chosen in 1946, [following a naming contest](#): I've toyed with using the 1946 runner-up, the Buffalo Nickels. **Kove Michaels of Seattle**, noted the Bills were named for Buffalo Bill Cody, who had nothing to do with the city of Buffalo, and thus proposes I call this franchise the Buffalo Buffalo Bills. In light of the Harvard-educated Marv Levy running the front office and the Yale-educated Dick Jauron prowling the sidelines, **John Peralez, also of Seattle**, proposed the Buffalo Ivies. Mr. Data, make it so! And as noted by **Elizabeth Whitman of Brunswick, Maine**, they'll be playing [Fight Fiercely Harvard](#) in The Miami of the North next autumn.

Last week's column speculated that if the light-speed barrier proves absolute, there will never be interplanetary combat. I noted that 47 Ursae Majoris, the closest known solar system similar to ours, is 45 light-years distant, and most of the galaxy is much farther away than that. At 99 percent of light speed, fastest possible velocity under the physical law as presently understood, an attack run against 47 Ursae Majoris would be 90 years roundtrip. **Daniel Bush of Fitchburg, Wis.**, counters I did not take into account relativistic time dilation -- the fastest you move, the slower time passes. During the roundtrip for a military strike against 47 Ursae Majoris, about 90 years would pass on Earth, but only about 14 years from the standpoint of those aboard the attack ships: perhaps tolerable if suspended animation is developed, or if future interstellar assault craft are automated. Great, so even societies hundreds of light-years apart might devote centuries to fighting each other. Something to look forward to.

Yesterday I wondered how Matt Hasselbeck could have been called for "low block" on the same play on which he was credited with a tackle. **Andy Neidlinger of Wayne, Pa.**, was among many to note that in the Pittsburgh at Indianapolis regular-season game, Jeff Hartings of the Steelers was called for low block in the same situation. After an interception, he went low to get past a defender and take down the intercepting player, and was called for low block and credited with the tackle simultaneously. [See the Game Book entry](#) at 27 seconds in the second quarter. **Jim Haywood** adds Bill Leavy was the referee in both the Super Bowl and that game. The rule says that following a change of possession, neither team may block below the waist. On both penalties, Hasselbeck and Hartings made low contact with a defender for the intercepting team, then legally tackled the intercepting player. It sounds to yours truly like an offseason rules clarification is in order. The rule against low blocks during turnovers, designed to prevent defensive players turned into blockers from blocking low in the open field and causing injuries, should be clarified to apply *only to blocks*, not to attempts to break past a blocker and tackle the ballcarrier.

Yesterday's item on the obscene \$198 Abercrombie & Fitch "premium destroyed" jeans was headlined, "Imagine Trying to Explain This to Someone in Bangladesh." **Daniel Shumake of Memphis, Tenn.**, points out that since many companies now have call centers on the Subcontinent, Abercrombie & Fitch buyers may, at some point, actually have called someone sitting in Bangladesh to order \$198 pre-damaged jeans.

Yours truly said that owing to recruiting advantages, an orangutan could win six games and become bowl-eligible at football-factory schools such as Ohio State. **Mike Byrne of Houston**, allowed that is was true, but noted that big-college coaching longevity requires more wins per season. He writes, "Jim Tressel's predecessor, John Cooper, averaged nearly nine wins and was let go. True, that was after 13 seasons, but I doubt the OSU powers-that-be would tolerate more than two consecutive seasons with the orangutan recording only six wins." Here is what the OSU board meeting might sound like:

BIG SHOT #1: The orangutan only won six games again. The boosters are in an uproar.

BIG SHOT #2: Pay off the bananas and oranges in his contract and let him go.

BIG SHOT #1: Who shall we hire?

BIG SHOT #2: A bonobo. Just keep him away from the cheerleaders.

Finally in an email I received four days before the Super Bowl, **Nathan Douglas of Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan**, wrote, "I propose a new method of predicting NFL winners. My idea is to play both teams in Madden NFL 2006 on PS2. I adjusted the home team to Pittsburgh and the away team to Seattle, and made the location Ford Field. The final score was Pittsburgh 17, Seattle 10."

## Playmate, aging fighter jock almost predict exact final score!

By Gregg Easterbrook  
Special to NFL.com

(Feb. 14, 2006) -- Now that Al Michaels has been traded for Oswald the Rabbit, will there be a fad of trading sports personalities for cartoon characters? The Eagles could trade Terrell Owens for Roger Ramjet -- Ramjet's goodie-goodie persona might be just what Philadelphia needs at the moment. After seeing the impact Troy Polamalu had on Pittsburgh's Super Bowl run, many clubs will offer draft picks for the Tazmanian Devil. Teams looking to stretch the field will be in the market for the Road Runner, though as with a lot of speed guys, there will be questions about his hands -- especially since Road Runner has no hands. Now that coaches, too, are traded, Foghorn Leghorn might be ideal for the next vacancy: he'd be great at halftime tirades. Will NFL.com's Tuesday Morning Quarterback and Dr. Cheeks become sought-after commodities? We are, after all, both cartoon characters.

In other football news, 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 write things down. Welcome to my annual Bad Predictions Review. You may end the column by muttering to yourself, "I should have been mentioned because I predicted Alex Smith would lead the league in fumble recoveries" or "I should have been mentioned because I predicted Pittsburgh would win the Super Bowl by a score of 17-10" (actual prediction by retired test pilot Chuck Yeager to Scripps Howard News Service). But remember, this is my annual *bad* predictions review.

And in other football news, forgot conferences -- how did the states do in 2005? See my annual State Standings below.

**Bad Predictions, Category One:** Category One is offseason predictions, and "off" is the operative word. Chris Berman of ESPN forecast the Lions to have "a breakout season." Detroit finished 5-11. Three weeks after calling Drew Bledsoe terrible, Peter King of *Sports Illustrated* declared Dallas, which had just signed Bledsoe to be its starter, the "most improved team in the NFL." Jeffri Chadiha of *Sports Illustrated* foresaw that Bill Parcells was "likely" to leave those same Cowboys when the season ended. Ray Glier of NBC Sports predicted that Atlanta would make the Super Bowl; Atlanta did not make the playoffs. "What puts the Falcons over the top and makes them fit for the Super Bowl will be Michael Vick's ability to pass from the pocket," Glier added; Vick finished 25th in passer rating. Adam Schefter of NFL Network foresaw, "Doug Jolley should catch about 70 passes in the Jets offense." He caught 29. "Call it a hunch, but this year the Atlanta Falcons don't wind up with the NFL's 30th-ranked passing attack," Clark Judge of CBS SportsLine predicted. They wound up 27th. "The Lions are poised to make a run at their first winning season since 2000," Judge also predicted. Joey Harrington "is approaching the skill level required to be a very good quarterback," Pat Kirwan of NFL.com predicted. Harrington was benched. Gil Brandt of NFL.com predicted Julius Jones would lead the league in rushing; he finished 17th. The *St. Louis Post Dispatch* predicted, "Take it to the bank, the Rams will go 10-6." Let's hope the bank did not charge an early withdrawal fee when the Rams went 6-10. "There is no reason [Tim Couch] can't play 10 more years in the league," Len Pasquarelli of ESPN.com forecast. There was a reason -- Couch was not on any team in 2005. It is hard to play in the NFL if you are not on a team. Drafting Maurice Clarett was "a good move" for Denver, Pete Prisco of SportsLine predicted: "Clarett will help this team." Clarett was waived in training camp.

**Cheerleader of the Week:** Daniel Apai of Perth, Australia, nominates Lyndsey of the St. Louis Rams, who gets the serious cheer-babe nod by virtue of listing *The Great Gatsby* as her favorite book. According to her team bio, Lyndsey is a nursing student whose favorite music genre is oldies -- like Led Zeppelin. Wait a minute, Led Zeppelin doesn't sound so old to me.

**Bad Predictions, Category Two:** Now it gets interesting -- predictions made in early September, eve of the season's start. *Sports Illustrated* devoted a September cover to predicting the Panthers would win the Super Bowl, by an exact final score of Carolina 31, Indianapolis 27. The *Sports Illustrated* article, by

veteran football writer Paul Zimmerman, predicted outcomes of all division and wild-card races: only two of Zimmerman's eight predicted division winners won their divisions, while eight of his predicted 12 postseason teams failed to make the playoffs. Zimmerman predicted the Seattle Seahawks would not make the playoffs, while he foresaw of Ben Roethlisberger, "I don't think everything will fall into place." Around the same time the *Sports Illustrated* web site ran five dueling sets of predictions: none had either Pittsburgh or Seattle reaching the Super Bowl.

*ESPN: The Magazine* ("Published on Earth: The Planet") predicted Minnesota would win the Super Bowl; the Vikings did not make the playoffs. This is the second consecutive year *ESPN Mag's* predicted Super Bowl winner failed to make the playoffs; the previous season it anointed Kansas City. *The Sporting News* predicted Philadelphia would win the Super Bowl; the Eagles did not make the playoffs.

Jay Glazer of Fox Sports foresaw the Falcons winning the Super Bowl; Atlanta did not make the playoffs. Glazer predicted, "the Chargers should be a deep playoff threat;" San Diego did not make the playoffs. Ron Borges of MSNBC forecast that neither the Steelers nor Seahawks would reach the conference championship round. The *New York Times* offered two Super Bowl predictions, Eagles over Colts and Patriots over Falcons; two of the four *New York Times* predicted Super Bowl entrants failed to make the playoffs. "The Eagles should win at least 10 games simply by showing up," the *Times* added. Philadelphia showed up and won six games.

In September, *USA Today* ran four Super Bowl predictions: Colts over Eagles (predicted twice), Eagles over Colts and Patriots over Eagles. Thus in eight guesses, *USA Today* failed to get even one Super Bowl entrant correct, while four of the paper's predicted Super Bowl teams failed to make the postseason.

Clark Judge of CBS SportsLine predicted the Eagles would win the Super Bowl; Philadelphia did not make the playoffs. Judge predicted Seattle would finish third in its division and miss the postseason, while the Steelers would go no farther than the second round. Seven of Judge's 12 predicted playoff teams did not make the playoffs. Judge predicted Donovan McNabb would be the MVP "whether T.O. is in or out of the lineup." A mere three days after predicting defending champion New England would not reach the AFC championship, Judge wrote that "the league has been warned" that New England could repeat as Super Bowl champs.

Then there was Fox Sports' meta-forecast of 10 dueling season predictions. Fox Sports forecast the Vikings, Eagles and Rams among its Super Bowl winners; none made the playoffs. None of Fox Sports' 10 forecast Super Bowl pairings, a total of 20 guesses, had either the Steelers or Seahawks appearing. Three of Fox Sports' 10 forecast Coach of the Year winners were fired or resigned within days of the season's end. And then there was the ESPN.com meta-forecast. Twelve experts divined the Super Bowl, and none of them had the Seahawks appearing in the game. ESPN.com's predicted NFC champions were: Vikings (predicted four times), Eagles (predicted three times), Falcons (predicted twice), Rams, Redskins and Panthers. That is, 10 of ESPN.com's 12 predicted NFC championship teams failed to make the playoffs. Four ESPN experts thought the Super Bowl would be won by either Philadelphia or St. Louis; neither made the playoffs. Joe Theismann of ESPN.com did pick the Steelers to hoist the Lombardi. Theismann also picked Kurt Warner as league MVP; Warner was benched. And as noted by reader Carl Schreiner of Edina, Minn., "All 12 ESPN experts picked an offensive player as the MVP, but only three picked the same player as offensive player of the year. If a player is the overall MVP, how can another player in his same category be better?"

***Sports Illustrated* Note:** The *Sports Illustrated* cover near this item is not the cover of the swimsuit issue, which is unveiled today. *Sports Illustrated* says its annual swimsuit issue is now the most-read issue of any magazine in the world. At least civilization still has its priorities in order on something!

**Maybe It's a Fake Play Name:** Fans got to call a play for the Pro Bowl by voting here. As many readers, including Sebastian Franke of Hannover, Germany, pointed out, the play identified as "Fake 15 Weak Double Reverse" is actually a single reverse -- quarterback hands off to a wide receiver on an end-around, who hands to a second receiver going in the opposite direction. That's one reverse: the ball changes direction once.

**2005 State Standings:** Each year, Tuesday Morning Quarterback compiles the NFL state standings based on where teams actually perform: the Redskins are a Maryland team, etc. Florida dominates the total-victories column, with all three Florida clubs being winning teams in 2005. California and Texas, America's capitals of athletic boasting, went 0-for-5 in terms of clubs making the playoffs, and staggered in at a combined 28-52.

Indiana: 14-3  
 Washington 15-4  
 Colorado 14-4  
 North Carolina: 13-6  
 Illinois: 11-6  
 Florida: 32-18  
 Massachusetts: 11-7  
 Pennsylvania: 21-15  
 Minnesota: 9-7  
 Ohio: 17-16  
 Maryland: 17-17  
 Missouri: 16-16  
 Georgia: 8-8  
 New Jersey: 15-18  
 California: 17-31  
 Texas: 11-21  
 Arizona, Michigan, New York: 5-11  
 Tennessee, Wisconsin: 4-12  
 Louisiana: 3-13

**Bad Arizona Cardinals Predictions:** "You heard it here first, Kurt Warner will lead the cardinals to their first NFC West title," Michael Silver of *Sports Illustrated* prophesied. "Arizona will be a breakout team," Steve Young declared on ESPN. "The Cardinals could be an NFC playoff contender," Mark Maske of the *Washington Post* foresaw. Arizona's offseason moves "might be enough to have them challenge for the division title," John Clayton of ESPN.com declared. "There's something about [the Cardinals] that makes you think maybe, just maybe, they'll be forced to cancel their January tee times," Clark Judge forecast. Dan Pompei of *The Sporting News*, Pete Prisco of CBS SportsLine, Adrian Hasenmayer and Dayn Perry of Fox Sports, Merrill Hoge and Joe Theismann of ESPN had Dennis Green as Coach of the Year. Peter King of *Sports Illustrated*, Elliott Kalb of Fox Sports and John Clayton, Jeremy Green, Hoge, Len Pasquarelli, Michael Smith and Theismann of ESPN.com had the Cardinals either winning their division or making the playoffs.

Nobody specialized in bad Arizona predictions like Pete Prisco of CBS SportsLine. "It's almost too unreal to write, but here goes: Watch out for the Arizona Cardinals in 2005," Prisco offered in the offseason. "Here's a prediction, the Arizona Cardinals will be contenders in the NFC West this season," Prisco said in another article. "The signing of Kurt Warner gives the Cardinals a legitimate chance to win the NFC West," Prisco said in a third article. "The Cardinals "will win the NFC West" and Dennis Green will be coach of the year, Prisco predicted in yet another article. Four times Prisco predicted a great year for the Cardinals. At least he learned his lesson, right? December 2005: "This may sound funny, but I don't think this team is that far away. If they improve their running game in 2006, they could push for a playoff spot." Arizona was 4-9 and last in the league in rushing when Prisco wrote that.

**Bad Oakland Raiders Predictions:** Kimberly Jones of the *Newark Star-Ledger* said Kerry Collins was "certain" to best his career high of 22 touchdown passes. Collins threw for 20 touchdowns. Adam Schein of Fox Sports predicted "Oakland's offense will challenge the Colts for being the greatest in the NFL." Oakland finished 20th in offense. Prisco foresaw, "With Randy Moss, the Raiders are contenders in the AFC West. Without him, they're 8-8, at best." The Raiders had Moss and finished 4-12, maybe they should have cut him and finished 8-8! Mike Florio of Profootballtalk.com predicted Oakland would win the Super Bowl; the Raiders did not make the playoffs. Here's a preseason prediction that almost came to pass for yours truly: "Oakland could be the worst team in the league."

**Bad Houston Texans Prediction:** Houston "should make the playoffs," Clark Judge of CBS SportsLine predicted. Houston finished with the worst record in the league. Judge added that the Texans "might have made the playoffs a year ago were it not for a 1-5 stretch." This is like saying Russia might have won the Crimean War, if only it had not lost all the battles.

**Mega-Babe News No. :1** Okay, I had to Google to find out who Keira Knightley and Scarlett Johansson are. The vital thing is that while they are wearing no clothes on the cover of the March *Vanity Fair*, they are not naked! Here, English art critic Jonathan Jones discourses on the subtle distinction between nude babes and naked babes: "The women in this picture are not naked, they are nude," Jones writes. It's a crucial distinction! Third person on the cover, designer Tom Ford, is fully dressed. I don't want to see Tom Ford either nude or naked, but the gender inequity seems pretty obvious.

**"...While the S&P Rose Three Points. In Other Financial News, Salary-Cap Futures Were Down in Heavy Trading":** Trading for cartoon characters isn't the only weird trading going on. TMQ has documented the NBA trend of teams trading for players they immediately waive -- the purpose is to manipulate salary-cap space. Now the NBA has cut out the middleman and decided teams can simply trade cap space. Last summer the New Jersey Nets traded \$5 million in cap space and a first-round draft pick to the Portland Trail Blazers for Shareef Abdur-Rahim. (The deal fell through when Abdur-Rahim flunked his physical.) Surely economists approve, since classical economics assumes free trading allows parties to maximize their welfare. Why not a futures market too? Teams could buy and sell salary-cap futures, hedging their positions by going long and short simultaneously. The trading could be done by frenzied brokers screaming orders in a pit, and ESPN could broadcast the whole thing live.

**On the Oakland Sideline, the Role of Art Shell Will Be Played by Christopher Lloyd:** "It's back to the future for the Raiders," the *San Francisco Chronicle* declared as Oakland re-hired Art Shell. No it's not, it's forward into the past! Aging Boomers will get that reference. In politics and journalism, the phrase "back to the future" is frequently misused to mean resuming something once done. "Back to the future" has no common-sense meaning in a world without time-travel; when you resume something once done, you're going forward into the past. Favorite trivia from the 1985 movie: Michael J. Fox is only a week younger than actress Lea Thompson, who played his mother.

**Would the Green Room for Sleep Actors Have Bunks and Pillows?:** Ads for the new sleep aid Lunesta show a woman slumbering blissfully as a glowing luna moth hovers above her. Is a luna moth really the best image? The luna moth is nocturnal but incapable of sleeping, or eating for that matter; as the adult stage of a caterpillar, the luna moth mates for about a week, then dies. Probably the Lunesta documentation does not caution, "Side effects may include inability to eat plus frenzied mating followed by rapid death." At any rate, tastefully named reader Gregg Bosak of Hoosick Falls, N.Y., notes that in the TV commercials, as the woman slumbers, the small-type disclaimer reads, ACTOR PORTRAYAL. She's a sleep actor? Where do you sign up for that job? And what if you are no good at sleep acting? Director: "Sorry, you're not convincing. Try method sleeping. Reach into your past for a sleep incident that lets you access your sleep emotions."

Check this *New York Times* article by Stephanie Saul, which says use of Lunesta and the similar prescription sleep aid Ambien is skyrocketing. She reports, "Experts acknowledge that insomnia has become a cultural benchmark of an overworked, overwrought society." That Lunesta is heavily advertised on television causes me to chortle. Studies show television itself is a leading cause of sleep disruption: experts recommend turning off the TV at least one hour before bed. Ambien and Lunesta are not known to have serious side effects, so TMQ sees nothing wrong with their use. Studies show sleep deprivation is common in the United States and European Union; more sleep is statistically associated with longer life, less stress, lower blood pressure and, interestingly, lower weight. The slight side effects of new anti-insomnia medication may be more than offset by the health benefits of added sleep.

A basic problem of debate on prescription drugs is that we fixate on the risks but overlook the benefits. Ask anyone whose arthritis pain was relieved by Vioxx. In that case a very effective pain reliever and inflammation reducer was removed from the market owing to a heart risk incurred only by those using the medicine for more than 18 months. Obviously, that meant the Vioxx should not be taken more than 18 months. Instead of having the drug restricted to its safe regime, Vioxx and a similar compound were

effectively banned, and now the legal system is debating whether a relatively low number who may be harmed should receive substantial compensation. Unmentioned are the millions who benefited from Vioxx reducing their arthritis pain and other kinds of inflammation pain, and now can't get the stuff. Vioxx is hardly an isolated example. Next month the Food and Drug Administration will review Tysbari, a new medicine that relieves symptoms of multiple sclerosis, among the hardest diseases to treat. Tysbari's maker voluntarily pulled the drug when three of 8,000 people taking it in a trial developed a rare neurological condition. Did Tysbari trigger the condition? Maybe, but everyone in the trial had MS, Crohn's or a similar serious disease -- that is, was at risk for complications whether taking drugs or not. Owing to fear of the legal consequences if harm were caused to a small number, the benefits of Tysbari have been withheld from a large number. Something's wrong with this kind of logic.

**Game-by-Game Predictions:** All picks mentioned in this section are straight-up; TMQ does not track picks against the spread, which is meaningless to NFL performance. At MSNBC, former Cowboys star Jay Novacek finished 160-96 in regular-season predictions, or 63 percent. If you had simply picked the home team in every game this season, you would have been 153-103, or correct 60 percent of the time. Over at Yahoo! the consensus of users did better on the season than all four football experts, upholding the "wisdom of crowds" thesis. So if you want highly sophisticated insider advice when picking for your office pool, whatever you do, don't consult highly sophisticated insiders: Check Yahoo! and pick whoever the consensus of users is backing. Another tip: Check the predictions of the ESPN on-air football bobble-heads. Individually, only Sean Salisbury and Merrill Hoge did better than the consensus of Yahoo! users, while Mike Golic was right only 63 percent of the time, barely besting simply picking the home team. But unanimous picks on the ESPN board ended up winners 79 percent of the time, a much better performance than recorded by any individual forecaster. So there was a "wisdom of crowds" effect at work at ESPN, too; when ESPN forecasters were unanimous, they were usually right.

Then there's the incredible Harmon Forecast. Until this season, the Harmon Forecast had claimed to possess "a mathematical formula that pick(s) winners correctly between 72 and 78 percent of the time, most seasons getting almost 75 percent right" and also that "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! In 2005, the Harmon Forecast stopped making its claim of 75 percent accuracy -- and it's about time. For the 2002 season, Harmon was 63 percent accurate; for 2003, 62 percent; for 2004, 62 percent; for this season, 63 percent. In each recent season, Harmon's mathematical formula has barely bested simply picking the home team in every game. Jim, time to light a fire under your staff!

**Disclaimer Watch:** Reader Jay Brotz of Albuquerque, N.M., notes the Subway sweepstakes web site says in tiny type, "The Subway chain does not endorse the diet Jared created." Hang on here, Jared Fogle has appeared in numerous Subway television commercials talking about his weight loss, is prominently shown in posters at Subway stores. Yet Subway is warning not to use Jared's diet? Which was, after all, eating at Subway.

**Bonus: Mike Tice Predictions:** In October, Vikings owner Zygi Wilf said he backed coach Mike Tice "100 percent;" a few hours after the final regular-season game, Wilf fired Tice. Peter King of *Sports Illustrated* and the scouting service Stats Inc. predicted Tice would be Coach of the Year.

**Bonus: Quarterback Prediction:** Dolphins' owner Wayne Huizenga predicted A.J. Feeley could be "another Dan Marino." If only he had been another David Woodley!

**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 teams. This year, for 13 of the 32 teams, I either hit the nail on the head or was within one game of correct -- obviously I will not be sending a resume to UPS for their oracle job. It's an improvement from last season, when I got a measly 11 of 32 correct or within one, though way worse than my 2003 forecast, which was exact or within one for 18 of 32. *USA Today* also forecast team final records, and was exact or within one for only nine clubs; *Sports Illustrated*

also forecast final records and was exact or within one for 11 clubs.

Each year in its six years of existence, TMQ has offered the 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*." 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.) Following 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. Last season, my prediction came oh so close to realization -- Pittsburgh and Atlanta, two of the four championship-round clubs, were not Monday night babies. Once this year's playoffs started, I was rooting for the Bears, Bucs or Giants to meet the Bengals or Jaguars in the Super Bowl, as those were the non-Monday-night teams to reach the postseason. (That five of the 12 playoff clubs had not been scheduled for *Monday Night Football* shows that even the league itself has no idea who will win.) But my generic Super Bowl prediction was finished by the divisionals, as Chicago, beaten in the second round, was the last of the non-Monday-night teams standing.

**Mega-Babe News No. 2:** Jennifer Lopez put herself in the public eye, as it were, by wearing only the back half of a dress to the 2000 Academy Awards. (Two years later her Oscars dress was actually borderline tasteful; when that happened, I knew an era in American history had ended.) Then Roselyn Sanchez wore only the front half of a dress to the Hispanic Heritage Awards. Now Terri Hatcher has worn a see-through dress to the Grammys. No front, no back, no fabric -- what's left for mega-babes of the future to shock with?

**Prediction That Could Only Be Mentioned in a Parking Garage at 2 a.m.:** After it was revealed that retired FBI official Mark Felt had been Deep Throat, former Nixon administration speechwriter Patrick Buchanan declared, "I've always thought it was Mark Felt. I've told people that privately for a number of years. But I have not mentioned it publicly." Oh -- so you knew it all along, you just forgot to say so!

**Bonus: "Could" Predictions:** A lot of things could happen. Kenneth Lay could give the money back. Congress could consider only the public interest when enacting legislation. Roselyn Sanchez could call me her Valentine. Many sport predictions are couched with "could." Arizona "could" win the NFC West -- John Clayton. Oakland receiver Ronald Curry "could have a big year" -- Len Pasquarelli. (Curry caught two passes in 2005.) St. Louis "could" score 500 points -- Clayton. (The Rams scored 363 points.) The Lions "could be a surprise" -- Vic Carucci, NFL.com. (If you expected them to go 0-16 then they were, in fact, a surprise.) "J.P. Losman could be this year's Ben Roethlisberger" -- Gil Brandt, NFL.com. "The Panthers could win their division or even reach the Super Bowl, or they could miss the playoffs entirely" -- the *New York Times*.

**Bonus: Bad Colts' Predictions:** "I will say it again: The Colts will go undefeated." Lincoln Kennedy, *NFL Total Access*, early November. "The Colts will run the table ... the Colts are going to go unbeaten." Tony Kornheiser, the *Washington Post*, late November. "The Colts in eight weeks will win the Super Bowl." Michael Wilbon, ESPN, early December. "I don't see how Indianapolis loses" the AFC. Clark Judge, CBS SportsLine, late December.

**Bonus: College Bad Prediction:** Collegefootballtalk.com on Oct. 27, 2005: "Write it down and put it in an envelope to be opened on Feb. 15, 2006. Two weeks after all of the new recruits have signed their letters-of-intent, we predict that Charlie Weis will be the head coach of the Jets, Bills, Chiefs or Rams." On Oct. 29, 2005, Weis signed a 10-year contract extension at Notre Dame.

**Bad Predictions Category Four: Absurdly Specific:** Andrew Perloff of *Sports Illustrated* predicted that rookie backs J.J. Arrington, Cedric Benson, Ronnie Brown, Frank Gore, Ryan Moats, Eric Shelton and Carnell Williams would combine to rush for 6,600 yards; they combined to rush for 3,613 yards. Pete Prisco predicted of Randy Moss, "He will have 100 catches and 16 touchdowns." Moss had 60 catches and eight touchdowns. "Brett Favre is primed for a good year, maybe 31 touchdowns, 16 picks," Peter King of *Sports Illustrated* predicted. Favre threw for 20 touchdowns and 29 interceptions. King makes so many absurdly specific predictions it's hard to know which ones are tongue-in-cheek. For instance, in the offseason he predicted LaMont Jordan would rush for 1,383 yards. My favorite King-ism: In June he

predicted the exact final score of the AFC Championship Game would be New England 13, San Diego 6; then in September he predicted the score of the same contest would be New England 30, San Diego 13. Last summer, King predicted Shaun Alexander would carry 23 times for 94 yards in the Super Bowl, weirdly close to his actual tally of 20 carries for 95 yards. It's just that King, who was predicting the Pats to repeat, predicted Alexander would get his yards for New England, following a predicted trade that never happened.

**Bonus: Miscellaneous Midseason Bad Predictions:** "The AFC rankings are virtually set -- San Diego and Kansas City will get the two wild cards." Shannon Sharpe, NFL.com, November. "Despite some speculation to the contrary, Packers head coach Mike Sherman will return to coach the team next season." Adam Schefter, NFL.com, December. The Redskins are "going to lose the Super Bowl by three points to New England. Honest." Mike Wise, *Washington Post*, late December.

**Bad Predictions Category Five: Endgame:** Before Wild Card Weekend, with the playoff entrants known, *USA Today* ran six dueling sets of predictions: No one at *USA Today* predicted the Steelers would reach the Super Bowl. During Super Bowl week, Aaron Schatz of Fox Sports predicted, "The Seahawks will ... bottle up Pittsburgh's running game. Ben Roethlisberger can't keep converting half his third-and-longs forever, and that makes Seattle a slight favorite." In the Super Bowl, the Steelers gained 181 yards rushing, while Roethlisberger converted a third-and-28. Stats Inc., which claims a sophisticated mathematic formula for forecasting games, picked Seattle to win the Super Bowl. Then there were the inevitable attempts to predict the exact final score. A representative instance: Actor Chris Wiehl, who played a sportscaster in the already-cancelled new TV show *Love Monkey*, predicted Seattle 31-17. *Playboy* Playmate Andrea Lowell did better than the faux sportscaster, giving the *Detroit News* a prediction of Pittsburgh 21, Seattle 17. *Sports Illustrated* ran six final score predictions -- all wrong. ESPN.com ran 24 final score predictions -- all wrong. *USA Today* ran 27 Super Bowl final score predictions -- all wrong. Maybe sports publications need more Playmates on their forecasting team! So far as I could determine, no one in the local space-time continuum forecast the actual final score. At least Mick Jagger had the dignity, in an interview with ABC's Robin Roberts, to refuse to make a prediction, insisting he had no idea who would win.

Most intriguing of the final-score forecasts was the annual celebrity ring-up conducted by David Nielsen of Scripps Howard. Rep. John Murtha of Pennsylvania came close at Pittsburgh 21, Seattle 7; former Celtics star Bob Cousy came close by predicting Pittsburgh 17, Seattle 10; skier Picabo Street came close at Pittsburgh 20, Seattle 13; Senator John McCain came close by estimating Pittsburgh by 10. All other celebrities polled by Scripps Howard were way off. Bill Gates predicted Seattle would win but declined to forecast a score, probably he was busy trying to get his Office to work. (God's honest truth: immediately after I wrote that sentence my laptop froze and had to be rebooted. Something in the Windows software detected implicit criticism of Gates and impose one penalty unit.) Arnold Palmer said Pittsburgh 35-20. Jennifer Berry, Miss America, said Seattle 24-17. Cartoonist Scott Adams said Seattle 35-24. Since 1990, Scripps Howard has rung up 1,441 celebrities for Super Bowl forecasts. Only two of 1,441, tennis star Martina Navratilova in 1998 and tough-guy actor Dennis Farina last year, have predicted the exact final score.

**Bonus: Bad Prediction by a Player:** Reader Briton Erwin of Fullerton, Calif., notes that before the San Diego-Jersey/A contest, Giants defensive linemen Kendrick Clancy said of LaDainian Tomlinson: "He can catch, block and run the ball. He can do everything but throw." In the game, Tomlinson threw a touch-down pass.

## WORST PREDICTIONS OF THE YEAR

**Third runner-up, Clifton Brown, *New York Times*:** Of the NFC West: "Nobody from this division is going to the Super Bowl."

**Second runner-up, Tuesday Morning Quarterback, NFL.com:** "People are predicting a big year for Carolina, but TMQ is less sanguine. Carolina strikes yours truly as having significant weaknesses, so I am adopting a wait-and-see policy. I will wait and see if the Panthers do well. If they do, I will claim to have

predicted it."

**First runner-up, Paul Zimmerman, *Sports Illustrated*:** After writing a *Sports Illustrated* cover story predicting Carolina would win the Super Bowl, Zimmerman predicted Carolina would lose to Chicago in the second round of the playoffs.

**Worst Prediction of the Year:** Jim Reineking of Fox Sports, for a spectacular feat of multiple bad predictions. In a September article that has mysteriously disappeared from the Fox web site, Reineking made NFL predictions in groups of five. One was "Five Teams Guaranteed to Make the Playoffs." Three of them -- the Eagles, Falcons and Jets -- did not make the playoffs. Another heading was "Five Teams That'll Be Just Awful." One, the Redskins, made the playoffs. Another category was "Five Players Who If They Got Hurt Their Teams Would Be Crushed." One was Daunte Culpepper. Minnesota was 2-5 when Culpepper got hurt; under backup Brad Johnson, the Vikings went 7-2. Another heading was "Five Players Who Will Thrive in New Environments." Two were Kurt Warner and Rod Gardner; Warner was benched and Gardner waived. Another category was, "Five Teams Primed for a Fall." One was the Denver Broncos, who made the AFC Championship Game. Two others were -- the Seattle Seahawks and Pittsburgh Steelers.

**Next Week:** The season concluded, Tuesday Morning Quarterback folds its tent and steals off into the desert. My advice is as usual: employ the offseason for spiritual growth, and then you will feel fully justified in racing back to the remote and the microbrews when the NFL artificial universe resumes in the fall.